

Peterson: Life in shadow of extinction

By Christopher Burbach

The massive U.S. military buildup since World War II has weakened American's economy without increasing its national security and the current administration's proposed spending will heighten that trend, according to two UNL professors.

Wallace Peterson, an economics professor, said large sums of money spent on U.S. military buildup are causing long-term damage to both the international and domestic arenas of the U.S. economy.

Since the military buildup that began with the Vietnam War in the late 1960s, the U.S. economy's rate of growth, ratio of exports to imports and productivity per

man hour have all declined, Peterson said.

He said the decline in the exports-to-imports ratio shows a decline in America's ability to compete internationally.

Partly because of the large amounts of money and resources spent on the military, U.S. industry has shifted from a "cost minimizing approach" to a "cost pass-along or cost indifferent approach," rather than increasing productivity, Peterson said.

That has made the American economy less competitive on the world market.

"I think that can be traced back to resources going into the military," he said.

According to Peterson, the current administration's proposed military spending

will accelerate the forces that are weakening the U.S. economy. He said Reagan wants to spend \$1.5 trillion on defense between 1984 and 1988.

The administration is proposing a massive military buildup along with a tax cut, which just won't work, Peterson said.

Those who are well off will benefit from the tax cuts, he said, and those who are not well off will pay for the buildup.

"Reagan thrust the real burden of the buildup on the backs of those who can least afford it," Peterson said.

The Reagan administration's rationale that the Soviets have outspent us and we have to catch up is erroneous, according to Peterson. He said the United States spent an average of \$108 billion annually between 1969 and 1978, while the Soviets spent an average of \$126 billion during the same period.

Because of the greater efficiency of the U.S. military-industrial complex, U.S. dollars buy more than the Soviet's.

"I just don't believe that there is strong evidence that they have outspent us," Peterson said.

In spite of the U.S. military buildup since World War II, the nation is less secure today than it was in 1945, when it was the most secure nation on earth, Peterson said.

"Today, after spending \$2.3 billion, we live in the shadow of nuclear extinction," he said. "To say we are more secure, you would have to be a complete fool."

Peterson said the Reagan administration is thinking in terms of World War II, when a huge military buildup boosted the economy. The results of such a buildup now are different, he said.

"The only way we are going to do something significant about the deteriorating economy is to find a way to stop the arms race — it's the only way we're going to survive," he said.

Leo Sartori, a physics professor who worked as a consultant to the SALT II negotiations, said political conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union is

the underlying factor contributing to the difficulty in reaching an arms control agreement.

"The disease is the political conflict; the arms race is a symptom. It behooves us to deal with the symptoms before the disease kills us all," Sartori said.

He said both the United States and the Soviet Union want to avoid annihilation, so arms control is a goal of both nations. However, there are several obstacles to such agreement.

One of those obstacles is mistrust between the nations, Sartori said. Another obstacle is the historical tradition of nations of ensuring their national security by armed forces. However, vast changes in military relationships caused by the development of nuclear and other advanced weapons should change that thinking, which is based on now irrelevant non-nuclear wars, Sartori said.

The arms race in the last 20 years has been fueled by the "action-reaction" phenomenon, according to Sartori, in which each side makes deployment decisions based on what the other side has or what they predict they will have.

Sartori said asymmetry between the United States and the Soviet Union in geographical surroundings and types of nuclear arsenals also has held back arms control agreement. The Soviets, who are virtually landlocked, and find hostile nations nearby, have the majority of their nuclear arsenal land-based missiles. The United States, however, has a sizable amount of nuclear weaponry on submarines because of its access to the sea, and it is surrounded by friendly nations.

The START (Strategic Arms Reduction Talks) talks are faltering because the two countries can not agree on the agenda of the talks, Sartori said. The Soviets, with their dependence on land-based missiles, are against U.S. proposals to talk about those types of missiles first.

