

## EIR Special Report

# The erosion of U.S. military capability

by Uwe Parpart  
Contributing Editor

One most instructive way of looking at the militarily and more broadly, strategically unanswered Soviet seizure of Afghanistan is to characterize it as a typical instance in which deterrence, the central concept of global U.S. strategy, has failed. Among other things, this failure, of course, was due to the correct Soviet assessment—shared by every competent U.S. and West European military professional—that the U.S. had absolutely no war-fighting counter-option available to oppose the Soviet move or neutralize it through action elsewhere. And what matters in the eyes of the Soviet military command is not what they disparagingly call the “metaphysical” deterrence capability—an unhappy Rand Corporation researcher once determined that there does not even exist an adequate Russian translation of the term—but the actual war-fighting capability that can be brought to bear on the situation at hand.

We will discuss important implications of the different U.S. and Soviet strategic orientation to deterrence and war-fighting, respectively, below. Suffice it to say at this point that the Soviet military regards the ability to fight and win a war as the only effective deterrent, for which there is no substitute, not the destruction of Soviet cities, not even the threat to the lives of a significant portion of the Soviet population. The Soviet military literature, without exception, reveals them to be “Clausewitzian” in the precise sense, that war, if engaged in at all, is to be fought with all necessary and available force to impose, as a continuation of politics by other means, one’s own will upon the enemy. This and no other

purpose justifies and necessitates the maintenance of armed forces.

Once the dust has settled and the pathetic nature of Mr. Carter’s counter-measures in the “Afghan crisis”—boycott of the Olympics, shooting ourselves in our own foot to prove our purpose and determination (i.e., grain embargo, etc.)—has become evident, then the strategic reality, still somewhat obscured until the overt Soviet military move, that the United States armed forces in large measure have lost the capability Clausewitz defined as their very purpose, will also become obvious. No hurriedly slapped together military spending program will achieve more than cosmetic changes. If such further clarification is necessary compare the present Afghanistan situation with the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis as many, including Mr. Carter, have done. What stands out in that case, however, are not the similarities, but the dissimilarities.

In 1962, the United States still enjoyed decisive strategic nuclear superiority as well as clear advantages, both qualitatively and quantitatively, regarding its naval and air forces, and thus, its capability to project power globally without serious challenge. Khrushchev’s move into Cuba was militarily untenable.

For different though equally compelling reasons a Carter move to reverse the Afghanistan situation, either directly, or indirectly through the establishment of Indian Ocean bases and/or permanent, sizeable naval deployments there, must similarly fail. Cuba 1962 defined the last instance in which 1950s style “containment” still



Photo: Alain Keler/Syigma

could show at least a modicum of success.

Since then, the Soviet Union has pulled even with the U.S. in strategic nuclear forces and has built up a capable "blue water" navy; most importantly for the evaluation of the Middle East and southwest Asia developments, the Soviet Union has built up an overwhelming conventional-forces superiority, quantitatively and in terms of the quality of its weapons systems, along the entire perimeter of its own and Warsaw Pact territory, which allows for rapidity and quantity of deployments—exploiting interior lines of supply—which the United States is entirely unable to match.

Any attempt of the U.S. to do so, given the present U.S. forces-structure and capability—or lack thereof—must either lead to forced U.S. withdrawal and a widely perceived strategic setback, or to rapid escalation to general thermonuclear war, which, as things presently stand, the U.S. would lose.

