

PROTECTING AMERICA'S DEFENDERS

Preserving American Defense Production

By William R. Hawkins

(NAPSA)—The United States economy has been the world's largest for over a century. Converting this potential into actual strength, however, requires keeping an eye on the health of key industries.



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While the news is filled with images of American fighters catapulting off aircraft carriers and tanks rolling through Baghdad, beneath the military muscle is a deteriorating manufacturing sector that weakens the ability of the United States to remain the unchallenged superpower in the future.

The defense cuts of the 1990s devastated many of the industries that supply the U.S. military. Many firms dropped out of the business of building parts for weapons systems due to lack of work.

Many were bought up by foreign interests who wanted U.S. technology and know-how to add to their own industrial capabilities in competition with the surviving American firms. Major corporations have been outsourcing military parts from foreign suppliers more with an eye to profit than security.

The House Armed Services Committee chaired by Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-CA) has attempted to reverse these dangerous trends in the 2004 Defense Authorization bill. This legislation requires that all machine tools used in military production be made in the United States by 2007. It creates a \$100 million fund to help firms reconstitute lost manufacturing capabilities vital to national defense.

The bill also mandates that the Secretary of Defense draw up a list of components and technologies that are critical to the production of U.S. weapon systems, and that the industrial capacity to produce such items be located within the United States.

American enterprise has provided the country with superior weapons and diplomatic leverage, while preserving America's ability to act independently when the nation's interests require it. The preservation of the U.S. defense industrial base should be a core objective in national security planning.

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