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## A false mythology

ANYONE with even rudimentary awareness of the facts of today's economic life finds himself in an Alice's Wonderland of misleading rhetoric as he reads, or listens to, the attack on defense spending by many members of Congress and the news media.

They appear to see the world as they'd like it to be, rather than the world as it really is. Theirs is a topsy-turvy world, where black is white, right is wrong, less spending is more, and shrinking military forces somehow have become a monster devouring U.S. resources.

Alfred Wohlstetter notes very perceptively in "Foreign Affairs" that a false mythology has been built up around such inaccurate terms as "the arms race," "steadily mounting defense budgets," and "record defense spending." This creates the misleading impression that our defense establishment is on a runaway spending spree.

Another discerning observer, former Presidential Special Assistant R. W. Komer, says this "rhetorical imagery" obscures more than it reveals, and urges Congress and the press to heed the warnings of James Schlesinger on U.S. defense expenditures vis-a-vis the U.S.S.R.

How can there be a nuclear "arms race," Wohlstetter wonders, when the U.S. isn't racing? Its nuclear effort is steadily declining rather than increasing in real terms, he points out.

The gap between reality and the perceptions of defense critics seems to center on their refusal to recognize the erosive effects on defense dollars of continuing inflation. Public figures who continue to hammer at "soaring arms costs" ignore a basic, unchallengeable fact. It is that, while the number of dollars appropriated for defense has indeed increased, we are getting far less defense per dollar.

The truth is that this nation is spending less for defense in pre-Vietnam dollars than at any point since FY 1950, when Louis Johnson's economizing rendered us almost impotent in the face of North Korea's thrust across the 38th Parallel.

The reality of defense spending is revealed by such facts as these:

— Today's defense dollar buys about 40 per cent less than it did in 1968, the peak year of the Vietnam War.

— Defense spending today accounts for 24 per cent of all federal outlays, only one-half of the 47 per cent that prevailed in 1960, and the proportion continues to decrease.


The misperceptions of those who would make further reductions in defense spending become even more apparent in comparisons of the "conventional forces" of the U.S. and U.S.S.R. Senator Sam Nunn of Georgia accurately pointed out that Soviet military manpower has increased by one million since 1964 while ours has dropped by 585,000. In consequence, Russian forces are now double ours. He reminded:

"On the average from 1972 to 1974, the Soviets produced 3,000 tanks per year compared to 462 by the United States. They produced annually 1,200 cannon, compared to 170 in the U.S.; 930 tactical aircraft were produced by the Soviets compared to 540 in the United States; 39 surface ships for them compared to 11 for us."

The Soviet Union is our potential adversary and we accept such growing disparities in defense capabilities only at great risk.

Nor are the National Guard and reserves insulated from the downward trend. Our appropriations have followed an upward trend in dollar amounts, but inflation has given our funds less buying power, reducing our ability to produce the readiness required.

Americans usually forget that the principal reason for uniting our 13 states under a strong central government nearly 200 years ago was to provide for their mutual security in a dangerous world. The world is still dangerous, and national defense still is one of the federal government's most crucial responsibilities. Without a defense structure that's adequate to cope with the threat posed by our potential enemies, we risk everything — life, liberty and continued enjoyment of the good things our mutual effort has produced.

The National  /76  
GUARDSMAN

Official publication of the National Guard Association of the United States

FEBRUARY 1976

VOLUME XXX, NUMBER 2

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THE NATIONAL GUARDSMAN is published monthly, except August, by the National Guard Association of the United States, with editorial and advertising offices at 1 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001. Telephone (202) 347-0341. Second class postage paid at Washington, D.C., and at additional mailing offices. Copyright 1976 by the National Guard Association of the U.S. All rights reserved. All members of the NGAUS receive the GUARDSMAN. Nonmember subscriptions: \$3 per year domestic; \$4 per year foreign. Bulk rate for 100 or more copies to the same address: \$2.50 each. Single copies 50¢. The GUARDSMAN welcomes original articles bearing on national defense, with emphasis on the National Guard. Manuscripts and artwork must be accompanied by return postage; no responsibility is assumed for safe handling. Opinions expressed by authors do not necessarily represent official NGAUS positions or policy. Likewise, publication of advertising cannot be deemed an endorsement thereof by this Association or its members.

FEBRUARY 1976

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The spirit of the militia

The spirit of the militia was lifted after North Carolina Patriots stopped Tory Highlander troops in the Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge, as depicted in this diorama of the ill-fated attack (see page 2).

—(National Park Service photo)

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