

The erosion of U.S. military capability part 2

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Two decades ago, upon conclusion of the NATO maneuver "Fallex 62," the West German armed forces (*Bundeswehr*) were judged "*bedingt abwehrbereit*"—in a state of only conditional (i.e., limited) defense preparedness—in the maneuver critique. The matter was leaked to the press, caused the famous "Spiegel Affair," and ultimately the forced resignation of defense minister Strauss. Still, nobody got upset for too long about the limited combat readiness of the West German army, because U.S. nuclear and conventional capabilities were judged sufficient for the defense of Western Europe. With some cautions, this judgment was correct.

However, when Soviet troops moved into Afghanistan shortly after Christmas last year, it became clear to much of the world that the U.S. had no military option to counter the Soviet move, and that the 1962 characterization of the *Bundeswehr* might have become applicable to the armed forces of the United States. This is not an unnecessarily alarmist conclusion. The figures comparing U.S. and Soviet forces we presented in last week's installment of our story on the erosion of in-depth U.S. war-fighting capability speak for themselves. Nor is this growing overall military strategic disparity simply or even primarily a result of massive Soviet arms build-up efforts. The decline in U.S. capabilities is absolute, not just relative to the growth of Soviet power.

This, as is documented in the pieces by Dr. Schoonover and Dr. Bardwell below, is the direct consequence of more than ten years of absolute decline in U.S. high-technology manufacturing and research and development capacity, and can be traced back even further to the disastrous strategic, R and D, and military procurement concepts and policies imported into the Pentagon and imposed upon the U.S. military starting in 1961 by Robert McNamara and General Maxwell Taylor. Next week's concluding piece in our series on U.S. war-fighting capability will review McNamara and Taylor's, as well as Henry Kissinger and James Schlesinger's "flexible response" and "theater

