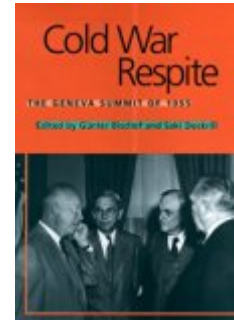


**Gunter Bischof, Saki Dockrill, eds..** *Cold War Respite: The Geneva Summit of 1955*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000. x + 319 pp. \$60.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8071-2370-6.



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### A Very Brief Cold War Respite

While much attention has been devoted to the origins and the numerous conflicts of the Cold War, possibilities for an easing of East-West tensions have received far less scrutiny. Conferences devoted to diplomacy, such as the 1954 Berlin and Geneva conferences and the 1955 Geneva summit, remain underexplored. Gunter Bischof and Saki Dockrill thus make an important contribution to Cold War scholarship with their international history of the 1955 Geneva summit—the first (and last) meeting of the heads of state from the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain, and France during the Cold War. Their edited compilation, *Cold War Respite: The Geneva Summit of 1955*, is comprised of thirteen well-documented essays that examine the American, Soviet, British, French, German, and Austrian perspectives of the summit.

The book focuses on three major themes—the importance of European agency in shaping the summit, the tension between the diverging goals of the Western allies and their determination to present a united front to the Soviets, and the fact that neither side went to Geneva with the inten-

tion of resolving outstanding issues at the cost of undermining their own interests. A fourth theme, not explicitly mentioned yet apparent throughout the essays, is how domestic politics (and especially the internal Soviet power struggle) helped shape the outcome of the summit. While the purported goal of the summit was to address the German problem, European security, and disarmament possibilities, no concrete discussion of these issues occurred. At the same time, all the participants were hopeful that a four-power meeting would provide an opportunity to gradually reduce East-West tensions.

Ernest May provides a short but detailed background chapter on the early Cold War—prior to the summit. Experts may want to skim this chapter since May gives a straightforward narration of early Cold War history, summarizing current scholarship, but providing little new information. May notes three significant events that encouraged Western governments to consider whether diplomacy might offer an alternative to nuclear war: the Soviet peace offensive following Joseph Stalin's death, the induction of West Ger-

many into NATO, and increasing Anglo-American fears of a nuclear war.[1]

May's overview is followed by an analysis of the American approach to Geneva. In "'Trust in the Lord but Keep Your Powder Dry': American Policy Aims at Geneva," Richard Immerman demonstrates that Dwight D. Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles's primary goal regarding Geneva was to avoid the conference altogether, but that this goal proved impossible to achieve given British and French insistence on a summit. In addition to pointing out divisions within the Western alliance, Immerman also compares the competing views within the administration, outlining how Eisenhower, Dulles, and the JCS all had different approaches toward the Soviets. Once the United States had agreed to a conference, Immerman explains, the goal was "to steer the talks away from substantive issues" in order to counter Soviet attempts to divide the allies (p. 49). The JCS and Dulles were particularly opposed to serious negotiations with the Soviets on disarmament issues but believed the United States had to make a pretense for the sake of propaganda and allied solidarity. Eisenhower followed his own plan, ultimately endorsing the "Open Skies" proposal that entailed a system of reciprocal Soviet and American aerial surveillance. Immerman, contrary to other authors in this volume, sees Open Skies as, "not simply another shot in the psychological war but [one which] reflected the president's genuine conviction that both because of and despite East-West distrust and hostility, the effort must be made to try to control nuclear weapons" (p. 54). More evidence and discussion of this claim would have been useful, especially given the differing views presented in the volume.[2]

