

Tuesday, May 10, 2011

## Ike's Most Prescient Insight 50 Years Ago Went Unspoken

By Stanley A. Weiss

**WASHINGTON**— He was a West Point graduate, a four-star general, the hero of the allied assault on Adolf Hitler, and the first commander of NATO. During his eight-year presidency, he quadrupled America's post-World War II military budget, increased the share of the federal budget spent on defense to more than 50 percent, ballooned America's nuclear stockpile from 1,000 to 23,000 warheads, and oversaw a sitting army that was ten times larger than the military he first joined in 1911.

And yet, during the final months of his presidency, in 1960, Dwight D. Eisenhower was excoriated by the Democratic nominee for President -- and eventual winner -- John F. Kennedy, for under-spending on the military while allowing a dangerous, non-existent "missile gap" to open between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

Twenty-five years ago, I brought together a group of business executives for a dinner to reflect back on Ike's legacy and the broad-side he launched against the U.S. defense establishment in his famous Farewell Address. The dinner featured talks by Eisenhower's grandchildren, David and Susan Eisenhower. It was the first high-profile event hosted by Business Executives for National Security, a nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization I started in 1982, which is dedicated to applying best-business practices to help government leaders implement solutions to the most challenging problems in national security.

This week, Susan Eisenhower will speak once again, at a BENS dinner looking back on the 50 years that have passed since President Eisenhower's Farewell Address, and his much-quoted warning that America "must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex."

Fifty years of hindsight would certainly suggest that Eisenhower was right: the dangers of a large standing army co-existing with a permanent arms industry has made its influence felt in every American conflict since, from Vietnam to Desert Storm to Afghanistan and Iraq. Today, Ike would not likely be surprised that America spends more on its military than the next 15 largest military budgets combined.

However, the military-industrial complex phrase is nearly always quoted out of the context of the speech. Eisenhower was neither condemning nor praising the military-industrial complex. Rather, he was making a much deeper point.

The essence of his warning to the American people, to which Ike returned again and again, was the need for balance -- "balance between the clearly necessary and the comfortably desirable," "balance between cost and hoped-for advantage," and, perhaps most important of all, "balance between the actions of the moment and the national welfare of the future."

Political balance is threatened, Ike said in his address, when interests or factions in the country wield unchecked power -- either as the result of growth over time or as the result of specific crises.

Two such factions concerned Eisenhower enough that he mentioned them explicitly in the speech.

One faction was created by an alliance between elements of the federal government and the scientific community. Science could become corrupted by a dependence on federal funding, Ike warned, and, conversely, "public policy itself could become the captive of a scientific-technological elite."

The other faction that worried him was the military-industrial complex. The U.S. had been "compelled to create" a huge national-defense establishment, Ike said, because it could no longer risk an emergency improvisation in defense -- precisely because it would face a "hostile" and "ruthless" ideology for an "indefinite" duration.

Ike didn't advocate the destruction of the military-industrial complex, any more than he advocated the dissolution of the federal government's relations with the scientific community. Instead, he characteristically urged his fellow citizens to keep the parts of the whole in proportion:

"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."

The task of democratic leadership, Eisenhower said, was to ensure that democracy's boisterous, contending factions served the nation, but never directed it. It is a challenge that BENS has acted upon since its creation: where knowledgeable citizens have worked to foster an innovative business-government partnership over the past two decades. It has helped save the Defense Department billions of dollars while positioning it to meet the new challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: helping to guard against cyber attack, tracking terrorists' financial assets, securing the nation's ports, and preparing state and local governments to deal with catastrophic events or terrorist attacks.

Far from being a quickly constructed message at the end of his presidency -- as historians have long believed -- a stash of drafts and notes discovered last year in boxes stored for decades at the Minnesota family vacation home of Eisenhower speechwriter Malcolm Moos suggest otherwise. As the documents show, the themes underpinning the Farewell Address evolved through 21 drafts over the course of 20 months.

Interestingly, one theme left out of the final address spoke to another issue of balance: divided government.

Dated December 21, 1960, the newly discovered draft has Ike saying that even though he was a Republican who faced Democratic control of the House and Senate for most of his term, "We did not fall into bitter, irreconcilable factions which in other nations have paralyzed the democratic process. Rather, we worked together, and the business of the nation went forward, and the fact that it did so is... a credit to the... sense of duty displayed by the Congress."

Of all the prescient words spoken by Dwight Eisenhower 50 years ago, it may be those words, left unspoken, that a bitterly divided America is most in need of today.