

Last Port of Call for the U.S. Merchant Marine?

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The privately owned U.S.-flag foreign trading fleet, which is an essential component of U.S. sealift capability, stands on the edge of a precipice. The fleet—roughly stable in terms of cargo carrying capacity from 2000 to 2012—has declined from 106 vessels in 2012 to 78 vessels at October 30, 2016 primarily because of a substantial decline in available U.S. Government-reserved cargo. The size of the fleet has reached a point where the viability of the U.S.-flag industry involved in foreign trade—including its trained mariners, maritime academies and schools, and experienced back office personnel—is in danger of disappearing. As the cargo decline is not likely to be reversed any time soon, the fleet will likely only survive into the future if there is a substantial, renewed national commitment to sustain it.

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