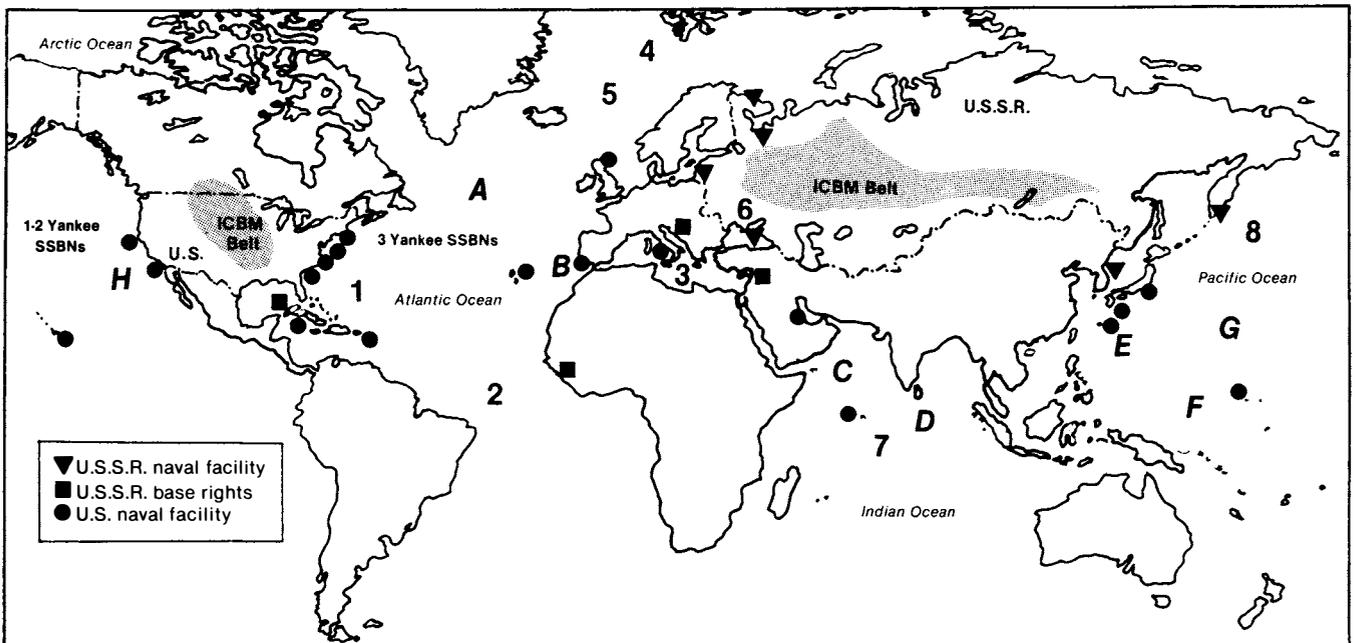
What has led to those circumstances is not simply or even primarily the much publicized Soviet military build-up during the last decade and a half. At least as important is the self-destruction of U.S. military power and in-depth war-fighting capability which has resulted from almost two decades of erosion of industrial infrastructure due to lack of investment in capital goods, failure to aggressively pursue technological innovation and provide adequate funding for basic research, and concomitant, gross failure of manpower development.

That industrial progress and growth of productive power are the key to national security was well under-

stood and tirelessly argued by the greatest American political economist, Alexander Hamilton, lieutenant-colonel at age 20 and military secretary to the Commander-in-Chief, General Washington. His foremost European student, Friedrich List, who spent seven years in the United States, and whose import of the American System into Germany laid the foundations for the rapid and enormously successful industrialization of that country in the second half of the 19th century, gave this descrip-

## In this section

This two-part study, to be concluded next week, is intended to serve both as background for a more competent evaluation of recent events in Iran and Afghanistan than that prevalent in the U.S.A., and as a framework for analysis of President Carter's military deployment and budget proposals outlined in the "State of the Union" message. Conducted under the direction of Uwe Parpart by D. Andromidas, S. Bardwell, D. Goldman, and S. Welsh, the study aims particularly at establishing the close relationship between the erosion of overall U.S. military capability and the large-scale failure of the U.S. economy to maintain an adequate research and development, capital goods investment, and manpower development posture.



