**The Role of Military Industrial Complex in US Military Policy**

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On January 17th, 1961, President Dwight D. Eisenhower left his office with an ominous warning. “In the councils of government,” he admonished, “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.”

Over half a century later, has President Eisenhower’s foresight remained valid? Has this mysterious military-industrial complex caused the rise of misplaced power? Has it come into unwarranted influence? Is it present in the councils of government?

First, we ought to establish what exactly was meant by Eisenhower. The military-industrial complex, a term he coined, referred to the system of close relationships between heavy industry (predominantly arms manufacturers), Congress and other legislative bodies, and the United States armed forces. In the United States specifically, the military industrial complex began to form more clearly in the mid-20th century as companies such as IBM, Lockheed, General Electric, Boeing, and more began contracted work for the military to produce even more advanced weaponry and technology. Corporations previously involved in civilian industry and technology were thus drawn to the much more profitable sector of weapons production for the military as demand within the armed forces grew for greater technological advances to combat growing Soviet hard power in the age of the Cold War. This growing supply and demand of and for weapons technology left the United States in a constant readiness for war, whether it needed to be in that state or not.

Even before Eisenhower voiced this concern, the military-industrial complex had begun to form in the United States and abroad. For the first couple of years of World War One, Allied powers pushed for United States military aid. However, given President Woodrow Wilson’s consistent pleas for neutrality, all that Western European powers had to settle for was US military prowess through its arms manufacturers, engaging in much more frequent trade with them. Some senators, like Bennett Clark, even went so far as to accuse Wilson’s eventual entry into the war as being a result of the influence of arms corporations involved in Europe that sought greater profits abroad.

This system remains pervasive and deeply engrained today, kept in place by government representatives. Corporations like Lockheed, GE, and Boring are members of an exhaustive list of arms manufacturers that maintain a foothold in our legislative process. The primary vehicle for this influence is the lobbying process, by which agents of these corporations persuade members of the federal government to pass legislation that favors them. For example, Michael Chertoff, formerly the secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, heavily advocated for the use of full-body scanners in airports, provided by an organization contracting him as a lobbyist, and succeeded. Other technologies familiar to us – U2 bombers, C130 planes – are also products of lucrative contracts with the government, provided by corporations like Lockheed Martin. Even in 2014, the Pentagon passed a bill to preserve $22 billion more dollars to defense contractors, bringing the defense budget to $497 billion.⁠1

The events of September 11th, 2001, have lit another fuse for the military industrial complex - the war on terror. William Hartung of Brown University, for example, finds that there have been hundreds of billions of dollars in new contracts for arms manufacturers written since the “War on Terror” was declared. Particularly because this war has the advantage for government and for military contractors of being vague in nature, it is extremely widespread in its scope of operations across North Africa and the Middle East and is nearly perpetual, with new battles being waged daily in conflicts from ISIS to Yemeni unrest.

What this all means is that there is a system in place – an “iron triangle,” as some refer to it – in which government officials, those who draft legislation, and lobbyists of military contractors exist in a mutually beneficial cycle wherein the government acquires and implements advanced military technology and fuels its international war effort in exchange for billions of dollars for these corporations. As it is a drain on the economy worth hundreds of billions of dollars and takes legislation out of the hands of the people and puts the influence over it into the hands of corporate arms manufacturers, it is doubtlessly a negative influence on power structures in our country. The state of vague and constant war that efforts like the war on terror have left us in only serve to reinforce this, wherein the United States’ ability to simply pick an international conflict to become a part of (like the ISIS fight, driven by our air force, whose equipment doubtlessly comes from members of the iron triangle) guarantees it an ability and justification for issuing more and more multibillion dollar contracts. Thus, it can be seen that Eisenhower has demonstrated impressive foresight – they are indeed in the councils of our government and certainly wield unwarranted influence.

1 Boehm, Eric. "Defense Contractors Spend Millions Lobbying Congress, Get Billions in New Budget - Watchdog.org." Watchdog. Franklin Center for Government & Public Integrity, 22 Jan. 2014. Web. 06 Oct. 2015. <http://watchdog.org/124909/defense-spending/>.