

***Published in the San Diego Union Tribune on April 4, 2010***

The strength of America's military is derived from the professionalism of the men and women filling its ranks and the technological advantage that sets it apart from any other fighting force in the world. Since World War II and the decades of diplomatic and military engagement during the Cold War, America's industrial base – once called the Arsenal of Democracy – designed and built the resources that helped carry us to victory and contribute to our security today.

With combat forces engaged in Afghanistan and new threats on the horizon, namely China, our national security posture rests heavily on our ability to develop effective and reliable defense systems for the future. Since the end of the Cold War, however, our nation's defense industrial base and the sizable work force it once sustained is deteriorating along with the rest of American manufacturing.

For San Diego, the defense and aerospace industry is one of the largest contributors to our regional economy, representing almost 30 percent of our local work force and further defining our community as a centerpiece of national security. It is estimated that nearly 305,000 jobs in San Diego are related to national defense.

Some of the platforms developed locally include unmanned aerial vehicles and related components, which are invaluable serving the U.S. combat mission in Afghanistan by mitigating the roadside bomb threat and providing persistent surveillance. San Diego is also home to the largest military and commercial ship building enterprises in the country.

Nevertheless, the defense industrial base is shrinking nationwide, due in large part to the temptations of a global economy and the misguided notion that foreign markets are often a better source for cutting-edge technology. One of the most telling indicators is the steady reduction of aerospace scientists and engineers. Today, there are fewer than 40,000 engineers and scientists in this industry, down from 145,000 just two decades ago.

This impact is not just related to jobs and skill sets, but domestic production capability, too. In fact, since 1990, the number of major surface combatant shipbuilders and the number of

fixed-wing aircraft developers fell from eight to three; tactical missile producers went from 13 to three; tracked combat vehicle developers dropped from three to two; and only two companies – Boeing and Lockheed Martin – currently build U.S. fighter aircraft. These are only a few examples, which take their place against the growing list of defense contracts, once held by American companies, going to foreign competitors.

This pattern must be reversed before it is too late. Without a strong defense industrial base, America will continue shedding the same industry jobs that have employed millions of people over the last 50 years and eventually lose military effectiveness – an outcome that would have severe implications for our security and global interests.

There are ways to prevent this from happening, but it will require a long-term commitment in several areas, including a focus on science, technology, engineering and math education in our schools. It will also require a reevaluation of U.S. trade, procurement and tax policies, as well as substantial investment in domestic manufacturing, including research and development.

In the short-term, targeted defense spending can provide a bigger jolt to our economy than most programs funded through the “stimulus package,” from which less than 10 percent of funding is dedicated to roadway construction – another job creator. As Harvard economist Martin Feldstein previously noted, a 10 percent funding increase for defense procurement and research would contribute about \$20 billion a year to the overall stimulus budget and, when coupled with other funding, stands to create an additional 300,000 jobs – a direct benefit to San Diego and other communities that depend on a strong industrial base.

Restoring American manufacturing must be one of our top priorities, because every day that we fail to take action, we risk losing another piece of our security, as well as an important part of our nation's work force that, once gone, might be near impossible to retrieve.