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Introduction by Thomas Maddux, California State University, Northridge

If you look at lecture notes from the late 1960s and 1970s when most of the authors of this new collection were either not yet breathing or playing AYSO soccer or Pac Man on their Atari game machines, you rediscover typewritten, discolored notes—not crumbling since paper was still at least partially a wood product then. The titles for lectures on the foreign policies of the Eisenhower administration in the Third World—very much of a dated term from that period—include old standbys such as “The Perils of Intervention” and “More Perils of Intervention” or “U.S. Covert Operations in the Third World.” The familiar topics include the U.S. interventions in Iran and Guatemala in 1954, a swift cruise through the Middle East via the Suez Crisis in 1956 and the Lebanon intervention/Eisenhower Doctrine in 1958, a jump shift to Asia with Indochina as the main focus along with the Taiwan Strait Crises, and then we brought it home with Cuba, Castro, and the Republicans which set the stage for even more crises in the sixties.

The authors in this study, from Chester Pach’s framing introduction to David Anderson’s conclusion, offer perspectives, a focus, and archival research that not only transcends the earlier, initial assessments but also moves beyond the revisionism of the 1980s and early 1990s. This revisionism effectively challenged the stereotypical view of President Eisenhower as being more interested in his golf game than strategy and tactics to deal with the crises of the Third World. The authors in this book all agree that Ike was in charge and not Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, who almost becomes something of a bit player rather than a supporting actor in the essays. They also all endorse Pach’s suggestion that the real issue is whether or not U.S. policies in the 1950s were effective and wise.

The commentators bring significant publications and teaching experience to this subject and, although they are highly impressed with the overall quality and interpretations of the study, they do raise some questions that merit further discussion, research, and ultimate publication, including

1) The thesis of failure on the part of the Eisenhower administration to manage U.S. policy in the third world wisely and with success—which is endorsed by many of the authors—is summarized most succinctly by Mary Ann Heiss who stresses the failure of Washington to reconcile deeds with words, the misapplication of tactics, and the pursuit of misguided and inappropriate goals.

2) Within the context of the challenges faced by the United States as it attempted to set up and manage a global involvement as the leading world power, is the overall record really one of failure? As all of the authors note, the Cold War was a primary, even excessive, preoccupation for Eisenhower, Dulles and other U.S. policymakers and advisers. The importance of the European NATO allies to the United States at the same time that their colonial empires were crumbling from the Middle East to Asia and back to Africa posed very difficult choices for Washington. Could the United States have taken the consistent stance that the authors call for, one of
support for nationalistic independence movements in these areas at the expense of relations with European allies? Could Eisenhower have stood against France in Indochina or against the powers in the African independence struggle in the same way that Washington stopped Great Britain, France, and Israel in the Suez Crisis of 1956 despite major suspicions and reservations concerning Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser?

3) In evaluating the success or failure of Washington’s policies—the authors do note some degree of success in relations with Bolivia, China and the Taiwan Strait, the Bandung Conference, and the Middle East—do the authors adequately develop and give weight to the challenges posed by Washington’s major Cold War adversaries, Nikita Khrushchev and Mao Zedong? This might require a significant increase in the size of the essays and an expansion of their focus. However, if the authors are making assessments of success and failure, wisdom or lack thereof, then consideration should be given to the nature of the adversaries and their policies in the Third World. There is some discussion of the presence or lack thereof of communist parties in several of the essays such as Nathan Citino’s study on U.S.-Iraqi relations, 1958-1961, and Mao in the Taiwan Straits. However, Khrushchev and Mao’s policies toward the Third World are not considered, even though Washington’s perceptions of their policies, however mistaken, did make it difficult for the U.S. to back up its rhetorical support for national independence vis-à-vis the European powers with meaningful action.

4) The authors skillfully extend the coverage of factors shaping U.S. policy from the earlier emphasis on security or economic concerns by including a range of considerations including the impact of the racial perspectives and biases of U.S. leaders. Should other considerations receive more attention such as the impact of domestic issues, opinion and political considerations? An exception is James Merriwether’s essay on U.S. policies and Africa in which Merriwether integrates the impact of the domestic civil rights movement on policy calculations.

5) In evaluating the methods used by Washington to manage its global involvement in the Third World, the authors critically evaluate the full range of Washington’s arsenal, from diplomatic and economic measures to covert political action operations, cultural diplomacy, and psychological pressures. This is an impressive strength of their evaluations as noted by the commentators who agree with the authors’ extensive criticism of the willingness of Eisenhower and Dulles to approve CIA interventions into Third World countries with destructive consequences for the countries and long term undesirable repercussions for the United States.

6) The tone of many of the authors—exceptions would include Yi Sun, James Siekmeier, and Peter Hahn—is one of complaints that the U.S. worked against or did not vigorously support national independence movements, that U.S. economic policy did not promote Third World economic development even at the expense of U.S. interests and economic beliefs, and that the U.S. went against and violated its own
principles of self-determination in a variety of ways such as in attempts to manipulate leaders in a neo-colonial manner or as clients in South Vietnam, Iraqi, Bolivia, etc. A perspective of realpolitik or recent imperial interpretations on the U.S. and its post-1945 empire advanced by Charles Maier, Niall Ferguson, and others with different interpretations, would not totally disagree with the authors on methods and consequences and issues such as the relationships between the imperial power and client states on the frontier. Should the authors, however, approach the subject with less moralistic hindsight and less surprise that an imperial power pursues and protects its strategic and economic interests?

7) If we return to those old lecture notes, the word Cuba and the name Fidel Castro jump off the page. In this study, Cuba is not in the index and Castro gets only two brief references. Yes, the subject has received far more attention in the published literature than the rest of the countries in the articles combined. Yet, there are definite ironies in the Republican relationship with Cuba. Unlike many of the examples in the book, the relationship is not new; the U.S. involvement is multifaceted from A to Z; and Eisenhower and his advisers tried to deal with the collapse of Fulgencio Batista’s regime and Castro’s victory in a manner significantly different from many of the examples in the book, more like their response to the MNR in Bolivia in Siekmeier’s essay. When problems emerged, when the red light of communist influence started to blink, when the Soviet Union moved to exploit an opportunity, Eisenhower reverted back to the normal unsuccessful methods: economic and diplomatic retaliation, covert political action operations including schemes to assassinate Castro, and setting up the Bay of Pigs disaster for his successor.

Statler and Johns have put together an outstanding collection of stimulating essays and I encourage all to read them and the commentaries, debate them, and share them with your students.

—Tom Maddux