

Defense Primer: United States Transportation Command

United States Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM or TRANSCOM) is a Department of Defense (DOD) combatant command responsible for providing air, land, and sea transportation across the globe to meet national security needs.

History and Role

Established in 1987, TRANSCOM is headquartered at Scott Air Force Base, IL. TRANSCOM is the U.S. military's primary logistics command, conducting global mobility operations, enabling joint force projection and sustainment, and functioning as the lead DOD element for transportation, global patient movement, and bulk fuel management and delivery.

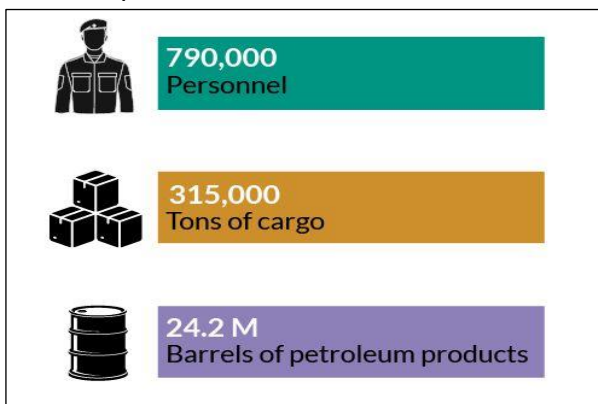
Historically, TRANSCOM has provided strategic mobility in support of several major contingency operations, including Operation Desert Storm, Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation Iraqi Freedom. The command has also played a central role in emergency operations, including the 2021 Afghanistan noncombatant evacuation operation, and security assistance efforts, including the provision of materiel to Ukraine following the 2022 Russian invasion.

Activities and Resources

TRANSCOM uses a mix of military assets, U.S. commercial transportation providers, and foreign partnerships to move DOD personnel and materiel across the globe (see **Figure 1**). TRANSCOM is also responsible for shipping personal property to support permanent change of station moves for approximately 430,000 servicemembers annually. The command reports that, on any given day, it manages 1,730 ground shipments, 33 ships in transit, 455 airlift sorties, and 14 aeromedical evacuations.

Figure 1. Selected TRANSCOM Activities

In calendar year 2021, TRANSCOM moved:



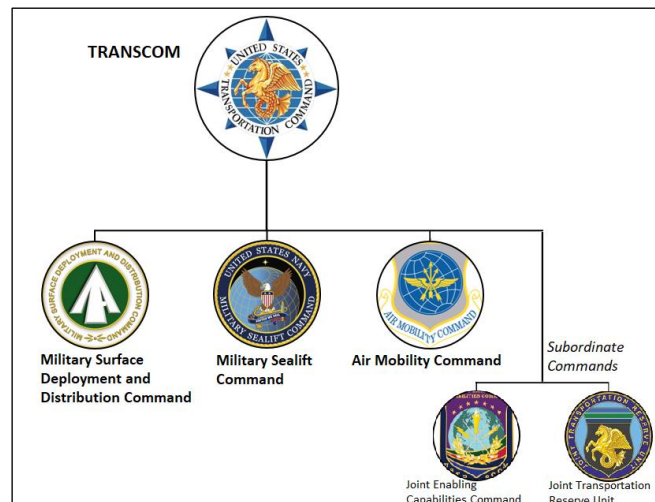
Source: CRS graphic based on analysis of TRANSCOM data.

TRANSCOM's workforce is approximately 73% military and 27% civilian, with a reported combined end strength of 16,682 for fiscal year (FY) 2021. TRANSCOM finances most of its activities through the Transportation Working Capital Fund (TWCF), a defense working capital fund (for more information, see CRS In Focus IF11233, *Defense Primer: Defense Working Capital Funds*). The TWCF allows TRANSCOM to conduct activities with minimal need for annual appropriations: instead, DOD components and other federal agencies place orders for transportation services, paying into the TWCF out of their own appropriated funds. In FY2023, TRANSCOM anticipates spending approximately \$8.1 billion out of the TWCF.

Organization

TRANSCOM is comprised of a headquarters element, three Transportation Component Commands (TCCs) assigned from the Army, Navy, and Air Force, and two joint subordinate commands (see **Figure 2**).

Figure 2. TRANSCOM Organizational Chart



Source: CRS graphic based on analysis of TRANSCOM data

Transportation Component Commands

Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command (SDDC). SDDC is the TRANSCOM Army component responsible for surface transportation. Headquartered at Scott Air Force Base, IL, SDDC uses DOD capabilities and commercial partnerships to move equipment and personnel by rail, road, and waterway. SDDC also provides ocean terminal services, traffic management, and transportation engineering globally. SDDC is also a major subordinate command to Army Materiel Command.

