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THE CASE FOR CONTEXT: EISENHOWER POST-REVISIONISM AND THIRD WORLD NATIONALISM

By Seth Drainie

Assessment of President Eisenhower's foreign policy legacy by "revisionist" historians beginning in the late 1970s revealed the leader's decisive and insightful tactics that kept America in relative peace at the beginning of the Cold War. Contrary to the image of Ike as an amiable golfer, removed from the tough policy decisions that not only preceded and followed his presidency but existed during his time in office, the majority of Eisenhower scholarship agrees that through tactful and decisive actions, Ike "ran the show."¹

Stephen Ambrose is one such esteemed and well-versed scholar of the Eisenhower presidency who, having met and conversed at length with the former president, has produced a substantial number of publications on the subject

¹ Steven Rabe, "Eisenhower Revisionism: A Decade of Scholarship," *Diplomatic History* vol 17, no 1 (1993): 97-98; Stephen Ambrose, *Eisenhower: Volume Two, The President* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), p. 10; For a highly contested and generally unaccepted argument for the centrality and successful policy guiding of John Foster Dulles during the Eisenhower presidency see Frederick W. Marks III, *Power and Peace: the Diplomacy of John Foster Dulles* (Westport Connecticut: Praeger, 1993). Both Ambrose and Richard Immerman deliver calculated, scathing reviews citing Marks' biased document selection leading to general misinterpretations of policy decisions and their impact.

and remains the preeminent scholar on Eisenhower. Throughout his writings, Ambrose maintains that, for better or for worse, Eisenhower's "impressive agility, quickness, and intelligence of mind" guided his own style of foreign policy.² For Ambrose, guiding Eisenhower's foreign policy was his firm belief that "nuclear war was unimaginable, limited conventional war unwinnable, and stalemate unacceptable," while stressing the importance and readiness to fight communists "with every weapon at his disposal—just as he had fought the Nazis."³ Ambrose acknowledges the administration's failures within the Third World, including perceiving and overreacting to communism within social reform movements as well as a borderline obsession with falling dominoes, however, Ambrose withholds judgment from these policy decisions claiming that "to say Eisenhower was right about this or wrong about that is to do little more than announce one's own political position."⁴ To this end, Ambrose questions the historians' ability to remove Eisenhower from the Cold War containment framework of the decolonizing world due to "domestic pressures, the relentless engagement of Moscow and Peking" meddling in the Third World, and the "unrealistic expectations of Third World leaders in their requests for military and economic aid."⁵

Other scholars of the revisionist camp take a less-balanced yet equally celebratory portrait of the President. H.W. Brands defends Eisenhower's involvement in the developing world by suggesting that despite the Eisenhower administration's packaging of their policies "in the wrappings of ideology, the product they sold reflected primarily a geopolitical interpretation of American strategic, military, diplomatic, and economic interests and demonstrated shrewd weighing of the effects on the international balance of power of the particular activities of specific nonaligned countries."⁶ The most recent biography on the President by journalist Jim Newton, by far the most disappointing considering the wealth of declassified information available since the 1970s and 80s, offers

² Ambrose, *Eisenhower*, 11. For a more condensed rewriting of Ambrose's argument, see *Eisenhower: Soldier and President* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991).

³ *Ibid.*, 111, 130.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 621-622, 619.

⁵ Stephen Ambrose and Gunter Bischof, *Eisenhower: A Centenary Assessment* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 10.

⁶ H.W. Brand, *The Specter of Neutralism: the United States and the Emergence of the Third World, 1947-1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 9.

a repetition of earlier works with a glossier nostalgia for “a nation [left] free, more prosperous, and more fair” after Eisenhower left office.⁷ Questionable policy decision are legitimized and long-view consequences are acknowledged yet disregarded as the Iranian coup of 1953 “seemed costly” yet in the end, “Iran lay safely nestled within the American orbit for the balance of Eisenhower’s tenure,” agreeing that “for the first time in three years, Iran was quiet—and still free.”⁸

Despite the insightful validity that the majority of the revisionist perspective provides, much of the “post-revisionist” scholarship has asked readers to give more weight, when considering Eisenhower’s legacy, to the use of covert actions within decolonized regions and the impact it has had on the developing world. Following Ambrose’s intentions for a clearer picture of the Eisenhower administration, this historiographical essay seeks to give this crucial period in American and world history the context it deserves. Specifically, it will examine the insights historians have provided on the motivations and impact of covert operations, suggesting that a misreading or failed recognition of regionally specific contexts led the foreign policies of the Eisenhower administration down interventionist paths with detrimental results in the Middle East, Central America, and South-east Asia. Thus, context, rather than damnation from the safety of hindsight, is the purpose of examining Eisenhower’s use of covert action throughout the Third World. By complicating our understanding of Cold War foreign policies to include geopolitical and economic strategies, as well as deconstructing the Cold War and post-colonial environment in which such decisions were enlisted, a more complete understanding of America’s use and impact of covert action will arise.