## U.S. and Soviet naval deployment

### U.S. naval deployment

- A Atlantic Ocean** (East Coast, Puerto Rico, Azores): 4 aircraft carrier task forces, 4 amphibious landing groups, 4 anti-submarine plane squadrons, 31 ballistic missile launching submarines, 35 attack submarines, 1 Marine division plus air wing
- B Mediterranean:** 2 aircraft carrier task forces, 2 amphibious landing groups, 2 antisubmarine plane squadrons, 7 attack submarines.
- C Bahrain:** 1 amphibious transport dock, 2 destroyers
- D Diego Garcia**
- E Okinawa:** two-thirds Marine division plus air wing
- F Guam:** 10 Polaris missile submarines
- G Western Pacific Ocean:** 2 aircraft carrier task forces, 2 amphibious landing groups, 2 antisubmarine plane squadrons, 35 attack submarines
- H Eastern Pacific Ocean** (California and Hawaii): 4 aircraft carrier task forces, 4 amphibious landing groups, 4 anti-submarine plane squadrons, 1 Marine division plus air wing, one-third Marine division plus air wing

### Soviet naval deployment

- 1 Cuba:** 1 cruiser, 2 destroyers, 1 submarine, 2 Bear D
- 2 Gulf of Guinea:** 1 destroyer, 1 LST, 2 Bear D
- 3 Mediterranean:** 8-10 attack submarines, 2-3 cruise missile submarines, 2-4 cruisers, 9-12 frigates, destroyers, escorts
- 4 Northern Fleet:** 51 major surface combat ships, 126 submarines, some Delta SSBNs, 20-21 Yankee SSBNs, 5 Hotel SSBNs
- 5 Baltic Fleet:** 44 major surface combat ships, 12 submarines
- 6 Black Sea Fleet:** 39-45 major surface combat ships, 9-11 submarines
- 7 Indian Ocean Squadron:** 1 cruiser, 2 destroyers, 1 LST, 1 attack submarine, 2 mine sweepers
- 8 Pacific Fleet:** 54 major surface combat ships, 73 submarines, some Delta SSBNs, 8-9 Yankee SSBNs, 2 Hotel SSBNs

In many cases the numbers listed in the accompanying boxes are averages or estimates.

tion of the relationship between productive power and war-fighting capability:

At the same time when technical and mechanical science exercises such immense influence on the methods of warfare, when all warlike operations depend so much on the condition of the national revenue, when successful defense greatly depends on the questions, whether the population of the nation is rich or poor, intelligent or stupid, energetic or sunk in apathy, whether its sympathies are given exclusively to the fatherland or partly to foreign countries; whether it can muster many or but few defenders of the country—at such a time, more than ever before, must the value of manufactures be estimated from a political point of view. (*The National System of Political Economy*, 1841)

It is precisely for such reasons, as cited here by List, as developed by Hamilton in depth, as understood and made into precepts of policy by the French republicans, outstanding scientists and military leaders Monge, Lazare Carnot and Dupin, that the evidence presented below about not just the stagnation, but the actual decline of U.S. research-and-development over the past 15 years, the doubling in the same period of Soviet R-and-D manpower to a point where it now exceeds the U.S.'s two to one; the drastic across-the-board cuts in R-and-D funding, the 50 percent reduction in Department of Defense support for basic research between 1965 and today, is of such a damaging nature. It is also more telling than the counting up of weapons systems, where growing U.S. inferiority merely reflects the more fundamental problem.

Trends that have been firmly established for 15 years cannot be reversed in months or even a few years. Nor is there the slightest indication in the Carter administration's budget proposals that there is any intention to attack the root causes of the problem. On the contrary. In particular, in the energy sector of the economy, whose R-and-D output and overall productivity have the most immediate bearing on advanced weapons-systems development and the overall health and productivity of the U.S. economy, the Carter policy initiated in 1977, continues to be one of conducting a ruthless war against R-and-D and implementation and installation of advanced energy systems. The reduction of the U.S. to third-rate-nation status, specifically in the nuclear energy field, will be the result, with the obvious strategic consequences.

