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# STRATEGIC SEALIFT: Management of the Ready Reserve Force



A paper submitted to the faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Operations Department.

Submitted By

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The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College of the Department of the Navy.



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The Persian Gulf Crisis has once again renewed debate concerning Strategic Sealift and management of the Nations Ready Reserve Force (RRF). Warfighting capabilities are directly tied to peacetime planning and management. As the peacetime manager of the RRF the Maritime Administration (Marad) has been held responsible for the poor condition of the Nations Strategic Sealift assets in general, and performance of the RRF during the Persian Gulf Crisis in particular. Although desired levels of readiness were not met during the surge phase of the operation, most other expectations of the RRF were met or exceeded during the buildup and sustainment phase. Furthermore, those identified areas of weakness were a direct of external constraints imposed upon Marad that prevented implementation of a sound management system.

This paper presents a sound argument in defense of Marads performance as manager of the RRF which is reflected in the acccomplishments of Sealift assets employed during the Crisis. However, a close review of the RRF vis-avis changing National Strategic and Military priorities supports moving managerial responsibilities to the DoD which is

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

With the successful conclusion of the Persian Gulf War in March of 1991, America released a sigh of relief and pressed on with the business at hand-after action reports. With the good, inevitably comes the bad, and although numerous successes were recorded, some of the identified failures could have jeopardized the entire war effort. One of the earliest and potentially most devastating problems, was insufficient strategic sealift to meet surge requirements, "In spite of what seems an impressive array of seagoing assets and the all-out effort by members of the US-flag merchant marine-Desert Shield was the first actual contingency to demonstrate that US sealift assets were not equal to the challenge."[1]

Had the Iraqi Forces not maintained their defensive positions in Kuwait, initial US Forces could have been overrun resulting in higher U.S. casualties and longer duration of the war. Indeed, sufficient US Force strength, as determined by the Joint Task Force Commander (JTFC), was not in place until late September 1990.

Certainly, there were a great number of reasons for the initial mobilization problems such as unfocused U.S. policy, coalition resolve, Force composition...etc,. However, the focus of this paper is on one component of Operation Desert Shield/Storm; Strategic Sealift and the operational readiness of the Ready Reserve Force (RRF).

The Maritime Administration (Marad), as manager of the RRF, expended enormous effort to ensure that all requested strategic sealift assets were not only tendered within the prescribed time-frames, but adequately manned as well. In spite of these efforts readiness objectives were not met in 51 percent of the cases. Large numbers of foreign ships were eventually chartered to augment RRF shortfalls, and identifying sufficient numbers of trained mariners to man activated vessels became a difficult undertaking.

The problem for Marad as manager of this form of an operation was that the measures of effectiveness (MOEs) were highly quantifiable and as such immediately reflected a failure to meet required objectives (as they should have). To lend balance to this determination of failure, external constraints beyond the control of Marad that impacted management have to be taken into consideration which revealed that most sealift, after initial surge, did meet goals and objectives: "Several material and coordination problems have been reported in the current sealift effort supporting Operation Desert Shield, but given the magnitude of the sealift effort, it is not clear that the number is inordinately large, As of mid-September, the overall sealift efforts was reported to be about 5 to 14 days behind schedule. Nevertheless, it had succeeded in delivering substantial quantities of equipment and supplies to the Persian Gulf area."[2]

This paper will present a sound argument in defense of Marads performance as manager of the RRF which was reflected in

the accomplishments of sealift assets employed during the Persian Gulf War. However, a close review of the RRF vis-a-vis changing National Strategic and Military priorities supports moving managerial responsibilities to the DoD which is ultimately responsible for meeting National Military objectives through employment of these assets.

This review cannot be accomplished in a vacuum. Political reality in terms of Fiscal priority and the changing international threat scenario demands a broad perspective and analysis. In that regard this paper will answer the following questions in support of the aforementioned thesis:

1.) Why do we need a Maritime Administration and what are it's responsibilities?

2.) Under what actual and perceived constraints does the Marad operate?

3.) What was Marads performance scorecard during the Persian Gulf Crisis?

4.) What are the current proposals and how will they impact future RRF operational readiness?