Despite this historiography’s argument for context, it does not strive to be a fully exhaustive historiographical narrative, nor an all-inclusive accounting of covert action and intervention during the Eisenhower years. For the purpose of brevity, only the most well received scholars on each regional intervention are discussed followed by a deconstructive account provided by historians of cultural studies to add an additional dimension to Eisenhower’s foreign policy decisions. Nor does this historiography include other interventions and plans pursued around the world such as in the Congo, Indochina, Burma, Laos, Venezuela, or Cuba. What proceeds is a chronological and regional

⁷ Jim Newton, *Eisenhower: the White House Years* (New York: Doubleday, 2011), 357.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 119

discussion of the CIA covert operations in Iran, Guatemala, and Indonesia by “post-revisionist” historians and authors. It seeks to dissect the motivations and impact of Eisenhower’s covert foreign policy decisions and the dangers of ignoring crucial regional contexts.

In *All the Shah’s Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle Eastern Terror*, Stephen Kinzer’s spy novel-like coverage of the players, intricacies, and motives surrounding the 1953 overthrow of Iranian president-elect, Muhammad Musaddiq, provides a bilateral, economic context for the CIA led coup and the dramatic repercussions that have plagued the region since. Taking a critical stance on the orchestrating and participation in the coup, Kinzer argues that British oil control in the region was threatened by Musaddiq’s desire to nationalize the industry, propagating unfounded fears of Iran’s path toward communism. The result was the re-installation of Reza Shah who supported British and American oil interests yet continued an oppressive tyranny that ultimately led to the Islamic Revolution of 1979, inspiring fundamentalists such as the Taliban to gain strength and momentum in a post-Cold War world.

Despite Kinzer’s suspense ridden prose, his revealing narrative through the use of both Iranian and American sources (following on the heels of leaked CIA documents in 2000 to the *New York Times* that both confirmed and added to historians’ knowledge of the American led events in 1953) has contributed to an argument that supports the long view of history—where actions have far reaching and often unforeseen impacts. To develop this argument, Kinzer addresses the three parties present during the build-up to the coup—Muhammad Musaddiq of Iran, Winston Churchill of Britain, and from the United States, Dwight Eisenhower and Allen and John Dulles—and their varying desires and motives during the crisis.

Kinzer sets the stage with a brief overview of Iran’s long historical dilemma between moral obligation and authoritarian foreign rule, beginning with the rise of Zoroastrianism during the sixth century B.C.E. and ending with the corrupt and irresponsible economic behavior of the Qajar monarchs in 1925, allowing British colonial rule to overwhelm the political and economic (oil) institutions of the region. Fast-forward twenty-four years of modernization attempts, Nazi sympathizers, and a British/Russian invasion to instate Reza Shah Pahlavi, Kinzer reveals his tragic protagonist, Mohammad Musaddiq. As a secular nationalist, Musaddiq was a champion of the democratic process, free press, and the right of Iranians to discard British colonial subjugation in the

political process and their primary economic industry—oil. On this secular nationalist platform, Musaddiq was elected as Prime Minister in 1951, and soon thereafter, nationalized the Anglo Iranian Oil Company.

For the second party, Britain, this development was unacceptable on two counts: Britain maintained the right to rule their established colonies, and that the oil profits from their colony sustained the British economy.⁹ Inciting help from the third party, the United States, proved to be a necessary yet difficult task. For former president Harry S. Truman, Cold War anxieties consumed his worldview and colonialism was merely a waning, outdated mode of international relations. After failed attempts at negotiation and reconciliation between Iran and British interests, what ultimately bridged this ideological gap, for Kinzer, were the Korean War and Soviet international communism. With the return of the Conservative Churchill and the election of more active containment policies of President Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, the White House was sold on the threat of Iran's takeover by communists as not only endangering the Middle East, but British supported efforts in Korea as well.¹⁰

