

Surge

In a world where regional conflicts can quickly spread out of control, taking stock of our own industrial resources to see if we can meet potential challenges is simple common sense.

At a unique roundtable meeting at Machinists headquarters in Upper Marlboro, the IAM asked the hard question: will America have the ability to manufacture the means of our own defense seven to ten years from now?

The disturbing conclusion after two days of discussions is no, not really. Defense firm executives, industrial policy experts and IAM representatives with manufacturing and defense sector responsibilities all agreed that we are increasingly dependent on a dubious supply chain with multiple weak links.

More than two decades of outsourcing and subcontracting have replaced home grown manufacturing capacity and sophisticated tooling expertise with a cost driven system that values the least expensive over than the most reliable.

From tanks and ships to aircraft, ammunition and electronics, our armed forces rely directly or indirectly on supplies from countries including Brazil, Japan, Turkey and even China. Participants at the Surge Roundtable weighed the fact that this country no longer makes a battlefield tank and outsources production of over a half billion rounds of M-16 ammunition.

Just as sobering is the steady loss of human expertise. The graying of America's skilled workforce and looming wave of retirements portends a time when we will need to rely totally on foreign workers to supply our most sensitive defense needs.

The Surge Roundtable triggered a lively debate among the participants about America's manufacturing future and our capacity to meet challenges posed to our national security. That debate will continue for the next thirty months and lead to a broader awareness of how a shrinking industrial base impacts national defense.

Have you heard?

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