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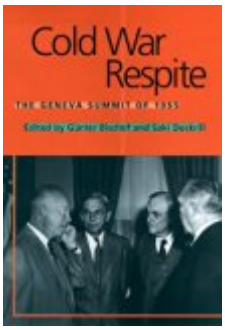

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Creating an Illusory Peace

Although the Cold War ended only a decade ago, historians have already produced a formidable body of scholarship that has enhanced our understanding of the origins of the Cold War and how it shaped political, economic, and cultural life in various parts of the world. But despite the voluminous (and growing) number of works on these subjects, Gunter Bischof and Saki Dockrill charge that scholars have overlooked the importance of international summit talks during the Cold War. As editors of *Cold War Respite: The Geneva Summit of 1955*, Bischof and Dockrill have addressed this lack by compiling a series of high quality essays that examine the origins of the 1955 Geneva conference, the aims of the participants, and their failure to produce an enduring détente.

Cold War Respite opens with Ernest R. May's introductory essay on the background of the early Cold War. Although Cold War specialists will find no surprises here, May provides a concise and informative overview that readers unfamiliar with the period will find valuable. The work proceeds with four essays that examine the policy aims of the major participants at the Geneva conference: The United States, Soviet Union, Great Britain, and France. In the first of these, "Trust the Lord but Keep Your Powder Dry: American Policy Aims at Geneva," Richard H. Immerman argues that U.S. officials resisted European pressure for summit talks until Moscow's sudden willingness to neutralize Austria made further resistance politically unwise. Yet neither Eisenhower nor Dulles expected the Soviets to negotiate in good faith. The latter worried that the Kremlin would attempt to seduce Western Europeans, giddy in their hopes to end the Cold War, into signing agreements detrimental to long-term western interests. Since American policymakers did not believe that the summit would yield significant results, they sought to avoid substantive debates, thereby sidestepping detailed discussions of any Soviet proposals deemed potentially divisive to western unity. The administration's low expectations for Geneva, Immerman rightly concludes, became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The practice of tentative and uninspired diplomacy, Vladislav M. Zubok explains, was not unique to Washington policymakers. In "Soviet Policy Aims at the Geneva Conference," Zubok argues that the political infighting that followed Joseph Stalin's death in 1953 hindered efforts to achieve a lasting détente with the west. Although the new Kremlin leaders wanted to reform the Stalinist system, Zubok argues that they found it difficult to do so without undermining the system that confirmed their own legitimacy.

Zubok argues that Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev believed that he needed to re-establish the Soviet Union's credentials as leader of the Communist world -- particularly in the eyes of the People's Republic of China. Hence, the Kremlin viewed Geneva as an opportunity to gauge America's actual commitment to its stated policy of "massive retaliation" and demonstrate that Moscow would stand firm in the face of Eisenhower's saber rattling. Zubok stresses that Soviet diplomacy was heavily influenced by Khrushchev's desire to consolidate his political power, rather than by any intellectual vision of Moscow's role in the world. This is an intriguing and persuasive argument, but one wishes that Zubok had further developed his assertion that Khrushchev "never quite grasped" the sophisticated concepts of statesmanship (p. 59).

According to Antonio Varsori, British officials approached the Geneva conference with greater expectations than their Soviet and American counterparts. His "British Policy Aims at Geneva" observes that London policymakers were initially lukewarm about a future summit, as they viewed their French, German, and American allies as unreliable partners at best. But British officials reappraised their position after Moscow suddenly agreed to resolve the Austrian question. Suspicious that Germany might now reassess its allegiance with the west, London officials decided to support summit talks before western unity deteriorated. British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden consequently tried to forge a constructive dialogue with the USSR at Geneva, but since neither the Soviets nor Americans shared Eden's willingness to discuss Germany, Varsori argues that Eden's efforts were doomed to fail.

