# CHIT CHAT CLUB
# April 9, 2019
# Kirk McKenzie
# "Eisenhower and Crisis Management: Suez, the Soviet Union, Berlin and the U-2 Incident"

Gentlemen, this evening I want to return to a time when our foreign crises seemed simpler, or at least involved fewer major players. That era is the 1950s, when Dwight Eisenhower served as president. Eisenhower's first term was largely devoid of major foreign crises, thanks in large part to the death of Joseph Stalin in March 1953 and the quick end to the Korean War that followed. It was not until the fall of 1956 that President Eisenhower faced a major international crisis, when the British, French and Israelis launched an invasion of the Suez Canal Zone in Egypt, and the Soviets brutally put down a revolt in Hungary. As we shall see, Eisenhower's calm and skillful handling of those twin crises defused a situation that could have triggered a major war. Nearly four years later, when the Soviet Union shot down a U-2 reconnaissance plane in May 1960 and the Paris summit conference collapsed, Eisenhower's approach was less successful, in large part because he allowed his own good judgment to be overridden by bad advice from the Central Intelligence Agency.

## The Election of 1952

Before we turn to the crises of 1956 and 1960, we need to revisit the circumstances that brought Eisenhower to the presidency, as well as some of the major issues in our relations with the Soviet Union that he faced during his first term.

By the time he ran for president in 1952, Dwight Eisenhower's name had been in the public consciousness as a potential candidate for nearly eight years. In 1948, members of both parties had sought to draft him for their nomination, but Eisenhower made it clear in a public statement that he was not interested.[1]

What changed his mind in 1952 were the events surrounding the Korean War, and the twin fears that a Soviet invasion of Western Europe might be next, and that a Republican isolationist might become president. In the fall of 1950, a few months after North Korea invaded the South, President Truman asked Eisenhower to take the job of commander-in-chief of all the allied forces in Europe. Ike took a leave of absence from the presidency of Columbia University and in early 1951 set out on a three-week trip to assess the military and political situation of the NATO countries, which after two years still had no integrated military structure or commander.

Upon his return, Eisenhower addressed a joint session of Congress. He stressed the connection between a strong Europe and American security, saying that if Western Europe were to fall under the control of the Soviets, America would be "gravely imperiled." The defense of

[1] Dwight D. Eisenhower, *At Ease: Stories I Tell to Friends* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1967), pp. 334-335. Hereinafter, this book is referred to as "At Ease".

Europe was not America's responsibility alone, he acknowledged, but the U.S. must take the lead because it was the nation most capable of leading.[2]

Shortly after this well-received speech, Eisenhower had a private meeting at the Pentagon with Senator Robert Taft of Ohio, one of the leading isolationists and a major presidential contender. In the meeting, Eisenhower directly asked Taft whether he agreed that collective security including the U.S. was necessary in Western Europe, and whether Taft would support this idea as a bipartisan policy. Eisenhower said that if Taft agreed, he would withdraw his name from any consideration as a 1952 presidential candidate. But the senator would not budge; he was opposed to NATO and to spending money on bailing out other nations, and he offered Eisenhower no assurances.[3]

Other events in the spring of 1951 made the question Eisenhower had posed to Taft more urgent. In April, President Truman relieved General Douglas MacArthur of his command in Korea after MacArthur publicly rebuked the President for refusing to take the Korean War directly to the Chinese. The result of this firing was that Truman's approval rating collapsed, falling below 30% and staying there for the rest of the year. It appeared that if Truman were to run for president again in 1952, he would be very vulnerable.[4]

In the meantime, concern was growing among moderate, internationalist Republicans about the power of the isolationists and the increasing likelihood that Taft would be the Republican nominee. In April, Eisenhower received a letter from General Lucius Clay, an old friend and politically-savvy general who had played a significant role in organizing NATO and implementing the Marshall Plan. Clay wrote that if Taft became president, all of Eisenhower's work promoting western security would be for naught. "We cannot let the isolationists gain control of government if we are to endure as a free people over the years," Clay wrote, and soon thereafter he formed a small group to organize a committee to win the Republican nomination for Eisenhower.[5]

In the latter half of 1951, many moderate Republicans visited Eisenhower in Paris and urged him to run, including Ike's friend Bill Robinson and Senator Henry Cabot Lodge. In late August, General Clay wrote to Eisenhower again, urging him to resign his NATO command and come home to campaign. In December, Robinson persuaded Eisenhower to let his name be placed on the ballot for the New Hampshire presidential primary, and in early January, Eisenhower issued a statement saying that while he was devoted to his NATO duties and could

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[2] William I. Hitchcock, *The Age of Eisenhower: America and the World in the 1950s* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2018), pp. 49-50. Hereinafter, this book is referred to as "Hitchcock".

[3] *Id.* at 51-52; *At Ease* at 371-72.

[4] Hitchcock, pp. 53-55.

[5] *Id.* At 55-56. In footnote 19 accompanying this discussion, Hitchcock quotes Herbert Brownell, Ike's 1952 campaign manager and his first Attorney General, as saying that General Clay was the "key man," and that "it would have been impossible for any other individual to convince him to run."

not campaign in person, receiving the Republican presidential nomination would be something he couldn't ignore.[6]

When the New Hampshire primary was held on March 11, Eisenhower won all of the Republican delegates and decisively beat Taft in the accompanying popularity poll. That made him more receptive to advice he received from Herbert Brownell, Tom Dewey's 1948 campaign manager, that if he really wanted the presidential nomination, he could not rely on a draft, but would have to come home and campaign, since Taft already had a large lead in delegates. Soon thereafter, Eisenhower asked President Truman (who had withdrawn from the presidential race himself) to be relieved of his NATO command, effective June 1.[7]

Over the course of the next month, Eisenhower accumulated about 400 of the 603 delegates needed for nomination, with Taft having 500, and a significant number being contested or uncommitted. In early July, Eisenhower achieved a major tactical victory when the Republican convention voted to seat his slate of Texas delegates rather than Taft's. Eisenhower very narrowly won the nomination on the first ballot, and sought to placate the Taft supporters by choosing Richard Nixon as his running mate.[8] The Democrats, of course, nominated Governor Adlai Stevenson of Illinois as their presidential candidate.

