

Question: I'm curious if your administration has documents available which would show the recent history of the last time the Jones Act fleet, or any other U.S. fleet, was used for sealift, either for strategic or tactical purposes.

Answer:

We don't have any specific documents addressing the history of Jones Act fleet sealift activations. However, the Jones Act fleet regularly operates in response to missions of national importance. The Jones Act fleet supports the U.S. in tactical emergency situations (such as hurricane response efforts) and for strategic military shipments, moving equipment and supplies when the military redeploys or changes its zones of activity. The Jones Act fleet also regularly supplies facilities in locations such as Alaska and Hawaii. Finally, and critically, the coastwise fleet employs a pool of mariners that the U.S. Government can call upon when the international U.S.-flag fleet needs to expand in wartime.

Regarding tactical emergency missions, the Jones Act fleet supported FEMA's response to Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico. Between September 20, 2017, when Maria made landfall on Puerto Rico, and December 22nd, Jones Act vessels delivered over 70,000 containers of emergency supplies and thousands of electric poles to support the reconstruction of the island's infrastructure. Indeed, the Jones Act fleet's response to Puerto Rico's destruction was so effective that, at one point, the Port of San Juan had a backlog of 10,000 containers full of emergency supplies that Jones Act vessels had unloaded, but which could not be delivered to sites on the island due to poor road conditions. In one specific instance, PASHA Lines activated its vessel SPIRIT in Fall 2017 to ship hundreds of containers of bottled water from Los Angeles to Puerto Rico to support Puerto Ricans and FEMA emergency personnel.

Regarding strategic military shipments, TOTE, a Jones Act carrier on the U.S. West Coast, transports an Army Brigade Combat Team based at Ft. Wainwright, Alaska, every other year to exercises at the National Training Center, Ft. Irwin, California. In the 2014 movement, TOTE transported 724 military vehicles aboard a Jones Act ship on the voyage from Alaska to California. All of this material was shipped to the West coast alongside commercial cargo in the coastwise trade. Matson, another U.S. west coast-based carrier, regularly transports military exercise and sustainment cargo between Hawaii and California. As of May 2016, Hawaii has 49,347 active duty and reserve members of the military, and Jones Act vessels transport all their regular supplies and equipment, including heavy vehicles, from the U.S. West coast every day.

Such transportation of military supplies among the U.S. west coast, Hawaii and Alaska may seem common place but the U.S. depends on such transportation for readiness and sustainment of our armed forces. Such service is especially important because foreign-carriers and foreign countries have, from time to time, failed to perform for the U.S. when needed. For example, thirteen foreign vessels scheduled to load cargo for Desert Storm refused to sail for the U.S. for a variety of reasons. U.S.-flag Jones Act ships and crews have always been there for the U.S. For example, during Operation Iraqi Freedom (2003) the U.S.-flag Jones Act ship S.S. NORTHERN LIGHTS carried Marine Corps vehicles and other cargoes directly to Iraq shortly after ground combat was over.

The Jones Act fleet also provides employment for a pool of trained, qualified U.S. Merchant Mariners needed to crew the nation's reserve sealift fleet, that is activated in the event of war, to provide a surge of sealift capacity. In the Defense Authorization Act of 2014 (H.R. 3979), Congress recognized the utility of the Jones Act by stating, "The domestic fleet is essential to national security and was a primary source of mariners needed to crew United States government-owned sealift vessels activated from reserve status during Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom in the period 2002 through 2010."