

# THE NATIONAL INTEREST

Published on *The National Interest* (<http://nationalinterest.org>)

Source URL (retrieved on Dec 29, 2010): <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-skeptics/more-eisenhower-the-military-industrial-complex-4627>

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## More on Eisenhower and the Military-Industrial Complex

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| December 23, 2010

| [Christopher A. Preble](#) [2]



I [posted](#) [3] Tuesday at Cato-@-Liberty about the recent interest in Eisenhower's farewell address and the phrase forever associated with that famous speech, the military-industrial complex (MIC). We're hosting a terrific [event](#) [4] next month at Cato to discuss the MIC at 50, I know that the Eisenhower Institute has something [planned](#) [5], as does the Nixon Center. I'm sure there are others.

The key to understanding the enduring relevance of the [speech](#) [6], and the message contained within, is to get past the crazier conspiracy theories and focus more narrowly on what Ike actually said. It also helps to understand what motivated the general-president for much of his adult lifetime. In a new book, *[Unwarranted Influence: Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Military Industrial Complex](#)* [7], James Ledbetter does an able job of drilling down on crucial episodes in Ike's career that reveal a long-standing concern about militarism, and of maintaining a balance between a capable military and a healthy economy. Ledbetter also sheds some new light onto the drafting of the speech, a story that has since been fleshed out even more [by the release of new documents](#) [8] discovered in the personal collection of presidential speechwriter, Malcolm Moos.

[amazon 0300153058 full]There is much to commend in Ledbetter's book, and I'll be writing more about it

in the weeks ahead. A key theme of the book, and of Eisenhower's speech, pertains to interests, specifically to the motivations of an entire class of people who are largely dependent upon the DoD budget for their livelihood. Of course these people will fight against cuts to that budget. There is nothing sinister in this. We expect teachers to do the same when school funding comes up for debate, or firemen, or air traffic controllers, etc. "These people" in the case of the MIC include uniformed military personnel, to be sure, and the makers of their equipment and gear. The complex also includes university laboratories that receive military R&D money, and scholars at think tanks and research centers who produce reports pertaining to all aspects of national security, from studies of particular geopolitical hotspots to assessments of the performance of various weapon systems.

That very last point has elicited recent [comments](#) [9] from Brookings' Peter Singer (and Spencer Ackerman at [Wired's Danger Room](#) [10].) Both Ackerman and Singer call for greater transparency, ensuring that analysts with interests at stake self-identify as such. Ackerman urges journalists to pay attention to the biases when they solicit quotes and comments from a pundit.

These are sensible recommendations, as far as they go, but I tend to think that the problem is the interests themselves, not the lack of transparency. And it is the disparity of interests that makes the MIC so difficult to dislodge, and that worried me so deeply. Simply put, the people who stand to gain from the building of one more DDG-1000, or ten more F-35s, or 100 more expeditionary fighting vehicles, stand to gain *a lot*; the people who pay, the taxpayers, pay only a small amount, and generally have more important things to do with their time. On that score, it is hardly surprising [that Lockheed Martin](#) [11], to name just one company, spends millions of dollars every year on lobbying; it would be more surprising if they didn't.

More by

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[3] <http://www.cato-at-liberty.org/eisenhowers-lament/>

[4] <http://www.cato.org/event.php?eventid=7604>

[5] [http://www.eisenhowerinstitute.org/news/news\\_detail.dot?inode=2851781&pageTitle=Award%20Winning%20Journalists%20to%20Discuss%20Eisenhower%E2%80%99s%20Farewell%20Address%20on%2050th%20Anniversary](http://www.eisenhowerinstitute.org/news/news_detail.dot?inode=2851781&pageTitle=Award%20Winning%20Journalists%20to%20Discuss%20Eisenhower%E2%80%99s%20Farewell%20Address%20on%2050th%20Anniversary)

[6] <http://millercenter.org/scripps/archive/speeches/detail/3361>

[7] [http://www.amazon.com/Unwarranted-Influence-Eisenhower-Military-Industrial-Complex/dp/0300153058/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1292971786&sr=1-1%5d](http://www.amazon.com/Unwarranted-Influence-Eisenhower-Military-Industrial-Complex/dp/0300153058/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1292971786&sr=1-1%5d)

[8] [http://www.newyorker.com/talk/2010/12/20/101220ta\\_talk\\_newton](http://www.newyorker.com/talk/2010/12/20/101220ta_talk_newton)

[9] [http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2010/1213\\_think\\_tanks\\_singer.aspx%5d](http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2010/1213_think_tanks_singer.aspx%5d)

[10] <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2010/12/can-i-quote-you-on-your-hidden-agenda-defense-wonk/%5d>

[11] [http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1568584202/ref=pd\\_lpo\\_k2\\_dp\\_sr\\_1?pf\\_rd\\_p=486539851&pf\\_rd\\_s=lpo-top-stripe-1&pf\\_rd\\_t=201&pf\\_rd\\_i=B0047T86BA&pf\\_rd\\_m=ATVPDKIKX0DER&pf\\_rd\\_r=0GH5DNCQS6H019Z6AAXS](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1568584202/ref=pd_lpo_k2_dp_sr_1?pf_rd_p=486539851&pf_rd_s=lpo-top-stripe-1&pf_rd_t=201&pf_rd_i=B0047T86BA&pf_rd_m=ATVPDKIKX0DER&pf_rd_r=0GH5DNCQS6H019Z6AAXS)