
Defense Report

AUSA



Strategic Mobility—Can We Get There From Here In Time?

Combat-ready forces of the U.S. Army, well trained and equipped and capably led, serve as a most effective deterrent to the potential aggressor who would threaten our vital national interests at home and overseas. Should their deterrent value ever diminish, Army forces of the proper size, composition and capability must be rapidly deployed to the crisis zone in time to protect those interests, and those forces must be sustained until the successful completion of their mission. Providing, operating and supporting the sea and airlift necessary to perform these tasks are the responsibilities of the U.S. Navy and U.S. Air Force.

For years the Army has urged an increase in the strategic mobility capability needed to provide rapid deployment, reinforcement and support of our ground combat elements. Although substantial improvements have been initiated or programmed, the failure to provide fully adequate resources for these vital support functions has left our airlift capability seriously deficient and our sealift assets woefully short.

By itself, airlift can never meet the quantity requirements for more than a short period, and then the aluminum bridge of planes would have to be replaced by a steel highway of ships to transport more than 90 percent of the ammunition, fuels, supplies and equipment which are the wherewithal of sustained combat.

Our NATO commitment alone demands more sealift than is included in the Navy's current strategic sealift program. Similar shortfalls exist in our ability to move forces to the Middle East, Korea and Latin America.

In short, while the programmed acquisition of additional intertheater airlift, fast container ships and the prepositioning of war reserve stocks will eventually provide a substantial increase in our ability to deploy and sustain the land forces, there will yet remain very serious shortages in our strategic mobility assets.

If America's land forces, developed and sustained at great expense, are to be a credible deterrent to war, the Administration and Congress must provide the funds to overcome the strategic mobility problems. Failure to do so could have disastrous results.