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[Followup Survey of Improvements Made in Military Airlift Command Operations Since the 1973 Middle East War]. LCD-78-207; B-180332. January 3, 1978. 4 pp.

Report to Rep. Lucien N. Nedzi; by Robert G. Rothwell (for Fred J. Shafer, Director, Logistics and Communications Div.

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A followup survey to evaluate actions designed to improve future airlift operations indicated that Military Airlift Command (MAC) operations have improved greatly since the 1973 Middle East War. A 1975 report evaluating airlift operations during the war contained the following recommendations: that the Secretary of Defense establish a contingency plan for the Middle East to provide for overall logistic support, including strategic airlift; that MAC be given authority to manage the movement of cargo, personnel, and aircraft in future strategic airlift operations; and that the Secretary of the Air Force provide in-flight refueling capability for the C-5 aircraft. Findings/Conclusions: MAC and the Joint Chiefs of Staff have prepared a contingency plan for the Middle East, and the Secretary of Defense has directed that MAC be given the emergency powers of a specified command. During the Israeli airlift, the operational capability to refuel the C-5 aircraft in flight did not exist because MAC lacked sufficient qualified crews. About 80% of C-5 crews have been qualified for aerial refueling. Additional actions have resulted in some improvement in C-5 spare parts stockage levels and reductions in the number of aircraft grounded for maintenance. A sufficient number of experienced personnel are now available to the Command Support Staff, weather displays have been automated, and communications facilities have been improved. (RRS)



UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

LOGISTICS AND COMMUNICATIONS
DIVISION

3 JAN 1978

04542

B-180332

The Honorable Lucien N. Nedzi
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Nedzi:

In our April 16, 1975, report to the Congress on our evaluation of the airlift operations of the Military Airlift Command (MAC) during the 1973 Middle East War (LCD-75-204), we identified several problem areas and made recommendations designed to improve future airlift operations. The report was the result of work undertaken at your request.

We recently completed a followup survey to determine what actions had been taken by the Department of Defense and the Air Force in response to our recommendations. We found that MAC operations had greatly improved since the 1973 Middle East War and that most of the problem areas had been corrected. Each such area is discussed below under separate captions.

LOGISTIC CONTINGENCY PLAN PREPARED

In our report we recommended that the Secretary of Defense establish a contingency plan for the Middle East that would provide overall logistic support, including strategic airlift support U.S. interests. We further recommended that the Secretary be given authority to manage the movement of cargo and personnel and to control the flow of aircraft in future strategic airlift operations, within the overall limits established by higher authorities.

MAC and the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) have reacted to our recommendation by preparing a contingency plan for the Middle East. To resolve the problem MAC had in managing its airfleet amidst receipt of voluminous orders from various sources through the Air Force chain of command during the

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1973 airlift, the Secretary of Defense, with the approval of the President, directed that MAC be given the emergency powers of a specified command. Commanders of specified commands are responsible directly to the President and the Secretary of Defense through the JCS for such military missions as may be assigned to them by the Secretary with the approval of the President. This latitude allows MAC to operate outside the normal Air Force chain of command during emergencies.

IN-FLIGHT REFUELING CAPABILITY IMPROVED

During the Israeli airlift, the operational capability to refuel the C-5 in flight did not exist because MAC lacked sufficient crews qualified for such refueling. An important lesson learned from the airlift was that, to implement U.S. policy of remote presence, effective in-flight refueling capability is necessary for strategic airlift aircraft. We recommended that the Secretary of the Air Force provide in-flight refueling capability for C-5 aircraft.

Action taken by MAC has resulted in about 80 percent of C-5 crews being qualified for aerial refueling. Thus, MAC has almost completely corrected this deficiency. In addition, proposed modification would add in-flight refueling capability to the C-141 aircraft and give MAC even greater operational flexibility.

IMPROVEMENTS MADE IN SUPPORT STAFF AND COMMUNICATIONS

In our earlier review we found that MAC's Command Support Staff was assigned an insufficient number of experienced personnel and that the communications facilities were inadequate. We also found that critical weather data needed to be automated and displayed electronically. The manual method used to scan and display weather data was inefficient, uneconomical, and untimely. Finally, we found that guidance on regulating priority communications was not realistic, appropriate, or complete and was being disregarded. Security classifications were needlessly assigned to messages, which caused problems in communicating airlift requirements data and in providing information to higher headquarters.

MAC has since taken action to resolve the problems with its command and control procedures. A sufficient number of

experienced personnel are now available to the Command Support Staff; weather displays have been automated; and communications facilities have been improved. For example, since the 1973 war, the base communications center has been equipped with optical character readers to automatically convert typed messages into paper or magnetic tape for transmission purposes. This process reduces normal outgoing message processing time significantly. In our opinion, MAC has greatly improved its command and control procedures since the 1973 Israeli airlift.

OPERATIONAL READINESS OF
MAC'S AIRCRAFT IMPROVED

During the Israeli airlift 60 percent of the C-5s and 35 percent of the C-141s assigned to MAC were inoperable each day--grounded for maintenance and lack of spare parts. The grounded aircraft did not prevent the accomplishment of any missions because the number of operable aircraft always exceeded mission requirements. We recommended, however, that the Secretary of the Air Force improve the operational readiness of U.S. strategic airlift aircraft.

According to MAC officials, having aircraft in a maintenance status does not always impair operational readiness. They told us that aircraft are sometimes placed in routine maintenance because there is no immediate requirement for them. In an emergency, such routine noncritical work would be deferred. Necessary maintenance work would be accelerated, which would reduce the number of nonoperable aircraft.

These officials believe the real test of readiness would be their ability to return the aircraft to flying status within a short period. In an April 1977 exercise to test operational readiness, 21 of 25 C-5 aircraft (84 percent) and 32 of 40 C-141 aircraft (80 percent) assigned to Travis Air Force Base, California, were made operable within a 12-hour period.

Concerning spare parts, action taken by MAC has resulted in some improvement in the C-5 spare parts stockage levels. The average number of C-5s grounded for lack of spares has been reduced from 10 to 4 aircraft. In addition, the average number of C-141s grounded for lack of spares has been reduced from 10 to 8 aircraft.

CONCLUSIONS

The timely and efficient actions taken by the Air Force and MAC in response to our earlier recommendations have greatly improved the operational capability of MAC.

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We are sending copies of this report to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations and Armed Services and to the Department of Defense.

Sincerely yours,



for F. J. Shafer
Director