The now indicated Carter defense policy of a certain, rapid "in width" rather than "in depth" expansion of U.S. capability does nothing to address the root causes of U.S. military decline and has the most dangerous consequence—that of creating the illusion of remedial action

power" will almost inevitably draw the country into destructive confrontation.

The combination of great "in width" military build-up and a massive uneconomical sythetic fuels production program was the policy of Nazi finance and economics minister Hjalmar Schacht in the late 1930s. The outcome of his policy should be sufficient warning to anyone proposing to embark on a similar policy course today.

The body of this study will document the erosion of U.S. military power in three principal sections, concentrating attention not so much on the much belabored strategic nuclear forces but on the crucial status of the general purpose forces.

In the first section, certain general trends and comparisons with Soviet forces are established; section two presents detailed discussion of the manpower problem, demonstrating what should be obvious—that in the 20th century, an 18th century-style mercenary "volunteer" army can be no match for a well-trained citizens' army. Section three presents an overview of R-and-D problems and their bearing on national security. The points touched upon here will be developed at greater length in next week's part II of this study.

We conclude this introductory section by touching once more on a basic issue of strategy already introduced above: *Deterrence versus War-Fighting*.

Aside from ignoring the fundamental relationship between economic and technological development and military strength, it has been the growing hegemony of the "deterrence" concept in U.S. strategic thinking which has had a most detrimental influence on U.S. and, by implication, NATO forces-structure and capabilities. If the purpose of the armed forces is to deter war, then, in a sense, the outbreak of war shows that these forces have

## Balance of power

### United States

### Soviet Union

#### Military Service

Voluntary	Conscript
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#### Total Armed Forces

2,068,000	3,638,000
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### Strategic nuclear forces

#### Offensive

656 SLBM in 41 submarines	1,015 SLBM in 90 submarines
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Strategic Air Command: 600 combat aircraft; 1,054 ICBM	Strategic Rocket Forces: 756 combat aircraft; 1,400 ICBM, 690 IRBM/MRBM
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#### Defensive

331 Interceptor aircraft	2,720 aircraft; 64 AMB Galash (ABMs) at 4 sites; 10,000 SAM launchers at 1,000 sites
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#### Army

774,200	1,825,000
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17 divisions (4 armored, 5 mechanized, 5 infantry, 1 airmobile, 1 A.B.); Brigades: 1 armored, 1 infantry, 1 in Berlin, 2 special mission; 3 armored cov. regiments	169 divisions (46 tank, 115 mechanized rifle, 8 A.B.)
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10,500 medium tanks; 22,000 AFV; 15,000 artillery and missiles, 26,000 AA artillery and SAM	50,000 heavy and medium tanks; 55,000 AFV; 33,500 artillery; 9,000 plus AA artillery and SAM
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9,500 Aircraft/helicopter 191,500, 3 divisions; 573 medium tanks; 950 armored personnel carriers; 364 combat aircraft	
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#### Navy

532,300	433,000
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172 major combat surface ships; 75 attack submarines	59,000 naval airforce, 12,000 naval infantry, 8,000 coast artillery and rocket troops, 243 major combat surface ships, 243 attack and cruise missile subs
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Reserve: 38 major surface ships, 4 attack submarines	Reserve: 29 major surface ships, 117 attack submarines
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Submarines: 70 nuclear, 5 diesel	Submarines: 85 nuclear, 158 diesel
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Surface ships: 13 aircraft carriers, 20 cruisers, 67 destroyers, 65 frigates	Surface ships: 3 aircraft, 35 cruisers, 97 destroyers, 107 frigates
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#### Air Force

