

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



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**Review by Christopher Tudda, Office of the Historian, Department of State**

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**Note:** The views presented here are my own and do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Department of State or the United States Government. I would like to thank my colleagues Douglas Kraft and Kristin Ahlberg for their helpful comments and suggestions.

This new volume reflects the recent emphasis in the historiography of the Eisenhower administration's diplomacy toward the nations emerging from decades of colonialism.<sup>1</sup> Eleven essays mainly based upon primary sources, found in U.S., European, Chinese, and Israeli archives, demonstrate that in their eagerness to combat the Soviet Union and win the allegiance of Third World nations, President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles often adopted counterproductive policies that actually alienated the very countries they courted.

Eisenhower believed that given the chance, communism could penetrate every area of the world. He thus decided to wage "total peace" in every region of the world by diplomatic, political, economic, and covert means. However, these essays suggest that his administration could not reconcile the tension between America's professed anti-colonial ideology with its need to maintain the cohesion of the NATO alliance against communism. The former colonial areas had been only recently and reluctantly abandoned by the Europeans, yet the administration inflamed Third World peoples by ultimately siding with the Europeans, even as it privately recognized they would not befriend the newly developing nations by adopting such a policy.

Instead, the administration criticized the emerging nations for adopting a policy of "neutralism" between the Western and Soviet blocs, an approach that had been championed by Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. In fact, Dulles branded neutralism "immoral" and argued that the developing world must choose between Washington and Moscow. As Chester Pach notes in his introduction, the administration contended that communism would undermine, and ultimately destroy, their independence, while democracy would preserve their independence. (p. xi)

Kenneth Osgood's chapter on Eisenhower's propaganda efforts in the Third World is an excellent summary of his recently-published book.<sup>2</sup> Characterizing the Cold War as "first

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Robert J. McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India, and Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Zachary Karabell, *Architects of Intervention: The United States, the Third World, and the Cold War* (Baton Rouge, La: Louisiana State University Press, 1999); Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press, 2001); and Peter Hahn and Mary Ann Heiss, eds., *Empire and Revolution: The United States and the Third World since 1945* (Columbus, Oh: Ohio State University Press, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence, KS: The University Press of Kansas, 2006).

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and foremost a political war, a war of persuasion” to be waged by the United States and Soviet Union throughout the world, (p. 3) Osgood writes that after Soviet Premier Josef Stalin died in March 1953, his successors embarked on a drive for “peaceful coexistence” between the two blocs. According to Osgood, this campaign attracted many, especially in the Third World, who viewed the Eisenhower administration’s “rigid anti-communism—not to mention Joseph McCarthy ... as the greater threat to international peace and stability.” (p. 7)

In order to counter the Soviet peace offensive and the attraction of neutralism, Osgood argues that Eisenhower adopted an intense, all-encompassing psychological war that highlighted his administration’s peaceful intentions. Public relations programs such as “The Chance for Peace,” “Atoms for Peace,” and “Open Skies” showed that the U.S. had undertaken a nuclear buildup not only to rework its defense strategy but to also expose the “insincerity” of the Soviet peace offensive. (p. 8) Osgood documents the administration’s failure to convince its Third World audience that communism rather than European imperialism threatened their new-found freedom.

In his essay on foreign aid, Michael Adamson explains that Stalin’s death also impacted Eisenhower’s economic policy toward the Third World. Stalin’s successors not only courted the developing nations politically but also economically. This new Soviet gambit, Adamson contends, “altered Washington’s strategy” and convinced Eisenhower and Dulles to respond with their own aid program based upon democratic “capitalism as a development strategy.” (p. 56) Ostensibly designed to re-establish a liberal “international political economy,” this foreign aid program, which emphasized private investment and development, failed because the administration used aid to buttress U.S. national security rather than to modernize the former European colonies. (pp. 47, 48) While the Eisenhower administration saw everything “through the prism of the Cold War,” it provided bilateral aid through the Mutual Security Program (MSP) only to those countries threatened by communism. (p.57) Adamson convincingly demonstrates that although geared toward creating independent economies, the MSP actually “created dependent relationships” between the U.S. and allies in the developing world that retarded economic growth. Meanwhile, many developing nations “leverage[d] Cold War tensions” to receive more economic aid, but funneled that aid into state-sponsored, not private, development programs.

Less compelling is Kathryn Statler’s analysis of U.S. policy toward South Vietnam, which she describes as “neocolonial.” (p. 101) While I agree that nationalism, decolonization, the Cold War, and U.S. foreign policy all “collided” in South Vietnam (p. 101), and that U.S. involvement deepened during the decade, Statler’s subsequent argument is weakened by the very evidence she cites. As she adroitly documents President Ngo Dinh Diem’s nimble Asian diplomacy and his ability to “manipulate” the administration to obtain more economic and military aid, she shows that in reality, Diem’s nationalism actually paralleled

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Washington's increased involvement. (p. 102) Statler fails to adequately explain why both simultaneously occurred.

