

Technological Wonders

Defense Industry Key To Military's Performance

by John J. Politi

(NAPSA)—More than a half century after America became the "Arsenal of Democracy," U.S. military power remains very much dependent on manufacturing and technological superiority.

However, the defense industrial base has been characterized by consolidation and shrinkage over the past 10 years as the Department of Defense (DoD) reduced programs and production at the end of the Cold War.

Since then, thousands of jobs have been lost in the defense industry as DoD budgets were cut and companies turned from relying on defense business to commercial markets. With layoffs still occurring and little new talent coming in, the defense industry workforce has aged rapidly. The problem is acute in the areas of science, engineering and manufacturing personnel.

Compounding this, a large number of employees are eligible for retirement in the next five years. Their departure will result in a devastating loss of experience and skill.

Meanwhile, our nation's education system is failing to equip America's youth with the necessary math and science skills to succeed in high-tech professions.

The U.S. industrial base is vital to sustaining, modernizing and transforming our armed forces today and for the future. While we cannot bring back the "Arsenal of Democracy," we can and must reinforce the remaining industrial base.

This should be done using wise acquisition strategies and sound contracting and business practices. We need to encourage a climate wherein the mutually beneficial partnership between the military and industry can thrive. Moreover, we must nurture and strike the right balance in the relationship between the private sector, logistics centers, research labs and academia.

The industrial workforce must also be replenished with new talent. A new commitment is needed to improve mathematics and science education from the elementary level through graduate school. This should include incentives such as scholarships and internship programs to encourage more students to pursue these fields.

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