

### *Diplomacy and Statecraft Book Review*

Kevin Ruane and Matthew Jones, **Anthony Eden, Anglo-American Relations and the 1954 Indochina Crisis** (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019). viii + 337pp. £85.00 hb. ISBN 978-1-3500-2117-4.

Kevin Ruane and Matthew Jones are two of Britain's pre-eminent historians of Anglo-American relations, nuclear weapons, and the Cold War in Southeast Asia. Consequently, this collaborative monograph has been long overdue. While the 1954 Indochina Crisis has received significant historical attention, the focus has overwhelmingly been on American actions and perspectives. Yet Ruane and Jones have re-examined the origins, course and aftermath of the Indochina Crisis through an original lens: the role played by British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden – at the height of his diplomatic powers before his disastrous handling of the Suez Crisis two years later – against the backdrop of Anglo-American relations and the advent of the thermonuclear age. Moreover, the analysis they present is convincingly demonstrated through meticulous use of British and American official records, private papers collections, and published primary and secondary sources. In addition, this monograph is written in a style accessible to both scholars and a broader audience interested in the history of the Cold War and crisis management.

More specifically, Ruane and Jones support the commonly-held argument presented by Eden's biographers and historians of the 1954 Geneva Conference that 'Eden's 1954 Indochinese diplomacy...was unquestionably the "glittering success" of Eden's annus mirabilis' (p. 255). The authors, therefore, portray Eden as a courageous figure who stood up against Washington's very real plans to intervene in Indochina through 'united action' with

Britain, and who instead worked shrewdly and successfully to find a diplomatic solution at the Geneva Conference. Nonetheless, Ruane and Jones add great nuance to this narrative. They bring to light new evidence of Eden's suspicions of maintaining too close ties to the United States and his over-riding fear of a thermonuclear war – with Britain as the Soviet Union's primary target – brought about by the brinkmanship of US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, with whom Eden had acrimonious relations. The authors aptly describe these factors as 'an interpretive Rosetta Stone helping decipher the determinants of British policy' (p. 257). Furthermore, by placing the Indochina Crisis within the context of Britain's longer-term policy towards the region, this book demonstrates that the Foreign Secretary was reacting pragmatically to events in 1954 and that before this 'Eden possessed no Indochina policy worth its name' (p. 10). Still, the strategy that Eden came to adopt with regard to Indochina was a tried and tested one: a weak Britain exercising 'power-by-proxy' by convincing Washington to take responsibility for the defence of Southeast Asia. At the same time Eden sought to bring about 'dual containment' through a collective security organisation that would deter both Communist aggression and American adventurism.

These arguments are coherently developed through sixteen chronological chapters. Chapters two to five provide a succinct account of the developments in Indochina and internationally between October 1951, when Eden was reinstated as Churchill's Foreign Secretary in the newly-elected Conservative government, and the start of the crisis year of 1954. In particular, Ruane and Jones stress that the discussions at the December 1953 Bermuda Conference – at which Eisenhower and Dulles firmly indicated their willingness to use nuclear weapons if China intervened in Korea – were fresh in Eden's mind when he formulated a response to the Indochina Crisis. Still, chapter six stresses that it was only with the beginning of the French failure at Dien Bien Phu that Eden placed his hopes in finding a diplomatic solution at the

Geneva Conference while chapter seven emphasises Washington's genuine desire for 'united action'. In the next three chapters, then, the focus is on the various unsuccessful attempts by Eisenhower and Dulles to cajole the British into supporting their military plans. It was during this period that relations between Eden and Dulles reached breaking point leading to the American writing privately that Eden had double-crossed and lied to him. Chapters eleven and twelve discuss the opening stages of the Geneva Conference, against the backdrop of the final Vietminh military victory, tracing the continued tensions between Eden and Dulles before the latter's departure. The following three chapters consider the United States' deliberations regarding use of nuclear weapons, and the near collapse of Eden's diplomatic efforts, before the Foreign Secretary, working closely with his Soviet counterpart, Vyacheslav Molotov, brought about the signing of the Geneva Accords. Lastly, the final two substantive chapters cover the achievement of Eden's ultimate goal, the creation of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO) with American backing, as well as provide a brief account of the events in Indochina after 1954 and the failure to implement the Geneva Accords.

My criticisms of this monograph, therefore, are few and limited. To begin with, it would have been interesting to read more about Eden's relationship with the French government and Paris' perspectives of Britain's policies. At the same time, given the importance of Australia and New Zealand to Dulles's 'united action' plan, as well as the fact Britain increasingly saw the defence of Southeast Asia in Commonwealth terms, more could have been said with regards to Canberra and Wellington's views. Additionally, in the final section of the Introduction as well as in the Conclusion the authors focus on the supposed links between Eden's successful handling of the Indochina Crisis and his Suez debacle. Ruane and Jones correctly claim that only circumstantial evidence exists that Eden gained an exaggerated

sense of Britain's importance in 1954. Similarly, there is little indication that Dulles 'stored up his resentment' (p. 17) towards Eden until 1956 when he enacted his revenge through the US economic sanctions that compelled Britain to halt its military action. While this argument is intriguing, since the authors themselves admit that 'this book has no remit to analyse the Suez Crisis or to seek to fathom why Eden decided "to go beserk about Nasser"' (p. 260), these sections could have been excluded. Nevertheless, none of these issues detract from the overall quality of this timely and excellent monograph.

*Robert Barnes, York St John University*