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## THE ORIGINS OF AMERICA'S WARFARE STATE

by Jacob G. Hornberger

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Given that most Americans living today were born and raised under a massive military establishment, the CIA, and the NSA, a large number of Americans very likely believe that the United States has always had this type of government.

Not so, as Michael Swanson shows in a new book, *The War State*. Swanson points out that America's warfare state didn't come into existence until more than 150 years after the country's inception. More important, he shows how the warfare state has not only altered our constitutional order in fundamental ways but also how it continues to pose a grave threat to the freedom and well-being of the American people.

Swanson begins by reminding people of the warning issued by Dwight Eisenhower in his Farewell Address in 1960. Eisenhower, a retired general who had served as the Allied commander in World War II, warned Americans of the dangers of the new massive "military-industrial complex" that had come to characterize American life:



Until the latest of our world conflicts, the United States had no armaments industry.... We have been compelled to create a permanent armaments industry of vast proportions. Added to this, three and a half million men and women are directly engaged in the defense establishment. We annually spend on military security alone more than the net income of all United States corporations.

Now 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 statehouse, 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.

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.

Emphasizing an important part of Eisenhower's speech, Swanson writes,

A key component of his speech is the word "new." Today we don't even think about the fact that the United States has the most powerful military in the world, with bases spread across the planet and a large portion of its federal budget devoted to military spending.... [Huge] military spending for the United States has always been a fact of life since the day you were born. That's why most don't even give it a second thought.

But this was not the case for President Eisenhower and the people of his generation. Before World War II, the United States never had a permanent arms industry.... [After] major wars, the country always demobilized its forces. That is, until World War II.

Swanson goes on to point out how different life was for pre-World War II Americans. Between World War I and World War II, fewer than 2.5 percent of Americans paid income taxes. In 1939, 93 percent of working Americans were paying no income taxes at all.

Given the enormous demand for weaponry, World War II gave rise to a large corporate establishment that was oriented toward the production of military armaments. The end of the war would ordinarily have spelled doom for those businesses, whose revenue and profits were dependent on massive military spending.



This time around, however, things changed. Simultaneously with the end of the war, the United States acquired a new enemy and a new “war,” which not only saved the enormous defense establishment but also ultimately made it one of the principal and permanent components of the American economy.

### **The new enemy**

That new enemy, of course, was the Soviet Union, which ironically had been America’s partner and ally (and Nazi Germany’s enemy) during World War II. The new “war” became known as the Cold War.

What had the Soviet Union done to become this new enemy of the United States?

First, it had continued to occupy and install puppet regimes in the eastern European countries it had invaded on its way to Nazi Germany. Second, it was a communist country, and communism was becoming attractive to people all over the world, igniting deep fears within U.S. officials that the United States might ultimately become communist too.

Thus, U.S. officials maintained that it was necessary for the United States to embark in a totally different direction from the one that had customarily been followed after previous wars. To save America from communism, it would be necessary to convert the United States into a warfare state — also commonly known as a national-security state, or a garrison state — one whose government included a massive permanent military and intelligence establishment, ironically much like that of the totalitarian regimes.

Given the mindset of conformity and deference to authority that characterized the American people in the 1940s and 1950s, hardly anyone challenged the necessity for the new direction or pointed out how such a military-intelligence apparatus would fundamentally alter the lives and fortunes of the American people. Among the few who did was Sen. Robert Taft, who was, as Swanson points out in chapter four, one of the subjects of John Kennedy’s book *Profiles in Courage*.

It wasn’t long, however, before U.S. officials expanded the Cold War to much more than a U.S.-Soviet confrontation. The U.S. government’s quest soon became to ensure freedom from communism all across the globe.



The first pronouncement of this expanded mission became known as the Truman Doctrine, after the president who issued it in a 1947 speech. Harry Truman announced that it would be the policy of the United States to “support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.”

More noteworthy, however, was Truman’s issuance of one of the most significant documents in U.S. history, one that was classified at the time as top-secret and that didn’t come to light until 30 years later. That document was NSC-68, which argued, falsely, that the Soviet Union was spending so much on defense that it would soon be able to attack and conquer Europe and the United States. NSC-68 helped launch the United States into a perpetual upward spiral of military spending and an ever-growing military establishment.

Meanwhile, another critical element of the warfare state, the CIA, was engaged in actions that were alien to the American way of life. Although the CIA was originally intended to be only an intelligence-gathering agency, someone had slipped the following language into the National Security Act of 1947, which brought the CIA into existence: “to perform such other functions and duties related to intelligence affecting the national security as the National Security Council may from time to time direct.”

The CIA would use that phrase to justify its ever-growing array of dark-side activities, including drug experimentation on unsuspecting people, coups, assassinations, bribery, murder, torture, invasions, regime-change operations, support of dictatorships, and similar practices.