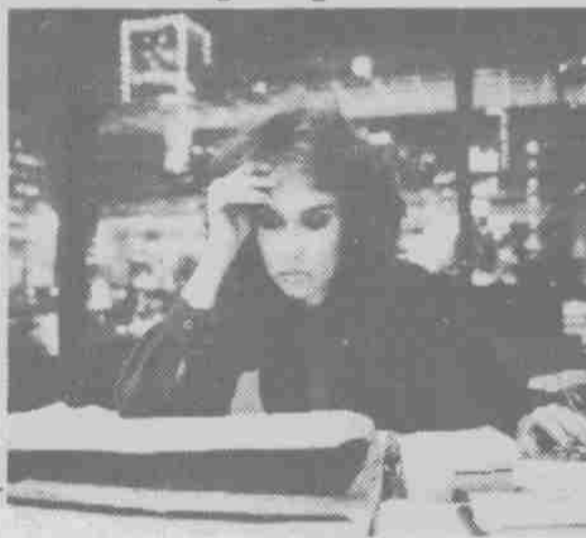
"We better solve some of these obstacles if we hope to preserve our civilization," Sartori said.

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U.S. illiteracy extends to math, science, E-Week lecturer says

By Kevin Hanken

Today, a certain ambivalence toward science and technology exists in the United States, and America is losing its lead in the field of technology, said Stephen Kahne, professor of systems engineering at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland.

Kahne spoke at the Nebraska Union Friday as part of Engineering Week, an annual symposium sponsored by UNL's College of Engineering and Technology.

During his lecture, titled "Technological Illiteracy for the Masses: The American Way," Kahne explored the causes of, and possible remedies to, the situation.

Kahne said interest in math and science has dropped tremendously in U.S. high schools through the years.

At the age of 9, 50 percent of U.S. students are interested in math, he said, but by the time they reach 17, only 25

percent show interest.

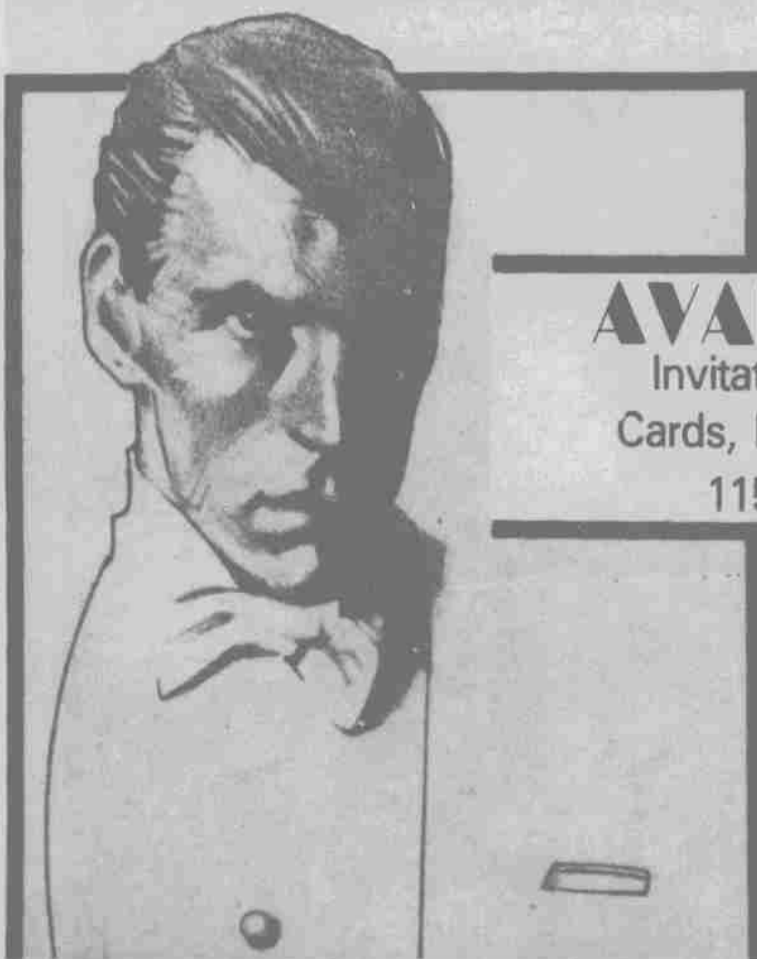
Only 20 percent of high school seniors take a junior or a senior level science course, Kahne said. Only one-third of all secondary school graduates have had three years of math, and only 6 percent take four years of math.

By comparison, he said, graduating students in Japan and the Soviet Union have had three times the math education as the U.S. student with four years of math. Kahne called the difference disastrous.

Kahne said it is very disturbing that since 1977, Scholastic Aptitude Test scores have dropped dramatically for the best students, who often become student engineers and scientists.

One-third of U.S. high schools fail to offer their students enough mathematics to permit them to study engineering, he said.

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