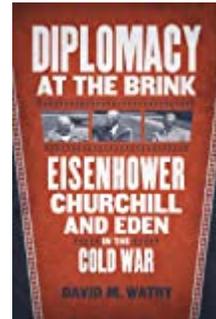




David M. Watry. *Diplomacy at the Brink: Eisenhower, Churchill, and Eden in the Cold War.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014. 240 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8071-5718-3.



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The Special Relationship Revisited

In *Diplomacy at the Brink: Eisenhower, Churchill, and Eden in the Cold War*, author David M. Watry argues that the special relationship between the United States and Great Britain steadily deteriorated throughout Dwight D. Eisenhower's presidency. Because of the American leader's staunch anti-Communism, dangerous nuclear policy, and Far-Right unilateralism, the close World War II alliance turned into a bitter and vengeful partnership, which ultimately led to Anthony Eden's, the prime minister's, removal and a US declaration of economic war against Britain.

This thought-provoking and well-researched monograph draws on a vast range of primary sources from both sides of the Atlantic and challenges many of the contentions made by the numerous schools of thought in the Eisenhower historiography. Among the most controversial ones, Watry argues that GOP Old Guard Ohio Senator Robert Taft's isolationist and unilateralist ideas on national security became the basis of Eisenhower's New Look; that Eisenhower did not consider the alliance with the United Kingdom a special relationship at all, but

was actually quite keen on distancing the United States from British imperialism and colonialism; and that historians for far too long have wrongly praised the president's strategy of ambiguity when dealing with nuclear weapons.

While it is true that on many occasions the president believed that a unilateral foreign policy and the use of tactical nuclear weapons were necessary to protect American national security, it would be wrong to argue (as Watry does) that these characterized his entire strategy. Eisenhower, like the East Coast establishment that embraced him in 1952, was an internationalist Republican. He believed that the United States could not afford to go back to isolationism and lose Europe. A fully communized Europe would deprive America of essential markets and investment opportunities and would shift the global military balance in favor of the Soviet Union, endangering American economic institutions. He was particularly disturbed by Taft and his fellow isolationists's rejection of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which he considered of vital importance for the security

of Europe.[1]

The importance of maintaining good relations with the European allies was especially evident during the Indochina crisis of 1953, which Watry discusses in detail in chapters 3 and 4. Eisenhower did consider the use of small tactical nuclear weapons to prevent the fall of Dienbienphu to Communism, but he withdrew the plan when Britain and France refused to collaborate. Lacking support from Europe, he successfully turned his attention to collective defense by creating and promoting the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), which the United States, Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Thailand signed on September 8, 1954.

Watry makes the valid point that historians have thus far failed to fully understand and acknowledge Eisenhower's willingness to treat tactical nuclear weapons as conventional munitions. He clearly demonstrates this in his analysis of the First Taiwan Crisis in chapters 3 and 4. The president was certainly not bluffing when it came to protect US national security. Losing the offshore islands of Matsu and Quemoy to Communist China would have endangered the position of Taiwan, a vital link in the American security chain in the Pacific. Eisenhower carefully planned and authorized the use of tactical nuclear weapons in order to save the islands. Watry's convincing argument, partially already explored by historian Matthew Jones, is amply backed up by a vast range of archival material, in particular, Eisenhower's correspondence with Winston Churchill, the British prime minister.[2]

It is through the analysis of this collection that the book makes its most important contribution: US-British disagreement over Far Eastern policy. The vast majority of scholars have identified the Suez Canal crisis of 1956 as the breaking point in the relationship. A furious Eisenhower forced Eden to abandon any military plans to regain the Suez Canal, and then, through skillful back-channel manipulations, had Eden replaced by Harold MacMillan. Watry actually argues that strong disagreements were already present well before the 1956 crisis. His discussion of the Korea, Indochina, and Taiwan crises clearly shows that British foreign policy was entirely Eurocentric and it did not believe in the domino theory. Britain was also one of the first countries to recognize the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1950,

a move that deeply upset the United States. Churchill and Eden constantly urged military restraint against Beijing. Their reason was to protect Hong Kong, a territory the United States did not deem important in fighting the Cold War and only used as an intelligence base. British-Chinese trade relations further exacerbated the Anglo-American relationship by weakening US policy of total hostility against the PRC.

The book also does an excellent job in explaining how the different relationships between Eisenhower and Churchill and Eisenhower and Eden affected the alliance. Churchill, unlike Eden, wisely realized the importance of keeping on the good side of the United States. After the Indochina crisis, he understood how transatlantic relations had become gravely strained and began to rebuild his relationship with both the president and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. Eden instead deliberately antagonized the Americans, especially Dulles for whom he had neither respect nor admiration. Their serious political differences had much to do with their opposing view of how to deal with the Soviet Union. The president and the secretary of state believed there was no room for negotiations with the Communists and only a hard-line policy would end the Cold War. Eden, on the other hand, continued his pragmatic balance-of-power approach toward Moscow, which ultimately, Watry argues, led to the complete unraveling of the British Empire.

Overall, the book reads slightly uneven as its focus is predominantly on the Eisenhower administration. This criticism notwithstanding, this is an important and outstanding contribution to the Eisenhower and Cold War historiographies.

Notes

[1]. Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Mandate for a Change: 1953-1956* (Garden City, NY: Heinemann, 1963), 17-18; Fred Greenstein, *The Hidden Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader* (New York: Basic Books, 1982); and John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[2]. Matthew Jones, "Targeting China: US Nuclear Planning and Massive Retaliation in East Asia 1953-1955," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 10 (2008): 37-65.

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