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# Eisenhower and the Suez Crisis of 1956

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Developing complex, trilateral war plans appeared easy, however, when compared to dividing up the command, as the military arm of Nato took shape. The essential principles agreed upon were that the nation providing the majority of the forces had first pick of command positions, unless some vital interest of another nation was involved, in which case command boundaries were often altered to accommodate the vital interest.

When it was recognized that only two major Nato commanders were required, and that the greatest number of forces in both commands would be from the United States, the vital-interest card quickly came into play. The underlying, fundamental issue in this arrangement was the rise of a new superpower, the United States, and the decline of a great power, Britain, whose resources had been decimated by war. Since Britain could not provide the majority of forces to any area in question, it had to rely on its claim to vital interest. Because Britain required absolute control over the waters surrounding it, an independent major command was formed (Commander in Chief Channel), and to protect its lines of communication to the Middle East the Mediterranean was divided in patchwork fashion with Italy, Greece, and Turkey, becoming Allied Forces South (with land, air, and U.S. naval forces [STRIKEFORSOUTH]). This command protected British vital interests and ensured that American nuclear weapons aboard aircraft carriers remained under U.S. control.

This easy-to-read account fills an important gap in the literature and will be of interest to historians of the Cold War. The numerous organizational charts are clearly laid out and help tell the story. It is essential reading for the serious student of Nato and for present and future naval planners wrestling with problems of coalition command and control at sea.

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Kingseed, Cole C. *Eisenhower and the Suez Crisis of 1956.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1995. 166pp. $22.50

Colonel Cole Kingseed, U.S. Army, researched and wrote the early drafts for this important study in the Advanced Research Department at the Naval War College. He set out to examine how President Dwight D. Eisenhower made decisions in times of crisis. In laying out his agenda for his research in documents at Princeton, the Naval Historical Center, the Eisenhower Library, the National Archives, and a variety of oral history interviews, Kingseed asked whether Eisenhower borrowed exclusively from his military experience or was flexible in his approach. This central issue posed a number of subsidiary questions. In the foreign policy area, did Eisenhower subordinate himself to Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, or did he take the lead? How effective was the president when personally dealing with allies and adversaries? Under Eisenhower, what were the roles of the CIA, the National Security Agency, and the State and Defense departments?

Looking to the Suez crisis as a principal case study, Kingseed examines in the first of his eight chapters the organization of the Eisenhower White House, showing how it served as the sole coordinating agency for national security decision making. Although Eisenhower drew together the key, responsible officials for discussion, clearly all final decisions rested on the president, and strategic management coalesced only at the level of the president as well.

Turning to the details of the Suez Crisis, Kingseed examines its background in the Aswan Dam problem, arguing that Eisenhower shares responsibility for igniting the crisis. And as the crisis intensified, he continued his involvement and began to examine ways to influence European allies as a means to enhance the outcome of the situation.

In a diplomatic marathon during the London conferences, Eisenhower did all in his power to prevent war over Suez. He believed that any military intervention over the Suez issue would be both unwarranted and self-defeating. Seriously miscalculating the situation, however, he failed to understand that Prime Minister Anthony Eden and French Premier Guy Mollet still considered military action a viable option and that both the United Kingdom and France were prepared to intervene without prior consultation with the United States.

In Kingseed's view, Eisenhower's inability to understand and prevent the situation was not a failure of his techniques in crisis management but merely showed that while he could control his own administration, he could not enforce his will on allies who pursued policies that were diametrically opposed to those supported by the United States. Faced with the Atlantic alliance in peril at the same time that he entered a presidential election, Eisenhower doubled his efforts to end the Suez Crisis and prevent the Soviet Union from exploiting the situation. Nearly simultaneously, there was a cease-fire in the Middle East, and a Republican victory in the election.

Interestingly for the naval reader, Eisenhower commented, "You remember that story of Nelson—dying, he looked around and asked, 'Are any of them still left?' . . . That's the way I feel." Kingseed likens Eisenhower's personal leadership to the "Nelson Touch"; where Nelson employed superior seamanship, Eisenhower used economic and diplomatic pressure.

Kingseed argues that the Suez crisis tested every aspect of Eisenhower's ability to manage a crisis and direct foreign policy. He reaffirms the current trends in research that show Eisenhower as an extraordinarily active leader and one who was not tied to any rigid military model in decision making.

The author's fruitful research provides readers with an extremely valuable and readable historical case study of presidential decision making in national security affairs.

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