

IKE'S WARNING

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In a televised farewell address to the American people on Jan. 17, 1961 — 65 years ago — Dwight D. Eisenhower, the only military leader elected to the presidency in the 20th century, warned the nation about the growing influence of what he called “the military-industrial complex.”

Did the country heed his warning?
Of course not.

‘WE SHOULD TAKE NOTHING FOR GRANTED’

In a nationally-televised farewell speech on Jan. 17, 1961, Eisenhower told the nation:

“Until the latest of our world conflicts, the United States had no armaments industry. American makers of plowshares could, with time and as required, make swords as well. But we can no longer risk emergency improvisation of national defense. 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 establish-



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ment 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.”

EISENHOWER'S FAREWELL ADDRESS

After serving as a five-star general during World War II, being named Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force in Europe and overseeing the D-Day invasion of Normandy and the Allied victory in Europe, Eisenhower had served briefly as president of Columbia University and the first Supreme Commander of NATO before being elected to two terms in the White House.

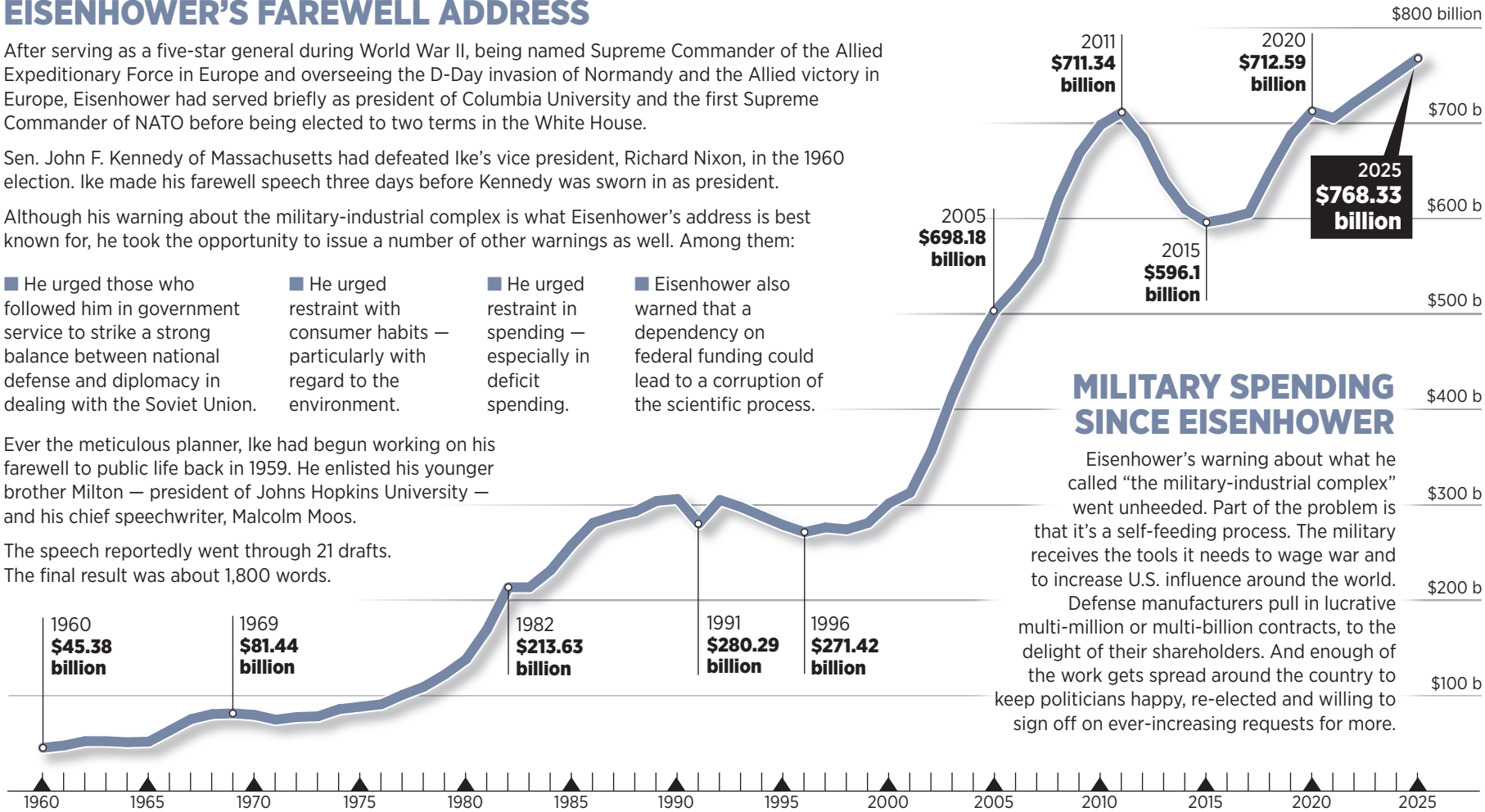
Sen. John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts had defeated Ike's vice president, Richard Nixon, in the 1960 election. Ike made his farewell speech three days before Kennedy was sworn in as president.

