
Defense Report

AUSA



Mobilizing Defense Industry — We Must Prepare To Do It, Now!

We take a lot of things for granted here in the United States—the right to make as much of ourselves as we choose, the right to an abundant life and the rights to personal freedom and safety. We also take as “given” the expectation that whenever the nation is threatened its people will rise to its defense and its industry will once again become the “arsenal of democracy,” to supply, in abundance, the weapons of war. Unfortunately, none of these assumptions is universally applicable. It is doubtful, in particular, that industry could do what we expect of it.

When the United States began producing weaponry for our allies, before we ourselves became involved in World War II, the nation was fighting its way back from a disastrous economic depression. There was a large amount of unused or underused industrial capacity and a willing work force anxious to be gainfully employed. Perhaps just as important, there was no shortage of the raw materials needed to undertake defense production. Also, the period of producing military supplies before our own involvement began permitted a buildup of capabilities that eventually supported the fantastic production figures accomplished in the next four years.

If we went to war again, tomorrow, things would not be the same as they were in 1941. Even though we are in a period of recession there is little idle production capacity. The weapons that seemed so complex and modern in the 1940s now seem rather primitive. Our modern aircraft, ships and tanks employ state-of-the-art technology unheard of in the World War II era. Our modern missiles and electronics equipment are the products of ideas that were just being conceived at the end of that war. Where we had a bountiful supply of petroleum as we entered World War II we are now badly pinched and largely dependent on foreign sources. Our new technology has also made us dependent on foreign suppliers of many rare metals, like palladium, iridium and rhodium, and one of our prime suppliers for these three metals is the Soviet Union.

The mobilization exercise *Nifty Nugget*, that has been so widely remarked on in relation to pure military readiness, also pointed up severe problems with plans, or the lack of plans, to mobilize the civilian sector of the nation. It showed that little attention has been given to the realities discussed above. It showed that the only way we can assure ourselves that industry would be able to do what we expect of it is to begin planning and preparing now. This planning and preparing must advance beyond the paper stage, too. There must be an investment in plant capacity and in production equipment. We must make it worthwhile for our defense industries to build-in expansion capability and we must constantly search for substitute materials and techniques that will lessen our dependence on foreign supplies of raw materials and of energy. Without this kind of advanced planning the validity of one of our most crucial national assumptions is seriously in question.