London's doubts regarding its western allies were not completely unjustified. As Colette Barbier notes in "French Policy Aims at Geneva," the recent French defeat in Indochina, its rejection of the EDC, and growing problems in Algeria had left French prestige in tatters by 1955. Officials in Paris therefore viewed participating in the Geneva talks as a chance to revive France's stature as a global power. But although the French delegation to Geneva arrived with far-reaching proposals on disarmament, European security, improving East-West contacts, and large-scale foreign aid to underdeveloped nations, these ideas were largely ignored by the other powers. Barbier argues that while the French proposals were well formulated (and in some cases, visionary) they were also irrelevant to the concerns of the superpowers. She concludes that while Paris was able to retain the appearance of great power status by participating in the conference, in the final analysis, the Soviets and Americans "did not need the participation of either Great Britain or France" (p. 18).

The remainder of the essays further explores issues raised in the first half of the book. Gunter Bischof's "The Making of the Austrian Treaty and the Road to Geneva," explains that Moscow's reluctance to discuss Austria resulted from its fear of German rearmament. Hence, the conclusion of the 1954 Paris agreements prompted Nikita Khrushchev to agree to neutralize Austria rather than see it follow West Germany into the western camp.

Western European leaders, meanwhile, disputed the ramifications of the Austrian treaty. Whereas German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer feared that Moscow would use Austria as a precedent for German reunification, his British and French counterparts rejected Adenauer's suspi-

cions of Soviet duplicity, countering that the Austrian Treaty demonstrated that the Soviets could be reasonable. Bischof concludes that the arguments of the latter were highly significant in convincing a reluctant Washington to concede to direct talks with the Soviet Union.

Saki Dockrill's "The Eden Plan and European Security" provides an expanded analysis of Anthony Eden's failed effort to devise a mutually acceptable German reunification plan. If successful, Eden believed that London would benefit from both an easing of tensions and from the prestige accompanying Britain's new role as mediator to the superpowers. But Dockrill confirms Varsori's assertion that neither Washington nor Moscow had any real interest in discussing German reunification at Geneva. Dockrill portrays Eden as a somewhat naïve statesman whose efforts only raised "false hopes [for détente] in Europe and especially in Germany" (p. 189).

Although West Germany did not participate directly in the Geneva summit, Eckart Conze reminds us that no country had a greater stake in the deliberations. In "No Way Back to Potsdam: The Adenauer Government and the Geneva Summit," Conze explains that Adenauer worried that his allies would agree to a permanent division of Germany as the price for a wider détente. To stave off such a disaster, Adenauer tried to persuade London and Paris that long-term stability would elude Europe if they agreed to partition Germany. But Conze points out that when Moscow later accepted West Germany's entry into NATO, Adenauer's efforts to maintain the idea of eventual reunification ran counter to "the de facto existence of two German states" after Geneva (p. 213).

John Prados provides a detailed analysis of Eisenhower's disarmament proposal in "Open Skies and Closed Minds: American Disarmament Policy at the Geneva Summit." Although Eisenhower depicted Open Skies as "an idea that might open a tiny gate in the disarmament fence," Prados explains that Eisenhower viewed the proposal as a way to wage psychological warfare rather than as a way to promote actual disarmament (p. 225). Aware that the new U-2 spy plane would soon provide detailed intelligence on Soviet military capabilities, Eisenhower could propose Open Skies without compromising national security. Prados concludes that Open Skies indeed contributed to a fleeting "spirit of Geneva," and he ends with a mild criticism that the Eisenhower administration failed to seize upon the goodwill created at Geneva as an opportunity for further, more substantial disarmament talks.

Unlike disarmament, East-West trade relations, Robert Mark Spaulding notes (in his contribution entitled "East-West Trade at the Geneva Summit") never developed into a significant issue at Geneva. Although western countries agreed to restrict exports to the Soviet bloc during the late 1940s, Europeans had resisted American appeals to tighten the controls. The Truman and Eisenhower administrations, in turn, had difficulty responding to these complaints with a single voice. Moreover, both presidents faced congressional efforts (such as the 1951 Battle Act) to link American economic aid to European deference to stricter export controls. Since these efforts predictably sparked great irritation in Western Europe, U.S. officials feared that their European allies might be receptive to Soviet calls to end export controls at Geneva. However, Spaulding explains that East-West trade issues faded in importance in 1955, when a Western European economic boom made access to Soviet markets less important. After scrutinizing Soviet behavior during the Geneva summit, the mid-1955 Soviet/Adenauer talks, and the 1955 Geneva foreign minister's meeting, Spaulding concludes that the Soviets were less interested in trade issues than might have been expected. Like Zubok, Spaulding contends that internal political conflicts preoccupied Soviet leaders during 1955, distracting them from other issues.