### **The work of the CIA**

Among the CIA’s first activities was the ousting of Iran’s prime minister, Mohammad Mossadegh, and the ushering in of 26 years of dictatorial rule under the shah, or monarch, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. To his credit, Truman had rejected the plan, in large part because it was nothing more than a way to help England get back its oil interests, which Mossadegh had nationalized. But once Eisenhower came to power, the CIA rebilled the plan as one to protect Iran and the West from the threat of communism. On that basis, Eisenhower authorized the plan. While the operation succeeded in replacing Mossadegh with the shah, it also led to the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the anti-Americanism that came with it.

One year later, in 1954, the CIA engineered the ouster of Guatemala’s democratically elected president, Jacobo Arbenz, and his replacement by a succession of brutal military dictators. The justification was, once again, the threat of communism. But we shouldn’t fail to note that many



U.S. officials, including CIA Director Allen Dulles, had significant connections to the United Fruit Company, a major portion of whose massive land holdings in Guatemala had been nationalized by Arbenz. In an ominous new direction for America, the CIA also delivered to its newly installed military dictatorship a secret list of people who should be assassinated after the coup.

Swanson points out the stunning op-ed that Truman published in the *Washington Post* 30 days after John Kennedy was assassinated, in which he indicated that the CIA had grown into a nefarious force that far exceeded its original intelligence-gathering purpose.

Kennedy, of course, had his own searing experience with the CIA. Soon after he took office, the CIA presented him with its plan for U.S.-supported Cuban exiles to invade Cuba, assuring the new president that the invasion would be successful without formal U.S. intervention. It was a lie. Believing that Kennedy would be compelled, once the operation was under way, to send in U.S. air support to save the invading forces, the CIA went ahead with the operation. Kennedy refused to provide the air support, and the operation was a disaster.

One of Swanson's fascinating observations is that the Bay of Pigs plan did not originate with either Eisenhower or Kennedy, neither of whom would have ever conceived or proposed it. It instead originated within the CIA itself.

The following year, 1962, brought the Cuban Missile Crisis, during which the Joint Chiefs of Staff advised Kennedy to immediately bomb, invade, and occupy Cuba. Kennedy rejected their advice, and it's a good thing he did because it would almost certainly have led to an all-out nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union.

The Cuban Missile Crisis was another searing experience for Kennedy. Having lost trust in the military and the CIA, he engaged in top-secret personal negotiations with Premier Nikita Khrushchev of the Soviet Union to end the Cold War, which obviously would have had major ramifications for America's warfare state. The new direction in which Kennedy was trying to move America before his death was best demonstrated in his famous "peace speech" at American University in June 1963, in which he challenged the entire purpose of America's warfare state:

What kind of peace do I mean? What kind of a peace do we seek? Not a Pax Americana forced on the world by American weapons of war. Not the peace of the grave or the security of the slave. I am talking about genuine peace, the kind of peace that makes life on earth worth living,



the kind that enables men and nations to grow and to hope and to build a better life for their children — not merely peace for Americans but peace for all men and women — not merely peace in our time but peace for all time.

### **Getting the origin right**

One of the greatest things about Swanson's book is that it is oriented toward the educated layman. That is, it is not an academic tome but is instead an easily readable history of the origins of America's warfare state. I was able to get through it in three evenings. I find it interesting that such a fine book was self-published (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform), something that many authors seem to be doing increasingly. According to the biographical sketch at the end of the book, Swanson lives in Virginia and received a master's degree in history from the University of Virginia. He dropped out of UVA's Ph.D. program to enter the business world and ran a hedge fund from 2003 to 2006. He now runs the website [wallstreetwindow.com](http://wallstreetwindow.com).

The Cold War, which was the original justification for this revolutionary change in America's governmental system, ended 25 years ago, yet Americans are still saddled with the warfare state. But to get the solution right, it is necessary to understand the origins of the problem.

As Swanson concludes,

Things are much darker at the moment. The world we live in today began after World War II with the creation of a permanent military-industrial complex and the transformation of the United States into a war state by the end of the 1950s. It changed the nation's relationship with the rest of the world and the American people's relationship with their own government. It helped to create a new power elite tied to a permanent government bureaucracy that made the real decisions of importance for the American people and fed them fear propaganda to get them to accept their decisions without question.... Even though the permanent government bureaucracy inside the executive branch of the federal government has become more and more powerful, the United States of America still has a constitutional form of government and will continue to have one as long as the people stay active. The people must be armed with the knowledge to make wise decisions. They must know their history to understand the origins of our present predicament. We must all do our part.

This is one of the best books I have ever read on the origins and consequences of America's fateful turn toward a warfare state. It's essential reading for everyone interested in moving our nation into a peaceful, prosperous, harmonious, and free direction.