

Read Ahead Material

University of Norte Dame – 19 November 2021

Speaker: Mr. Andy Hove

Topic: “Patriots and War Profiteers: America’s uncomfortable relationship with its defense industry”

Synopsis:

On the 4th of June 1940, the British completed the evacuation from Dunkirk and Winston Churchill gave the now famous “never surrender” speech to Parliament. When the British evacuated Dunkirk they left behind all their tanks, cannons, trucks and most of their rifles and machine guns. When the bulk of the Army returned to the British Isles, there were fewer than 20 tanks, very few cannons, rifles, and machine guns to replace what was left on the beach. In the United States the situation was not much better. When George Patton took command of the Second Armored Brigade in the summer of 1939, he had only 325 tanks and had to spend his own money to get spare parts from the Sears and Roebuck catalogue.

Not only did the United States military, and the Army in particular, lack the equipment it needed fight and win, it lacked the industrial capacity to build what it needed. The problem was particularly acute in unique military items such as gunpowder, TNT and tanks. At the end of World War I, the U.S. produced more gunpowder and TNT than Britain and France combined. By June 1940 it produced almost none. At the end of World War I, the U.S. was the world leader in tank production, in 1940, there was no U.S. tank production.

How did the U.S. dismantle critical parts of the defense industry it desperately needed in the summer of 1940 in the twenty years between WWI and WWII? The answer is that the United States has always had an uncomfortable relationship with its defense industry, and it adopted policies and strategies in those twenty years that put the nation, and the free world in serious peril. This uncomfortable relationship manifested itself in our founding documents. Article 1 of the constitution states that congress shall have the power to “raise and support Armies, but no appropriation of money to that use shall be for a longer term than two years.” The founding fathers did not want a standing Army and it certainly did not want to equip a standing Army.

Over the course of our 245-year history we have asked our defense industry to ramp up in time of war (hot or cold), investigated how they ramped up once the war ended and then adopted a range of policies and strategies to manage and or suppress the industry in the interwar period. In 2021, thirty years after the end of the Cold War have, we repeated many of the same mistakes we made between 1920 and 1940? If so, what can we do to correct those mistakes to ensure that we convince our enemies to not even start the next war but then win that war if they do.

Recommended Reading

Richard H. Kohn, *Eagle and Sword: The Federalists and the Creation of the Military Establishment in America, 1783–1802* (1975)

Allan Millet & Peter Maslowski, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States of America* (2d ed. 1994)

Karl-Friedrich Walling, *Republican Empire: Alexander Hamilton on War and Free Government* (1999)

Paul Kennedy, *Engineers of Victory: The Problem Solvers Who Turned the Tide in the Second World War* (2013)

J. A. Baime, *The Arsenal of Democracy: FDR, Detroit, and an Epic Quest to Arm an America at War* (2014)

Arthur Herman, *Freedom's Forge: How American Business Produced Victory in World War II* (2013)

Report of the Special Committee on Investigation of the Munitions Industry (The Nye Report), U.S. Congress, Senate, 74th Congress, 2nd sess., February 24, 1936, pp. 3-13.

Robert A. Howard, *Interchangeable Parts Reexamined: The Private Sector of the American Arms Industry on the Eve of the Civil War, Technology and Culture*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Oct., 1978), pp. 633-649

“PROCUREMENT: 100 Days”, *Time Magazine*, Monday, Oct. 07, 1940

Other Suggestions

Watch “Darkest Hour” – 2017

Watch “Dunkirk” – 2017

Visit the “Manufacturing Victory” a joint exhibit by the Studebaker National Museum and The History Museum