If Kinzer paints the White House as being courted and persuaded by the British, it was the clever work of the Secretary of State John Foster and his brother, head of the CIA, Allen Dulles that ultimately convinced Eisenhower to approve the CIA-led coup of Musaddiq. By distorting the implications of negotiation deals between Britain and Iran concerning their oil holdings as well as stirring dissent among prominent ties in Iran, the Dulles brothers were able to make the case to remove an unreasonable and unsupported Musaddiq regime. After expressing his “desire not to know too much,” Eisenhower was given the “broad brush [strokes]” of the coup, leaving the ground work of Operation AJAX up to CIA officer Kermit Roosevelt who implemented the operation's psychological warfare of propaganda and mob insurrection that ultimately led to the arrest, overthrow, and imprisonment of Musaddiq.¹¹

As stated in the preceding paragraphs, one of the major contributions of Kinzer's work to the fields of American history and foreign policy has been his insistence of, not merely economic and Cold War anxieties as agents of

⁹ Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2003), 88-91.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 130-132.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 152-154, 156, 159-160.

intervention within the Third World, but allied pressure and manipulation of these factors toward unscrupulous ends. Furthermore, Kinzer's extensive historical accounts of both British era colonialism and pre-modern roots of foreign distrust and contempt offer a more complete understanding of regional problems and priorities. However, such a macro-approach does have its pitfalls. Just as Kinzer takes the long view of historical impact leading up to the election of Musaddiq, his conclusion that the events that followed the coup's reinstating of Reza Shah Pahlavi's oppressive regime led to the overwhelming distrust and anger toward the United States and the West creates a simplified picture of the Middle East. Certainly Reza Shah's oppression and imprisonment of religious leaders and political adversaries contributed to the Islamic Revolution and terrorist fringe that spiraled from it. However, overall distaste for the West must include other factors such as the Suez Crisis just three years later, Kennedy's land and liberal reforms imposed on the Shah, and Johnson's and Nixon's support of Israel.¹² Kinzer's contribution to our remembering of the 1953 CIA-led coup is invaluable, riveting, and illuminating, however, by presuming such a clear line of causation, he simplifies the very region that he works so diligently to complicate.

Just as Kinzer works to expand our understanding of the Iranian coup by concentrating on the persuasive arguments made by European allies and within the White House, John Foran's "Discursive Subversions: *Time Magazine*, the CIA Overthrow of Musaddiq, and the Installation of the Shah" complicates the policy decision further through a deconstruction of U.S. domestic influences. By examining popular cultural discourse in America during the 1940s and 1950s, Foran sheds light on the influences of Orientalism within the press and its great impact on American foreign policy in Iran and the subsequent CIA-led coup in 1953. For Foran, along with the Cold War context of the political economy of oil and geostrategic power within the Middle East, the 1953 coup was a product of a battle over discursive hegemony between the Orientalist discourse of American and Iranian actors, specifically Musaddiq. Ultimately, it was *Time Magazine's* condemnation of the tumultuous region

¹² Masoud Kazemzadeh, "All the Shah's Men book review," *Middle East Policy* 11, 4 (Winter 2004): 122.25

during Truman's presidency that helped bring about an administration more willing to intervene in Iran's internal affairs.¹³

Due to his source emphasis on popular press, Foran first seeks to articulate his "thick descriptive" theoretical dimensions by defining and explaining cultural studies in the context of Marxist literary criticism and subaltern studies to create what he defines as "third world cultural studies."¹⁴ Within these general and fluctuating boundaries of his version of cultural studies, Foran contends that the press, most notably *Time* magazine, "framed" public and elite discussion through its ability to create a general popular mood, provide a check on policy elites, and to give or withhold legitimacy from dissenting views. In turn, these "frames" of constructed social realities, reflected long-standing Orientalist images and stereotypes of Easterners as inferior, childish, and feminine.¹⁵

To understand how *Time* influenced American foreign policy, Foran argues that from its inception, the magazine was a key shaper of American political culture and through its devotion to Republican, pro-business lines, and commitment to bringing the "serious issues of world politics" to an educated American audience, by the 1940s and 50s *Time* (and its subsidiary *Life*) had become the most influential shaper of public opinion in America.¹⁶ To demonstrate this assertion, Foran reveals not only the fluctuating attention by *Time* to the events in Iran and the change in U.S. administration, but the language used to report on it throughout each stage of the international development. In this instance, although all politics in Iran were covered as corrupt in the U.S., the treatment of Reza Shah and Musaddiq differed significantly. While the Shah maintained both Middle Eastern stereotypes of youthful ignorance and Western sensibilities of class and educated business interests, Musaddiq is at first briefly depicted as honest, of Western education, and devoted to

¹³ John Foran, "Discursive Subversions: Time Magazine, the CIA Overthrow of Musaddiq, and the Installation of the Shah" in *Cold War Constructions: the Political Culture of the United States Imperialism, 1945-1966*, ed. Christian G. Appy (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 182.