The 1952 campaign was a nasty one, and did not show Eisenhower at his best. Charging that the Democrats represented "Korea, corruption and Communism," the Republicans argued that it was time for a change. Hanging over the campaign was the shadow of Senator Joseph McCarthy, who had charged that Ike's mentor, General George Marshall, had been so inept as Truman's envoy to China after World War II that the subsequent loss of China called Marshall's loyalty into question. Although Eisenhower said Marshall was both loyal and a patriot, he refused to repudiate either McCarthy or Senator William Jenner, another Marshall critic. Eisenhower's refusal to offer a forceful defense of Marshall enraged President Truman, as did Ike's promise toward the end of the campaign that he "would go to Korea." Truman thought this was a cheap political stunt and said so, which greatly offended Eisenhower. Another issue was the so-called "Nixon slush fund," which led to the famous "Checkers speech" and some suspense about whether Nixon would remain on the ticket. Despite all of this, on election day Eisenhower won overwhelmingly.

## 1953-1956: Korea, the Geneva Summit Conference, and Eisenhower's Heart Attack

After he took office in January 1953, Eisenhower saw his first task as bringing the stalemated Korean War to an end, one way or another. In the first months of the new Administration, Eisenhower even considered widening the war and using what he called "tactical atomic weapons" against the Chinese.[9] He was saved from having to make this decision by the

[6] *Id.* at 56-62.

[7] *Id.* at 62-65.

[8] *Id.* at 66-73.

[9] Hitchcock at 103-4.

death of the Soviet dictator, Joseph Stalin, on March 5, 1953. The new leaders of the Soviet Union wanted to reduce international tensions and urged the Chinese to give in on the issue of whether captured soldiers must be repatriated to their home countries. The North Korean leadership was also tired of the war, which had devastated their country. Soon after Stalin's funeral, the terms for a Korean armistice fell into place, and it took effect in June.[10]

Although the Korean armistice reduced Cold War tensions, Eisenhower continued to be very suspicious of the new Soviet leaders. Nonetheless, the President made a positive proposal in a speech at the United Nations in December, when he urged that the Americans and the Soviets should turn some of their uranium and fissionable material over to a new International Atomic Energy Agency, which would use it to supply electricity to the developing world.[11] This proposal, which the Soviets immediately rejected, came to be known as the "Atoms for Peace" initiative.

In 1954, much of the Administration's attention in foreign policy was directed toward Indochina, where the President resisted pressure by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and others to aid the beleaguered French. By 1955, the new leaders in Moscow were showing signs of flexibility that would have been unthinkable in Stalin's time. Early in the year, they finally agreed to withdraw from Austria and end the four-power occupation of that country. They also made peace with the Yugoslavian leader, Marshall Tito, whom Stalin had denounced as a traitor to communism. Finally, the Soviets began angling for a summit conference, something that had not taken place since 1945. They were well aware that Stalin's postwar foreign policy had led to NATO and the Marshall Plan, and that the United States now had a massive arsenal of nuclear weapons it could deliver anywhere. They also knew they lagged well behind the West economically. All of this suggested to them that for some period of time, at least, the Soviet Union must abandon direct confrontation with the West and seek peaceful coexistence. Hence their desire for a summit conference.[12]

Secretary Dulles was opposed to a summit, and Eisenhower was skeptical about what one could accomplish, but he also didn't want to appear unreasonably stubborn. The British were the most enthusiastic about the idea, largely because Anthony Eden had just succeeded Winston Churchill as prime minister and had called a general election in hopes of enlarging his parliamentary majority. Eden made a personal appeal to Eisenhower, arguing that a summit conference to discuss world peace would help him in his campaign. Ike accepted this argument, and a summit meeting was scheduled to take place in Geneva from July 18 to 23, 1955.

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[10] Thus, Hitchcock rejects the long-popular view that Eisenhower brought the Korean War to an end by directly threatening the Chinese with nuclear weapons. Although there is some evidence that Secretary Dulles used Prime Minister Nehru of India to hint at such use to the Chinese, that is apparently as far as it went. Hitchcock at 103-104 and note 35.

[11] *Id.*at 112-114.

[12] *Id.* at 268-69.

When the summit opened, it soon became evident that at the formal sessions, the parties were merely restating their well-established positions on issues such as Germany and disarmament. The real action, to the extent there was some, took place at the dinners and cocktail parties the delegations gave for each other, with Eisenhower being particularly effective at the one he gave for the Soviet leadership. However, the real news came when, after a long statement at one of the formal sessions about the desirability of disarmament, Eisenhower put forth a well-rehearsed proposal. He suggested that the biggest problem in the modern era was the possibility of a surprise attack. To make that impossible, both the U.S. and the Soviet Union should "provid[e] the other with blueprints and charts of military installations as well as the airfields used by their planes." Each country would then be free to conduct aerial reconnaissance of the other, taking as many photographs as it wished. In this way, the President suggested, each side could be confident that the other was not preparing a surprise attack, thus reducing dangers and tensions. Eisenhower's idea came to be known as the "Open Skies" proposal. [13]

The Soviets quickly rejected this idea as a thinly-veiled opportunity for espionage,[14] but in a conference otherwise starved for accomplishments, the Open Skies proposal quickly captivated world opinion. Eisenhower returned home to a hero's welcome in Washington.