John Prados also examines American strategy at the summit. His essay "Open Skies and Closed Minds: American Disarmament Policy at the Geneva Summit" assesses Eisenhower's "Open Skies" plan. Along with Immerman and contrary to Gunter Bischof's essay, Prados takes a sympa-

thetic view of Eisenhower's approach to disarmament at the summit. Prados explains why Eisenhower came out with the Open Skies program when he did, noting that Eisenhower was well aware that the U-2 plans (Project AUTOMAT) were nearing completion. Therefore, the American position going into Geneva was that mutual inspection should precede concrete measures of disarmament. According to Prados, the United States gained an advantage in world opinion by offering to reveal its own military secrets through Open Skies. Although the Open Skies proposal was not implemented, Prados gives Eisenhower credit for providing the Russians an opportunity to do something (aerial photography) on a bilateral basis that he knew the United States was going to do unilaterally, through the U-2 (p. 233). In contrast to Vladislav Zubok and Antonio Varsori's assessments, Prados notes that although the plan had begun as a gambit in psychological warfare, the idea that the United States might be willing to reveal secrets to reduce global tensions did build some world confidence. Both Immerman and Prados underscore Eisenhower's agency in determining American strategy for the summit.

As the last contributor to focus on the American perspective, Ronald Pruessen in "From Good Breakfast to Bad Supper: John Foster Dulles between the Geneva Summit and the Geneva Foreign Minister' Conference" emphasizes the importance and complexity of Dulles's role in the period leading up to and following Geneva. Contrary to others in the volume, Pruessen argues that Dulles thought that the conference benefited the West and that he was "engaged and optimistic" following Geneva (p. 270). Pruessen suggests that Dulles's optimism after the summit actually undercut opportunities for either détente or meaningful improvements in Europe. (p. 261) Dulles's focus on an all or nothing approach to the German question made negotiations with the Soviets more difficult since his belief that real breakthroughs were possible led him to a diplomatic style that emphasized pressure rather than negotiations. I

was disappointed that Pruessen did not follow through on his point that "insights into the behavior of others can be gained through an examination of Dulles's interactions with them" (p. 254). Although Pruessen does discuss Dulles's interaction with West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, he did not examine Dulles's relations with British Foreign Secretary Harold Macmillan or French Foreign Minister Antoine Pinay. Such a comparison would have proved helpful in establishing the overall Western attitude after Geneva.

Illustrating another major theme of the compilation, Vladislav Zubok focuses on the importance of domestic divisions in formulating foreign policy. Zubok's main argument in "Soviet Policy Aims at the Geneva Conference, 1955" is that the internal power struggle between Nikita Khrushchev, Georgi Malenkov, and V.M. Molotov influenced Soviet foreign policy regarding the summit. Zubok targets two conflicting impulses. On the one hand, Moscow searched for more effective ways to alleviate domestic and foreign problems. On the other hand, Soviet leaders were constrained by the Stalin cult and official ideology, which resulted in a somewhat erratic foreign policy. According to Zubok, the Soviets' main political goal at the summit was "to overcome the inferiority complex and prove to the country, the world, and themselves that they could deal with the Western powers without being intimidated" (p. 62). The Soviets thus saw the Geneva summit as a psychological success in that they had forced the Americans to talk to them as equal partners, without open intimidation or condescension (p. 72). Drawing on Russian archival sources, Zubok's essay illuminates the murky politics within the Kremlin and provides a compelling argument that the Americans and Soviets were determined to avoid substantive discussion on German reunification.

Antonio Varsori and Saki Dockrill address another theme in the volume by demonstrating the pivotal importance of Britain in shaping Western

strategy for the summit. Antonio Varsori contends that British policy aims for the summit differed markedly from both Soviet and American goals. The primary goal of the United Kingdom was to achieve European security and German reunification. Britain was increasingly concerned over allied behavior, in particular France's reliability and West Germany's political future. The Soviet willingness to resolve the Austrian question was a crucial turning point for London. The British feared that the Soviets were stealing the diplomatic initiative from the West, prompting British Prime Minister Anthony Eden to call for a four-power conference. Varsori points out that although Britain hoped to serve as a bridge between the US and Soviet Union following the summit, this "proved to be wishful thinking." (p. 96) Varsori emphasizes British agency in formulating Western strategy for the conference, highlighting the importance of actors outside Washington and Moscow in shaping Cold War diplomacy.

