

Dr Malcolm Craig (University of Edinburgh), review of:

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, ISBN 978-0-8071-5718-3.

Nearly seventy years on from Winston Churchill's speech in Dayton, Ohio that was the rhetorical backbone of the US-UK 'special relationship', the topic of Anglo-American relations – special or otherwise – remains a thriving and vibrant field of study. Every year, new archival releases, revisionist takes on old stories, and contemporary crises permit historians to re-evaluate and re-assess critical post-war episodes. Likewise, university courses on the subject continue to attract legions of undergraduates and postgraduates keen to delve into the conjoined but fractious trans-Atlantic affiliation.

David Watry's new book *Diplomacy at the Brink: Eisenhower, Churchill, and Eden in the Cold War* enters this crowded field boldly claiming to re-evaluate Dwight D. Eisenhower's foreign policy towards his closest allies and his fiercest enemies. In the service of this aim, Watry has impressively researched and substantiated his work, drawing as he does upon a wide range of archival sources from both sides of the Atlantic.

Within the book's six substantive chapters, Watry clearly describes the critical differences between the Eisenhower-Churchill relationship and the Eisenhower-Eden relationship. The former was warm and friendly – although at times strained – founded in the shared experience of World War 2 leadership. The latter relationship was dominated by tension and disagreement, as the ill, pain-wracked Anthony Eden antagonised the President and his Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles (a particular figure of dislike for the Foreign Secretary turned Prime Minister). None of this is particularly new, but Watry paints a convincing, engaging picture of the relationships and the ways in which they affected ties with the Middle East and the Soviet Union, to name but two areas of contention.

Less convincing is the analysis of Eisenhower's attitude towards nuclear weapons. This is a significant point, as Eisenhower was involved in more 'nuclear crises' than any other president of the United States. Watry

suggests that Eisenhower's seeming willingness to deploy and potentially use tactical nuclear weapons was a constant. It is true that on many occasions, Eisenhower did unilaterally threaten (even if only in a veiled manner) the use of such weapons. Moreover, the President envisaged a world with a clear distinction between 'small' battlefield nuclear weapons and the city-destroying monsters of the thermonuclear age – his oft cited statement that tactical nuclear weapons should be “simply another weapon in our arsenal” clearly delineating his position. Yet, Eisenhower's attitude was malleable. Occasions arose where nuclear use was considered and then withdrawn in the face of a lack of allied acquiescence and Congressional resistance. The plan to lift the siege of Dien Bien Phu during the French war in Indochina is but one example. His prudent restraint in a whole series of Asian crises being others. Thus, Eisenhower demonstrated a willingness – even if grudgingly – to mould his strategy to meet the needs of domestic and foreign diplomacy.

Critically, the book is not really about Eisenhower, Churchill, and Eden. Notwithstanding the fine job Watry does of sketching the relationships, this is fundamentally a work about Eisenhower and – to a certain extent – John Foster Dulles. If anything, the governments of the elderly Churchill and the ailing Eden are barely even secondary to the story of the Eisenhower administration's continual deployment of brinksmanship. More on the British point of view would have been very welcome, especially in view of the impressive amount of digging that Watry has done in the British archives.

But to return to the positives, Watry's analysis of the Suez Crisis – a story that had been told and re-told many times over – is concise and compelling. The author fits in with recent scholarly reinterpretations of the Crisis, assessments that de-emphasise Suez as *the* critical juncture in US-UK relations over the Middle East and bring into play the splits in the relationship (such as the Buriami Oasis affair, an event that Watry does not mention) that were emerging long before Operation Musketeer.

In the final analysis, this is a book that any historian interested in the terrain of US-UK relations during the Cold War should read. Based on sound research, Watry raises intriguing points and offers new perspectives on a variety of topics, all anchored by the overarching theme of brinksmanship in the Cold War.