Although the President returned home with the good will of the world, that exhilaration would be short-lived. In late August, Eisenhower flew with his wife to Denver, where they had planned a month-long vacation. Ike did relax a lot, but on September 23, after playing golf, he developed what he thought was a bad case of heartburn and indigestion. His doctor gave him some morphine to deal with the intense pain that woke him up during the night, but by the next day, after an electrocardiogram, it became apparent that the President had suffered a serious heart attack. He was taken immediately to Fitzsimons Army Hospital, where he remained under the care of Dr. Paul Dudley White and others until the second week of November. The president then returned to Washington and resumed a light work schedule, but he split most of the rest of the year between Camp David and his home in Gettysburg.

The biggest question Eisenhower's illness raised, of course, was whether he would be able or willing to run for a second term in 1956. He was initially inclined to retire, but after concluding that none of the other plausible Republican candidates was ready for the job, and that neither they nor any of the likely Democrats could function in the presidency as well as he could, Eisenhower announced on February 29, 1956 that he would run for reelection.[15] After some suspense about whether Vice President Nixon would remain on the ticket, both men were renominated at the Republican convention in San Francisco.

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[13] Evan Thomas, *Ike's Bluff: President Eisenhower's Secret Battle to Save the World* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2012), p. 175. Hereinafter, this book is referred to as "Thomas". *See also*, Hitchcock at 276-77.

[14] Hitchcock at 277.

[15] *Id*. at 278-88.

**The Suez Crisis and the Hungarian Revolt of 1956**

Today, more than 60 years after President Eisenhower ran for reelection, we are all familiar with the term "October surprise." But in 1956, the October surprise came not from an election opponent, but from dramatic events at the Suez Canal in Egypt and from communist-controlled Hungary. The skillful way in which Eisenhower handled these crises, which unfolded over two and one-half weeks, occurred on the eve of the 1956 presidential election, and could have escalated into another world war, was one of the best moments of his presidency.

The problems with the Suez Canal began in 1955. In an effort to curry favor with the new Egyptian leader, Colonel Nasser, Britain agreed to help finance construction of the Aswan Dam, an ambitious hydroelectric project on the Nile. Since it couldn't provide the financing alone, the British government asked the U.S. for assistance, and in December the Eisenhower Administration made an offer of $56 million to support the project. Rather than express gratitude for this help, however, Nasser continued to denounce the British, granted diplomatic recognition to Communist China, and signed an agreement to purchase arms and aircraft from the communist government in Czechoslovakia.[16]

This was unacceptable to the United States, and Secretary of State Dulles informed the Egyptians in July 1956 that the U.S. was pulling out of the project. Nasser's response a week later was to give a speech in Alexandria announcing that Egypt would nationalize the Suez Canal Company and use profits from its tolls to finance the Aswan Dam. This decision outraged the British, who owned 44% of the Suez Canal Company, and who were mindful that 70% of Western Europe's oil passed through the Canal. Allowing Egypt's new leader to put a chokehold on Europe's oil supplies was intolerable to the British, and Prime Minister Eden immediately told Eisenhower that Britain was prepared "to use force to bring Nasser to his senses."

The French were also upset. They also owned part of the canal company, but what outraged them most was the fact that Nasser had been sending arms to the rebels fighting France's colonial rule in Algeria. The Israelis were upset, too, because Nasser had moved to unite the Arab states in the region into an anti-Israeli bloc, and because border attacks by the Egyptians had increased.

Eisenhower was worried by the reaction of the British, French, and Israelis to Nasser's activities, because the President very much wanted to win friends for the U.S. among the non-aligned nations in the world, including those in the Middle East, which he feared might otherwise turn to the Soviet Union. As a result, Eisenhower quickly wrote to Eden warning him in strong language against the use of military force in Egypt. At the same time, he and Dulles leaned heavily on the British and French to participate in a series of conferences called to devise a plan for international control of the Canal.[17]

[16] *Id*. at 306-08.

[17] *Id*. at 308-311.

In September, Eisenhower and Eden exchanged frank letters about the situation. In his first letter, Eisenhower warned Eden that using force against Egypt would rally Arab opinion to Nasser, lead to a cutoff of oil shipments to Europe, and bring about wider Soviet influence in the region. Eden refused to accept this advice and likened Nasser to Hitler in the 1930s; Eden said he could not allow a situation in which Nasser could deny oil to Western Europe. In a second letter to Eden, Eisenhower upped the ante, saying that using force against Nasser would not only fail to solve the problem, but would also "cause a serious misunderstanding between our two countries."[18]

Although the British and French went through the motions of participating in the negotiations with Egypt sponsored by the U.N., in the meantime they and the Israelis hatched a secret plot to invade Egypt and drive Nasser from power. In his new book *The Age of Eisenhower*, William Hitchcock describes their plan, which was worked out in mid-to-late October, as follows:

> Israel would attack Egypt on the evening of October 29. The next morning the British and French governments would call on Egypt and Israel to stop military action and withdraw their forces from the Canal Zone, and Egypt would be told that it must accept an Anglo-French occupation of the zone so as to ensure freedom of passage through it. The plotters expected Egypt to refuse this condition, whereupon Anglo-French forces would attack Egypt early the next day.[19]

While this secret plotting was going on, events exploded in Eastern Europe. While there were riots in Poland, the situation was worse in Hungary, where on October 22, students, workers and intellectuals gathered at a Budapest university and demanded the removal of Soviet troops, replacement of the country's current leadership with a liberal former prime minister, Imre Nagy, and free multiparty elections. The next day, after a statue of Stalin was toppled, the Hungarian Security Police fired into the crowd, killing unarmed demonstrators.