¹⁴ Clifford Geertz' use of "thick description" was intended to understand human behavior and language by deconstructing their historical, social, and cultural contexts. Marxist literary criticism benefits from Geertz' work by referring to "texts" as reflections of their historical and social surroundings, thus revealing the silent language of class consciousness hidden beneath the text. Subaltern studies works to reveal the agency of actors outside of a world-systems hegemonic power structure.

¹⁵ Foran, 161-162.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 165.

democracy and anti-Soviet communism, but then quickly turns into a weak man of childish fanatical tantrums.¹⁷

By the time of the 1952 election, much of *Time* and *Life* magazine had been devoted to criticizing the Truman administration's weak stance on containment and supported the installation of "strong men" in order to insure stability and "order" in regions of interest.¹⁸ With Eisenhower's election (Henry Luce, editor-in-chief of *Time* and *Life*, often bragged that his editorial work had elected Ike into office), *Time* and *Life* publications were at the forefront of positing communist "domino theories" with Iran, not Vietnam, at the top. Both publications heavily supported the removal of Musaddiq under these presumptions. However, for Foran, this fear was a view held at the top, not by lower-level Iranian specialists within the State Department, who arguably had more contextual knowledge of the region and its underlining nationalist prerogatives. Thus, the influence of the press in sustaining a Cold War view of the world helped legitimize the necessity of a coup and in the aftermath of political trials of Musaddiq, the benefits of a redefined "older," "wiser", yet a rejuvenated and "firm" Shah.¹⁹

Foran qualifies his theoretical approach by admitting the absence of a clear line of causality between Orientalist discourse and foreign policy decisions. However, this does not make these mindsets irrelevant, as they serve as contextual realities that reveal themselves in the language used by policy officials, perpetuating and applying ideas of weakness versus strength, masculinity versus femininity, and aptitude versus child-like ignorance. Therefore, a deconstruction of why and how ideological frameworks are created and sustained is crucial for understanding the decision making process of top foreign policy leaders.

In his well received analysis, *The CIA in Guatemala*, Richard Immerman argues that though protection of United Fruit (UFCO) business interests in Guatemala was paramount, a basic misunderstanding of Guatemalan people and history by the U.S. government and public resulted in the ensuing coup and conflict between the two nations. Rather than "merely another instance of big stick diplomacy," American covert action in Guatemala illustrates McCarthy-era, Cold War ethos of economic and ideological security abroad from a Soviet

¹⁷ Ibid., 169-171.

¹⁸ Ibid., 174.

¹⁹ Ibid., 179.

international-conspiracy. The result was a skewing of regional revolutions where the line between nationalism and communist subversion was narrowed to a point where threats to U.S. interests became the only discernible difference. To thwart communist subversion, the Eisenhower administration pushed for the use of decisive and preventative covert measures as opposed to costly and thinly spread containment policies.

The argument for context begins with an understanding of the 1944 Guatemalan Revolution and the nationalist desire to overthrow a legacy of exploitation and underdevelopment by foreign rule in Guatemala. Immerman traces back racial divisions and land consolidation to sixteenth-century Spanish rule, however, the dichotomy between imperial growth at the cost of Guatemalan underdevelopment explodes with the liberal era of industrialization, foreign investment, and public services beginning in the late nineteenth century.²⁰ Specifically, Guatemala's growing dependence on U.S. business investment, most notably but not solely United Fruit, resulted in the skewing of land ownership, exploitation of indigenous labor, reliance on an export based resource economy for revenues and imports to sustain population needs, and political leaders that accommodated such foreign investments at the cost of the Guatemalan people. In October of 1944, such disparities within the nation were taken to the streets and with it the overthrow of the oppressive regime of Jorge Ubico Casteneda. In his place emerged the revolution's first elected president, Juan Jose Arevalo, under promises of land and labor reform as well as social programs that would become the cornerstone of the new Guatemalan government.²¹

From the October Revolution in 1944 to the election of Jacobo Arbenz in 1950, Immerman contends that U.S. lack of preparedness (Ambassador Boaz Long admitted to the State Department that the overthrow of Ubico was "the farthest thing from my thoughts") and understanding of the causes behind the decade's revolutionary and nationalizing events was due to a state of denial about the capabilities of the "children" of Guatemala.²² Therefore, when Guatemalans voiced dissent of "Yankee imperialism"—signified by United Fruit-led government corruption, tax evasion, racist policies, and indifference

²⁰ Richard H. Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala: the Foreign Policy of Intervention* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 22.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

²² *Ibid.*, 85.