Military Sealift Command (MSC). MSC is the TRANSCOM Navy component responsible for sealift and ocean transportation, providing logistics support, moving

equipment and cargo, and supplying U.S. and partner forces. Headquartered at Naval Station Norfolk, VA, MSC operates a fleet of 125 civilian-crewed ships to provide a government-owned oceanic transport capability. When activated, MSC also commands the Ready Reserve Force (RRF), a fleet of 51 ships within the Department of Transportation's larger National Defense Reserve Fleet (NDRF) providing surge sealift capacity. Within the Navy, MSC reports to U.S. Fleet Forces Command, U.S. Pacific Fleet, and the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development, and Acquisition.

Air Mobility Command (AMC). AMC is the TRANSCOM Air Force component responsible for airlift and aerial transportation across DOD. Headquartered at Scott Air Force Base, IL, AMC utilizes military aircraft and commercial partnerships to provide global support across its four core mission areas of airlift, aerial refueling, air mobility support, and aeromedical evacuation. AMC operates a fleet of more than 1,000 aircraft, including the C-5, KC-10, KC-46, C-130, and KC-135. AMC is one of nine four-star level Air Force major commands.

Subordinate Commands

In addition to the Transportation Component Commands, TRANSCOM has two joint subordinate commands: the Joint Transportation Reserve Unit (JTRU) and the Joint Enabling Capabilities Command (JECC). JTRU is responsible for providing operational forces to augment TRANSCOM's active components, and includes reservists from the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard. JECC is responsible for providing mission-tailored capability packages to assist other combatant commands in conducting globally integrated operations.

Commercial Partnerships

TRANSCOM develops and maintains a wide variety of contractual relationships between DOD and commercial carriers to meet defense transportation requirements. In addition to its standard procurement and service contracts, TRANSCOM is also responsible for two unique partnership programs with the transportation industry: the Civil Reserve Air Fleet (CRAF) and the Voluntary Intermodal Sealift Agreement (VISA) program.

Civil Reserve Air Fleet

CRAF is comprised of selected aircraft from U.S. airlines that are contractually committed to support DOD in emergencies when the need for airlift exceeds the capability of military assets. In return, participating airlines receive priority consideration for other DOD airlift contracts. Title 50, Section 4501 *et seq.* of the *U.S. Code* (U.S.C.) and 10 U.S.C. §9511 *et seq.* provide the authorities for CRAF; TRANSCOM manages activation, while the Department of Transportation (DOT) coordinates commercial peacetime participation.

TRANSCOM has activated CRAF three times: to support Operations Desert Shield/Storm (1990-91), Operation Iraqi Freedom (2002-2003), and noncombatant evacuation operations in Afghanistan (2021).

Voluntary Intermodal Sealift Agreement

The VISA program is a partnership between DOD, DOT's Maritime Administration (MARAD), and maritime industry. In a similar manner to CRAF, the purpose of the VISA program is to provide supplemental maritime shipping capacity to DOD during national emergencies. Participating civilian vessels agree to commit oceanic shipping and intermodal capacity to DOD should TRANSCOM issue a VISA activation, and in return receive priority consideration for other DOD shipping business. 50 U.S.C. §4501 *et seq.* and the Maritime Security Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-239) provide the authorities for the VISA program.

TRANSCOM has never activated VISA.

Considerations for Congress

- **Sealift fleet recapitalization.** TRANSCOM projects that by 2032, approximately 70% of government-owned surge sealift ships will reach the end of their service life. In FY2022, Congress approved the use of up to \$300 million in appropriated Navy Shipbuilding funds to buy used sealift ships for the NDRF; FY2023 NDAA deliberations have included a proposal for MARAD to design and build up to ten new sealift vessels. Congress may consider the most effective blend of acquisition strategies as well as the appropriate level of investment in surge sealift capacity.
- **Aerial refueling capacity.** Under wartime conditions, TRANSCOM assesses that the aerial refueling fleet of KC-135, KC-10, and the new KC-46 tanker aircraft would be subject to considerable stress, especially given the age of the KC-135 platform. Congress may assess requirements for the tanker fleet as well as resourcing for KC-135 recapitalization.
- **Contested logistics.** Sustained conflict with a strategic competitor, especially in the Indo-Pacific, could create a contested logistics environment unlike any in which TRANSCOM has previously operated. Congress may direct TRANSCOM to develop options for the further diversification and distribution of transportation operations to reduce wartime logistical vulnerabilities.

Relevant Statutes

Title 10, *U.S. Code*, Chapter 6 – Combatant Commands
 Title 10, *U.S. Code*, Chapter 157 – Transportation
 Title 10, *U.S. Code*, Chapter 961 – Civil Reserve Air Fleet
 Title 50, *U.S. Code*, Chapter 55 – Defense Production Act

Other Resources

Joint Publication 4-01, *The Defense Transportation System*
 DOD Instruction 5158.06, "JDDE Planning and Operations"
 DOD 4500.9-R, "Defense Transportation Regulation"

Luke A. Nicastro, Analyst in U.S. Defense Infrastructure Policy

Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.