

I Don't Like Ike

He vastly expanded the garrison state.

By Llewellyn H. Rockwell Jr.

EISENHOWER'S FAREWELL speech was a long and nearly hysterical argument for the Cold War. He presented it as more than a military policy against Russia, but rather as a grand metaphysical struggle that should take over our minds and souls, as bizarre as that must sound to the current generation.

His words were Wilsonian, even messianic. The job of U.S. military policy is to "foster progress in human achievement" and enhance "dignity and integrity" the world over. That's a rather expansive role for government by any standard. But he went further. An enemy stands in the way of achieving this dream, and this enemy is "global in scope, atheistic in character, ruthless in purpose, and insidious in method." This great struggle "commands our whole attention, absorbs our very beings."

Because some crusty apparatchiks are imposing every manner of economic control over Russia and a few satellites, U.S. foreign policy must absorb the whole of our beings? So much for limited government.

The rhetoric had to be hysterical to overcome a few obvious problems. Russia is a faraway country and the notion of an invasion was about as likely as one from Mars. Russia, an authoritarian state operating under the ideological cover of Communism, had only a few years earlier been declared our valiant ally in the struggle against Japan and Germany.

But Americans woke up one day to find that the line had suddenly changed: now Russia was the enemy to be defeated. In fact, the Russian government—already in deep economic trouble as a socialist regime—was bankrupted by World War II and dealing with incredible internal problems. The Soviets couldn't begin to manage the world of Eastern Europe that had been given as a prize for being the ally of the United States during the war. It was for this reason that Nikita Khrushchev began the first great period of liberalization that would end in the eventual unraveling of this nonviable state. The U.S. not only failed to encourage this liberalization, but pretended it wasn't happening so as to build up a new form of socialism at home.

Indeed, the entire Cold War ideology was invented by Harry Truman and his advisers in 1948 as: 1.) a political trick to keep from losing more congressional backing, 2.) a way to circumvent political pressure for postwar disarmament, and 3.) a method to maintain U.S. industrial dependence on government spending, particularly with regard to American corporations operating overseas.

It was an unprecedented form of peacetime socialism, designed to appeal to big business, and Eisenhower became its spokesman. Savvy libertarians knew exactly what was

going on and supported Cold War opponent Robert Taft for the Republican nomination in 1952. But the nomination was effectively stolen by Eisenhower, with massive establishment backing. He repaid his backers with his support and expansion of Truman's program.

It's true that his farewell speech warned against "unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex," and this is the part that people remember. But Eisenhower himself entrenched this very machinery in American life, virtually inventing the peacetime armaments industry and imposing military regimentation on the country. His approach was fundamentally un-American; or, another way to put it, he redefined what it meant to be an American. Instead of a free people, he forged a program for the permanent militarization of the country.

The evidence for this militarization begins with massive increases in military spending. As a percent of total budget outlays, military spending went from 30 percent in 1950 to 70 percent in 1957. This was the largest peacetime buildup in American history. During a dramatic economic expansion, the president worked to maintain a high military spending level as a percentage of the rising GDP—establishing the modern precedent that military socialism is integral to the economic life of the country. Spending rose in absolute terms every year he was president, from \$358 billion in 1952 to \$585 billion in the last budget for which he bore responsibility in 1962, a whopping 63.4 percent increase during the Eisenhower years.

His buildup was not limited to the arms sector; it penetrated every aspect of civilian life. Our schools were made to feature scary and abusive drills to practice what children should do if the Russians should drop bombs on their heads. An entire generation was raised with irrational fears of mythical threats.

Then there was the catastrophic Interstate Highway System, which was not built to make your trip to the beach go faster. Its purpose was to permit the military to move troops quickly. There were also cockamamie schemes of driving nuclear bombs around on those highways to prevent the commies from keeping track of them.

Eisenhower was influenced in funding this amazing boondoggle by his experience in 1919 with the Transcontinental Convoy on the Lincoln Highway, which drove military trucks from one coast to the other. Another influence was Hitler's project of building cross-country roads, again to move troops. The Interstate Highway System led to huge population upheavals and continues to distort commercial demographics in every town in the United States.