## CHAPTER II

### The Maritime Administration

### Merchant Marine: The fourth arm of Defense

> "To establish a United States Shipping Board for the purpose of encouraging, developing, and creating a naval reserve and a merchant marine to meet the requirements of the commerce of the United States with its territories and possessions and with foreign countries;... ."[1]

The Shipping Act of 1916 effectively established, among other things, a direct relationship between the Merchant Marine and National Security. It created a five member shipping board, appropriated Government funds to produce merchant ships and was really the first comprehensive maritime legislation. This legislation resulted in part from U.S. inability to mobilize and transport troops during the Spanish American War in 1989, and President Teddy Roosevelt's embarrassment at having had to charter foreign merchants to provide support for his Great White Fleet's world cruise. In reality, the drafters had a more practical near term goal: to establish a viable domestic fleet of seagoing vessels to "...fill the vacuum created in World commerce by the evolvement of the European powers in war...."[2] However, the drafters were aware of the historic sensitivity of the Nation to Government intervention in the marketplace and addressed this issue in the following manner: " Wilson sidestepped private capitol's resistance to a Government shipping program by adroitly marketing the merchant fleet as an Auxiliary Force for the Navy."[3]

The position of the American people was clearly stated,

intervene only when absolutely necessary and get out as soon as possible! Nevertheless, both the Administration and Congress recognized the special relationship between a healthy merchant marine and National Security and thus attempted to pursue a balanced approach with passage of the Shipping Act of 1928 (The Jones Act); "It is hereby declared the policy of the United States to do whatever may be necessary to develop and encourage the maintenance of... a merchant marine... sufficient to carry the greater portion of it's commerce and serve as a naval or military auxiliary in time of war of national emergency, ultimately to be owned and operated privately by citizens of the United States."[4]

The Jones Act was also the means by which the Federal Government could divest itself of the large post World War I merchant fleet. This legislation also accomplished two other purposes that are often overlooked; retention of the five man Shipping Board created under the Merchant Marine Act of 1916 and most importantly, was the first real declaration of a relationship between merchant marine policy and National Security.

The Merchant Marine Act of 1936 sought to establish greater order and purpose than that provided through previous acts, becoming the foundation of current maritime policy. Its intent was to both regulate and promote the merchant marine industry. Of President Roosevelts three primary intentions in approving the legislation, only the third is of immediate concern in this

study; "to provide the Navy with auxiliary vessels in the event that the United States itself became engaged in war."

As with the 1916 Act, the health of the merchant marine was felt to have an impact on National Security.

The Merchant Marine Act of 1936 had other utility as well, particularly with the advent of World War II. By the conclusion of the war the US Government had amassed a huge merchant fleet which it sought to divest through the provisions of the Ship Sales Act of 1946. However, the Act of 1946 did more than merely allow for the sale of excess merchant vessels, it also supported a revision to 1936 Act which led to the creation of the National Defense Reserve Force (NDRF). Part of the motivation for this act was the inability to sell all to the vessels on a bloated world market. Just the same, experience in three wars had proven the utility of having in reserve some number of vessels that would undertake immediate movement of troops and supplies when needed. Reliance upon a civilian owned domestic fleet was tenuous at best and a reserve force maintained in an inactive status not in competition with commercial operations would provide a much needed safety margin. "The United States built 5,037 merchant vessels of 2,000 gross tons and over between 1940 and 1945. A total of 1,956 of these ships were sold under provision of the Ship Sales Act of 1946 before it expired on January 15, 1951."[5]

Shipping losses during the war, retention of some vessels by the Navy and past year layups and scrapping also reduced the these members so that "by 1951 all but 1900 were sold and became part of the NDRF."[6]

This was an historic move and these ships have been used routinely in time of war and National disaster. Clearly, by this time a fundamental change had taken place in how America viewed the merchant marine. It had truly become a "fourth Arm of Defense," and has been used on four different occasions through 1970.

Marad: Current responsibilities

The Maritime Commission, created in the 1936 Merchant Marine Act was abolished in 1950 and two new organizations resulted: The Federal Maritime Commission (FMC), an independent agency that assumed all maritime related regulatory functions, and the Maritime Administration (MARAD) which remained in the department of Commerce as a maritime promotional agency (promotion of the U.S. Merchant Marine as a viable industry). Marad also tasked with management of the NDRF, was eventually transferred to The Department of Transportation (DoT) in 1981 where it resides today.

Marad has a number of responsibilities such as maintaining maritime industry liaison with the Federal Government, subsidy management, management of the Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point and collection of a wide variety of maritime statistical data.

However, it's primary responsibility is management of the Ready Reserve Fleet, a subcomponent of the NDRF which was established in 1976.

