

Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890–1969) served as commander of US forces in Europe during the D-Day invasion before he was elected president of the United States in 1952. Like Harry S. Truman, Eisenhower advocated the “containment” of communism worldwide, but in his farewell address to the nation, he questioned the expansion of a permanent armament industry as a result of the Cold War.

A vital element in keeping the peace is our military establishment.

Our arms must be mighty, ready for instant action, so that no potential aggressor may be tempted to risk his own destruction.

Our military organization today bears little relation to that known by any of my predecessors in peacetime, or indeed by the fighting men of World War II or Korea.

Until the latest of our world conflicts, the United States had no armaments industry.

American makers of plowshares could, with time and as required, make swords as well.

But now we can no longer risk emergency improvisation of national defense; we have been compelled to create a permanent armaments industry of vast proportions.

Added to this, three and a half million men and women are directly engaged in the defense establishment.

We annually spend on military security more than the net income of all United States Corporations.

This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience.

The total influence—economic, political, even spiritual—is felt in every city, every State house, every office of the Federal government.

We recognize the imperative need for this development.

Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications.

Our toil, resources and livelihood are all involved; so is the very structure of our society.

In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex.

The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.

We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes.

We should take nothing for granted.

Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together.

Farewell address by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, January 17, 1961, final TV talk 1/17/61 (1), box 38, Speech Series, Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower as President, 1953–1961, Eisenhower Library, National Archives and Records Administration, 12–16.

PRACTICING Historical Thinking

Identify: Summarize Eisenhower's warning.

Analyze: What contrasts does Eisenhower draw between wartime and peacetime? Do you see any irony in the development of the American military establishment?

Evaluate: Develop a position on the extent to which American political reactions to global conflict justified the development of the American military establishment.