During the past several years, the Defense Department has been embarked on a major effort to achieve the rapid deployment capability needed to support such a strategy. Now, we are buying a new transport, the C–5A, which will enable us to make another major improvement, both qualitative and quantitative, in our strategic airlift capacity. Thus, when our presently planned six squadrons of C–5A's are all in the force in fiscal year 1972, our airlift capacity will be more than 10 times what it was in fiscal year 1961.

Over the years, forward prepositioning of military materiel, especially heavy and bulky equipment, has grown in importance, partly because of the great increase in our ability to airlift forces and partly because of the emergency of new prepositioning concepts and equipment. The most important of these concepts has been the "forward floating depot" (FFD), in which balanced stocks of equipment and supplies are maintained on ships stationed overseas within a few days steaming distance of potential trouble spots, and thus very quickly available to "marry up" with airlifted forces from the central reserve. As a first generation "floating depot" system we planned to use old Victory-class ships, specially modified for this purpose. Three of these ships were actually deployed in fiscal year 1963 and we had planned to add more this year. However, the requirements of the conflict in southeast Asia have now caused us to defer this deployment for the time being.

Our future plans call for this first generation system to be replaced by a new class of ships, the FDL's, which are being specifically designed to support a rapid deployment strategy. Unlike the relatively slow (16 knots) and small payload (2,265 short tons) Victory ships, the FDL's will be fast, large payload (8–10,000 short tons) ships capable of rapidly delivering cargo either over the beach, using embarked lighters and helicopters, or at established ports. Because of these improvements, the FDL's will provide a wider range of operational flexibility than the Victory's. While we would probably always want to have some of them fully loaded and deployed forward, some of them could also be held partially loaded with ammunition and supplies but in a ready status in either U.S. or overseas ports where vehicles, helicopters, etc., tailored to the mission, could be placed on board quickly as the situation requires. This mode of operation which is feasible only because of the speed and efficiency of the FDL's would allow us to meet the desired rapid deployment schedules without immobilizing indefinitely large amounts of high cost equipment some of which also requires substantial continuing maintenance. In either mode of operation, however, the FDL's would have to be committed to the rapid deployment mission at all times and would not be available for regular point-to-point service. Thus while they will make an enormous contribution to our rapid deployment capability and will also be highly efficient carriers for resupply after the initial deployment phase, these FDL's in themselves do not provide the answer to the overall sealift problem.

Indeed, all of our study and experience shows that the requirement for sealift continues to grow after the initial buildup phase, as more forces are deployed and stocks of consumables have to be replaced. To meet this larger and longer term need, we must rely in large part on merchant shipping. Based on the transportation re-