Power Behind Policy

Reading Eisenhower's warning about defense and foreign policy

USH.C.6.3.B "Explain President Dwight Eisenhower's concern regarding the power of the military industrial complex to influence American foreign policy (e.g., Eisenhower's Farewell Address)."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details that show how defense interests might affect decisions about other countries, then circle the words naming the safeguard Eisenhower proposed.

A Warning at the End of a Presidency

1 In January 1961, as he prepared to leave office, President Dwight D. Eisenhower addressed Americans on television. He had led Allied forces in World War II and later served eight years as president. He knew that a strong defense mattered during the Cold War, when the United States and Soviet Union faced each other as rivals. Yet he warned about a new feature of American life: a large, permanent partnership among the armed forces, companies that built weapons, and the government officials who funded them. He called this partnership the *military-industrial complex*. Its size, he argued, brought power as well as protection.

2 Before World War II, the United States had not maintained such a vast weapons industry in peacetime. Now defense contracts supported factories and jobs in many communities. A contractor could press officials to buy a new weapon; military leaders could argue that more weapons were needed; lawmakers could worry about losing local jobs if spending fell. These pressures might make a larger budget or a more forceful response abroad seem necessary even when other choices deserved attention. Eisenhower called the danger "unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought," in government decisions. He did not claim that every defense request was dishonest.

3 Imagine a crisis overseas: officials must decide whether to negotiate, offer aid, or send more troops and weapons. If spending on weapons has powerful supporters, leaders might give the military option extra weight without fully testing its costs or alternatives. That is the foreign-policy danger Eisenhower wanted citizens to recognize, not a prediction that every military action was wrong. In his farewell address, he urged an "alert and knowledgeable citizenry" to keep defense connected to peaceful goals. Public scrutiny of spending and careful debate over options could help prevent a permanent defense system from steering policy simply because it benefits from expansion.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why could a defense system that protected the United States also worry Eisenhower when leaders made foreign-policy choices?

2. How could defense contracts and local jobs influence lawmakers' views of a more forceful response abroad?

3. In the passage's overseas crisis, how might pressure from weapons interests change the way officials weigh their options?

4. How could an "alert and knowledgeable citizenry" help address Eisenhower's foreign-policy concern?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A fictional president is considering a new naval base near a busy shipping route. Defense firms favor the contracts, while military leaders say the base would protect ships; in four sentences, explain how their influence could shape the decision, why the security claim still deserves consideration, and one way to check their influence.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · USH.C.6.3.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details that show how defense interests might affect decisions about other countries, then circle the words naming the safeguard Eisenhower proposed. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why could a defense system that protected the United States also worry Eisenhower when leaders made foreign-policy choices?	**A strong defense mattered during the Cold War, but the defense partnership could gain too much influence and push leaders toward forceful choices without enough attention to alternatives.**
2	How could defense contracts and local jobs influence lawmakers' views of a more forceful response abroad?	**Lawmakers might fear that reduced defense spending would cost jobs in their communities, making a more forceful response that requires weapons spending seem more appealing.**
3	In the passage's overseas crisis, how might pressure from weapons interests change the way officials weigh their options?	**Officials might give sending troops and weapons extra weight instead of fully testing its costs or considering negotiation and aid.**
4	How could an "alert and knowledgeable citizenry" help address Eisenhower's foreign-policy concern?	**Citizens could scrutinize defense spending and demand careful debate over foreign-policy options so defense interests do not steer decisions on their own.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A new naval base might protect ships, so the president should consider the military leaders' claim. Defense firms would profit from building and supplying the base, giving them a reason to support it. If their interests dominate, the president might approve the base without weighing its costs or other ways to protect shipping. Public hearings could examine the security evidence, costs, and alternatives before a decision.

Accept answers that explain a plausible path from defense interests to a foreign-policy choice without claiming that every defense proposal is improper. For Part 3, look for a distinct security consideration and a concrete way to examine the proposal.