The key points to be gleaned from this brief review of U.S. Maritime history is first, a relationship was established between a healthy merchant marine and national Security. U.S. ability to maintain international commerce, exert influence, project force and support allies was directly impacted by the merchant marine and if sufficient merchant vessels were not available to support National objectives then a fleet must be held in reserve to provide these needs. Second, this fleet of ships held in reserve has always been transferred to civilian management (currently Marad) upon cessation of hostilities or a National Emergency, for lay-up out of competition with the commercial fleet.

## Chapter III

### The Ready Reserve Fleet

> "The RRF is a U.S. Government owned fleet of commercially designed deep-draft ships of various configurations and capabilities maintained to respond within 5, 10, and 20 days to National Emergency sealift requirements, particularly the movement of military equipment. The RRF was organized in 1976 with 30 ships drawn from the much larger NDRF, which had been responding to National Defense Emergencies since 1946."[1].

The age of the 360 ships in the NDRF (World War Two vintage) became a National security issue in 1975. Not only age, but Military utility of ships designed 40 years earlier drove testimony before Congress that led to the establishment of the RRF. Marad, as the manager of the NDRF, was also tasked with management of the newly created RRF.

These commercially designed deep draft ships are maintained in readiness periods of 5, 10, and 20 days. There is also a separate category of extremely high priority reduced operating status ships (ROS) that must be available within four days or less of notification. They have skeleton operating crews and don't require industrial facility services for activation. Currently consisting of 94 vessels, these assets are anchored at various points along the east and west coasts, the gulf coast and points overseas depending upon their readiness category.

Marad manages these ships through General Agent Agreements (GAA) and ships managers in accordance with guidance and oversight provided by the Navy and Coast Guard through Memoranda of Agreememt with the Department of Defense and Department of Transportation. Under these agreements routine inspections and unannounced activations of the RRF vessels are conducted by the Military Sealift Command (MSC) on behalf of DoD. The Coast Guard and Bureau of Ships Standards also conduct routine inspections to ensure regulations are being met and the ships are kept in class (Safety...). Performance assessments are then made, reports generated and recommendations for changes and other improvements result. Funding for Marad's activities is provided through both DoD and DoT.

Upon notification, Marad is responsible for activation, manning and tendering of these vessels to MSC within scheduled time frames. These time frames and readiness levels are critical because they are tied to contingency plans that respond to conflicts throughout the world. Just this very process took place in August of 1990 as the RRF prepared to respond to mobilization of U.S. Forces for transport to the Persian Gulf.

## Desert Shield/Storm

The Persian Gulf crisis was comprised of two phases; phase I (the surge phase) from 7 August - 8 November 1990, and phase II (the sustainment phase) which commenced on 8 November and continued through demobilization. Although hostilities did not begin until 16 January 1991, they began on 10 August for the RRF following Marad's activation from MSC.

> "The first ever large-scale activation of the RRF activated 78 and employed 66 of the dry cargo vessels in the reserve. Marad, in cooperation with industry and labor, undertook a level of effort in ship activation never before attempted. Once activated operational control was transferred to MSC, where the RRF performed exceptionally well, delivering 29 percent of all dry cargo to the gulf region."[2]

This was the first large scale activation of the RRF since it was separated from the NDRF in 1976 and over 75 percent of RRF assets were utilized. Although a total of 78 RRF vessels were used during operation Desert Shield/Storm and its aftermath, 73 vessels were used in direct support of day to day operations. As table 3-1 and 3-2 reflect, 46 ships were broken out during phase one and 27 during phase two. However, the numbers of vessels actually tendered to MSC on time fell below expectations.

**Table 3-1**

RRF SHIPS ACTIVATED FOR OPERATION DESERT SHIELD FROM 10 AUGUST THROUGH 21 SEPTEMBER 1991

| Type of ship | Number activated |
|---|---|
| Breakbulk | 17 |
| Crane (TACS)* | 2 (4) |
| Heavy lift | 7 |
| RO/RO | 17 |
| Tanker | 1 |
| Troopship | 0 |
| Total | 44 (46) |

Source: MARAD

* [illegible]

**Table 3-2**

RRF SHIPS ACTIVATED FOR OPERATION DESERT SHIELD/STORM ON 9 NOVEMBER 1990 AND FROM 8 DECEMBER 1990 THROUGH 5 FEBRUARY 1991

| Type of ship | Number activated |
|---|---|
| Breakbulk | 24 |
| Crane (TACS) | 1 |
| Heavy lift | 0 |
| RO/RO | 0 |
| Tanker | 2 |
| Troopship | 0 |
| Total | 27 |

Source: MARAD

Of the 46 vessels activated during phase one only 27 percent were tendered to MSC on time and only 22 percent of the 27 follow-on vessels met their assigned readiness periods. Tables 3-2 and 3-4 depict a summary of the activation record of the ships.