to public welfare and wages—materialized in the revolutionary government’s capitalist modernization plans for infrastructure development and agrarian reform, UFCO lobbyists cried foul. What followed was a suspicious eye on the labor reform policies under Arevalo, and a heightened sense of anxiety over the election of Arbenz with his promise to continue Arevalo’s social reforms as well as initiate agrarian reforms. Such agrarian reforms sought to expropriate, with compensation, land left idle by 2.2 percent of the population (which, by 1950, claimed 70 percent of Guatemalan land) to the rest of the Guatemalan people, thereby diversifying Guatemala’s export-based economy and reducing their dependency on imports.²³ Arbenz’ measure was soundly rejected by UFCO which voiced its fear of a loss of stability to policy makers within the United States government.

However, as opposed to what authors Schlesinger and Kinzer have written on the influence of United Fruit lobbyists and the revolving door between the company and U.S. political office, Immerman maintains that even without such business influences and pressures, a government led removal of Arbenz was imminent simply within the Cold War beliefs of communist international threats.²⁴ For Immerman, a misunderstanding by U.S. policy makers of the intentions of Guatemalan reforms coupled with the broad definition of communism developed within the polar world of Cold War ethos brought about the perceived need for intervention. By the time the more active anti-communist foreign policy of Dwight Eisenhower (in comparison to Truman) was elected into office and John Foster Dulles was appointed as his Secretary of State, much of Washington was in agreement that communism could be defined as simply “opposing United States interests” and that identifying such elements could be concluded through a “duck test” where the accused were guilty by merely walking or talking like a communist.²⁵

Immerman relies on the wealth of behind-the-scenes insights revealed through the Eisenhower Diaries, NSC documents, and “Whitman file” transcripts between the President and Dulles to reveal the hard-line, anti-communist beliefs that guided the President and Secretary of State in opposition to what

²³ Ibid., 65.

²⁴ For an argument blaming the infiltration of business into U.S. politics resulting in the Guatemalan coup see Stephen Kinzer and Stephen Schlesinger, *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982); Immerman, 123-124.

²⁵ Immerman, 105

they believed were the failed containment measures of the Truman administration in China and Korea. In light of these documents, Immerman contends that ignorance and a general lack of information and evidence did not stop the administration from green lighting project PBSUCCESS, the covert operation to overthrow Arbenz, into action. Repeatedly, “tenuous and indirect” evidence as well as intelligence that showed “nothing conclusive” for an international communist conspiracy left Dulles continually frustrated in his attempt to find a connection.²⁶ This lack of direct communist evidence to support covert intervention strengthens Immerman’s argument for a nationalist revolution unable to be translated into the absolutist language of Cold War polarity.

Christian Appy expands on the argument for a lack of evidence and understanding of the Guatemalan people used to justify military intervention into Guatemalan politics. However, in his article “Eisenhower’s Guatemalan Doodle, or: How to Draw, Deny, and Take Credit for a Third World Coup,” Appy concentrates on Eisenhower’s personality, a product of his competitive spirit as well as societal trends of Cold War urgency and polarity to make his unique argument. For Appy, the means by which the Eisenhower administration both denied involvement as well as took credit for the 1954 Guatemalan coup is emblematic of the mentalité that drove the administration to intervene in the first place. Just as policy makers created a shaky, yet unchallenged narrative to comment on their Latin American success, so too did Eisenhower and Dulles “file the edges” of Guatemalan communist evidence to make their actions fit their predetermined national security priorities. Appy argues that this is partially indicative of Eisenhower’s competitive, score-keeping spirit, where the odds for success (cited in classified papers as merely twenty percent) were pitted against images and assumption of “Amero-centric” “superpower arrogance” that shaped much of Cold War policy. Thus, as Appy writes: “Once Eisenhower had concluded that Guatemala had fallen within the ‘Soviet orbit,’ that satellite’s internal life and history was, by definition, rendered largely irrelevant.”²⁷

Though much of Appy’s argument is informed by the work of highly

²⁶ Ibid., 185.