With Hungary apparently on the brink of revolution, the Soviet leaders grew alarmed. They immediately ordered Soviet troops stationed near Budapest to restore order in the city, and by the next day 30,000 Red Army troops had entered the country. But these foreign troops only served to provoke the people of Budapest, who fought them with Molotov cocktails and rifles taken from the barracks of troops sympathetic to the rebellion.

The reports from Hungary alarmed Eisenhower and his senior advisors. Fearing that the Soviets might resort to war, which he was determined to avoid, and concluding that there was little he could do to help the Hungarians anyway, Eisenhower directed Dulles not to take the Hungarian issue to the U.N. Security Council, and to insert language in an upcoming speech reassuring the Soviets that while the U.S. condemned their repression of the Hungarians, it did not look upon the Hungarians as potential allies.[20]

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[18] *Id.* at 312.

[19] *Id.* at 313 (citation omitted).

[20] *Id.* at 314-17.

At the same time he was dealing with Hungary, word reached Eisenhower that the Israelis were mobilizing their forces for war. Furthermore, surveillance from the new U-2 planes showed that French jets had been delivered to Israel, and that a large British naval buildup was taking place in Cyprus. Finally, Dulles pointed out that both British and French diplomats had suddenly gone silent about their plans, which made him suspicious that something was up.

When Eisenhower returned to the White House on Sunday evening, October 28, he learned that the Israelis were in full-scale mobilization, and Dulles said he suspected that the British and French were encouraging the Israelis to attack Egypt. Eisenhower said he could not believe that "Britain would be dragged into this," but Dulles said he was not so sure. The next day, Eisenhower went off to some campaign appearances, but while he was in Miami on one of them, he learned that the Israelis had invaded the Sinai Peninsula. He made a second brief campaign stop in Virginia and then headed back immediately to the White House.

At the evening meeting that followed, Dulles said it was now clear to him that the Israelis had not acted alone, and that British and French intervention in the Egyptian situation should be expected. Eisenhower was furious, saying of the British that "nothing justifies double-crossing us," and that "we cannot be bound by our traditional alliances." When Ike demanded that the British support a U.N. resolution condemning the Israelis, both he and U.N. Ambassador Lodge were rebuffed.[21]

The next day Eisenhower suppressed his anger and wrote to Eden again. He urged that the Israeli invasion of Sinai should be taken up by the U.N. immediately, and lamented that America and Britain now found themselves "in a very sad state of confusion" which, if it continued, could open the door to war in the Middle East, with the Soviets intervening on Egypt's behalf. In his reply to Eisenhower, Eden lied, claiming that Egypt was responsible for the tensions in the region and had "brought this attack on herself," and that Britain had urged restraint on the Israelis. Later in the day, and consistent with the secret plan, Eden told Parliament that Israel and Egypt would be given 12 hours within which to decide whether to withdraw their forces from the Canal Zone and allow British and French forces to be stationed there to ensure continued Canal operations. If they refused, Eden said, Britain and France would launch an invasion of the Canal Zone. That evening, the U.N. Security Council debated a resolution calling on Israel to withdraw its forces from Egypt. The U.S. and the Soviets supported the resolution, but Britain and France vetoed it. [22]

The next day, October 31, the British and French began bombing Egyptian ports and railroads, and Eisenhower gave a national television speech about the two foreign crises. He began by praising the Hungarians and calling on the Soviets to respect their independence. As for the Middle East, the President admonished the British and French for violating Egypt's sovereignty, although he condemned the nationalization of the Suez Canal. Eisenhower

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[21] *Id.* at 317-19.

[22] *Id.* at 319-21.

characterized the invasion as an "error," and emphasized that the U.S. had not been "consulted in any way" beforehand. He urged that the whole matter be taken to the U.N., where it should be resolved with regard for international law.[23]

The next day, November 1, the Hungarian and Suez crises converged. Eisenhower learned that in Hungary, Imre Nagy had been installed as prime minister, and that Nagy had asserted Hungary's independence, announced the end of one-party rule, and stated his intention to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact. At the same time, the Soviet troops that had been fighting the Hungarians appeared to be withdrawing. Although this would have been good news under normal circumstances, Eisenhower suspected that the Soviets' passive reaction to these events was a ruse designed to gain the moral high ground on the Suez crisis, which they would then exploit at the U.N. Consequently, Eisenhower felt he had to keep up the pressure against the Suez invasion. He and Dulles therefore drafted a resolution for the U.N. General Assembly that called for a cease-fire and withdrawal of all combatant forces from Egypt. At the same time, Dulles announced that the U.S. would suspend all shipments of military supplies to the "area of hostilities," which in practice meant to Israel. Later, Dulles flew to New York and introduced his resolution at the U.N., where it was well-received and adopted by the General Assembly on a 64-5 vote.[24]

