

**History 282 US Diplomatic
Discussion Transcript for October 27, 2020
Brinksmanship Diplomacy**

Main Reading: Chapter 15 Herring + Aillon project on Dulles

Herring's discussion of the Eisenhower years touches on many different elements, including the evolution of containment policy away from NSC-68 toward the New Look, the rise of covert operations and their long-term blowback, the increasing importance of what contemporaries called the "Third World" or non-aligned nations and the global fight over decolonization. In particular, I asked students to consider how the Suez Crisis of 1956 fits into this multi-layered context.

Here is a selection of student comments:

NEW LOOK AND COVERT OPS

STUDENT COMMENT: "The 1950s reshaped American defense spending and the military to the way we view it today. The Cold War was brought to space with satellites and missiles, and below the earth with tunnels used for spying. By the mid-1950s, 12% of the United States' entire gross national product and 60% of federal expenditure was invested in defense spending for global power. Over 1 million military personnel were located in over 800 hundred bases, in more than 100 nations across the globe. The Cold War was not simply United States versus the Soviet Union, but in fact was a global conflict for the United States' "containment" policy to prohibit the Soviets from expanding their communist influence elsewhere. Eisenhower took office and from day one, had extremely different views on the Cold War as his predecessors. He was opposed to NSC-68, which allocated mass amounts of funds in the short run for increased military spending. Eisenhower was invested in the long game with the Soviet Union, and correctly anticipated a much longer conflict than many others had hoped for. Eisenhower and his staff agreed on a "New Look" policy, which still maintained the commitment to containment, but through means of deterring aggression and armed conflict, instead of encouraging and promoting them. The New Look relied on nuclear weapons. Eisenhower believed a simple gun fight war was not in play for the two sides, and that if war between the United States and the Soviets broke out, it would quickly escalate into a World War, and would require nuclear weapons to end it/deter it, not guns. Herring quotes is as "more bang for your buck" as a single nuclear bomb could end an entire war, and would allow for budget cuts."

STUDENT COMMENT: "Outside of Eisenhower's personal penchant for clandestine operations in the Cold War, the CIA's early success in the field promoted its effectiveness. Outside of intelligence gathering, espionage was viewed as a successful means of securing U.S. interests. This belief stems from the 1954 CIA's Operation PBSUCCESS in Guatemala, where the CIA succeed to replace the left-leaning Árbenz with U.S. friendly Castillo Armas. The CIA achieved this by, "...using psywar tactics showered Guatemala with broadcasts and leaflets fomenting rebellion. They sent 'mourning cards' to Árbenz..." (Herring 685). The power of the CIA's propaganda led Árbenz to believe that the U.S. had high stakes in Guatemala and relinquished power

just nine days after Armas invaded Guatemala. Personally, I find the use of ‘mourning cards’ both hysterical and childish, but the tactic was effective in the instillation of fear in Árbenz, that likely contributed to his quick defeat. Operation PBSUCCESS contributed to increased confidence of the effectiveness of clandestine operations and subsequently the U.S. increasingly utilized this tool. The U-2 Affair, although unfortunate, was necessary for U.S. strategy, as it was vital to obtain accurate information in order to for policymakers to make the most informed decisions. Overall, due to Eisenhower’s background in WWII, his relationship to key national security actors, and the early successes of CIA covert operations contributed to a proliferation of clandestine and espionage operations.”

STUDENT COMMENT: “Clandestine operations in the 1950s were also involved in preventing Japan from slipping away, a concern voiced by Ambassador John Allison. In 1957, President Eisenhower “authorized a major CIA covert operation to bolster conservative elements in Japanese politics” (694). Its methods included financing Japan’s Liberal Democratic Party with millions of dollars in order to both influence Japanese elections and acquire intelligence to use against the party’s enemies (694). Out of curiosity, given how this operation uses tactics that blatantly violate the U.S.’s democratic ideals, I would have liked if Herring could have given details on how it was received by the public once it was uncovered. Nevertheless, U.S. intervention in Japanese politics aimed to keep the government aligned with its own political agenda. The operation also included a reevaluation of the security treaty. In order to put the two countries on more equal footing, the U.S. reduced the number of troops that they had stationed in Japan and offered trade concessions, but wanted renewed based rights and the ability “to act to protect the security of Japan and the Far East” (694). Overall, the CIA’s involvement in Japanese politics during the Cold War era was central to restoring the Japanese-American relationship, especially when Japan was on the edge of falling into Soviet hands.”

SUEZ CRISIS

STUDENT COMMENT: “Fueled by the rise of Arab Nationalism, in July 1956 Egyptian President Nasser sought to nationalize the Suez Canal, initially built under a French diplomat’s supervision, and which was being jointly controlled by Britain and France. He argued that the tolls would help finance the Aswan Dam across the Nile river that the US had reneged its earlier offer of \$400 million to finance the project when Nasser attempted to blackmail the US by recognizing the People’s republic of China (Herring 674-675). This sparked a great deal of anger, specifically for Britain whose oil interests were jeopardized and one of the greatest signs of its ‘once glorious empire’ was also being undermined (675). Israel who held “numerous grievances against the Egyptian leader”, was more than happy to join in on a secret military plan with France and Britain that sent Israeli forces across the Sinai desert to attack Egypt, giving the two Allies of the US pretext to reclaim the Suez canal (675). Some key geopolitical factors that drove the confrontation were the remnants of Israeli hatred toward Egypt from the 1948 Arab Israeli war, the strategic location of the Suez Canal connecting the Mediterranean and