Table 3-3

RRF ACTIVATION SUMMARY: SURGE SUPPORT

| Activation record | Readiness period | | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 5 days | 10 days | 20 days | |
| Early or ontime | 8 | 3 | 1 | 12 |
| 5 days late or less | 10 | 2 | 0 | 12 |
| 6 – 20 days late | 15 | 1 | 0 | 16 |
| More than 20 days late | 4 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Total | 37 | 6 | 1 | 44 |

Source: MARAD

Table 3-4

RRF ACTIVATION SUMMARY: FOLLOW-ON SUPPORT

| Activation record | Readiness period | | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 5 days | 10 days | 20 days | |
| Early or ontime | 3 | 2 | 1 | 6 |
| 5 days late or less | 6 | 1 | 0 | 7 |
| 6 – 20 days late | 4 | 1 | 0 | 5 |
| More than 20 days late | 5 | 4 | 0 | 9 |
| Total | 18 | 8 | 1 | 27 |

Source: MARAD

These tables further show that a significant number of the ships in both phases missed their readiness periods by more than six days. Table 3-4 also indicates that the ships activated during phase two took longer to tender probably because they were in worse physical condition than those activated during the earlier period or because they were not the correct "type" of vessel to meet the immediate requirements ( such as roll-on/roll-off (ro/ro) vessels used to transport tanks...etc,.). This should have raised serious questions regarding the operational readiness or suitability of the remaining 18 vessels in the RRF.

Nevertheless, once activated, the RRF performed admirably, transporting enormous amounts of cargo for extended periods.

Steaming hours greatly outnumbered downtime and enormous distances were traveled further validating the investment made in sealift during the 1980s.

## Marads Scorecard

Marads scorecard for management of the RRF during peacetime is excellent as validated by the total number of RRF vessels activated and gross tons of cargo transported (over 200,000 short tons by 13 May 1991 or roughly one third of all dry cargo transported). Of the total number of vessels tendered to MSC only five were returned to Marad for repair.[3] While manning the activated vessels did present an initial problem, mariners were eventually located and all ships sailed properly crewed.

Of the problems experienced, perhaps the most serious was the inadequacy of initial surge sealift. While failure to meet established activation time-frames was of the utmost concern, this shortcoming was more related to the wrong types of ships in the RRF rather than the readiness of the vessels and this was more a function of National Policy and adequate funding rather than management. Other managerial issues found wanting were: inadequacy of Marads ships manning procedures, poor historical records of RRF assets, repair parts procurement and inventory shortcomings and insufficient controls on maintenance contract awards.

Chapter IV

"...In short, the large-scale activation of RRF ships in support of Operation Desert Shield/Storm demonstrated the need for Marad to shift from a custodial to an operational posture and mentality; the shift requires DoS fiscal support. Only then can RRF readiness be enhanced to the point where its ships can be relied on to respond to any call for activation."[1]

If response to "any call for activation," is the measure by which the RRF is judged, then Marad failed in its mission as manager. Even though the RRFs performance was impressive, it still fell short of goals as previously identified. But, what of the numerous constraints imposed upon Marad and the ultimate impact they had upon its ability to fully implement the comprehensive RRF management plan originally intended? Why has the National Leadership consistently elected to delay decisions regarding Strategic Sealift if it is such an important part of National Security and why is the issue so politically sensitive?

Part of the answer lies in the fact that the Defense budget is so large and has such an immediate impact on U.S. commerce that scrutiny has become a national municipal project in which everyone has a stake! The other half of the answer resides within DoD itself and that is interservice rivalry and parochialism: "...Strategic lift has always been a bureaucratic stepchild within the pentagon. No Armed Service, including the Air Force which operates the Military Airlift Command, likes to spend precious procurement dollars on things designed primarily to help another service, in this case the Army, accomplish its missions."[2]

Investments in sealift require big dollars and big dollars

require big decisions, which few in Congress are willing to make with big returns for their constituency or political party or both. Granted, this is somewhat of a simplification but not by much!