Given all this, the notion that Eisenhower was worried about the military-industrial complex is preposterous. He was devoted to it. ■

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The Other Eisenhowers

Ike's anti-militarist roots

By Bill Kauffman

DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER'S MOTHER was a pacifist, a breed common in the Middle America of yore, before war became the national religion. Her son left Kansas to climb the martial ladder of the Department of War, whose motto, suggested Declaration of Independence signatory Benjamin Rush, should have been "A Widow and Orphan making office." It was also the greatest deracinating force in American history; Dwight, unlike Dorothy and Toto, never returned to the Sunflower State.

Old men grow sentimentally pensive, and one wonders if President Eisenhower's sober and remarkable Farewell Address counseling vigilance against the "military-industrial complex"—delivered 50 years ago over the televisions that even then were addling America—echoes, however faintly, Ida Eisenhower's Mennonite convictions. It surely is redolent of his older brother and frequent correspondent Edgar, the Tacoma attorney who in most Eisenhower biographies gets a walk-on as the crusty reactionary pestering the moderate Ike to repeal the New Deal and support the Bricker Amendment, that last gasp of the Old Right.

The president's son John, in his memoir *Strictly Personal*, writes affectionately that Uncle Ed "considered President Roosevelt a work of the devil." No jingo chickenhawk of the sort whose squawk dominates today's Right, Ed tried to talk John out of a career in the military: "he declared that I should forego any ideas of becoming a 'professional killer' and go to law school at his expense, later to join his law office."

This language—"professional killer"—marked Edgar Eisenhower as an anachronism among the placeless technocrats who were busy engineering the Empire of Euphemism. Organization men like Robert McNamara and McGeorge Bundy could no more understand Edgar Eisenhower than they could dig Jack Kerouac or Paul Goodman.

In his new study of Ike's valediction, *Unwarranted Influence*, James Ledbetter places the Farewell Address within a thematic range that stretches from North Dakota Senator Gerald Nye's 1930s investigation of the "merchants of death" to the power-elite analysis of C. Wright Mills and his idealistic admirers in Students for a Democratic Society. Speechwriters Malcolm Moos and Capt. Ralph Williams—perhaps younger brother Milton Eisenhower, too—crafted much of the address, but its concerns were those of the president, who later wrote in *Waging Peace*: "During the years of my Presidency, and especially the latter years, I began to feel more and more uneasiness about the effect on the nation of tremendous peacetime military expenditures." (How many

Republican members of the 112th Congress would nod assent: ten, at most?)

The somber dignity with which Eisenhower left office ought not to obscure his administration's disgraceful interventions abroad (Iran, Guatemala) and at home (the Interstate Highway System, the National Defense Education Act). For those who preferred the American Republic to the American Empire, Ohio Sen. Robert Taft was the GOP choice in 1952.

Yet Ike was the last president confident enough to name, and even sometimes take on, the military-industrial complex. He lamented the "appalling costs" of the war machine and worried that a "garrison state" might arise in freedom's erstwhile land. He was justly furious to be reproved as soft on defense by such hawkish Democrats as the Pulitzer Prize-winning PT boat hero and devoted husband John F. Kennedy.

In his twilight, my old boss, Sen. Pat Moynihan, a Kennedy loyalist, was unsettled in Eisenhower-like ways by the seeming permanence of the national-security state, enshrouded in its miasmic secrecy. The new collection *Daniel Patrick Moynihan: A Portrait in Letters of an American Visionary*, contains a Sept. 8, 1990, letter to Erwin N. Griswold, former dean of Harvard Law

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School, in which Moynihan grandiloquently—that is, characteristically—announces, "I have one purpose left in life; or at least in the Senate. It is to try to sort out what would be involved in reconstituting the American government in the aftermath of the cold war. Huge changes took place, some of which we hardly notice."

Two months later, in a letter to constituents—which Moynihan, unlike most members of Congress this side of Tennessee's Jimmy Duncan and my late friend Barber Conable, wrote himself—the senator "wondered ... whether we any longer knew how" to be a "nation essentially at peace with the rest of the world."

We do not. Since 1941, war has warped American life. Only the doddering and the dotards among us have lived in an America that is not armed, aggressive, and perpetually at war. If you would seek those who know what an America at peace is like, visit the nursing home. If you would hear the sounds of America at war, walk the corridors of a veterans' hospital. Listen to the shrieks and sobs—the keening for the lost America of Ida and Edgar Eisenhower. ■

Bill Kauffman's latest book is Bye Bye, Miss American Empire: Neighborhood Patriots, Backcountry Rebels, and Their Underdog Crusades to Redraw America's Political Map