

**The Eisenhower Administration, the Third World, and the
Globalization of the Cold War Roundtable *Review***
Review by Kenton Clymer



Reviewed Work:

Kathryn C. Statler and Andrew L. Johns, eds. *The Eisenhower Administration, the Third World, and the Globalization of the Cold War*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006.

Roundtable Editor: Thomas Maddux

Reviewers: Kenton Clymer, Brian Etheridge, Mary Ann Heiss, Christopher Tudra

For the other parts of this roundtable, please visit <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/>

Stable URL: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/EisenhowerThirdWorldGlobalization-Clymer.pdf>

Your use of this H-Diplo roundtable review indicates your acceptance of the H-Diplo and H-Net copyright policies, and terms of condition and use.

The following is a plain language summary of these policies:

You may redistribute and reprint this work under the following conditions:

- Attribution:** You must include full and accurate attribution to the author(s), web location, date of publication, H-Diplo, and H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online.
 - Nonprofit and education purposes only.** You may not use this work for commercial purposes.
 - For any reuse or distribution, you must make clear to others the license terms of this work.
 - Any of these conditions may be waived if you obtain permission from the copyright holder. For such queries, contact the H-Diplo editorial staff at h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu.
-

H-Diplo is an international discussion network dedicated to the study of diplomatic and international history (including the history of foreign relations). For more information regarding H-Diplo, please visit <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/>.

For further information about our parent organization, H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online, please visit <http://www.h-net.org/>.

Copyright © 2007 by H-Diplo, a part of H-Net. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For other uses contact the H-Diplo editorial staff at h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu.

6 March 2007

Review by Kenton Clymer, Northern Illinois University

It was a pleasure to read this intelligently conceived book about the Eisenhower administration's approach to the third world at the height of the Cold War. The editors did an excellent job of selecting the contributions, which cover a wide range of topics and many areas of the Third World from Asia, to Latin America, to Africa, and finally to the Middle East. All of the chapters are well researched and very well written, concise and very much to the point. I learned a great deal about the administration's approach to colonialism and related issues, and I think other readers will as well.

Historians are well aware of the debate about the Eisenhower administration's foreign policy, with revisionists arguing that the President, who was initially ridiculed for being uninvolved in policy and not very bright (he played much too much golf), was actually much more complex than originally thought and certainly did not abdicate his responsibilities in policy making to anyone else, including Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. The revisionists are convincing on this score, but Chester Pach gets it exactly right in his introduction: the more important question is whether Eisenhower's "policies were effective or wise." (p. xiv) These essays, taken together, bolster the revisionist case about Eisenhower's engagement but generally answer Pach's challenge with a resounding "no."

The book begins with three chapters on general topics. Kenneth Osgood's essay on race, colonialism, and propaganda provides an outstanding start to the book. Osgood demonstrates that Eisenhower was devoted to psychological warfare because the Cold War was primarily an ideological and cultural conflict. But he finds the president unable to persuade much of the developing world that the United States really wished their nationalist struggles well. This was partly because the United States needed, or felt it needed, to retain close ties to the very colonial powers that colonial peoples were resisting. Further complicating the American task was race. Osgood is absolutely compelling on this score. Given Eisenhower's ambivalent ideas about race (he was initially opposed to the Brown decision, for example, and never again invited Chief Justice Earl Warren to the White House, except when protocol demanded it), together with the reality of widespread racial discrimination and segregation, American educational or propaganda efforts in colonial areas were unlikely to have much impact.

Interesting, the administration ultimately realized the problem here, Osgood asserts, and eventually placed more attention on cultural diplomacy, including the teaching of English around the world in an effort to make English the universal language. In this the United States has largely succeeded, and although Osgood seems to regard this as a form of cultural imperialism (the host countries are seen as passive recipients), in fact, at least to some degree, they may well have seen advantages in making the use of English more widespread – much as students and ordinary citizens everywhere in China today strive to learn English and do so with great dedication. This example may, in fact, foreshadow one of the themes in some of the essays, that alleged "puppets" were not really so, that they had agency of their own and to an extent were able to manipulate the United States. But on the

6 March 2007

larger point, Osgood seems to have it right: the problem for the United States was not one of words but of deeds, and given American ties to the colonial powers, combined with its own racism and racial problems at home, it was difficult to convince many in the Third World that the American way was the best way.