570,000	455,000
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3,400 combat aircraft	4,650 combat aircraft
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failed. Such thinking leads to a large number of distortions of both tactical and strategic significance. By way of contrast, Soviet forces, correctly, are designed and trained precisely for the contingency that deterrence has failed and consequently war-fighting and war-winning, be that nuclear or non-nuclear, is their basic purpose. The principal type of illusion created in U.S. and NATO circles is that in the European Center Sector, war-fighting might break out "below the threshold of" strategic nuclear weapons, tactical nuclear weapons, or whatever the strategist's preference may be; combine this with talk of "partial failure of deterrence," limited "theater nuclear warfare," etc. and the whole illusory arsenal of Rand Corporation, Herman Kahn-type gadgetry has been unleashed, without, of course, adding an iota to real NATO capability, but instead undermining effective utilization even of existing, wholly inadequate forces.

Special reference must be made in this context to a still very influential 1974 Brookings Institution study, authored by Jeffrey Record, entitled *U.S. Nuclear Weapons in Europe*. Record has since then become a prominent spokesman for conventional build-up in Europe, arguing on the basis of the famous 3:1 formula, the advent of precision-guided munitions, etc. that a "conventional defense of Europe ... would appear to be actually within the capability of the (NATO) forces available at present on the continent."

Looking at the conventional forces facing each other in the Center Sector, this is indeed an extraordinary assertion, prompting a German commentator to cite—in desperation—Frederick the Great's famous dictum: "In the long term, God is always on the side of the larger battalions." He might also have made the further point that a Soviet commander would not be foolish enough to assume that NATO forces would stick to "conventional" means knowing full well that they would lose. The next step should then be obvious: The Soviet commander will use the entirety of his artillery power, including nuclear, before he makes any "conventional" advance. Thus, it will be the very idea of deterrence and more foolish yet, of "differential deterrence" which creates the greatest instability and lowest threshold of strategic war-avoidance.

Mr. Carter's plans for the Indian Ocean/Persian Gulf theater merely replicate Record's strategic follies. With the commitment of three aircraft carriers to the Indian Ocean—two of them over 20 years old—Mr. Carter has committed the entirety of available carrier-based naval forces of the United States. There is nothing else available. In the event of confrontation, Mr. Carter may order the carriers to retreat, or he may order nuclear war. He has no conventional option but defeat. He therefore gives the Soviet command no option but to assume that he will order nuclear war.

# General Purpose

by Dean Andromidas

Two decades ago the United States possessed clear superiority in the strategic nuclear category (see Figure page 24). The U.S. also prevailed in key sea and air categories, and in tactical ground and air forces.

Today's realities are different. The Soviets have reached nuclear parity with the U.S. The Soviets have also reached parity in strategic naval forces. In ground forces and tactical air support, the Soviets have an overwhelming superiority, of such magnitudes that the U.S. could not hope to assume the lead in the near future.

Beyond these figures, strategic numbers need not be discussed. All the static comparisons have been discussed in the SALT debates, and lead to the conclusion that rough parity exists. "Parity" does not represent war-fighting capability.

## Summary data on the NATO and Warsaw Pact balance

### Mainland deployed active forces in the center region<sup>1</sup> (thousands)

NATO	Manpower		Equipment	
	Ground	Air	Tanks	Aircraft
United States	193	35	2,000	335
Britain	58	9	575	145
Canada	3	2	30	50
Belgium	62	19	300	145
Germany	341	110	3,000	509
Netherlands	75	18	500	160
France	732	193	6,405	1,344
	50	—	325	—
<b>Total</b>	<b>782</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>6,730</b>	<b>1,344</b>
<b>Warsaw Pact</b>				
Soviet Union	475	60	9,250	1,300
Czechoslovakia	135	46	2,500	550
East Germany	105	36	1,550	375
Poland	220	62	2,900	850
<b>Total</b>	<b>935</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>16,200</b>	<b>3,075</b>

<sup>1</sup>Includes only French forces in the FRG, no NATO forces in Denmark, France, and the UK, and no Warsaw Pact forces in Hungary.