On the next day, November 2, Eden learned the price of his actions. In retaliation for the Suez invasion, the Syrians destroyed three pipelines that carried oil from Iraq to the Mediterranean for shipment to Europe. The loss amounted to 500,000 barrels per day, one-fourth of Europe's oil imports from the Middle East. In addition, the Egyptians sank old trawlers and barges in the Canal itself, a sure way to cut off the flow of Mideast oil. It was evident that Eden had put his country's economy in harm's way. However, his response was not to retreat, but to double-down. He staunchly defended his policy in Parliament, and in a television speech on the night of November 3, said that the lessons of the 1930s demanded that Nasser be confronted, not appeased. Nasser's seizure of the Canal had made the Israeli invasion inevitable, Eden said, and Nasser's subsequent refusal to withdraw from the Canal Zone made the use of force inevitable. Hoping to head such an outcome off, the Canadians offered a resolution at the U.N. to create a peacekeeping force to do the job in the Canal Zone that the British and French wanted to do. It passed overwhelmingly.[25]

On November 4, just as the Suez crisis appeared to be reaching its climax, there came terrible news from Hungary. Alarmed by Imre Nagy's threats to leave the Warsaw Pact, the Soviet leaders ordered the suppression of the Hungarian uprising. At dawn, 60,000 Soviet troops entered Budapest and quickly took over radio stations, the Parliament building, and Hungarian Army barracks, giving them effective control of the city. Nagy fled to the Yugoslav embassy.

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[23] *Id*. at 322.

[24] *Id*. at 323-26.

[25] *Id*. at 326-27.

In response to denunciations at the U.N. and across the world for their brutality in Hungary, the Soviets then sought to exploit the Suez crisis. On November 5, after learning that the British and French had landed paratroopers in the Canal Zone, Soviet Premier Bulganin sent cables to the British, French and Israelis threatening them with military action if they did not withdraw immediately. Bulganin's cable to Eisenhower demanded that the British and French accept the U.N. cease-fire resolution of November 1, and proposed that the U.S. and the Soviet Union should send a joint task force to Egypt to pull apart the warring parties and restore order. Bulganin continued that "if this war is not stopped, it is fraught with danger and can grow into a third world war."

Although Eisenhower considered Bulganin's proposal outrageous, the U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union, Charles Bohlen, urged the President not to dismiss it as mere propaganda, since the Soviets might be laying a foundation for intervention in the Middle East based on the need to resist imperialist aggression. Eisenhower promptly took two actions: he sent a cable to Bulganin warning him to stay out of Egypt, and he put out a press statement. Characterizing Bulganin's proposal as "unthinkable," Eisenhower's statement said that instead, the U.N. resolution calling for a U.N. peacekeeping force in the Canal Zone once a cease-fire had taken hold should be implemented and respected.[26]

The next day, November 6, was – believe it or not – election day in the U.S.! For Eisenhower, the day began with a troubling intelligence briefing that the Soviets had told the Egyptians they would "do something." At 9 a.m., he and Mrs. Eisenhower left the White House by car for the two-hour drive to Gettysburg, where they were scheduled to vote. Shortly after they had arrived and voted, however, the President was told he was needed back at the White House immediately, and he boarded a helicopter for the trip. Upon arrival, he was told about a message from Ambassador Bohlen in Moscow that the Soviet attitude had become "ominous," and that some sort of military action seemed likely.

Just then, there came news that Israel had accepted the U.N. proposal for a cease-fire, and soon thereafter, the defeated Egyptians accepted it as well. That put the pressure on the British government, whose prime minister was quickly losing support. Although Eden would have liked to keep the invasion going, his Foreign Secretary told him that doing so would greatly increase the risk of Soviet intervention, and that the economic pressure on Britain from the loss of one-quarter of its oil supply had created an economic crisis. The only way Britain could make up for the loss of Persian Gulf oil was by purchasing oil elsewhere, which required dollars, and Britain's supply of those was rapidly shrinking.

The Americans were not willing to help. When Chancellor of the Exchequer Harold MacMillan telephoned the U.S. Treasury Secretary to ask for a repatriation of dollars that Britain had deposited with the International Monetary Fund, the Secretary refused. There being no other source for the needed funds, Eden bowed to the inevitable and agreed to accept the U.N. cease-fire, while immediately asking the U.S. for economic aid.[27]

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[26] *Id*. at 328-331.

[27] *Id*. at 331-33.

Eisenhower promptly called Eden to say how pleased he was that Britain had accepted the cease-fire. Before he would grant economic aid, however, Eisenhower said he wanted not merely a cease-fire, but withdrawal of British forces from Egypt. Eden asked for time to think it over.

Early the next morning, Eden telephoned Eisenhower to say that he would like to come to Washington to consult on the Suez matter. Wanting to patch up the quarrel with Britain, Eisenhower initially agreed, but after his staff told him that such a meeting would be a mistake, because it would likely be seen by the Arab world as a reprieve for Britain before it had agreed to withdraw all its forces from Suez, the President quickly called Eden back and said the meeting would have to be postponed.

Despite their economic predicament, the British stalled for three weeks in withdrawing their forces from Egypt. They begged and pleaded with Eisenhower for the economic aid they had requested, but the President politely and repeatedly held firm. After the exhausted Eden left for a rest break in Jamaica on November 23, MacMillan worked to get the cabinet to agree to a public statement of Britain's intent to withdraw. The cabinet agreed on November 29, and on December 3 the decision to withdraw was announced in the House of Commons. American economic aid and oil soon began to flow to Britain.[28]

The Suez crisis marked a real turning point in U.S. relations with the Middle East. As Hitchcock puts it, "the invasion had discredited the Europeans, enraged Arab opinion, jeopardized Western access to Middle East oil, and opened the door to Soviet interference." Eisenhower concluded that the United States had no choice but to take the place of the British and French in the region. Accordingly, in a special speech to Congress in January 1957, he announced what came to be known as the Eisenhower Doctrine. After noting that Russia's rulers had long sought to dominate the Middle East, the President announced a plan to frustrate their ambitions. He asked Congress to approve a program of economic and military assistance to friendly Mideast nations, including the use of U.S. armed forces "to secure and protect the territorial integrity and political independence" of these friendly nations against "overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by International Communism."[29] As we know, the United States has been deeply embroiled in the affairs of the Middle East ever since.