Red seas for British oil interests and to South and Southeast Asia, and France's fear of Nasser's threat to its North African colonies (Herring 675). Arab Nationalism can be seen as both cause and outcome of the Suez crisis. Herring outlines that the crisis flamed Arab Nationalism but the approval of the Israeli arms deal by Eisenhower in spring of 1956, just prior to the start of the Suez crisis, that was initially to counter Soviet military aid to Egypt while the US-backed out of its original \$400 million deal to finance the Aswan Dam, hindered Nasser's nationalistic attempt to uplift Egypt as a regional leader. Similarly, Nasser's goals to bring Egypt glory were successful in that it blocked access to the canal after the French, British and Israeli attacks, giving it leverage against the imperial powers of Europe."

STUDENT COMMENT: "The extent to which the US response was an example of anti-colonialism is debatable. Nasser came to power by overthrowing a "British puppet," and this resulted in a US "[appreciation] of his suspicions of the colonial powers" (p. 674). Yet the US sought to quickly fill the gap of declining British influence by funding the Aswan Dam (p. 674), in the hopes of securing a valuable Third World ally from the Soviets. The American response was not just due to outrage at blatant colonial intervention by Britain and France, but also by its ramifications. The conflict "inflamed Arab nationalism and risked major Soviet gains" and limited the US's ability to respond to the crackdown in Hungary (p. 676). It is difficult to determine which factor was more important between a commitment to decolonization and the threat to US national security and neo-colonial activities in the Middle East. Ultimately, it seems that preserving a truly independent Egypt was never the goal: before the intervention, "[t]he Americans had no use for Nasser" (p. 676), afterwards, "Dulles later privately lamented" the fact that "Nasser remained in power" (p. 676-677). While the US response to the crisis struck a severe blow to British and French prestige, it was hardly the end of their empires, and can easily be seen as a shift in regional hegemony towards the United States. It is likewise difficult to frame the decision as a shift from anti-Communism, particularly when the broad goal was to secure Egypt from Soviet influence, and a proximate factor in was a heightened fear of just that. As with previous (Iran) and later (Lebanon) examples, a rhetorical commitment to decolonization often took a backseat to anti-Communist policy and US neo-colonial ambitions closely tied to that."

STUDENT COMMENT: "United States efforts during the Suez crisis were reflective of an alternative policy to anti-communism the United States could have taken in the '50s - that of anti-colonialism. US handling of the crisis showed that it was -to an extent- capable of mediating disputes between European and Middle Eastern nations. While the United States did so primarily for its own strategic interests and less because of moral conviction against colonialism, it did successfully control its European allies through economic and diplomatic efforts, as in the words of Herring, the United States "refused to bolster British currency reserves and oil supplies" and Secretary of State Dulles gave "a dramatic speech before the United Nations disassociat[ing] his nation from Britain, France, and England and propoed a cease-fire" (Herring, 676). This action sharply contrasts with United States policy in other parts of the world during the 1950s such as Syria and Lebanon, where rather than seeking to control allied aggression and allow former colonies to utilize their newfound independence as it did in Egypt, the

United States pursued regime change, utilized gunboat diplomacy (a notably imperial tactic), and sent in military forces to promote US interests and prevent the spread of communism. Thus, US handling of the Suez crisis was not only unique, but representative of a possible alternative role the United States could have adopted in the 1950's, in which it would promote true independence of former colonies from their previous European masters and avoid intervening in the internal affairs of newfound nations, rather than creating a (now long-running) tradition of clumsy US interventions in the Middle East."

STUDENT COMMENT: "In my opinion, the Suez Crisis is a prime example of President Eisenhower's risk-avoidant decision making. At the time of the crisis, the United States had the military power to force its will on Egypt, and yet Eisenhower chose to not join the conflict. The military restraint preserved American stature and prestige in the Arab world. It proved to be of significant importance, as the Arab-American relation already deteriorated after several CIA unsuccessful attempts to overthrow the government of Syria, inflaming anti-U.S. sentiments in the region (Herring, 677). On the other hand, a gamble offered by the option of participating in the allied military intervention, if successful, presented the possibility of consolidating the Western alliance and potentially intimidating future aggressors. If the option failed, however, it also offered the prospect of inflaming the region, an anti-American coalition in the Arab world, and potentially instigating a war with the Soviet Union (Herring, 675-676). Eisenhower was cautious and avoided involving the United States in a military action that might precipitate a larger war. His behavior deeply contrasted with the British and French decision-makers who took great risks and subsequently sustained great losses. The British in particular endured the fall of their cabinet, a severe oil shortage, and an almost complete collapse of their banking system as a direct result of their military involvement in Suez."

RACE AND THE COLD WAR

STUDENT COMMENT: "Something that popped out to me within the reading was that in 1955 delegates from 29 nations held the first ever worldwide meeting of peoples of color. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss what these nations should do and the role that they should play within the cold war. This is obviously important on a couple of different levels. First and foremost, it is important and groundbreaking because this was a very white led world at the time and this meeting in a way set these nations up to strategize on issues such as equality and decolonization while at the same time figure out their role in world at that point. The Bandung conference was also important because it put pressure on other nations such as America, they were fearful of, "a riptide of nationalism among Africans and Asians, even a new yellow peril."