Similar to Varsori's argument, Saki Dockrill's essay draws attention to London's determination to play a leading role at Geneva. Dockrill provides a detailed and well-substantiated account of the origins of the "Eden Plan," the American response, and why the plan was never implemented. The Eden Plan for the Geneva summit was not an agreed upon Western proposal but established the essential features of the British plan for German reunification and European security. According to Dockrill, Eden was responsible for trying to create a concrete discussion on German reunification at the forefront of the summit, but was subsequently thwarted by both the Americans and the Soviets. In the end, Dockrill argues that Eden became almost obsessed with the question of German reunification and European security, attributing his obsession to a desire to create an independent European detente. According to Dockrill, Eden's determination to impose his plan raised false hopes in Europe and especially in Germany. Although Dockrill is critical of Eden's actions at the summit, more analysis of the motives behind Eden's rea-

soning would have strengthened Dockrill's assessment of the Eden Plan.

Colette Barbier focuses on the last major participant in the summit. Her chapter explores the French dilemma of trying to persuade the Conseil de la République to ratify the Paris accords while simultaneously ensuring that a four-power conference would take place. Barbier contends that France was conscious of its isolation from the North Atlantic Alliance, its defeat in Indochina, its growing difficulties in North Africa, and its vulnerability vis-a-vis the newly independent West Germany. According to Barbier, Paris wanted to use the summit to achieve a psychological and propaganda advantage both at home and abroad and had a number of policy goals. France achieved its first goal of being one of the three inviting nations at the summit. Second, French leaders wanted to resolve the German question and with it the problems of European security. Finally, France hoped to reestablish European unity. While Barbier does a good job setting out French goals, more analysis of the French reaction to the lack of concrete discussion at the summit would have been useful. In addition, readers might appreciate further clarification of who provided more impetus for the conference, the French or the British (especially given Varsori and Dockrill's focus on British agency). Barbier's ultimate conclusion parallels Varsori's in that just as Britain sought to become a bridge between the Soviets and Americans, France would have liked to be the intermediary between the two superpowers. Ultimately, both the French and the British failed in their objective.

Contrary to the previous essays that focused primarily on the Geneva summit, Gunter Bischof's "The Making of the Austrian Treaty and the Road to Geneva" examines Soviet-Austrian negotiations over the Austrian treaty. Bischof argues that the Soviet Union offered Austrian neutrality as a means of preventing Western Austria from being rearmed and integrated with the West. According

to Bischof, and building upon Zubok's analysis of Soviet domestic politics, it appears that the power struggle in the Kremlin and Khrushchev's ascendancy were responsible for the breakthrough in the Austrian treaty standoff. Bischof provides a fairly sympathetic account of Soviet efforts and a rather harsh portrayal of American, and in particular, Eisenhower's actions. Just as Immerman appears to take Eisenhower's "Open Skies" proposal at face value, Bischof suggests that the Soviets, by 1955, were sincere in their peaceful coexistence policy. Bischof indicts Eisenhower as an unbending Cold Warrior, arguing that Eisenhower's determination to wage Cold War led to his failure to respond to the Soviet peace initiative (p. 126). Although Bischof provides a useful corrective to the usual views of Eisenhower as the most willing person in his administration to pursue peace with the Soviets, Bischof has perhaps overstated Eisenhower's Cold Warrior tendencies, at least when compared to those of Dulles and the JCS, as noted by Immerman. Bischof does a very good job of pointing to the interplay between Austrian neutrality and West German rearmament, especially in tracing British and American worries that the Soviet gambit on Austria was made with Germany in mind as the real target (p. 138). Yet given Bischof's numerous works on Austrian-Anglo-American relations in the 1950s, I was disappointed not to find more on the Austrian perspective regarding both the treaty and how Austria viewed preparations for the Geneva Summit.