²⁷ Christian Appy, “Eisenhower’s Guatemalan Doodle, or: How to Draw, Deny, and Take Credit for a Third World Coup” in *Cold War Constructions: the Political Culture of the United States Imperialism, 1945-1966*, edited by Christian G. Appy (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 190.

regarded scholars on the subject, his original vantage point is guided by the many personal letters and diary entrees available through the Eisenhower Library. The most interesting, and unique, source used sets the tone and trajectory of Appy's deconstruction: a sketch drawn by Eisenhower the day after the coup on a morning meeting agenda outline (for an image of the "Eisenhower doodle" see Figure 1).²⁸ From the roughly sketched images of a bare-chested Anglo (presumably a self portrait), gun boat and non-military vessels, as well as "Internal security" and "Guatemala" written twice, underlined, and traced repeatedly, Appy attempts to deconstruct the images as representative of the assumptions and themes that shaped U.S. Cold War foreign policy. For Appy, these images shed light on how "Eisenhower envisioned the world he so profoundly affected"—a faceless world, void of the individual Guatemalans he sought to redirect, in need of Anglo strength and security. Thus, despite Eisenhower's self-publicized support of the non-existent "Guatemalan counterrevolutionaries" and "people-to-people" exchanges, "he left no evidence of any serious interest in the people of Guatemala."²⁹

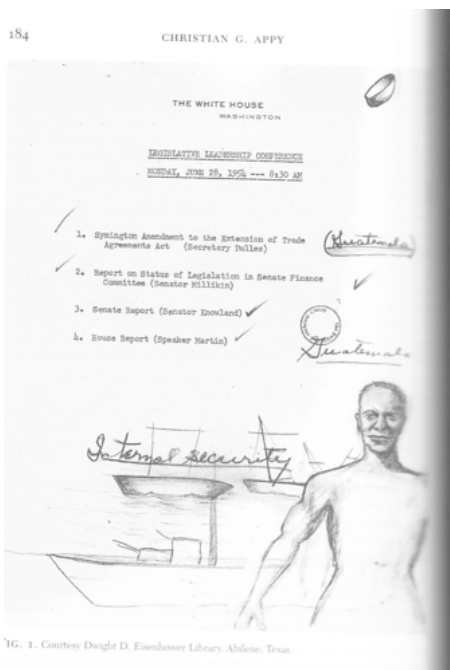
Those readers who have little patience for cultural abstractions and deconstructions will be pleased that Eisenhower's doodle does not serve as a "smoking gun" or central primary source for any argument of subconscious motives or actions. Rather, through the use of personal letters by Eisenhower, Appy extracts a common theme of competition, from the golf course to the bridge table, which can be seen in his secret organizing and public explanation of the 1954 coup.³⁰ From laughing at Secretary of State Dulles' and assistant Henry Holland's warning of the twenty percent chance for a successful coup of Arbenz as well as its legality under international agreements, to his preoccupation with golf games leading up to and during the time of the coup and his desires to take credit for what was projected as another notch within the anti-communist struggle, Appy raises important questions concerning the level of interest Eisenhower had for the actual people of Guatemala—that Eisenhower was at once intricately involved yet emotionally removed from the coup itself.

²⁸ Appy's work is informed by prominent scholars on the subject including Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, Richard Immerman, Piero Gleijese, Jim Handy, Blanche Wiesen Cook, and Nick Cullather.

²⁹ Appy, 186.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 197-198.

Along with the actual planning of the coup, media propaganda within Guatemala as well as the United States played a key role in its success. At once, the administration faced the difficult task of denying U.S. involvement, presenting Guatemala as a dangerous “communist beachhead,” and revealing a popular Guatemalan resistance that did not exist, while taking credit for the covert operation.³¹ To achieve this ambitious goal, Appy suggests that the threat of communism within Guatemala was relentlessly presented as a real and dangerous international threat while descriptions of the actual “popular revolt” were left vague and inconclusive. Any challenges to the legitimacy of the revolt were not only dismissed as a “communist lie” but “regarded as a retroactive justification for the very operation they were disavowing.”³² Thus, the vilification of the Arbenz government and the subsequent dismissal of foul play



16. 1. Courtesy Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Texas.

Fig. 1: “Eisenhower Doodle.”
 (Photocopy from Christian Appy, *Cold War Constructions: The Political Culture of the United States Imperialism, 1945-1966*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000, 184.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 205.

³² *Ibid.*, 209

closely paralleled the domestic fear mongering campaigns of McCarthyism. In the end, through a complacent press and presidential memoirs and speeches, both Eisenhower and Dulles were able at once to affirm Guatemalan popular support for the counterrevolution as well as cite the event as a victory for U.S. desires to thwart the communist threat throughout the world.

