



May 28, 2020

Hon. Mike Pompeo  
U.S. Secretary of State  
2201 C St., NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Hon. Mark T. Esper  
U.S. Secretary of Defense  
100 S Washington Blvd,  
Arlington, VA 22202

Dear Secretary Pompeo and Secretary Esper:

We are writing to request your immediate assistance on an urgent matter. Scores of U.S. mariners are presently trapped aboard cargo ships, unable to take leave or return home due to extreme COVID-19 lockdown measures imposed by foreign governments. This humanitarian crisis, if not resolved as soon as possible, may threaten the essential supply chain for some 200,000 active U.S. military personnel now serving overseas.

The cargo carried on these U.S. flagged ships supports our troops, our allies and the global economy.

Ship's captains, officers and crew members who sail under the American flag and perform these essential functions for our country have not been able to set foot on dry land in months. Their workplaces have become floating prisons. Crewmembers are in danger of losing access to life-sustaining medicines. In many cases, they cannot contact their loved ones at home in the United States as some of these vessels lack Internet access.

It is well documented that isolation and excessive time serving aboard ship can create increased fatigue and psychological stress, raising the risk of marine accidents. Thousands of mariners across the globe who work on foreign-flagged vessels are in the same predicament.

U.S. mariners who are part of the U.S. Maritime Security Program typically serve a four-month assignment on ship and then rotate home by air to the United States for time off while awaiting their next assignment. A fresh crew flies in to relieve them. Right now, foreign governments are refusing to allow U.S. mariners to leave their ships, to enter overseas airports, or to use hotels or any other form of accommodation or transport which would allow them to return home.

These extreme lockdown conditions, imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, are not related to any meaningful health risks. Thanks to rigorous and comprehensive safety measures jointly implemented by employers and those aboard ship, in conjunction with our union, there have been no reported cases – none – of the deadly virus on U.S. Maritime Security Program vessels. These are not cruise ships



suffering massive outbreaks; these are cargo ships staffed by mariners who have kept out an infectious disease by scrupulously following all required safety measures.

These American men and women need to come home immediately. The longer they are stuck at sea without relief, the greater the risk that fatigue and stress will lead to accidents interrupting the delivery of vital food, medicine, military supplies and other cargo to our troops serving overseas.

It is inconceivable that the United States – the wealthiest and most powerful nation on earth, with military bases, planes and facilities all over the globe – cannot relieve its own mariners who are stranded at sea. To date, however, our efforts to address this problem with members of your respective departments have yielded no results. That’s why we are bringing this issue to your attention.

COVID-19 has been a sudden and intense storm. We know that you and your staffs have a lot on your desks to contend with during this time of peril. Please make this a priority. Help us bring these stranded U.S. mariners home to safe harbor.

Sincerely,

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