John Prados follows with an excellent overview of the CIA's activities related to the decolonization process. Prados confirms that the Eisenhower administration was much more attracted to covert actions than was its predecessor. Iran and Guatemala are very important, because their apparent and relatively easy (and inexpensive) successes early on in overthrowing allegedly procommunist governments served as models for involvement in a number of other countries, most of which were less successful. In Syria an attempt to overthrow the government was thwarted when one of the Syrian plotters revealed the conspiracy; in Indonesia American efforts to assist the regional rebellions in 1958 failed utterly (as Robert McMahon details in a later chapter).

After Michael R. Adamson's overview of the Eisenhower administration's use of foreign aid in the Third World, the book moves on to several case studies that illuminate the general themes. Robert McMahon, noting, like Prados, the importance of the Iran and Guatemala precedents, provides a fine account of American meddling in Indonesia. Efforts to sway Sukarno away from neutralism with an invitation to the White House proved unsuccessful (shortly after the Washington visit the Indonesian leader accepted aid from the Soviet Union), and the United States became increasingly concerned. McMahon utilizes important secondary sources, including the essential work by Audrey Kahin and George Kahin, *Subversion as Foreign Policy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), to examine the actual covert intervention in the regional rebellions of 1958. The intervention was, as he aptly puts it, "an abject failure. The president's reckless interventionism and promiscuous use of clandestine paramilitary measures proved as ineffectual as they were counterproductive." (p. 96)

McMahon's essay is the most adamant about the "failure and counterproductive" nature of American intervention. Many of the other authors would not disagree (indeed one of the unifying themes throughout the book is the failure of the Americans to have much understanding of the force of nationalism), but they approach American policy asking different questions. Thus Kathryn C. Statler's extremely stimulating and well written essay on South Vietnam argues that Ngo Dinh Diem was no puppet of the United States. On the contrary, he wagged "the tale [sic] of the dog" (p. 102) and "systematically thwarted American desires in South Vietnam." (p. 103) At the same time she insists that South Vietnam was a "client state" (p. 101) and that the United States produced a "colony" (p. 117) in South Vietnam. This apparent contradiction is not fully resolved in the article, as Statler also argues that American neocolonialism was "indirect, informal, and incomplete" (p.102) and, on another occasion, that the United States "assumed a quasi-colonial position." (p. 116) What is compelling in this piece is the argument that Diem was not a puppet and that previous accounts (which she does not specifically identify) have underestimated his abilities. The essay, while based on excellent primary sources, could have benefited the readers with more discussion of the historiography of American

6 March 2007

policy toward Vietnam in the 1950s. George Herring is not mentioned at all, and David L. Anderson's book on precisely the same topic is accorded only one notation. Since she and Anderson have quite different assessments of the Michigan State Group advisers, for example, more engagement with the literature would have been very helpful, though again I found the piece to be excellent overall.

Statler's emphasis on Third World "agency" is echoed to some degree in James F. Siekmeier's contribution on Bolivia, which argues that, although Bolivia received more aid from the norteamericanos than did any other Latin American country, it was not beholden to the United States. The United States did not control its policy, and the important Bolivian revolution of 1952, a true social revolution, managed to retain most of its gains despite American influence. Much like Diem, Bolivian leaders took advantage of American largesse and maximized their gains. At the same time, Siekmeier indicates that Bolivia paid a great price for the American aid, and the revolutionary movement, the MNR, splintered over an American-backed stabilization scheme. Thus it appears to me that if Bolivia did exploit its client state position, the United States nevertheless had considerable clout regarding Bolivian developments.

Eisenhower revisionists will find some comfort in Yi Sun's essay on Taiwan and Jason Parker's on the Bandung Conference. Yi finds the Eisenhower administration's approach to the Taiwan crisis to be non-ideological, pragmatic, and generally astute. Essentially both the United States and China saw the Taiwan crises of the 1950s (over the status of the offshore island of Jinmen and Mazu) primarily from the standpoint of national security, though both powers also faced domestic pressures. Mao played "hardball" (p. 128) on Taiwan to stop it from becoming a U.S. military base. Mao's effort backfired, as the United States and Taiwan concluded a defense treaty and Congress passed the Formosa Resolution. To appease right wingers in the Republican Party, Dulles used strong rhetoric, but he quietly sought a way out of the crisis. The treaty with Taiwan was deliberately ambiguous on the question of defending the offshore islands, for example, and the secretary also tried to resolve the first crisis through the United Nations (though China, which was not represented in the U.N.) declined to go along. But Mao also wanted no war, and so both sides backed away for the moment.

