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Peter G. Boyle, ed. *The Eden-Eisenhower Correspondence, 1955-1957.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005. ix + 230 pp. $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-2935-6.

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Plus a change?

"Plus a change?" is now a well-known phrase in English as well as in French. A passage in the correspondence under review, with one Western leader addressing another on the subject of a proposed military intervention in the Middle East, will no doubt ring a familiar bell:

"If unfortunately the situation can finally be resolved only by drastic means, there should be no grounds for belief anywhere that corrective measures were undertaken merely to protect national or individual investors, or the legal rights of a sovereign nation were ruthlessly flouted. Moreover, initial military successes might be easy, but the eventual price might become far too heavy" (p. 156).

This is not Jacques Chirac or Gerhard Schroeder writing to George W. Bush on the eve of the invasion of Iraq, but President Eisenhower writing to Prime Minister Eden on July 31, 1956, on the eve of the invasion of Egypt by Israeli forces at the instigation of the British and French–a move which was immediately disowned and countered by the United States, giving birth to the "Suez Affair" and eventually leading to the downfall of Eden, who resigned on January 9, 1957. The "Suez Affair" provides the substance of the book, in that we see the Anglo-American "Special Relationship" (a phrase which Eisenhower always studiously avoided, even in his letters to Eden, believing it was offensive to other allies of the United States) continuing to prosper after Eden replaced Churchill in April 1955,[1] perhaps reaching new heights when Eden finally agreed to allow British bases to be used by the Americans for their very risky U-2 spy plane project in the spring of 1956–only to be shattered by Eden's deception, as Eisenhower (correctly) saw it.

The correspondence between "Dear Anthony" (becoming "Dear Mr. Prime Minister" when the crisis really unfolded) and "Dear Mr. President" (this initial, suitably deferential form of address turning into "Dear Friend" after a few months) makes fascinating reading, not only because as in every good tragedy there is a crescendo before the final crisis–a crisis which all readers today know is bound to come when reading the first warm letters, thus making them appreciate the irony of much of their content–but also because of the insight it gives us into the two protagonists' complementary and contrasting personalities.

The editor argues that the correspondence partici-

pates in no small way in the rehabilitation which Eisenhower deserves. For Boyle, earlier biographers of Eisenhower tended to show him, if not as a nonentity, at least as a vacillating president, and he convincingly argues in the excellent background pages that accompany the correspondence that it is high time this tendentious presentation of Eisenhower's character–"the discredited myth of Eisenhower as a weak, ill-informed figurehead more interested in golf than government" (p. 198)–was abandoned and reversed.

Conversely, Boyle seems to believe that Churchill's low opinion of Eden's ability to surmount the stress of the Premiership is vindicated by the poor judgment that he showed in the confrontation with Nasser, and which is somehow reflected in his letters to Eisenhower of autumn 1956. Yet all was not wrong in Eden's approach to foreign affairs. With great foresight, Eden apprehensively wrote to Eisenhower about the proposed spy plane project on March 1, 1956: "If one of the aircraft had for any reason, engine trouble or otherwise, to come down at a level at which it could be intercepted, we should be confronted with a serious international incident for which the blame would be laid upon the West." On May 1, 1960, Francis Gary Powers failed to take the suicide pill provided to U-2 pilots, preferring to eject, and the self-destruct mechanism was damaged by the Soviet missile which hit his plane, easily identifiable as a spy plane by the Soviets, who immediately retrieved the intact reconnaissance apparatus. The result was humiliation for President Eisenhower (who, unlike Eden, was still in power) and a drastic deterioration in Soviet-American relations.

The background pages come in several sections. Two sections, "The Personalities" and "The Issues" precede the correspondence proper, with a very good biographical notice on the two protagonists, notably reminding the reader of their wartime relations (hence the immediate "Dear Anthony"), and an excellent summary of the state of Anglo-American relations as they stood in 1955, with a very useful overview of the Cold War, which had been developing since the end of the Second World War. (Interestingly, for those who like to follow the evolution of Cold War vocabulary, the word "dtente" is never used in the correspondence: at the time, the two English-speaking leaders only talked of "a relaxation" or "an easing" of international tensions.)

Then follows the first part of the correspondence, "From Eden's Accession to the Outbreak of the Suez Crisis," with copious explanatory notes immediately following each letter–which is the most convenient way of printing them. A sort of break is provided by a section of photographs, starting with General Eisenhower greeting British Foreign Secretary Eden in Normandy, August 21, 1944, and ending with Eden leaving Downing Street to tender his resignation to the Sovereign, January 9, 1957. After a few pages of contextual introduction, we have the second part of the correspondence, entitled "The Suez Crisis and Eden's Resignation, July 1956-January 1957," with the same excellent footnoting. In his seventeen-page conclusion, Boyle takes up the threads he had followed in his various background sections, and rightly writes that "The Eden-Eisenhower correspondence, then, vividly documents the disappointment of a relationship that began with much promise in April 1955, developed quite soundly for fifteen months, and was then blown dangerously off course" (p. 207).

The important word here is "vividly": Boyle's *maestria* as an editor, with his wealth of unobtrusive yet highly informative background material, actually brings the correspondence alive–no small achievement when one considers the austere subjects discussed between statesmen. The book is unreservedly recommended for all university libraries–it can be given even to first-year students in History or International Relations without prior preparation since the contextual sections and notes provide all that is needed to appreciate the full value of the correspondence proper. The eight-page bibliographical essay that precedes the comprehensive index will also be found of outstanding value for anyone interested in Eden, Eisenhower and the complex world of their time. Statesmen today seem to face intractable problems in trying to make the world more peaceful–but Boyle's book magnificently shows that those of the mid- to late 1950s had an equally impossible task, notably in the Middle East: "Plus a change?"

Note

[1]. See Boyle's previous edited book, *The Churchill-Eisenhower Correspondence, 1953-1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

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