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Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Technological Elite

 David Rothkopf makes an interesting point in his 2008 book *Superclass*.  In Dwight Eisenhower's famous military-industrial-complex speech, he comments not only on the rise of the military-industrial complex but also on the rise of universities as centers of power.  This is what Eisenhower said in January 1961, 53 years ago:  
  
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.  
  
Akin to, and largely responsible for the sweeping changes in our industrial-military posture, has been the technological revolution during recent decades...  
[[1]](#footnote-1)  
 **Yet, in holding scientific research and discovery in respect, as we should, we must also be alert to the equal and opposite danger that public policy could itself become the captive of a scientific-technological elite.**  
  
It is the task of statesmanship to mold, to balance, and to integrate these and other forces, new and old, within the principles of our democratic system -- ever aiming toward the supreme goals of our free society.  
  
While, as Rothkopf points out in his 2008 book, the influence of the arms industry and the absolute size of the military have waned since the Cold War, the threat of terrorism poses a new complex that mingle military with civil power.  Also, both the 1960s complex and the 2010s complex have relied on finance, which as an institutionalized power center was old in Eisenhower's day but since 1971 has exponentially expanded in influence.  
  
Universities are crucial to the new power complex, just as they were to the military-industrial complex,  not because universities' research is of crucial importance to technological progress--most important technological innovation comes from for-profit sources--but because university professors, who benefit from university endowments that special interests fund, lend an illusive patina of legitimacy and impartiality to federal policy.  
  
Sadly, and this is the truly tragic development since Eisenhower's speech, the American public has shown itself to be incapable of the alertness to the global elite's acquisition of power that Eisenhower thought would be essential to maintain freedom.  The reasons include apathy and an unwillingness to, as Benjamin Franklin put it, question authority.   Another reason is the eagerness of Americans to conform to the norms that the mass media presents to them, and part of the reason is their indoctrination in elementary school, high school, and college.  Americans are increasingly unwilling to take risks and to think for themselves; the unwillingness is both a cause and effect of the increasing power of the nation's technological elite.

1. [At this point, three paragraphs are simply omitted! Otherwise, the Eisenhower quotation seems not to have been Bowdlerized. -FNC] [↑](#footnote-ref-1)