## Less Successful Crisis Management: Berlin, the U-2 Incident and the Paris Summit of 1960

The second major example of Eisenhower's crisis management I want to consider this evening is the U-2 incident, which resulted in the capture of the plane's pilot, Francis Gary

[28] *Id*. at 333-38. Not long after his return from three weeks in Jamaica, Eden resigned as prime minister and was replaced by MacMillan.

[29] *Id*. at 339.

Powers, the cancellation of a long-anticipated summit conference in Paris in May 1960, and a significant increase in Cold War tensions. As we shall see, although Eisenhower behaved honorably throughout this episode, he allowed pressure from overzealous C.I.A. officials to override his own good judgment that a spy flight so close to the summit was too big a risk to take.

The origins of the Paris summit conference go back to November 1958, when Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev sent the U.S., Britain and France a diplomatic note with an ultimatum stating that the Western powers must sign a peace treaty with East Germany within six months and leave Berlin. If they did not do so, Khrushchev said, the Soviet Union would turn control of its administration zone in the city of Berlin (which was located 100 miles inside East Germany) over to the communist East German government, and defend that government if the Western powers sought to interfere with East German administration of the city.[30]

Eisenhower and the other western leaders reacted cautiously to Khrushchev's ultimatum. The U.S. ambassador in Moscow, Llewellyn Thompson, thought its real purpose was to obtain a summit conference, which Khrushchev had been hinting he wanted for some time. Thompson thought that the U.S. had unwisely rebuffed past overtures from Khrushchev, but even he could not explain why, if the Soviet leader really wanted to reduce tensions through a summit, he would resort to something as hostile as the Berlin ultimatum.[31]

Over the next several months, the U.S., Britain, France and West Germany felt each other out about Khrushchev's note. Konrad Adenauer was fiercely opposed to recognition of East Germany, so he was opposed. Charles de Gaulle feared that a Western withdrawal from Berlin would mean the neutralization of Germany and eventually a Soviet-German alliance, so he was essentially in Adenauer's corner. Eisenhower thought giving in to Khrushchev could destabilize West Germany, destroy the Western alliance and leave the U.S. isolated, but he also feared the possibility of a nuclear war over Berlin.[32]

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[30] Hitchcock at 410-12; William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), pp. 396-99 (hereinafter referred to as "Taubman").

One of the leading contemporary historians of the Cold War has suggested that Khrushchev issued his Berlin ultimatum, with its implicit threat of war, because he drew the wrong lesson from the Suez crisis of 1956. Khrushchev assumed that the British and French withdrew their military forces from the Canal Zone because of the Soviet Union's threats to use "rocket weapons" if they did not withdraw. In fact, as shown in the text above, it was American insistence that Britain and France must withdraw before the U.S. would extend loans to buy oil and other economic assistance that finally brought about the withdrawal. John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2005), pp. 70-71 (hereinafter referred to as "Gaddis").

[31] Taubman at 399-403.

[32] *Id*. at 403-08. As noted earlier in the text, when Eisenhower first became president in 1953, he considered using what he called "tactical atomic weapons" against the Chinese in Korea, because at that point he thought the U.S. should use nuclear weapons in war "exactly as you would use a bullet or anything else." However, by 1956 Eisenhower's thinking had changed. When informed that year that a Soviet attack on the U.S. could wipe out the entire government and kill two-thirds of the country's

The government most open to Khrushchev was Britain. At the end of February 1959, Prime Minister Harold MacMillan flew to Moscow to meet with Khrushchev. They had a very contentious meeting, but MacMillan emerged with a promise that the six-month deadline for signing a peace treaty was off, and that there should be a foreign ministers' meeting to discuss Berlin and other German questions.[33] When MacMillan met with Eisenhower a month later in Washington, Ike made it clear that he did not wish to be associated with any Berlin deal that resulted from a threat, and that he did not appreciate efforts to manipulate him into a summit. However, Eisenhower agreed that a meeting of foreign ministers was appropriate, and he and MacMillan drafted a letter to Khrushchev stating that if a foreign ministers' meeting scheduled for late spring made adequate progress, then a summit meeting could be held in the fall. At the end of March, Khrushchev accepted this proposal.[34]

Even though the foreign ministers' conference in May soon deadlocked, other events kept the possibility of a summit alive. In April, Eisenhower announced that Vice President Nixon would visit Moscow in July to open the American National Exhibition in Sokolniki Park, the place where the famous "Kitchen Debate" took place. However, before Nixon left on the trip, the President – who was frustrated over the lack of diplomatic progress on Germany and arms control -- extended a secret invitation to Khrushchev to visit the United States for one-on-one talks with him at Camp David, along with a tour of the U.S. if Khrushchev wished. Khrushchev excitedly accepted this invitation the day before Nixon left for Moscow.[35]

There has probably never been another foreign leader's visit to the U.S. quite so remarkable as the one Khrushchev made in the third week of September 1959. Alternately charming and aggressive, he received a frosty welcome in New York, then a lunch in Los Angeles where he was insulted, and a visit to 20th Century Fox in Hollywood to see the filming of the movie "Can-Can." He was disappointed at not being able to visit Disneyland, but had a pleasant visit in San Francisco and the Bay Area, which was followed by a trip to Russell Garth's farm in Iowa to see Garth's new hybrid corn. After a final day in Pittsburgh, Khrushchev returned to Washington to meet with Eisenhower at Camp David. [36]

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population, he conceded that it "would literally be a business of digging ourselves out of the ashes, starting again." From then on, he considered the use of nuclear weapons in war to be suicidal, and rejected the idea that there could be a "limited" nuclear war. A corollary of this was that Eisenhower believed in planning only for a total nuclear war. Gaddis at 66-68; Thomas at 274-75.

