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THE MILITARY-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

Some people are using the 25th anniversary of President Dwight Eisenhower's Farewell Address of 1961 to trot out a favorite liberal cliche: the claim that Ike warned us against "the military-industrial complex." This argument is out of touch with reality; it was our military-industrial complex that won World War II and made Ike a victorious general and national hero.

The liberals' use of the term "military-industrial complex" is a classic case of taking a quotation out of context. The principal message of Eisenhower's Farewell Address of 1961 was his warning against the Soviet military threat.

In that speech Ike said: "We face a hostile ideology -- global in scope, atheistic in character, ruthless in purpose, and insidious in method. ... A vital element in keeping the peace is our military establishment. Our arms must be mighty, ready for instant action."

The Eisenhower strategy about military weapons was best summed up in his famous statement that is now inscribed on the keel of the aircraft carrier that bears his name: "Until war is eliminated from international relations, unpreparedness for it is well nigh as criminal as war itself."

The Eisenhower Administration initiated, ordered, and funded the three great weapons systems that form the Triad of our defense today: the Minuteman missiles, the Polaris (now Poseidon) submarines, and the B-52 bombers.

In his famous Farewell Address, however, Eisenhower did deliver a warning that is still timely and important. It was about an entirely different group of power-seekers.

"Yet in holding scientific research and discovery in respect, as we should," Ike said, "we must also be alert to the equal and opposite danger that public policy could itself become the captive of a scientific-technological elite."

His words were prophetic. At the time he spoke, that scientific-technological elite was meeting in little seminars such as the Asilomar Conference held in California in 1960,

and the annual Pugwash Conferences bankrolled by Cyrus Eaton. Their constant theme was detente, disarmament, and accommodation of the Soviet Union.

As soon as Eisenhower left the White House, this scientific-technological elite flooded into the Pentagon under Defense Secretary Robert McNamara and his Whiz Kids. Two of the participants in the 1960 Pugwash Conference held in Moscow, Dr. Walt W. Rostow and Dr. Jerome B. Wiesner, became high-ranking members of the John Kennedy Administration.

American public policy did, indeed, become the captive of this elite group. They abandoned the Eisenhower strategy of defending America through military superiority.

They scrapped three-fourths of our multi-megaton missiles, all our medium-range and intermediate-range missiles, our largest bomb, and three-fourths of our strategic bombers. They cancelled Eisenhower's plans for a second thousand Minuteman missiles, capping the total at one thousand. They blocked all programs to build new or additional weapons systems, and they prevented the building of a fleet of bombers to replace our aging B-52s.

At the time that Eisenhower left the White House, the United States enjoyed an 8-to-1 military superiority over the Soviet Union. After the scientific-technological elite took control of our public policy, the U.S. advantage declined until we dropped to parity in the late 1960s, and then to a 3-to-2 inferiority in the SALT I Agreement of 1972. By the Geneva Summit of 1985, the Reagan Administration had to admit that the Soviets have a hard-target kill advantage of 3-to-1.

The scientific-technological elite is still trying to control public policy. These activists tried (unsuccessfully) to lock us in a nuclear freeze in 1981.

They are the ones who more recently have been saying that SDI (Star Wars) "won't work," that it will "escalate the arms race," that the Soviets can easily "overwhelm" it, that Reagan should "use it as a bargaining chip," and all the other deceits and diversions designed to kill the only plan that can shoot down enemy missiles before they kill millions of Americans. They don't offer a substitute defense; they just offer surrender.

Yes, Ike did give us an important warning in his Farewell Address. He told us to look out for the pseudo-scientists who are trying to keep America defenseless against a ruthless enemy. That's still good advice today.