As with most actions, the true impact of the intervention is only revealed in its enduring legacy. For Immerman and Appy, the impact of the Guatemalan coup was indeed far reaching. Primarily, the 1954 coup reinstated the life Guatemalan's had fought to diminish. Castillo Armas, the first in a long line of U.S.-supported presidents after the coup, not only reversed the land and labor reforms to support United Fruit once again, but installed an oppressive regime that fell hard on dissent through "Gestapo-like tactics" resulting in a fifty year cycle of repression and killing of over 200,000 lives.³³ Beyond the persecution of the Guatemalans themselves, both Immerman and Appy make a compelling argument that the perceived success of the 1954 coup led to misguided conclusions that were applied to subsequent interventions. Just as the Iranian coup a year earlier provided a framework for the events in Guatemala, the blanket model of combining military threats, covert operations, and indigenous alliances are argued to have been directly applied to the soon to follow intervention in Indonesia and the Bay of Pigs invasion the following decade.

Both Immerman's and Appy's discussions of Cold War policy through preemptive action in Guatemala complicates our understanding of the motivations and assumptions behind Cold War covert actions. Although in one sense Immerman's and Appy's work testifies to the incredibly blurred and uncertain world in which foreign policy leaders worked, it also speaks to this paper's theme of selective ignorance of regional historical directions and the extent to which the Eisenhower administration was willing to ensure economic, political, and ideological security in Latin America. Thus, during a time when the actions of individual actors became increasingly more powerful, and the implications of such decisions more detrimental, an examination of personalities and viewpoints has the potential to reveal additional context to motivations and reasoning of Cold War policies.

During the beginning years of the Cold War, little room was left for neutrality as Soviet/American bipolarity effectively mapped out and kept a

³³ Immerman, 199; Appy, 196.

running score of regional ideological and political affiliation. For the Eisenhower administration, the Sukarno government in Indonesia fit this mold of dangerous neutrality and, running on the momentum of perceived successful subversive action in Iran, Guatemala, and the Congo, opted for another round in CIA- led covert political disruption. In *Subversion as Foreign Policy: The Secret Eisenhower and Dulles Debacle in Indonesia*, Audrey and George Kahin argue that the covert operations used to provoke and abet a major revolution and civil war in Indonesia during the late 1950s is attributed not only to “presidential prejudice” of popular elected leaders, but a reliance on poor intelligence gathering by the CIA and the political naïveté that followed. With a wealth of over 45 years of research including both CIA and Indonesian documents as well as firsthand accounts and interviews conducted by George Kahin in Indonesia during the 1940s revolution, the Kahins’ critical yet sophisticated assessment of the failed 1959 coup warn of the dangers in using past and ultimately detrimental CIA led actions as guidelines when applied to complex and varying regional contexts.

To give context to American involvement in the region and Indonesia’s non-alignment decision, the Kahins describe America’s favorable yet at times contradictory role in the 1949 Revolution. Though America had supported the popular revolution against Dutch colonial control, after the successful declaration of the independent Indonesian state the U.S. refrained from holding the Dutch accountable in the United Nations to relinquish its control over the culturally significant region of West Irian (New Guinea). The Kahins maintain that although the Dutch were probably correct in their desire to withhold the small portion of the island to appease the nationalism of chauvinistic elements in Holland needed to pass the decolonization agreement through Parliament, the Indonesians saw the act as an illegitimate retention of culturally significant land.³⁴ Ultimately for the Kahins, the support of the United States behind the Dutch West Irian issue as well as unscrupulous, U.S.-mediated debt negotiations that favored the Dutch made Indonesian alignment with the U.S. a less than favorable resolution.

In an act of realism and balance, much of which has come from George Kahin’s residency and connections in Indonesia during the post-revolution

³⁴ Audrey R. Kahin and George McT. Kahin, *Subversion as Foreign Policy: The Secret Eisenhower and Dulles Debacle in Indonesia* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 34-35.

era, the Kahins portray the revolution's shaky government as a less than ideal system, far from a popular utopia of democratic self-determination. Due to the region's unfortunate history during WWII, Japanese occupation, and the revolution against the Dutch, much of the country's government, infrastructure, economy, and social well being had been either dismantled or destroyed. With the country experiencing growing hardships and the colonial hegemonic educational structure severely weakened during the decade leading up to the revolution, much of the incoming political contenders espoused left of center variants of socialist, anti-foreign capital control. Within this context, Sukarno, Indonesia's president from 1945 to 1967, sought a "guided democracy" to strengthen national unity where exploitation of weaker groups would be avoided through a more balanced power structure.³⁵