[33] *Id*. at 410-11.

[34] Hitchcock at 415-16.

[35] *Id*. at 417-21; Taubman at 414-19.

[36] The most colorful and enjoyable account of Khrushchev's visit is found in Peter Carlson, *K Blows Top: A Cold War Comic Interlude, Starring Nikita Khrushchev, America's Most Unlikely Tourist* (New York: Public Affairs, 2009). For more conventional accounts of the trip, see Hitchcock at 424-31 and Taubman at 419-35. In 2014, the PBS program "American Experience" presented an hour-long episode about the Khrushchev trip entitled "Cold War Roadshow," in which both Carlson and Taubman appear as narrators. It is available on DVD.

Initially, the talks at Camp David did not go well. After breakfast on Saturday, when they discussed the Berlin question, Eisenhower made it clear to Khrushchev that the U.S. would not object to the Soviets signing a peace treaty with the East Germans, so long as that would not alter the Western position in Berlin. Khrushchev called that "an impossible condition," and the two men went round and round until a very strained lunch. After a nap in the afternoon, Eisenhower invited Khrushchev to join him for a visit to his Gettysburg farm. The visit helped, with Khrushchev admiring the house, Ike's cattle, and the President's grandchildren, whom Khrushchev invited to accompany their grandfather on a visit to the Soviet Union.

The next morning the two men were able to reach an agreement. Khrushchev withdrew his ultimatum over Berlin, while Eisenhower agreed that the current arrangements in that city would not be continued indefinitely. Further, the President agreed to attend a full four-power conference in the spring of 1960, followed by a visit to the Soviet Union. Although Eisenhower had previously said he would not attend a summit without some diplomatic progress, he now felt that "a situation where he would not have to act under duress could be regarded as progress." Then the meetings ended, the two men returned to Washington, and Khrushchev flew home.[37] The world was delighted to hear about the progress that emerged from Camp David, and the rest of 1959 went well, with Eisenhower making a nearly three-week round-the-world tour to promote peace in December.

Earlier in this essay, I mentioned that during the Suez crisis in 1956, Eisenhower had relied on photographs taken by U-2 planes to understand the buildup of French and British forces before the invasion. That was one of the earliest uses of the U-2, which Eisenhower had first authorized in late 1954, and which conducted its first mission over the Soviet Union on July 4, 1956.[38] In thinking about the U-2, it is important to remember that in 1956, neither the U.S. nor any other nation had any satellites. Although an American one was on the drawing boards in 1957, the Sputnik that the Soviets launched on October 4, 1957 was the first time any nation had been able to put a satellite into space and, theoretically at least, use that satellite to photograph the military facilities of other nations.

A corollary of this situation was that in the late 1950s, if the U.S. wanted pictorial evidence of Soviet military installations, it had only two viable options. The first was to obtain the information through human spies, who were obviously vulnerable. The second was to fly over the facilities in question and photograph them. However, such flights constituted violations of Soviet air space, and thus could lead to war. For that reason, Eisenhower insisted from the beginning that each U-2 flight would require his personal authorization.

Ike did not grant these authorizations lightly. Although he approved about 20 U-2 flights in 1956 and 1957, after March of 1958 he did not authorize any for a full year. Not only was he

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[37] Taubman at 435-39; Hitchcock at 428-29. *See also*, Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Waging Peace, 1956-1961* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1965), pp. 446-47.

[38] Hitchcock at 172-74, 457.

concerned that the Soviets would eventually be able to shoot down one of the fragile U-2s, but it was apparent even in 1956 that Soviet radar was good enough to detect when the U-2s had entered Soviet airspace. The Soviets filed quiet diplomatic protests over the U-2 flights, but did not publicize them because these protests only demonstrated the Soviets' inability to shoot the spy planes down.[39]

Eisenhower tolerated the risks of the U-2 because of the high-quality intelligence they provided. The 1957 flights demonstrated not only that the Soviets had not yet developed an intercontinental ballistic missile, but also that they had far fewer "Bisons" -- the Soviet version of the B-52 long-range bomber -- than the Administration's critics in Congress had been claiming.

Eisenhower stopped the U-2 flights in 1958 because of worries they would undercut U.S. diplomatic initiatives. In particular, the President was worried that a U-2 shoot-down might trigger a Soviet attack on Berlin, a concern that increased after Khrushchev's November 1958 note. However, starting in 1959, the CIA and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, joined by the Secretary of Defense, began pushing back. They argued that intelligence provided by the U-2s was the only effective way to silence the congressional critics who were now complaining about a "missile gap." The president continued to resist, saying he wanted to wait until the satellites being developed under the Corona project became operational.[40] But the proponents of U-2 flights wore him down, and the President authorized one more flight that took place on July 9, 1959.

The evidence about Soviet missile capabilities that resulted from this flight was so good that in early 1960, after the Camp David meeting, the Joint Chiefs and the CIA resumed their campaign for more U-2 flights. Their hand was strengthened by a speech Khrushchev gave in January, when he announced heavy troop reductions that would be compensated for by corresponding increases in Soviet missiles.

