



Valerie L. Adams. *Eisenhower's Fine Group of Fellows: Crafting a National Security Policy to Uphold the Great Equation.* Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006. 247 pp. \$58.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7391-0958-8.



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Summing Up the “Great Equation”

Nearly half a century after Dwight D. Eisenhower departed office, books continue to emerge that assess the foreign policies of the thirty-fourth president. Despite the appearance of several important studies, disagreement remains on such matters as Eisenhower's thoughts on nuclear warfare, the wisdom of the New Look, and the role of the president in the formulation of policy. Many of those who examine the administration's national security strategy assess how effectively the president balanced his objectives of sustaining military superiority and maintaining a sound economy. Valerie L. Adams's book, *Eisenhower's Fine Group of Fellows*, suggests a third variable for analysis—retaining high public morale. These strategic, economic, and spiritual components form Eisenhower's “Great Equation,” the author's term for the principles she identifies that guided the president's strategy for waging an enduring Cold War (p. 2).

Adams takes a novel approach to her analysis of the “Great Equation.” For her, Eisenhower's presidency is unique in the frequency with which the administration formed ad hoc committees of civilians to advise it on

matters of national security. Asserting that the use of these committees was “an integral part of Eisenhower's decision-making process,” Adams argues that examining them sheds light on Eisenhower's leadership style and the formulation of his national security strategy (p. 5). She concludes that Eisenhower formed them to forge a consensus for his policies within the administration, gain valuable insights on emerging technologies, and make critics complicit in his policies by providing them a role in his decision-making process.

Scholars interested in the subject of Adams's book will be familiar with the case studies she chose as the framework for her analysis—the Solarium exercise and the Killian and Gaither committees.[1] For each group, she examines the origins of their project, the background of their members, the conclusions they reached, and the impact of their findings on the president. Not surprisingly, her study reveals more differences than similarities in the groups's composition and purpose as well as the response of the president to their reports. Adams concludes that the Solarium exercise and the Killian committee vali-

dated the usefulness of seeking such counsel. Both stayed within their mandates, kept their conclusions out of the press and away from Congress, and provided recommendations that fit within the principles of the "Great Equation." The Gaither committee, however, failed on all three of these measures, souring Eisenhower's attitude toward civilian advice for the remainder of his presidency.

Adams describes how the administration carefully oversaw the selection of participants in the Solarium exercise to predetermine an outcome the president desired, which was to "re-examine containment, bury rollback, and build a team consensus for his "New Look" (pp. 67-68). For her, the exercise did not alter any of Eisenhower's own views. Instead, it served to educate the members of the National Security Council (NSC) and convince them of the wisdom of his previously determined approach to national security. Although Adams continues her analysis of the reports into the discussions that culminated in NSC 162/2, she may have overstated the connection between the exercise and the strategy that followed. As others have demonstrated, the Solarium exercise produced just one of several studies that contributed to the formulation of the New Look as it appeared in NSC 162/2. Further, NSC 162/2 glossed over several critical components of Eisenhower's national security strategy, such as promoting arms control and strengthening the noncommunist world, leaving those issues to further study and debate that extended over several additional months.[2]

The strongest contributions of the book appear in Adams's analysis of the Technological Capabilities Panel, commonly known as the Killian committee after its chairman, James R. Killian, president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The administration asked this group of scientists and engineers from government, industry, and universities to assess how to use advances in science and technology to minimize the threat of a surprise attack. According to the author, the Killian committee reinforced Eisenhower's "Great Equation" by offering the most economical means to strengthen the nation's defense while maintaining a spiritually centered populace. Adams credits the panel with convincing Eisenhower to build a nuclear deterrent force with second-strike capabilities. She underscores the committee's responsibility for the development of the highly successful U-2 spy plane, though she does not discuss the even more sensitive and beneficial Corona reconnaissance satellite program. Finally, Adams praises the committee for improving the relationship between the scientific community and the government that had been strained by President Harry Truman's H-bomb decision

and the Robert Oppenheimer security affair. She emphasizes how the members of the Killian committee gained Eisenhower's confidence by demonstrating how science and technology could enhance his national security strategy. As a result, the committee "secured a greater role for science advising during the rest of the Eisenhower administration" (p. 135).

