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The Wisdom of Eisenhower

On Oct. 3, 1961, shortly after he left the Presidency, Dwight D. Eisenhower made a speech at the Naval War College, and then answered questions from faculty and students. The speech was kept secret until now—it appears in the June issue of U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings. The following remarks are excerpts from Mr. Eisenhower's address:

On a President's Responsibility. Your research and your study means that you've got to understand what a new weapon or new weapons system means to the economy, what it does to the psychology of our people. To illustrate what I mean, we know that the Communists seek to break the economy of the United States—an economy that is based on free enterprise and sound currency. If we, therefore, put one more dollar in a weapons system than we should, we are weakening the defense of the United States.

Consequently, an adviser to the President cannot say, "I am interested only in the Polaris or a new fighter, or a new bomb, a new missile." He must ask himself, "What does this mean to the United States?" and, "What does it mean to our psychology?" Because now we see in our magazines that we are going to fight wars by making an exchange of our nuclear stockpiles and that is called "war." It isn't war! Not as we understand it! That kind of war is not one opponent against the other; that is just potential destruction against survival.

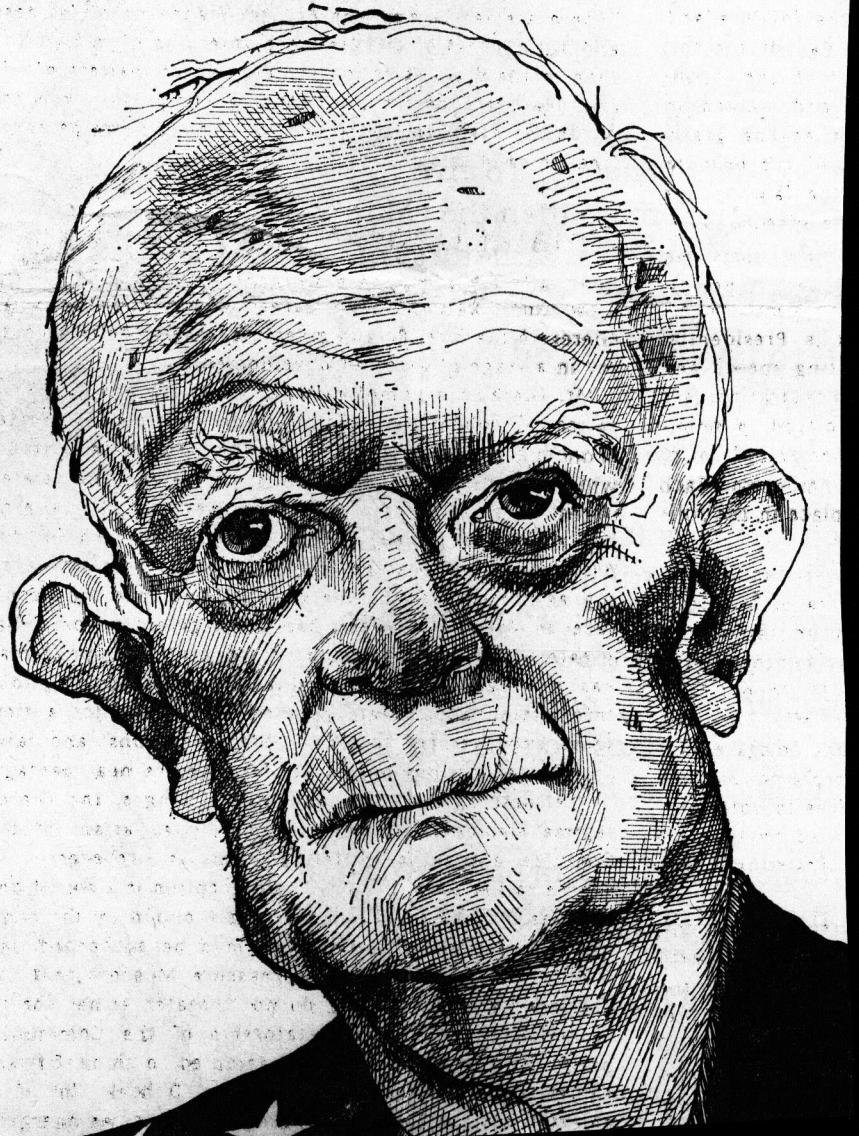
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On Space Travel. Are the doors locked so no one can get out? This is what I believe: The United States has got priority tasks, and we ought to keep our minds on those tasks. I believe that some day humans are going to circle the moon, take some pictures of it, and maybe even get to a planet and back if there's time—I don't know—but I believe those things ought to come about as a byproduct of all the research we are doing today in missiles and in bigger engines and so on. I think to make the so-called race to the moon a major element in our struggle to show that we are superior to the Russians, is getting our eyes off the right target. I really believe that we don't have that many enemies on the moon.

On the Military-Industrial Complex. I think that my earlier little sermon was about as good an answer as I could give. What I did say was this: It wasn't merely the armament industry. I said that we are getting such combinations of influences which affect our own interests in so many places that we must be very, very careful that we don't go on the wrong path. For example, if, as an Army officer, I am offered more armies or more missiles, I will consider this as double insurance. All the other services certainly feel that same way. We want all we can get. The Joint Chiefs of Staff

constantly would tell me that the sums placed before Congress for our defense were quite ample. But each always said that he needed a little bit more of the pie.

If we are going to solve this particular problem, we have got to recognize that the nation's resources are not unlimited. The Congressman who sees a new defense establishment in his district; the company in Los Angeles, Denver, or Baltimore that wants an order for more airplanes; the services which want them, the armies of scientists who want so terribly to test out their newest views; put all of



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these together and you have a lobby.

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On Loyalty. It's all right for the officer to have his own ideas which differ with the admiral, the general, or the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but I don't believe he should go down to the hill and say that, out of his personal wisdom, he disagrees completely.

I think until we can inculcate this self-restraint among our people we will have problems in this democracy. There is nothing a Congressman likes better than to get his name in the headlines and for it to be published all over the United States. And maybe sometimes others of us like it, too. But the point is we have a higher duty than just to air our own personal convictions when we are part of the body that has laid its recommendation before the chiefs, after they have modified them or approved them, and then, sent them to the President. I do not believe it is our duty to go down before the Congress and show they were wrong.

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On Peace. This is a problem that has engaged the attention of philosophers for so long that I feel almost embarrassed to attempt to give an answer of any kind. Because we have known so long that man's genius for inventing things which were evil created for him problems of control, sometimes it seems that his spiritual strength is not up to the task. I believe that in a way the military forces are a priesthood. I cannot tell you how deep is my respect for the responsibility they carry. Our problem of course is this: we have an intransigent enemy. He is going to bluff, to threaten, and to use everything that will divide us or our nation from yours. He has no spiritual values. I think the best thing we can do is for us and all those nations with which we are allied or are our friends, to realize that the forces that bind us together are far more important than the little problems which divide us.