More importantly, her discussion of U.S. "neocolonialism" is unconvincing. For example, she argues that the South Vietnamese army's decision to wear helmets rather than berets reveals creeping U.S. neocolonialism. (p. 113) Curiously, this decision actually seems to have had a practical basis, since helmets provide better protection from bullets than do berets. Indeed, strangely absent from the entire chapter is the constant military threat from North Vietnam and communist insurgents in the South, as if a shift in dress, and the growing U.S. presence, occurred in a vacuum. Statler also contends that in 1955 the newly independent government of South Vietnam "modeled itself after Washington" by changing ministries to secretaries, adopting a constitution, and pushing its people to learn English. (p. 113) This seems to be the very antithesis of "neocolonialism," since the Diem government freely implemented these changes.

On the other hand, John Prados and Robert McMahon each persuasively illustrate how the Eisenhower administration's use of covert action crashed on the shoals of Third World nationalism. Prados argues that the administration, through the CIA, wanted to "remobilize" the former colonial powers on the U.S. side of the cold war. (p. 30) By the administration's cold war calculus, Third World resentment at this intrusion did not matter. Thus the administration sided with Britain and France by covertly attempting to influence governments in Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon (even though it had refused to back London and Paris during the 1956 Suez crisis), the Dutch in Indonesia, and Belgium in the Congo crisis. The administration therefore "made a mockery of [the U.S. rhetorical commitment to] self-determination" because it could not move beyond its conception of the threat from a communist monolith. (p. 43)

McMahon skillfully examines the administration's "ill-conceived and reckless" attempt to covertly topple President Sukarno in Indonesia, whose neutralist stance and tolerance of the Indonesian Communist Party infuriated Eisenhower and Dulles. (p. 75) Propelled by the success of covert operations in Iran and Guatemala, McMahon argues that the administration failed to account for the power of nationalism in Indonesia. Indeed, despite criticizing Sukarno's pledge of neutrality in the cold war, the Eisenhower administration ironically adopted a neutral position over control of West Irian (Western New Guinea) that in effect became a pro-Dutch position. (p. 78) It even preferred a divided, anti-communist Indonesia to a united, neutralist Indonesia. (p. 79) This public policy strengthened Sukarno's anti-imperialist bona fides and doomed the subsequent U.S.-backed coup.

Jason Parker offers a fine analysis of the challenge that Sukarno's conference of non-aligned nations at Bandung posed to Washington. The administration attempted in vain to convince the visiting delegates that the "new colonialism of communism" created a greater threat than the old European colonialism. (p. 155) Even though the administration took the conference seriously, it was "insufficiently ambitious." (p. 169) Parker concludes that Eisenhower and Dulles squandered a chance to curry favor with developing nations

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because of their insistence that ideology was more important than racialism, regionalism, or anti-colonialism. (p. 154)

Yi Sun has contributed a very important examination of Dulles's rhetorical diplomacy over the Taiwan Straits islands that supports what I have previously theorized about the administration's Asian policy.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, she has uncovered Chinese sources that demonstrate that Chinese Premier Mao Zedong used the same strategy to promote his foreign policy towards Taiwan. Both Dulles and Mao publicly used belligerent rhetoric and "competed for the 'hearts and minds' of the Third World countries in Asia" in order to "test each other's resolve and limit," while privately advocating a cautious policy resembling détente. (p. 126) Thus while both created crises in 1954-55 and 1958 over the islands, both restrained the hawks within their governments who were willing to go to war over Taiwan.

In another strong essay, James Meriwether shows how the need to blunt Soviet penetration of Africa and prejudices about the inability of Africans to govern themselves convinced Eisenhower to view nationalism and decolonization as a "problem," rather than an opportunity to disseminate democracy. (p. 179) The administration realized that its spotty domestic racial record continued to undermine its efforts to woo even the most sympathetic African nation, but nonetheless insisted on channeling its Africa policy through its global cold war strategy. Meriwether explains that even Vice President Richard Nixon—a liberal on civil rights—believed the Africans were unready to govern and recommended that the administration stick with the former colonial masters or back military strongmen after his official visit to the continent in 1957. (p. 185) Thus the Eisenhower administration subsequently supported the white minority government in South Africa, even after the brutal Sharpeville massacre of March 1960, and backed the Belgians against the nationalist leader Patrice Lumumba in the Congo.

Since James Siekmeier is a friend and colleague of mine at the Office of the Historian in the Department of State, I have decided not to comment on his essay on the Eisenhower administration's relationship with Bolivia.