Although his warning about the military-industrial complex is what Eisenhower's address is best known for, he took the opportunity to issue a number of other warnings as well. Among them:

- He urged those who followed him in government service to strike a strong balance between national defense and diplomacy in dealing with the Soviet Union.
- He urged restraint with consumer habits — particularly with regard to the environment.
- He urged restraint in spending — especially in deficit spending.
- Eisenhower also warned that a dependency on federal funding could lead to a corruption of the scientific process.

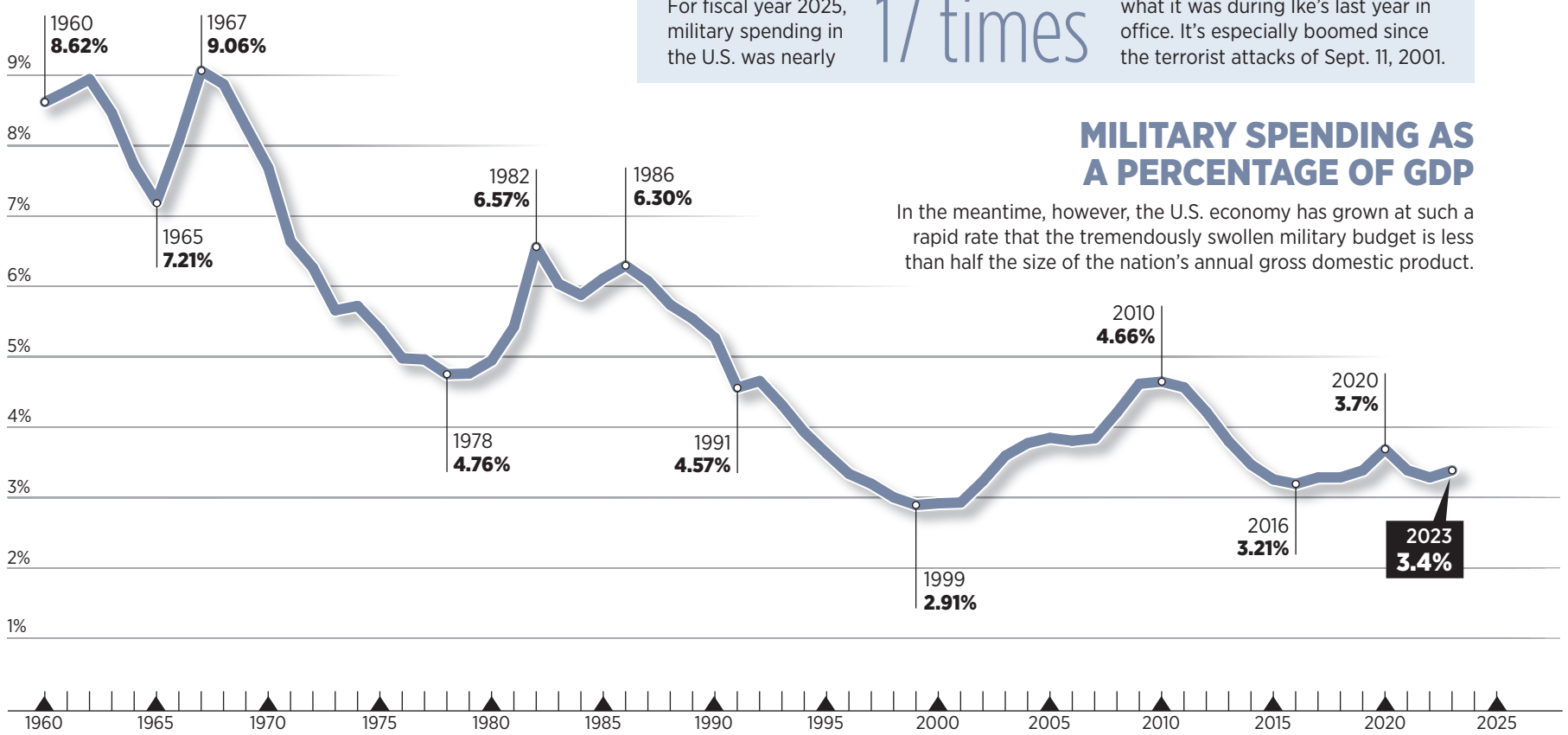
Ever the meticulous planner, Ike had begun working on his farewell to public life back in 1959. He enlisted his younger brother Milton — president of Johns Hopkins University — and his chief speechwriter, Malcolm Moos.

The speech reportedly went through 21 drafts. The final result was about 1,800 words.



MILITARY SPENDING SINCE EISENHOWER

Eisenhower's warning about what he called “the military-industrial complex” went unheeded. Part of the problem is that it's a self-feeding process. The military receives the tools it needs to wage war and to increase U.S. influence around the world. Defense manufacturers pull in lucrative multi-million or multi-billion contracts, to the delight of their shareholders. And enough of the work gets spread around the country to keep politicians happy, re-elected and willing to sign off on ever-increasing requests for more.



For fiscal year 2025, military spending in the U.S. was nearly

17 times

what it was during Ike's last year in office. It's especially boomed since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

MILITARY SPENDING AS A PERCENTAGE OF GDP

In the meantime, however, the U.S. economy has grown at such a rapid rate that the tremendously swollen military budget is less than half the size of the nation's annual gross domestic product.