

75 YEARS OF MOBILITY OPERATIONS EVOLVING FOR THE NEXT 75

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Operation Allies Refuge, certain to be studied for generations to come, unmistakably demonstrated the resolve of the logistics enterprise. But we cannot become complacent; the complex and dynamic nature of tomorrow's challenges to US national security require an agile US Transportation Command, flexible, fully integrated, and responsive enough to meet the volume and tempo of warfighters' demands. The command must place renewed emphasis on maneuver and evolve how the concept is applied across domains.

"This evacuation could simply not have been done without the amazing flexibility of U.S. Transportation Command and the airlift provided by the United States Air Force. No other military in the world has anything like it."

General Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr., USMC, Commander,
US Central Command, August 26, 2021



Operation Allies Refuge was a capstone event for the United States Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM). Together with commercial industry and like-minded Allies and partners, USTRANSCOM conducted the largest noncombatant evacuation operation airlift in American history and demonstrated to the world the full range of capabilities of the Joint deployment and distribution enterprise (JDDE).

United States Transportation Command's entire warfighting framework was put to the test, from global posture and mobility capacity to global command and control. This effort demanded the worldwide integration of four department-level agencies (Defense, State, Homeland Security, and Health and Human Services) and four US combatant commands (USTRANSCOM, US Central Command, US European Command, and US Northern Command).

This team employed an extensive global mobility posture encompassing a vast constellation of Allies and partners. Further increasing global capacity, USTRANSCOM utilized commercial industry partners, many of whom volunteered at the first opportunity, and the so-called Total Force (active, guard, and reserve). Underpinning these efforts, a robust command and control network that operated 24/7 provided the decision space for leaders to maneuver force elements in support of the evacuation of over 124,000 personnel to safety.

This monumental effort clearly demonstrated the resolve of the logistics enterprise, and many will study this operation for generations. But while all should celebrate the successes of Operation Allies Refuge, we cannot become complacent, as tomorrow's challenges will present new, complex, and dynamic problems for America's national defense.

In December, our nation commemorated the eightieth anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor, which led to the United States entering World War II. Coincidentally, the end of the war just a few years later marked the last time the JDDE faced a traditional contested environment. Since then, US logistics forces have operated largely uncontested, free to maneuver to any point on the globe at a time of our choosing.

Despite the technological advances since World War II, maneuver in a future conflict will likely look more like what bomber crews faced while flying missions over Germany in 1944 than what we have experienced over the last 75 years. Unlike in Operation Allies Refuge, it was not uncommon for aircraft and crews flying missions during World War II to regularly experience threats of direct enemy fire. The operational environment they faced over enemy territory was laden with air defense systems, what we presently call anti-access/area-denial systems.

The Axis powers targeted communications and navigational systems in every theater to deny Allied command and control. The speed at which the enemy advanced, particularly during the first few months in the Pacific Theater, drastically limited access, basing, and overflight. Now with the reemergence of strategic competition, our adversaries will not simply grant advantages we have enjoyed since the end of that war.

In 1947, *Air University Quarterly Review's* first year of publication, Colonel Clifford J. Helfin wrote, "this country should plan and build its Air Force with full knowledge that the methods of waging war are changing at a rate never equaled in history."¹ Today, 75 years later, Helfin's words eloquently define the current strategic climate. At USTRANSCOM, we believe the complexity of future logistic operations will be immense,

1. Clifford J. Helfin, "Mobility in the Next War," *Air University Quarterly Review* 1, no. 2 (Fall 1947): 76, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/>.

and the demands will be exponential. Logistics in a contested environment necessitates we return to a doctrinal, World War II-type approach to maneuver.

Furthermore, our success in a contested environment hinges on an agile, adaptable, and resilient workforce, capable of addressing complex challenges. Leaders must create and foster a culture in which the force understands the need to evolve both the concepts and the mindset required to compete, deter, and win.

USTRANSCOM Today

Since its establishment in 1987, USTRANSCOM has existed to project and sustain military power at a time and place of our nation's choosing. USTRANSCOM possesses the unique capability to deploy, sustain, and redeploy forces and equipment to anywhere on the globe by air, land, or sea. Powered by a dedicated, diverse workforce, the logistics enterprise underwrites the global lethality of the Joint Force, advances American interests around the world, and provides our nation's leaders with strategic flexibility, all while creating multiple cognitive dilemmas for our adversaries.

By maintaining favorable global posture, sufficient transportation capacity, and the ability to command and control global mobility operations, USTRANSCOM secures the Joint Force's ability to project an immediate and credible force required to meet US strategic objectives. America now, however, faces direct challenges across all domains. Our adversaries clearly recognize the United States' ability to rapidly scale and deliver the Joint Force globally as a strategic comparative advantage, and they are actively attempting to degrade or deny our ability to project power. If we are to maintain this advantage for our nation, we simply must evolve for tomorrow.

