

# The Strategic Seaport Program: Ensuring Transportation Readiness



1 / 1 Show Caption + Hide Caption – An M1A2 Abrams tank from 1st Battalion, 68th Armor Regiment, 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, sits on the dock after being off-loaded from a cargo vessel at the port of Bremerhaven, Germany, January 6, 2017. The 3rd ABCT's full equipment set began arriving to Germany from Fort Carson, Colorado, and will be transported to Poland by rail, line haul and military convoys over the next two weeks to kick off the beginning of the heel-to-toe rotations of U.S.-based armored brigades to Europe in support of Operation Atlantic Resolve. (Photo Credit: Capt. Scott Walters) [VIEW ORIGINAL](#)

"Readiness for ground combat is -- and will remain -- the U.S. Army's Number 1 priority," declared Army Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Milley in his first major address. Readiness, the ability of the Army and its sister services to respond to any situation at any time with

effective force, requires not only trained troops, but an effective transportation infrastructure capable of supplying their needs, wherever and whenever they operate. On an ordinary basis, the U.S. military's global arrangement of air, land, and sea transportation infrastructure is responsive and capable enough to meet the needs of its troops. In extraordinary situations, however, such as surge deployments or major national contingencies, a reserve capacity may be required to handle the associated spike in demand. Anticipating this, the Department of Defense, along with other federal agencies, has created programs designed to prevent critical shortfalls.

The Strategic Seaport Program, or SSP, serves to meet one aspect of this requirement by ensuring America has the seaport capacity necessary to effectively handle any contingency affecting national security. It provides America's armed forces with a reserve seaport capacity to handle any sudden, large increases in the need to move military assets during a national emergency or surge deployment. This is accomplished by identifying and selecting seaports, whether military or commercial, that best fit the nation's long term needs. Then readying these seaports in the event they need to be utilized.

As a component of readiness, the SSP fulfills three basic objectives. The first of these is to determine which seaports fit the requirements for inclusion in the program. Not all seaports qualify for acceptance. While a strategic seaport can be either military or commercial, only ports with the capability and capacity to meet America's national security needs can be designated as strategic. Any ports considered for the program must undergo thorough vetting and preparation to ensure their ability to support America's armed forces during a national emergency. Satisfying this second objective involves managing a number of factors relevant to a port's readiness, including planning for how the ports will be used during a contingency, training of personnel, and security. After these issues have been taken into account, the third objective of the program is to continuously evaluate and assess the capabilities of strategic seaports to track their continued fit for the program. Since national security requirements change as new threats emerge, the SSP ensures the program is responsive to evolving national security challenges. This includes reviewing whether strategic seaports still fit readiness requirements and, if not, whether they should be dedesignated and replaced with a more suitable one. Accomplishing these objectives allows America to have the seaports necessary to support materiel movement in any major contingency.

Maintaining the SSP's massive reserve capacity requires the coordinated effort of numerous federal agencies. In total, nine government agencies work to run the program: the U.S. Maritime Administration (MARAD), U.S. Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM), Military Sealift Command (MSC), U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), Transportation Security

Administration (TSA), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), U.S. Army Forces Command (USAFORSCOM), U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM), and the Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command (SDDC). Together they make up the National Port Readiness Network or NPRN.

The NPRN operates the SSP through a three-tiered organizational structure. At the top is the NPRN Steering Group, consisting of senior leadership from each NPRN agency, which provides overall guidance on the direction of the program. Next, the NPRN Working Group is responsible for implementing policies and directives set by the steering group. Finally, every strategic seaport has a Port Readiness Committee which manages the program at the local level. All three tiers include representatives from each NPRN agency. Working within the context of the NPRN's structure, these representatives keep the program focused and operational.

Although each agency within the NPRN possesses their own distinct jurisdiction as defined by federal regulations, they often serve various functions at multiple levels within the program. SDDC, for example, plays several critical roles. With input from other NPRN agencies, the SDDC Commanding General authorizes the designation and dedesignation of seaports as strategic. SDDC's Transportation Engineering Agency (TEA) evaluates ports to assess their strategic fit in terms of capacity and capability. Representing SDDC at NPRN Working Groups, its Strategy and Adaptive Planning Directorate (G5) works to address any readiness deficiencies, while its Operations Directorate (G3) works to keep ports trained, ready, and secure. Finally, on the ground operational level, SDDC's transportation brigades the 596th, 597th, and 599th coordinate with local port authorities to facilitate movement of cargo and port security requirements. In the NPRN, one agency may be responsible for multiple lines of effort. Through regular coordination these many lines of effort divided among the different agencies combine to enable the SSP to function as a dynamic whole.

In the overall picture of readiness, the Strategic Seaport Program is a key component of transportation and materiel readiness. It enables surge deployments and responses to national security contingencies by providing a reserve seaport capacity to meet elevated demand for military cargo. Furthermore, it synchronizes the efforts of multiple federal agencies to achieve the common goal of protecting the American people. Most importantly, it provides our forces the ability to project power whenever and wherever it's needed.