The Khrushchev speech strengthened the hand of the CIA because it suggested the Soviets had many more missiles than U.S. intelligence had been able to detect, a theme the press and congressional critics also kept pounding away at. The President was also influenced by his foreign intelligence advisory board, which argued that the window on the U-2's usefulness was closing, since Soviet interceptor aircraft and missiles were improving every day. Eisenhower finally gave in to all this pressure, and authorized another U-2 flight that took place on February 10, 1960. CIA Director Allen Dulles soon requested four more, but Eisenhower approved only two, which ultimately took place on April 9 and May 1.

The President recognized that the May 1 flight was risky, since it would take place only two weeks before the opening of the Paris summit, where he hoped to obtain agreements on disarmament, Berlin, and nuclear weapons testing. Despite his misgivings, the President approved the flight because he wanted the best possible intelligence about Soviet capabilities before he entered into summit negotiations with Khrushchev, and because of the constant

[39] Thomas at 211-15; Hitchcock at 456-58.

[40] Hitchcock at 458, Thomas at 367.

pressure that his own military and intelligence staffs had been applying to him. He had also been assured once again by the CIA that in the unlikely event the U-2 was shot down, [41] the plane would disintegrate and the pilot would die, either from the blast or by his own hand.

Although he knew the risks, not even Eisenhower could have foreseen how badly the situation would play out. On May 1, he was telephoned at Camp David and told that the U-2 was long overdue at the base in Norway where it was supposed to land. On May 3, a cover story devised by the CIA was released, which said that the missing plane was a high-altitude weather aircraft flying out of Turkey. On May 5, Khrushchev destroyed that story when he announced to the Supreme Soviet that a U.S. aircraft had violated Soviet airspace and been shot down. He blamed this on "Pentagon militarists" who, he said, were determined to sabotage the upcoming summit. In response, the State Department put out a statement sticking with the CIA cover story, but NASA claimed that the downed plane was one of 10 "flying weather laboratories" it operated, that the plane contained no reconnaissance cameras, and that it was flown by a civilian scientist.

On May 7, Khrushchev demolished all of these cover stories when he told the Supreme Soviet that his government had not only recovered parts of the U-2 plane, but that it also had the plane's camera and film, and that the pilot, Gary Powers, was "alive and kicking." Not only that, but Powers had confessed that he was not a weather analyst, but a former air force pilot who worked for the CIA.[42]

When Khrushchev first announced that an American plane had been shot down, Ambassador Thompson had cabled the State Department that he thought by putting the blame on "Pentagon militarists," Khrushchev had left Eisenhower a way out. If the President put the blame for the flight on overzealous subordinates and apologized for the incident, Thompson thought the summit might be able to go forward, even though it would be an embarrassing admission that Eisenhower was not in full control of his government.[43]

But this, of course, was not the path Eisenhower chose. On May 11, he gave a press conference in which he was totally unapologetic about the U-2 flight. He called spying "a distasteful but vital necessity," especially when one was dealing with a country like the Soviet Union that was "capable of massive surprise attacks" and whose leaders made "a fetish of secrecy and concealment."

Although Eisenhower apparently believed that the summit meeting could still proceed, others saw his press conference as nailing the coffin shut. Walter Lippmann wrote that Eisenhower's statement had "transform[ed] the embarrassment of being caught in a spying operation into a direct challenge to the sovereignty of the Soviet Union." And subsequent

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[41] Hitchcock at 459-62. In fact, the CIA knew in early 1960 that Soviet surface-to-air missiles were improving and might be able to hit a U-2, especially if the Soviets knew the flight path.

[42] *Id.* at 462-64.

[43] *Id.* at 464; Taubman at 446, 457-58.

historians have agreed that it would have been a major blow to Soviet sovereignty and prestige if Khrushchev had accepted Eisenhower's statement without protest and continued with the summit.[44]

In any event, that is not what Khrushchev did. When Eisenhower arrived in Paris on May 15, he was told by President de Gaulle that the Soviet leader had insisted on three things before the summit could proceed: an apology for the U-2 flight, a ban on all future overflights, and punishment of those responsible for the U-2 incident. The next morning, at the formal opening of the conference, after Khrushchev had spoken, Eisenhower said that he had already put a stop to future overflights of the Soviet Union, and that the May 1 flight had no aggressive intent, but was intended only to gather intelligence. Eisenhower was silent after Khrushchev demanded an apology. With that, the summit conference that had been 18 months in the making was effectively over.

In his new book on Eisenhower, Hitchcock offers the following unflinching judgment on the U-2 affair:

> . . . [T]he downing of the [U-2] spy plane had a huge impact on [Eisenhower's] presidency and on the cold war itself. It shattered his hopes to bring about a thaw in the war, thereby robbing him of a brilliant achievement in his last months in office. It led to a sharp intensification of cold war hostilities. It undermined all of his efforts to establish himself as a man of peace and goodwill in the eyes of the world's peoples. And it provided his domestic political rivals with powerful ammunition to use against him and his handling of the cold war. In retrospect his decision to approve the U-2 overflights in the spring of 1960 was the biggest mistake he ever made.[45]

My 14th birthday took place a few days after the collapse of the Paris summit conference, and I remember sitting in our dining room that day wondering out loud what was going to happen to the world now. As we know, over the next two and one-half years, U.S.-Soviet relations grew worse, and culminated in the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962. But the events of those years, if and when we revisit them, will have to await another essay.

[44] Hitchcock at 466-67; Gaddis at 74.

[45] *Id*. at 469.