USTRANSCOM Tomorrow

America's challengers are competing through all instruments of national power and posturing to gain a positional advantage across all domains. They are using economic, diplomatic, and technological power to coerce other nations, challenge the stable and open international system, and attack democratic principles. Even more concerning, America's homeland is now no longer a sanctuary; force elements may have to "fight to get to the fight." To maintain our strategic advantages, the JDDE must overcome this complexity.

Evolving for the future starts with understanding the fundamental difference between logistics and maneuver. Webster's dictionary defines logistics as "the aspect of military science dealing with the procurement, maintenance, and transportation of military materiel, facilities, and personnel."² Contrast this definition of logistics with the Joint Staff definition of maneuver: "the employment of forces in the operational area through movement in combination with fires and information to gain a positional advantage in respect to the enemy."³

2. *Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed. (1998), s.v. "logistics."

3. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), *Joint Operations*, Joint Publication 3-0 (Washington, DC: CJCS, October 22, 2018), III-38.

Arguably since World War II, mobility operations have been largely focused on efficient logistics. As an example, compare Operation Allies Refuge operations to the Battle of the Atlantic during the war. Although still very difficult, Operation Allies Refuge was a logistics problem, an uncontested movement of personnel, albeit with some key constraints. In contrast, the Battle of the Atlantic was textbook maneuver.

By fully integrating armed escorts (fires) and utilizing broken secret German communications (information) to avoid enemy forces, the Allies were able to maneuver forces and supplies from North America to Europe and ultimately deny German U-Boats from accomplishing their mission. Just as this integration of maneuver with fires and information turned the tide in Western Europe, a renewed focus on maneuver will also ensure the JDDE provides the strategic advantage required for future contested logistics environments.

With the reemergence of strategic competition, we must also further evolve our thinking of maneuver concepts to include elements and domains not previously considered, such as space, cyber, and the electromagnetic spectrum. Maneuver in competition below the threshold of war is redefining traditional battlefield boundaries.

USTRANSCOM's ability to command and control mobility forces is contingent on secure networks and continuous IT and platform modernization efforts to retain the advantages needed in the cyber and space domains. America's competitors recognize this fact and are actively maneuvering in these nontraditional spaces, to deny, disrupt, and degrade our mobilization and force projection capabilities. As a warfighting combatant command, USTRANSCOM must remain agile enough to shift modes, nodes, and routes and be resilient enough to meet the volume and tempo of warfighters' demands. Further, resilient, agile, and integrated command and control allows us to overcome mission disruption and maintain decision advantage, which are essential to enabling Joint Force operations at the speed of need.

As a critical part of the maneuver force, USTRANSCOM must face these realities. The mobility enterprise must evolve to be fully integrated with all war-fighting functions. The defense industrial base, commercial industries, and the United States military need to be unified in effort and purpose. Even more so, true global integration is critical and requires the deliberate integration of all 11 combatant commands with every government branch. This must be a united, concentrated effort as we operate hand-in-hand with our Allies and partners. From initial planning to end-state achievement, we must collaborate throughout all phases. This integration is underpinned by shared, trusted data and a suite of analytic capabilities to enhance agile and effective decision making at echelon.

Equally important to evolving concepts is the evolution of our mindset. The success of USTRANSCOM's warfighting framework and the JDDE's ability to project combat power are underpinned by our collective ability to innovate and overcome formidable problems. Maintaining deterrence requires the Joint Force be biased to action, setting conditions for a forward-looking and forward-leaning posture. To do so, it is imperative that we develop a competitive mindset—hungry, determined, and focused.

A workforce with a competitive mindset is continually creating advantages for tomorrow by innovating and experimenting with more effective ways to operate. A competitive mindset encourages imaginative ideas and challenges antiquated concepts and processes. It develops a resilient force that has the courage to take disciplined risks and accept lessons of failure as learning opportunities. Competitive leaders link their mission to national objectives and empower others with commander's intent. Competitive thinkers value continued learning and self-improvement to ward off obsolescence. Competition sets the conditions for innovation, creates advantages, and enables faster, more effective decision making. A competitive force keeps pace with emerging challenges and evolves to meet the needs of tomorrow.

Conclusion

Just as Helfin argued 75 years ago, we must confront the rapidly changing methods of waging war. Time is of the essence; we cannot cling to yesterday's successes. Logistics in a contested environment necessitates a renewed emphasis on maneuver and an evolution of how we apply the concept across domains. Furthermore, we must develop a competitive mindset to maintain advantage in this rapidly changing strategic environment. It is evident the traditional methods of today are not sufficient to solve the new and complex challenges of tomorrow. In 1947, President Harry Truman stated "America was not built on fear. America was built on courage, on imagination, and an unbeatable determination to do the job at hand."⁴ Together, we will rise to meet these complexities; the Total Force and our partners possess the talent and capabilities to overcome any challenge. Together—We Deliver! Æ



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4. Harry S. Truman, *Special Message to the Congress: The President's First Economic Report*, Harry S. Truman Library (website), January 8, 1947, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/>.