Although Germany was not invited to the summit, Eckart Conze makes a significant contribution to the volume by stressing Adenauer's influence in helping determine Western strategy. His chapter "No Way Back to Potsdam: The Adenauer Government and the Geneva Summit" examines Adenauer's policy of assuring West German integration into the Atlantic Alliance before negotiations with the Soviet Union over the reunification of Germany could take place. Conze notes that Adenauer was the most pessimistic and cautious of all the Western leaders in his judgement

of Soviet motives and aims, even more so than Dulles. According to Adenauer, "West Germany's firm alliance with the West should not be sacrificed to achieve short-lived successes regarding dtente (p. 197). Conze, along with other authors in the volume, points out that the Soviets had already given up on the idea of German reunification and instead would be satisfied with two separate German states. In the end, Moscow turned out to be Adenauer's best ally at the Geneva summit. By refusing to discuss the question of German reunification and trying to push through disarmament and security measures based on the status quo, the Soviets allowed Adenauer to blame Moscow for the lack of progress on German reunification.

Robert Mark Spaulding tackles an important, but underexplored issue pertaining to the summit: East-West trade. In his essay Spaulding examines why the East-West trade issue, which the Americans believed would be discussed, never arose at the summit. Once again, the issue of the power struggle in the Kremlin emerges as the primary factor as to why events played out at Geneva the way they did. Spaulding argues that uncertainty over the future course of Soviet economic policy explains why the Soviets were reluctant to discuss trade issues at the conference. A discussion of trade issues would have posed significant risks for the United States since Washington continued its practice of strategic export controls. Dulles thought that the prospect of increased Western trade would help moderate Soviet intransigence on other issues but his plan fell flat when the Soviets failed to bring up the issue. Spaulding concludes that the Kremlin power struggle precluded a clear direction to Soviet economic policy.

In the last essay, "The Geneva Conference of Foreign Ministers, October-November 1955: The Acid Test of Dtente," John Young argues that the November foreign ministers' conference failed for a number of reasons. Young points out that Western leaders were well aware that an ultimate fail-

ure at the foreign ministers' level would be far less dangerous than a build up of expectations and subsequent let down at the far more publicized Geneva summit. According to Young, all the subjects on the November agenda were set to produce deadlock. Young notes that no resolution was reached on German reunification, European security, or East-West trade as a result of the unreasonable demands on both sides.

The essays in this compilation clearly demonstrate that as long as the Russians refused to cooperate with the West on the creation of a unified Germany, or as long as the West persisted in the idea of reunifying Germany within NATO, there could be no reunification acceptable to both blocs. Bischof and Dockrill thus place the German question as central in the failure to achieve a lasting peace.[3] The editors acknowledge that the problem with summit conferences is that they always arouse unreasonable expectations. And yet, the Geneva summit did result in at least a temporary reduction of East-West tensions and hence a short-lived respite from the Cold War. The thirteen essays, substantiated with thorough primary and secondary research, demonstrate why serious negotiations did not occur at the Geneva summit and why the "Spirit of Geneva" lingered so briefly.

#### Notes

[1]. In October 1954 the signing of the Paris agreements led to the creation of the Western European Union and to West Germany's admission to NATO. The German Bundestag ratified the treaties in February 1955 and the French Conseil de la Republique approved the treaties in late March 1955.

[2]. Vladislav Zubok sees the Open Skies program as a propaganda tool as does Antonio Varsoi (pp. 73-74, 95). John Prados, while recognizing that Open Skies began as a psychological warfare proposal, provides a more nuanced treatment of the proposal (pp. 215-233).

[3]. Marc Trachtenberg's *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement*,

*1945-1963* (New Jersey: Princeton, 1999) provides a detailed account of the centrality of the German question in the Cold War.

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