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# Defense Report

AUSA



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## Strategic Mobility—The Weak Link

The first priority in United States military strategy is given to the defense of our NATO partners in Europe. The strategy calls for rapid reinforcement of our deployed forces in the event of a Warsaw Pact invasion.

The reinforcing U.S. Army divisions are trained and equipped to do their job but there is serious doubt that they could be moved from their U.S. bases, across the Atlantic to Europe in time to do what they are supposed to do. The doubt arises from a lack of strategic mobility—the absence of enough ships and heavy cargo planes to move the troops and their equipment rapidly.

Repeated requests from the Air Force for money to improve its own fleet of heavy cargo aircraft and to modify the fleet of large commercial aircraft known as the Civil Reserve Air Fleet for better military adaptability have been the victims of cost-cutting. It now requires an almost total commitment of Air Force strategic airlift to transport the single Army division that is sent to Europe each year to exercise the reinforcement plans.

It must be remembered, too, that equipment like tanks and heavy artillery to support these training exercises is already on the ground in Europe so the real test of the reinforcing machinery would come after those stockpiled weapons are committed to use and the following divisions must bring their heavy gear all the way from Texas, Colorado and California.

This follow-up lift is not the job for aircraft but for cargo ships. The Navy has few and the U.S. merchant fleet is shrinking in numbers each year. Even in a relatively small war like Vietnam the Defense Department had to charter foreign "bottoms" to fill the sealift gap.

And not just any old cargo ship will do the job. If an all-out attack comes in Europe, even without nuclear weapons, one of the first targets for Warsaw Pact bombers will be the ports through which the equipment and supplies must funnel. Assuming that shoreside cranes and other heavy cargo-handling gear are rendered inoperable, each cargo ship will have to be able to unload itself. The need for ships that can unload tanks from their holds is crucial.

Congress and the budgeteers in the new administrations can no longer sidestep the problem of strategic mobility. The Air Force must be permitted to improve its aircraft capability. The U.S. maritime industry must be encouraged, and subsidized if necessary, to improve its emergency capacity.