During Eisenhower's second term, a domestic political debate over civil defense formed part of a broader critique of the administration's national security strategy. Publicly, Eisenhower opposed proposals to commit federal funds for a nationwide system of fallout shelters, citing his conviction that civil defense facilities were state and local responsibilities. In private, the president did not believe that their inordinate cost was justified because he had little faith in the nation's ability to survive a nuclear conflict. With his mind clear, why did Eisenhower charter a study from outside consultants to provide recommendations on the matter? Adams suggests that the president formed the Gaither committee, headed by RAND chairman H. Rowan Gaither, to defang his critics by carefully considering their views as part of his policymaking process. He would provide a group of diverse minded civilians access to a limited amount of classified information to study the issues, ask for their advice, and then announce that he found their confidential conclusions unpersuasive.

This tactic backfired when the administration failed to oversee the formation, limit the scope, or safeguard the conclusions of the Gaither committee, all in contrast to its careful oversight of the Solarium exercise and the Killian committee. Adams faults Eisenhower for not foreseeing that members of the committee would expand their mandate and leak its findings to reinforce the criticism of his policies. The Gaither committee not only recommended twenty-five billion dollars in federal spending for the construction of fallout shelters, but also issued several other recommendations that went well beyond its mandate. In total, the findings amounted to a stinging rebuke of the administration's strategy for waging the Cold War and advocated a major increase in defense spending that unbalanced Eisenhower's "Great Equation." Leaks of the assessment that the nation was increasingly vulnerable to the Soviet Union contributed to the near panic that followed the Soviet launch of *Sputnik* and bolstered Eisenhower's critics for the remainder of his presidency.

Adams correctly identifies Eisenhower's displeasure with the outcome of the committee, but her conclusion that the president never turned again to civilian advisors

is overdrawn. In fact, several different ad hoc panels of scientists provided counsel on the complex matters of detection and inspection required to implement a nuclear test-ban agreement. Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles, shortly after the disbandment of the Gaither committee, also hand picked a small group of outside civilians to consult them on disarmament. Eisenhower did not abandon his use of civilian advisors, but he did learn to manage them more effectively.

How does the "Great Equation" add up? Adams has crafted a solidly researched and clearly written book that skillfully explains Eisenhower's evolving thoughts on nuclear warfare and effectively demonstrates how his concerns about the economy influenced the administration's national security strategy. Yet her analysis yields few surprises on these topics and does not succeed in presenting an alternate vision of the overarching principles that guided Eisenhower's approach to the Cold War.

Adams could have presented a stronger case by devoting more attention to the third component of her equation—how the president sought to sustain a high state of public morale. Eisenhower struggled throughout his presidency to achieve his goal of maintaining the high spirits of an informed citizenry. Operation Candor, and the "Atoms for Peace" speech that emerged from it, attempted to solve the dilemma of how to inform the public of the implications of the nuclear age while striking a balance between instilling fear of its perils and providing hope for survival, if not sustained peace.[3] As the author's analysis of the internal debates on civil defense suggests, the administration never resolved this

dilemma. Particularly after the launch of *Sputnik*, Eisenhower failed to meet his own objectives for maintaining the high morale of an enlightened public. It remains to be seen if this shortcoming was a result of poor leadership, inadequate communications skills, excessive secrecy, or other factors simply taking priority.

The greatest value of Adams's book lies in her examination of Eisenhower's policymaking process, rather than her discussions of the policies that followed. Readers will appreciate the insights this process provides on the president's management style, especially his use and misuse of ad hoc committees of scientists and others to formulate his national security strategy. The recent congressional hearings investigating the political influence on scientists studying climate change make her analysis of how Eisenhower benefited from independent science advice particularly timely.

Notes

[1]. Robert R. Bowie and Richard H. Immerman, *Waging Peace: How Eisenhower Forged an Enduring Cold War Strategy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Richard V. Damms, "James Killian, the Technological Capabilities Panel, and the Emergence of President Eisenhower's 'Scientific-Technological Elite,'" *Diplomatic History* 24 (Winter 2000): 57-78; and David L. Snead, *The Gaither Committee, Eisenhower, and the Cold War* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999).

[2]. Bowie and Immerman, *Waging Peace*, 141-146.

[3]. Ira Chernus, *Eisenhower's Atoms for Peace* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2002).

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