## Current proposals

Although the inactivity in Congress and DoD appears to be prevalent, there are some initiatives circulating that portend fundamental changes in the way lift is being viewed. The two most significant issues are creation of a National Defense Sealift fund and Transfer of the RRF to DoD:

National Defense Sealift Fund (NDSF): This fund would allow the management of all sealift funding through one central fund and would consist of funds from ship leasing operations, scrapping of the NDRF, direct annual appropriations and revenue from alliance contributions. Japanese contributions to the U.S. during Operation Desert Storm could be placed there for future investment in sealift. Congress views this fund somewhat differently,"A Senate source said the sealift fund sounds like a Department of Defense slush fund...we would take a close look at it." [3] Still, this appears to be a reasonable proposal and would serve to eliminate sealift competition with combatant requirements within Navy.

There is yet another view of this initiative as a transparent power play to eventually transfer the RRF from Marad to DoD. "The Office of Management and Budget, in early versions of the federal budget package for the fiscal year that begins Oct

2, proposed to transfer nearly half of Marads funding - about $300 million - and half its 1,000 - person work force to the Defense Department."[4] There could be some merit to this argument because bitter feelings still remain within DoD, specifically Navy, over having lost control of the RRF to Marad in the mid 1980s.

Nationalization of the Merchant Fleet: The U.S. has a long history of aversion to Govt intervention in the marketplace - particularly by the military. $300 billion in annual appropriations speaks loudly in the marketplace. That explains why there are so many Dod oversight committees and competition in contracting initiatives. The merchant Marine Industry purports to believe that DoD will eventually enter the marketplace: "What the Military Sealift Command plans to do is eliminate the Maritime Administration and take over the RRF. This will start the process of nationalization of our merchant fleet."[5]

While DoD's goal is better control over the RRF, creeping nationalization could indeed take place as DoD, out of necessity, fills the void created by the demise of the U.S. Merchant Fleet in transportation of defense cargo.

## Chapter V

## Recommendations and Conclusions

Operation Desert Shield/Storm has been extremely rewarding both in terms of National pride over a stunning victory and revelations of deeply embedded systemic problems within the RRF. The fact that we were able to mobilize and activate the RRF with such remarkable results is a tribute to the ingenuity and determination of both civilian and military managers involved. However, we may not have the luxury of time, facilities and weather the next time we come to arms and must act now and not react later. The following recommendations will serve as a foundation for change in the near future:

1. Implement changes to the RRF that will make it a viable component of the Strategic Lift Triad. This includes full funding so that readiness becomes a matter of fact rather that assumption. Current legislative proposals to terminate the NDRF is a long overdue initiative and should serve to improve the RRF. The force composition and size should be tied directly to National Military Goals and Objectives.

2. Proceed with plans to implement the National Defense Sealift Fund. This will inevitably lead to better capitalization of Strategic Sealift. These funds will be fenced off and cannot be used for other than sealift maintenance, enhancements or acquisition. Therefore, they stand better chance of not being siphoned off for other purposes.

3. Transfer the RRF to DoD. In view of the inherent weakness

within the U.S. Merchant Fleet and unsuitability of reliance upon foreign shipping to provide contingency lift, military planners need to know exactly what sealift assets are available and their operational readiness. CincTrans should be tasked with management of the RRF in addition to custody to the previously mentioned NDSF. This action would reduce the political sensitivity of the issue because CincTrans could be objective - an honest broker without parochialism or hidden agendas that would be expected out of the component's.

4. Take action to sustain the Merchant Marine Industrial Base. It has not only national Security implications but would assist in keeping DoD out of the commercial cargo business and provide manpower for the RRF that is quickly vanishing.

These recommendations are by no means the sum total of initiatives needed to solve our lift problems. However they do represent the pillars upon which change can be realized.

## Conclusions

Careful review of the data from the Persian Gulf War reveals that the RRF performed well even though some initial surge problems did occur. However, this validates Marads performance as manager in the face of significant constraints. Additionally, the data reflects some serious fissures within the Strategic Sealift Program of a systemic nature. One solution to the readiness problem would be to transfer the RRF to DoD who provides funding and has operational control when the force is

activated. This would centralize management and ensure operational readiness. Economies would be realized through reductions in staff and responsibility would not be a question.

This position does not in any way signal the end of Marad who has served a good purpose for many years. In fact I would envision a place for Marad in management of the RRF primarily in the position of an agent similar to their current position but without a budget. Marad also serves a critical liaison function with the Maritime Industry and maintains a dialogue and relationship that DoD does not currently enjoy.

Centralization of management combined with other economy measures will only serve to enhance a critical capability which allows us to influence events at any point on the face of the globe at the time of our choosing.

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## Chapter I

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