

Wednesday, 10 December, 11 a.m.

Fellow Seminar

Shawn Powers

THE INFORMATION INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX



Daniel Guerin introduced the concept of a “military industrial complex” (MIC) in 1936 to refer to a “coalition of groups with vested psychological, moral, and material interests in the continuous development and maintenance of high levels of weaponry, in preservation of colonial markets and in military-strategic conceptions of internal affairs.” Seventy odd years later, the transition from an economy based on heavy industry towards one grounded in communication technology and information management has resulted in a new “silicon triangle” between policymakers, the information industries and the American public.

This talk will outline how the US government has cultivated a close and co-dependent relationship with companies involved in information production, storage, processing and distribution. Regular cooperation between US government and private sector actors have furthered the rise of a global economy driven by information and communication technologies while simultaneously placing US companies at its center. Through various policy mechanisms, the US government facilitated the rise of the modern internet, funded its most advanced technological developers, and pushed for governance structures that enabled its globalization. The analogue to the military industrial complex is not merely descriptive, but also prescriptive. The co-dependence that defined the military-industrial complex produced an ineffective model for governments and enterprises alike.

Shawn Powers is a jointly appointed fellow at CEU’s Institute for Advanced Study and the Center for Media, Data and Society. He is also an assistant professor in the Department of Communication at Georgia State University. His research specializes in international political communication with particular attention to the geopolitics of information and technology policy. Powers co-directs a British Council and U.S. Institute of Peace funded project on Civic Approaches to Religious Conflict. He is also an associate director at the Center for International Media Education and co-directs its Open Society Foundation funded initiative on Reform in Iraqi Higher Education. Powers serves on the Board of Advisors for the State Department’s U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy and recently completed a book entitled, [*“The Real Cyber War: A Political Economy of Internet Freedom”*](#) (University of Illinois Press, 2015).