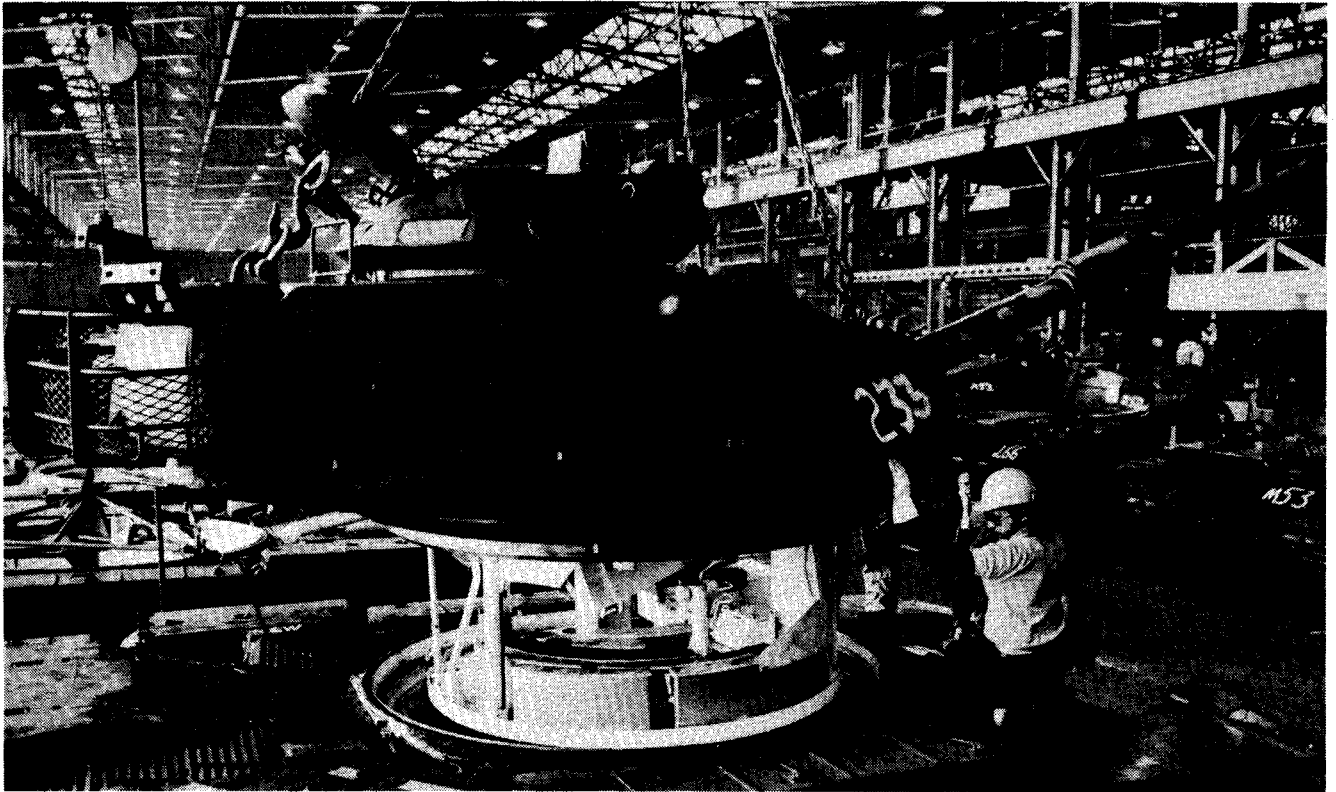


Photo: Fred Conrad/SYGMA

nuclear war” strategic doctrines and evaluate their impact on U.S. military power.

This week’s installment begins with an analysis by David Goldman of the expected impact upon the U.S. economy of the type of U.S. rearmament effort presently proposed by the Carter administration. Goldman’s conclusions reach well beyond the rather simple-minded enumeration of production bottlenecks and scheduling problems the U.S. economy is predicted to encounter in the Feb. 4 *Business Week*’s title story, “Defense Production Gap” or “Why the U.S. Can’t Rearm Fast.” After an initial spurt in economic activity, Goldman’s analysis forecasts a dramatic downturn of the economy as a whole due to large-scale internal dislocations not offset by significant new capital formation and productivity gains. The shallow, “in-width” Carter rearmament proposal will in fact further exacerbate U.S. economic and defense posture problems by continuing the very policies that got us into trouble in the first place.

What the *Business Week* study crucially overlooks is the dependency of both a healthy economy and a capable military upon the kind of sustained and in-depth shaping out of R and D capabilities which leads to a continuous flow of technological innovations into the economy as a whole, be that its military or civilian sector. Here, the U.S. has fallen well behind. No “quick fix” solutions to this problem exist.

There can also be little doubt that the U.S. is in imminent danger of being strategically outflanked by

possible Soviet technological breakthroughs. The type of problem to be faced was stated by George Heilmeyer—then head of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA)—in Congressional testimony in 1976:

In 1878, Frederick Engels stated that the weapons used in the Franco-Prussian War had reached such a state of perfection that further progress which would have any revolutionary influence on war was no longer possible. Thirty years later the following unforeseen systems were used in World War I: aircraft, tanks, chemical warfare, trucks, submarines, and radio communications. A 1937 study entitled “Technological Trends and National Policy” failed to foresee the following systems, all of which were operational by 1957: helicopters, jet engines, radar, inertial navigators, nuclear weapons, nuclear submarines, rocket-powered missiles, electronic computers and cruise missiles. ...

That the Carter administration has no comprehension of the in-depth U.S. scientific and technological rearmament problem that has to be faced, or is in any case determined to ignore it, is pointed up by the fact that the overall 1981 budget proposal, while providing for a 3-5 percent increase of the defense budget in real terms, at the same time mandates a close to 10 percent cut in real terms (assuming the 1979 inflation rate) for basic research in all areas. The Soviet Union—grain embargo, Olympic boycott and all—won’t be that stupid.