America’s Military Potemkin Crisis

written by Jack Lifton | March 29, 2026

The now-fading military crisis du jour, the critical minerals, metals, and materials crisis, is a supreme example of a Potemkin situation. Let me explain this to my younger readers.

There is a historical tale that in the days of the Russian Empress Catherine the Great, she set out upon a progress, which meant she was to review the standard of living in villages in her empire. Her managers, or what we would today call the deep state, decided that it was not a good idea for Catherine to see the levels of despair and poverty actually present in the Empire. Therefore, they had constructed along the way to her progress false fronts on the streets she would travel, showing shops, theaters, and restaurants, decorated with peasants, others, and officials in gaily colored clothes, looking as if they were having a good time. These places she visited became known historically as Potemkin villages. Illusions to calm the nerves of rulers, and prevent inquiries that might be embarrassing

In today’s America, those bureaucrats who need to find ways to maintain their power, influence, and income, and not to disturb our highest elected officials with reality, have created what I call our age of the Potemkin crisis.

For the managers of any Potemkin crisis du jour, the only required necessity to solve the crisis is capital. Naturally, this is other people’s money, i.e., yours and mine.

Therefore the solution to every problem is to fund first a study and then to finance the physical property, plant, and equipment

necessary to manufacture whatever it is that we are short of through the distribution of immense amounts of capital to friends, family, and donors so they can use some of the capital to find people to identify and find the various components necessary to manufacture that item even though the Potemkin bureaucrats have no idea what those items should be, where they come from, how they are to be processed into useful forms, or any of those myriad details associated with the “tradesmen” who actually do the work.

It is, of course, required by the Washington bureaucracy that no one with actual experience in the total supply chains required to produce the necessary products be involved in any way in the process of the allocation of capital. The sole requirement to receive government largesse is that you “know someone.”

Naturally, it is always necessary to point out to the taxpayers that we are deprived of these critical materials due to the machinations of the evil others, not due to the fact that we are short-sighted, greedy, and completely illiterate in both mineral and manufacturing economics.

One thing I do have to admit is that denominating a company as a “national champion” is a masterstroke worthy of P.T. Barnum and of the American advertising industry that created our urgent need for instant gratification in place of long-term solutions.

Barnum’s thesis that there is a sucker born every minute was vastly understated. The sucker turnover seems to be approaching light speed.

And as an afterthought, I recall from a very distant past that the purpose of soldiering was to kill the enemy and break his fortifications through training, discipline, unit cohesion, obedience to officers, personal strength, and whatever was handy, such as

– A rock
– A club
– A spear
– A sword
– A knife of any kind or a sharp object.
– A pilum (Roman specialized spear)
– A mace
– A longbow
– A firearm
– A cannon, or
– A two by four with a nail in it (I note that the nail was optional).

All are effective. None need critical minerals, metals, or materials that are not readily available.