

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-17-503](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Military Sealift Command ships perform a wide variety of support services and missions, including transporting military equipment and supplies in the event of a major contingency (performed by the surge sealift fleet) and replenishing fuel and provisions for U.S. Navy ships at sea (performed by the combat logistics force). An aging surge sealift fleet in which some ships are more than 50 years old, and a combat logistics force tasked with supporting more widely distributed operations (i.e., the employment of ships in dispersed formations across a wider expanse of territory), present several force structure and readiness challenges.

House Report 114-537 included a provision for GAO to assess the readiness of the Military Sealift Command. This report (1) describes the readiness trends of the surge sealift and combat logistics fleets since 2012, (2) evaluates the extent to which the Navy has plans to address an aging surge sealift fleet, and (3) evaluates the extent to which the Navy has assessed the effects of widely distributed operations on the combat logistics force. GAO analyzed 3 to 5 years of readiness, maintenance, and exercise data, based on available data; visited surge sealift and logistics ships; and interviewed Navy, U.S. Transportation Command, and Maritime Administration officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Navy incorporate leading practices for capital planning in a comprehensive sealift recapitalization plan and assess the effects of widely distributed operations on the combat logistics force. The Navy concurred with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-17-503](#). For more information, contact John Pendleton at (202) 512-3489 or pendletonj@gao.gov

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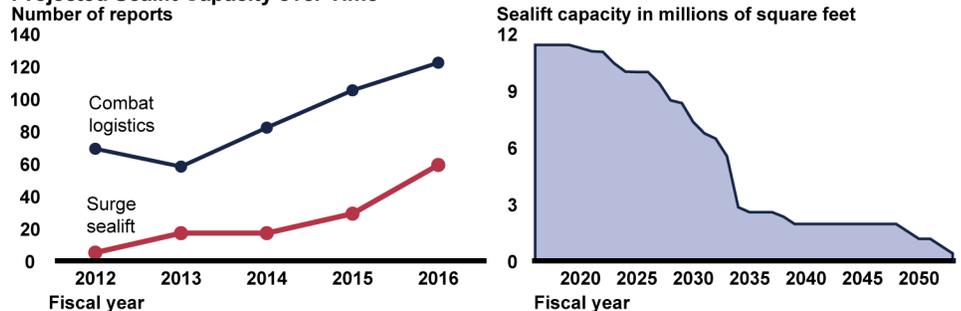
NAVY READINESS

Actions Needed to Maintain Viable Surge Sealift and Combat Logistics Fleets

What GAO Found

The readiness of the surge sealift and combat logistics fleets has trended downward since 2012. For example, GAO found that mission-limiting equipment casualties—incidents of degraded or out-of-service equipment—have increased over the past 5 years, and maintenance periods are running longer than planned, indicating declining materiel readiness across both fleets (see fig.).

Surge Sealift and Combat Logistics Fleet Historical Mission-Limiting Casualty Reports and Projected Sealift Capacity over Time



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense and Maritime Administration data. | GAO-17-503

The Navy has started to develop a long-term plan to address recapitalization of the aging surge sealift fleet, but this plan has not been finalized. The average age of the ships in the surge sealift fleet is nearly 40 years, and the number of surge sealift ships reaching the end of their programmed service lives over the next 10 years will reduce sealift capacity by over 25 percent. The Navy has not finalized these plans, and officials acknowledged that these efforts do not fully incorporate leading practices for capital investment planning. For example, Navy officials told us that the plan does not include a needs assessment or project prioritization comparing the costs and benefits of proposed investments to each other. Without effective capital planning to ensure the availability of surge sealift capability, the equipment and supplies needed by the Army, Marine Corps, and other forces may not arrive when needed, potentially hindering U.S. operations.

The Navy has not assessed the effects of widely distributed operations, which could affect the required number and type of combat logistics ships. The Navy released its new operational concept of more widely distributed operations—ships traveling farther distances and operating more days to support a more distributed fleet—in 2017. The Navy has not assessed the effects that implementing this concept will have on the required number and type of combat logistics ships. These effects could be exacerbated in the event that the Navy is less able to rely on in-port refueling—which has comprised about 30 percent of all refuelings over the past 3 years—placing greater demand on the combat logistics fleet. Given the fleet's dependence on the combat logistics force, waiting until 2019 or 2020 to conduct an assessment, as planned, could result in poor investment decisions as the Navy continues to build and modernize its fleet. Furthermore, without assessing the effects of widely distributed operations on logistics force requirements and modifying its force structure plans accordingly, the Navy risks being unprepared to provide required fuel and other supplies.