The shelling resumed (much to everyone's surprise) in 1958, and Yi provides much insight into Mao's complex reasons for doing so, including the need to support anti-Western movements around the world, whip up nationalist fervor at home, and challenge those Soviet officials who sought detente. But as in the previous crisis, both sides ultimately showed much restraint, despite much bluster on both sides. Thus in the final analysis, she concludes, both Mao and Dulles (whom she seems to think was at least as important as Eisenhower in formulating policy in this instance) deserve credit for not carrying things to extremes.

Jason Parker is less fulsome in his praise for the administration's response to the Bandung Conference of 1955. But he too concludes that the United States handled the conference reasonably well and, unlike in most of the situations described in this book, actually

6 March 2007

demonstrated a certain sensitivity to issues of nationalism, anticolonialism, and neutralism. The conference of Asian and African nations, called by Indonesia's leader Sukarno, initially worried the United States, particularly after it became evident that China would attend. However, the United States kept a low profile and worked through its Asian allies to try to bring about a satisfactory outcome. African American Congressman Adam Clayton Powell attended as a journalist, which worried the Americans; but in the end the administration came to view the conference much as Powell did: European colonialism was a dying institution that the United States should oppose. In the end, the United States had no objection to the conference's conclusions. In fact Dulles characterized the conference as (in Parker's words) "more or less a windfall for American diplomacy." (p. 164)

After Bandung, Parker believes, the United States became more outspoken against European colonialism and more nuanced in its treatment of neutralism. But the change was ultimately more rhetorical than real. Thus, although Parker thinks that the Americans approached the Bandung Conference in a constructive way and even learned some important lessons, they missed an opportunity to follow up on what they had learned by making real policy changes. American involvement in such places as Indonesia, Cambodia, and Africa would certainly seem to bear this out.

The lack of substantive change was particularly evident in Africa, which James Meriwether discusses in yet another revealing, interesting, and well written chapter. Meriwether demonstrates that there was very little real change in American policy toward Africa over the decade. Although the Eisenhower administration said it was seeking a middle course between support for the colonial powers and the African nationalists, in fact American policy favored the former. At heart this derived from the racist, negative perceptions that policy makers had toward Africans. For Henry Byroade, Eisenhower's Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs, writes Meriwether, "the white man's burden had not ended." (p. 178) But the more important point is that Eisenhower and most of his top advisers shared such attitudes. Maurice Stans, Director of the Bureau of the Budget, for example, observed that many Africans "still belonged in the trees." (p. 185)

Domestic developments – notably the civil rights movement – forced some changes. In 1956 for the first time the position of Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs was created in the Department of State, and in 1957 on the occasion of Ghana's independence Vice President Richard Nixon took an extended trip to Africa. Nixon returned urging the United States to become more involved in African affairs, perhaps because of Nixon's more liberal racial views but even more because of fear of communist inroads in the continent. As for South Africa, the administration was unquestionably comfortable with white rule. After the brutal Sharpeville Massacre in 1960 the State Department put out a statement condemning South Africa. But the statement had not been cleared with Secretary of State Christian Herter, and Herter and the President were livid that it had been distributed. They called in the South African ambassador to apologize. The chapter concludes with a riveting account of Congolese independence in 1960 which brought Patrice Lumumba to power. The Americans planned to assassinate him, though in the end others killed him.

6 March 2007

In sum, American policy in Africa remained strongly in favor of the colonial states. Realities on the ground and the impact of American racial problems at home forced some cosmetic changes. But that was about all.

The book concludes with two pieces on the Middle East. Peter Hahn traces American policy toward Israel, while Nathan Citino examines American policy toward Iraq from 1958-1961. These chapters fit less easily into the larger book, particularly the essay on Israel, since it would be hard to argue that Israel was a part of the Third World. Nevertheless, Hahn's article is instructive on its own terms because it demonstrates that Eisenhower repudiated Truman's strong support for Israel and instead adopted a more balanced position. There was no "special relationship" with Israel during the Eisenhower period, he shows. Israel countered the administration by working with the Congress and attempting to sway public opinion. Its success was mixed; when Israel's efforts were blatant, in fact, the administration dug in its heels. Hahn does demonstrate that Eisenhower was in charge of policy, thus reinforcing the revisionists' views of presidential primacy.

