

U.S. International Food Aid Programs: Transportation Perspectives

Written Testimony

**Before the United States House of Representatives
Agriculture Subcommittee on Livestock and Foreign Agriculture and the
Transportation Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation**

Witness Statement of

**Mr. David Berteau, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Logistics and Materiel
Readiness**

November 17, 2015

Chairman Hunter, Ranking Member Garamendi, Chairman Rouzer, Ranking Member Costa, and distinguished members of the subcommittees, I am David Berteau, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Logistics and Materiel Readiness, and I appreciate the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the Defense Department on the importance of the U.S. Merchant Marine and cargo preference.

National security readiness hinges on the success of the Department of Defense (DoD) in getting to the mission and sustaining that mission. Sealift capability is a major consideration. The Defense Department maintains surge sealift vessels (mostly Roll-On/Roll-Off) in a high state of readiness and maintains prepositioning fleets with military equipment and supplies aboard ships located in key ocean areas to ensure rapid availability.

The commercial U.S. Merchant Marine, consisting of ships and mariners, is equally important to the Department's organic sealift surge capability. The Department relies on the U.S. Merchant Marine as a key element of its readiness to perform all of its national security missions, working through a wide range of DoD commercial sealift programs that support deploying and sustaining military forces around the world. One such program is the Voluntary Intermodal Sealift Agreement program that provides assured access to U.S.-flag commercial sealift capacity during contingency operations in exchange for priority for DoD cargo.

Another is the Maritime Security Program that provides a Federal support stipend for up to 60 U.S.-flag commercial vessels in exchange for military access to vessel capacity and global intermodal networks. These programs are important for the overall health of the U.S. Merchant Marine and for providing the Defense Department with assured access to sealift capacity in time of national need.

U.S. Merchant Mariners are especially critical to the Department's ability to surge and sustain the mission. In addition to crewing U.S.-flag commercial vessels in support of DoD requirements, the Department depends on U.S. Mariners to crew Navy logistics support vessels and reserve (surge) sealift vessels. The Defense Department plans to use the pool of actively sailing U.S. Mariners for the surge ships. To mitigate the risk of insufficient numbers of licensed mariners for the surge fleet, the U.S. Navy also maintains a Strategic Sealift Officer program comprised of approximately 2,000 Naval Reservists who are licensed mariners that could be activated, but only in the event that a sufficient number of licensed civilian mariners did not volunteer to crew the surge fleet.

As U.S.-flag ship numbers in international trade decline, the number of U.S. Merchant Mariners employed in international trade also declines. If there are fewer job opportunities, there may be fewer U.S. mariners to crew the government-owned sealift ships if they are activated for a major crisis.

There are many factors that affect the viability of the U.S. Merchant Marine to keep the ships and mariners needed to meet Defense Department needs. These

include not only demand to transport DoD cargo for day-to-day defense needs but also other potential options to maintain mariner licenses. These factors combined may affect the ability of the U.S. Merchant Marine to provide the required sealift surge and sustainment needed for potential national security missions worldwide.

The Administration continues to examine and propose policies to improve the balance of costs and benefits. The Department supports the reform of the P.L. 480 Title II food aid program and has assessed that the proposal will not impact its ability to crew the surge fleet and deploy forces and sustainment cargoes. The FY 2016 President's Budget food aid reform proposal improves the U.S. Government's ability to respond to humanitarian crises within current budget constraints.

Ultimately, America depends on the Defense Department to be ready to execute all of its national security missions. The availability of ships and mariners from the U.S. Merchant Marine is an important element of that readiness. I thank you for holding this hearing and inviting DoD to participate.