Turning to U.S. policy in the Middle East, Peter Hahn provides an excellent corrective to the much-ballyhooed "special relationship" thesis that scholars have employed when discussing Israel and the U.S.<sup>4</sup> Tapping into both U.S. and Israeli sources, Hahn demonstrates that Eisenhower's determination to "practice impartiality on Arab-Israeli issues" led to a "fundamental security divergence" between the two nations. (pp. 226, 229)

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<sup>3</sup> I speculated that Eisenhower's and Dulles's reliance on "rhetorical diplomacy" as a public strategy in their European diplomacy, which differed greatly from its confidential goals, in all likelihood was also employed toward Asia. See Chris Tudda, *The Truth is Our Weapon: Eisenhower's and Dulles's Rhetorical Diplomacy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Isaac Alteras, *Eisenhower and Israel: U.S.-Israeli Relations, 1953-1960* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1993), and Zach Levey, *Israel and the Western Powers, 1952-1960* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

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Viewing the Arab-Israeli dispute strictly in cold war terms, the administration feared that Moscow would use Arab nationalism to further its own ends and did not want to be branded as Israel's sole defender, so it vowed to "build bridges to estranged Arab states" and pursue an Arab-Israeli peace settlement. (p. 235) Israel, conversely, worried that U.S. policy, in particular the Eisenhower Doctrine of 1958, would strengthen the Arabs militarily so they could wage another war against the Jewish state. Israel reacted by going around the administration and appealing for help from pro-Israeli congressmen and interest groups in order to blunt the administration's efforts at establishing a peace settlement.

Nathan Citino examines U.S.-Iraqi relations in the last essay. In keeping with the overall theme of the collection, Citino credibly demonstrates that the administration perceived intra-Arab relations and Arab nationalism through the prism of its global struggle with the Soviet Union. He also excoriates Eisenhower for ignoring an "Arab cold war" between Egyptian President Gamel 'Abd al-Nasser and Iraqi leader 'Abd al-Karim Qasim in favor of oil politics and an attempt to "incorporate the region into the global economy." (p. 247) By 1958, Citino argues, quite persuasively, the administration treated Iraq as "a major foreign policy crisis" and extensively documents the workings of an interdepartmental committee the President himself created to analyze the Iraqi situation. (p. 245, pp. 254-55) The administration then set into motion a covert action against Qasim because it believed that he, like Sukarno in Indonesia, had ties to Iraqi Communists and could thus be drawn into the Soviet orbit. (p. 249)

Citino overreaches, however, when he attempts to draw a parallel between the Eisenhower administration's use of covert action against the Qasim government and President George W. Bush's decision to invade Iraq and topple Saddam Hussein in 2003. Much of this is speculation, and historians engage in counterfactual debates at their peril. Citino admits that so far, documents proving U.S. covert action in Iraq in 1959 and 1960 have yet to be declassified, and contends that this information has been withheld because of "the political controversy about America's subsequent relationship with the regime of Saddam." (p. 255) Citino cites no evidence to back up his claim and expects the reader to assume that the lack of evidence proves his point. He then says that "disclosure of U.S. policies in the pre-Saddam era might also tend to undermine official rhetoric about American democratization of post-Saddam Iraq." (p. 255) Again, this is unfounded speculation, rather than an argument backed by any evidence.

Furthermore, Citino alludes to allegations of U.S. involvement in the 1963 coup that toppled Qasim which, of course, occurred under President John F. Kennedy, not Eisenhower. This is confusing to the reader because on the very next page, Citino cites a highly speculative claim by a writer for United Press International in 2003 that Saddam Hussein himself was involved in the 1963 coup with U.S. knowledge, only to knock it down because "historians have more rigorous standards of proof than journalists do. Not only must they base their conclusions on documentary evidence, but they must also try to understand events in their contemporary context." (p. 260) Had Citino heeded his own advice, his argument might have been more persuasive. Instead, his claims about Saddam Hussein and current U.S.

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policy influencing declassification decisions, not to mention his speculation about what occurred after Eisenhower left office, undermine an otherwise compelling and well-written discussion of U.S.-Iraqi relations during the Eisenhower administration.

In his conclusion, David Anderson argues that “the connecting theme of these studies is disconnection.” (p. 273) Indeed, the front cover of the book effectively summarizes the administration’s commitment to a zero-sum game strategy, reprinting a “Box Score” of the Cold War from a 1955 issue of *U.S. News and World Report*. Any “loss” by the free world during the Cold War necessarily meant a “gain” for the Soviets. Had Eisenhower and Dulles been willing to adapt to local or regional conditions, understand the growing power of nationalism, and de-emphasize the bogeymen of communism and neutralism, they might have increased their gains and prevented Moscow from making headway in the Third World.

**Chris Tudda** is a Historian in the Declassification and Publishing Division in the Office of the Historian, Department of State, where he declassifies manuscripts for the Foreign Relations of the United States series and co-produces the Office’s internet-only publications. He earned a B.A. from the University of Vermont in 1987 and the Ph.D. from American University in 2002. He is the author of *The Truth is our Weapon: The Rhetorical Diplomacy of Dwight D. Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles*, which was published by Louisiana State University Press in April 2006. He is currently working on a history of Nixon’s Opening to China and a reassessment of American Revolutionary Diplomacy.

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