Citino's essay on Iraq fits more easily into the larger themes of the book. In Iraq the United States seriously considered trying to topple the regime of Adbul al-Karim Qasim who had an alliance with domestic communists, just as it also considered regime change in other parts of the world. The United States found itself in something of a dilemma here since Qasim was bitterly disliked by Egyptian (and United Arab Republic) President Gammal Abdel Nassar, whom the United States also disliked. There was in fact an abortive coup against Qasim (one Saddam Hussein was one of the plotters). Whether the United States was involved in the coup is hotly debated. No firm evidence has yet emerged that it was, but this was about the same time that the United States was unquestionably involved in efforts at regime change in Indonesia and Cuba and had adopted a policy in Cambodia allowing support, in certain circumstances, to antigovernment forces. Given the administration's attraction to covert operations it would not be entirely surprising if the CIA was in fact involved.

But with the failure of the coup attempt, the United States backed off, much as it also did in Indonesia and Cambodia. There were a variety of reasons for this, including a divided bureaucracy, opposition from the British, and Qasim's decision to curb communist influence.

Out of this crisis came the creation of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which Citino argues was an American success. It split the Arab world and reduced the importance of pan-Arab nationalism, which had always worried Washington. Qasim was nevertheless overthrown in 1963, which resulted in a terrible bloodbath as the Ba'athists purged and slaughtered the communists in gruesome ways. Just as the CIA supported the bloody purge of communists in Indonesia in 1965, it may be that they did so in Iraq in 1963.

6 March 2007

So what, then, do we come away with from this excellent collection of essays? These essays bolster the revisionist case that Eisenhower, not Dulles, was engaged and directed policy (except perhaps in the case of Taiwan). There is also some evidence that the administration could be surprising pragmatic and competent in its approach, notably in Taiwan and in response to the Bandung Conference. But for the most part the authors, like Chester Pach, question the wisdom of the policies. This was particularly evident in the response to nationalism. With some exceptions, the United States was insufficiently attuned to the force and vitality of nationalism sweeping the Third World. There had been Americans in the previous decade who had warned their country precisely of this and urged it to side with the nationalists for both moral and realistic reasons. William Phillips, a senior diplomat sent to India by President Franklin Roosevelt, for example, had glimpsed the forces of nationalism, not just in India but all over Asia, even before the end of World War II, and Roosevelt himself was not unaffected by his reports. But the emerging Cold War, to say nothing of continuing condescending racial attitudes, complicated the American approach to nationalism, and under Eisenhower one can only conclude that the American response was tepid and inadequate.

Years ago Felix Gilbert wrote that from the earliest days the United States “has wavered in her foreign policy between Idealism and Realism, and her great historical moments have occurred when both were combined.”¹ Based on the evidence in most of these essays, few of Eisenhower policies would qualify for Gilbert’s “great historical moments.”

Kenton Clymer is Presidential Research Professor at Northern Illinois University, where he chairs the Department of History. In 2003-04 he was Distinguished Fulbright Professor at Renmin (People’s) University in Beijing, and he has also taught at universities in the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Germany. He teaches courses in the history of American foreign relations and has a particular interest in teaching about American involvement in Southeast Asia. His two-volume history of the United States-Cambodian relationship (Routledge, 2004) won the Robert H. Ferrell Book Prize for 2005. An updated, revised, and abridged paperback version of the work will be published in 2007 by Northern Illinois University Press. His other books include *John Hay: The Gentleman as Diplomat* (University of Michigan Press, 1975); *Protestant Missionaries in the Philippines, 1898-1914: An Inquiry into the American Colonial Mentality* (University of Illinois Press, 1986); and *Quest for Freedom: The United States and the India’s Independence* (Columbia University Press, 1995).

Copyright © 2007 by H-Diplo, a part of H-Net. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For other uses contact the H-Diplo editorial staff at h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu

¹ Felix Gilbert, *To the Farewell Address: Ideas of Early American Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 136.