



Maritime Administration POLICY PAPER



America's Advocate for the Maritime Industry



MARITIME SECURITY PROGRAM and VOLUNTARY INTERMODAL SEALIFT AGREEMENTS

The U.S. merchant marine has a proud history of helping to protect the nation and win peace. Defense sealift continues to rely heavily on the U.S. commercial sector. The National Security Sealift Policy of October 5, 1989, which remains in force today, states that a vital objective of the Nation is to ensure that sufficient military and civil maritime resources will be available to meet defense deployment and essential economic requirements.

Industrial globalization and consolidation have led to the decline of many traditional maritime fleets, including the U.S.-flag general cargo fleet. In order to ensure that an active U.S. fleet of militarily-useful general cargo ships will continue to adequately serve both the economic and national security objectives of U.S. maritime policy in the future, the Maritime Administration administers the interlocking Maritime Security Program (MSP) and Voluntary Intermodal Sealift Agreement (VISA).

The MSP and VISA programs work together to provide militarily useful commercial vessels, and the crews to operate them (and government-owned reserve vessels), to maintain commercial service and to supply the Department of Defense (DOD) with assured access to sealift resources in times of emergency. MSP vessel operators receive financial support to partially offset the higher operating costs of keeping these vessels under U.S.-flag, in exchange for this commitment to provide intermodal sealift capacity to DOD. MSP and VISA participants also obtain priority consideration in the award of DOD peacetime cargoes.

Through MSP and VISA, U.S. flag vessel operators have made an extraordinary commitment. Over 80 percent of all U.S.-flag dry cargo ships are enrolled in either one or both programs, obligating two-thirds of the carrying capacity of the entire U.S. flag dry cargo fleet.

The vessel capacity made available through MSP and VISA advance the Department of Transportation toward achieving its Security, Preparedness and Response strategic goal by ensuring that our transportation system can respond to emergency needs. These programs help ensure that DOD meets its strategic goals. Moreover, the design of MSP and VISA provides for a coordinated seamless transition from peace to war or national emergency while these vessels continue serving in the commerce of the United States.

For the marine transportation system today, defense mobilization still equates to having sufficient U.S. commercial ships and civilian crews available to meet defense sealift requirements. MSP and VISA have been a tremendous success. Since implementation of the two programs, the capacity of the U.S.-flag general cargo fleet has increased. These two programs have had a positive effect on achieving critically important U.S. economic and national security objectives.



U.S.-Flag Dry Cargo Vessel Capacity Total Fleet Deadweight Tons