This desire for unity sounded alarms for President Eisenhower, Secretary of State Dulles, and CIA operatives in Java (including brother, Allen Dulles). Following the Truman administration's loss of China, criticized for allowing the weakening Nationalist government to maintain its territorial integrity and thus unity in time of crisis, the Eisenhower administration perceived the proposed plan for Indonesian unification as a potential threat for communist subversion. Criticism and warnings by U.S. ambassador in Indonesia, John Allison, that the barriers which propped up non-alignment sentiment in the country were rooted in the debt and territorial issues surrounding the United State's support of the Dutch, were ignored and ultimately led to his reassignment in Czechoslovakia. Based on the inaccurate conclusions of a communist "absolute majority" on select islands made by the CIA (specifically John's brother, Allen Dulles), despite counter evidence provided by ambassador Allison, the Eisenhower administration not only chose to support rebel colonels against the government, but discouraged compromise between the opposing sides through a refusal to bend on the Dutch territorial and debt issues as well as through encouragement and support of rebellious army colonels. Though the opposing sides were far from willing or prepared to engage in another war, the U.S. had anticipated the possibility of a civil war and was already building up support for the rebels during the ultimately futile negotiations.³⁶

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 95, 115-119, 143.

As U.S. officials had predicted, the result was a civil war in 1958 between the Sukarno government and the rebels, secretly backed by American forces through unmarked air support and armaments. For two years leading up to and during the war, U.S. support continued for the rebels, yet due to an overestimation of popular support for rebel leaders (hurt by Indonesian awareness of U.S. support), an underestimation of nationalist support for Sukarno, and the capture of American pilot Allen Pope, the Eisenhower administration was forced to reassess its policy. In a move to increase flexibility, yet in hindsight painfully contradictory, Secretary of State Dulles and President Eisenhower made the decision to switch their support to the Sukarno government while continuing, albeit severely limited, support for the rebels.³⁷ In the end, U.S. meddling in the affairs of Indonesia had strengthened the very forces Americans had tried to diminish: the non-alignment of the Sukarno government, the army's increased authority through martial law, as well as the now growing popularity of the communist PKI party due to their capitalization of outrage over U.S. involvement. The result was a tripolarization between these now enlarged, tense, and brittle fractions leaving neither an effective form of governance nor political stability, paving the way for a major political explosion ending in a failed communist coupe, an army-led counter-coup, and the beginnings of a singular military dictatorship under Suharto in 1965, lasting until 1998.³⁸

As what is now embarrassingly clear and yet frustratingly absent during the time, was any consideration to dissenting views of intervention. However, despite these inconsistencies, an argument for a clearer vision based on the present benefit of hindsight is perhaps too much to ask of historical actors. Rather, what is particularly troublesome with the case of covert action in Indonesia is not only the flip-flopping of U.S. support during the civil war, but more importantly the willingness of the Eisenhower administration to encourage such a steadfast, uncompromising division that would most certainly lead to a devastating loss of life (thousands during the Civil War and over half a million during the 1965-66 massacre under the military coup victor, Suharto) and societal cohesion.³⁹ Thus, as with the covert actions in Iran and Guatemala, despite intentions of precision and strategic action meant to ultimately save lives

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 190.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 220.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 228.

by avoiding conventional or atomic warfare, the intervention methods chosen ultimately reflect a failure to gather as well as consider known intelligence of regional and historical circumstances, resulting in the loss of life and societal disruption well beyond the organizers' predicted consequences.

This stage within the Cold War offers a glimpse of the world at the height of modernity: societal power and structure whittled down to two competing ideologies, one claiming supremacy as the bearer of history and the future, while the other asserting its authority as the protector of human rights and freedom; technological might to annihilate thousands at the push of a button; and the ability to overrule the natural boundaries that had once offered societies security and comfort from foreign threats. With the amazingly destructive power to human life, society, and nature displayed during the Second World War, many saw the urgency of this global crossroads and chose to act, not with the total might of their visible arsenal, but with the precision and quickness only possible under the cloak of secrecy.

With modernity, however, the perceived ability of individuals to supersede and manipulate humankind and the natural world in which they reside, comes the responsibility to use all of the knowledge at one's disposal. Though President Eisenhower was merely a single individual, surrounded by persuasive cabinet members and consumed by a Cold War culture of uncertainty, distrust, and urgency the actions he chose to pursue failed to set a precedent for appropriate conduct within a new and changing world. With the perception of repetitive triumphant operations so close in their rearview mirror, Eisenhower and his administration continued down an interventionist path, ignoring evidence that challenged what they believed had been successful manipulations of foreign government and society. For the Eisenhower administration, despite their efforts to use far less invasive and physically damaging methods, societal scars left from the coups d'état had far reaching implications. By validating or glossing over events that had such a detrimental effect on the people, government, and overall well being of developing nations, historians not only risk promoting a repetition of such short-sighted decisions, but also threaten our global reputation as a nation that holds freedom above oppression.

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