
Defense Report

AUSA



Industrial Preparedness — A Vital Element in Our National Defense

There is much more to national defense than having good people who are well-trained and are equipped with the best possible weapons. We must be assured, for instance, that once our elected leaders have committed our forces to combat there are adequate sources of manpower, supplies and equipment to keep our forces going until the fighting achieves the desired conclusion. The extended debate over the ability of our present Selective Service System to provide mobilization manpower in a timely manner is one manifestation of these additional needs. Another can be found in the report of the House Armed Service Committee special panel which, in December, 1980, found many alarming flaws in the ability of our nation's industries to react swiftly to the need for increased defense production.

This inability to react highlights the weaknesses in the Army's sustainability — its readiness to go to war and keep going until the full force of American industry and the American people can be brought to bear. The Army is almost entirely lacking a reservoir of equipment that could be used to replace combat losses. Indeed, many of the active Army's combat elements stationed in the United States have had to relinquish equipment to be stockpiled in Germany for possible use in a NATO emergency. The units of the Army National Guard and Army Reserve, whose readiness is crucial to the fighting capabilities of the Total Army, are either drastically short of equipment, have obsolescent gear, or both. The supply of the most critical item, ammunition, is also short.

Of course, there is a government-owned production base for ammunition, but most of its capacity is "laid away" and inactive because the Army has not been able to procure enough ammunition to justify keeping its capacity "warm." The Army estimates that across the broad spectrum of its mobilization hardware needs only about 25 percent could be "surged" to full production within the first six months of a military emergency. As long as two years would be required to convert existing civilian production facilities or build new ones that could fill all the gaps in the supply flow. In the meantime, of course, a mere trickle of supplies would be reaching the combat forces.

The reasons for this predicament are many and varied, but the constrained defense budgets of the last ten years are largely responsible. Constant adjustments in what should have been reliable, long-term programs have forced many civilian manufacturers away from defense production because there were too many uncertainties. Stultifying government regulations superimposed on every aspect of defense contracting have driven away suppliers who can easily find lucrative markets elsewhere.

Our government-owned industrial base must be enlivened and a new package of incentives must be offered civilian industry to draw them back into defense production. None of this can be accomplished, however, without an underlying commitment of spending for readiness.