In "From Good Breakfast to Bad Supper: John Foster Dulles between the Geneva Summit and the Geneva Foreign Minister's Conference," Ronald Pruessen argues that Dulles departed Geneva believing that the USSR's willingness to negotiate demonstrated that it had dangerously overextended its reach. Dulles subsequently practiced obstinacy over accommodation, declaring that if Moscow wanted détente, it must agree to German reunification and European security on western terms. Pruessen's account is a welcome addition to recent literature on Dulles that rejects depicting the secretary as a dour, one-dimensional anti-communist. While Pruessen confirms that Dulles possessed a crusading spirit, he convincingly argues that the secretary was a more complex thinker than scholars have acknowledged.

Several of the contributors to ***Cold War Respite*** point to a significant, albeit short-lived détente as the most important achievement of the conference. But the real measure of the "spirit of Geneva," John W. Young reminds us in the final essay, "The Geneva Conference of Foreign Ministers, October-November 1955: The Acid Test of Détente," was the later Conference of Foreign Ministers. Young finds that the Foreign Ministers' meeting failed because the participants could not paper over their fundamental differences as they had at the summit. Since both East and West held irreconcilable views on major issues such as German reunification, Young concludes that the conference quickly became "an interesting case study of complete deadlock" (p. 273).

Each of the contributors provide thoroughly researched, sophisticated accounts that shed light on the internal disputes that accompanied policymaking in each country. Immerman, for example, depicts a moderate Eisenhower who, with varying degrees of success, fended off elements within his administration who preferred to browbeat the Soviets rather than negotiate with them. In like vein, Prados portrays Eisenhower's success in pushing the Open Skies proposal as a victory (albeit coming in hidden-hand fashion) over less enlightened internal opposition. Bischof, on the other hand, claims that Eisenhower was more sympathetic to Joseph McCarthy's hawkish brand of anti-communism. While Eisenhower scholars may question this assertion, it is well to note that Bischof still distances Eisenhower from Republican "extremists" who "roped" Eisenhower into denouncing Yalta during the 1952 campaign (p. 127).

Political scholars will be equally intrigued by the analysis of political debates and dissention in countries beyond the United States. In the USSR, Zubok sees "state leaders and bureaucrats" trying to assert their views over their "ideologist" opponents (p. 60). In France and Germany, successful policymaking depended upon satisfying the conflicting interests between international allies and domestic interests. Regardless of the particulars described in the various essays, all do well to illuminate how domestic considerations influenced the shaping of international policies. Foreign policy, as Immerman observes, was by no means monolithic.

Another recurring theme in the work concerns the efforts of Western European nations to act independently in a world dominated by the superpowers. As Bischof suggests, Britain and French officials successfully used the Austrian State Treaty as a means to pressure their American counterparts into attending a superpower conference. So too did London and Paris seize upon the opportunity provided by Geneva to regain some measure of national prestige stripped away by the Second World War. But although European agency was evident in making the Geneva conference a reality, it seems that this agency was quite limited. As the various contributors note, none of the participants at Geneva (save perhaps for Anthony Eden) believed that any important issues could be solved at the conference. And since both Moscow and Washington regarded the summit as a vehicle for propaganda rather than negotiations, it appears that all the Western Europeans

could hope from the summit was that the "spirit of Geneva" would prove to be enduring.

Although the resultant détente proved to be fleeting, the contributors to the volume argue that the "spirit of Geneva" was by no means irrelevant. Yet given the extensive references to the "spirit of Geneva" and its subsequent importance, the term itself merits closer scrutiny than is provided. If, as the editors claim, the conference had "psychological effects...of immense significance," a deeper discussion of these effects seems essential (p. 19). How did the spirit of Geneva vary from country to country? Did it persist longer in some areas as opposed to others? The most provoking remarks in this regard come from Barbier, who observes that the French public paid scant attention to the effusive praise Parisian officials bestowed upon their efforts at Geneva. Further analysis of the nature and extent of public interest in the summit, and how it varied from country to country, would have further enriched the volume.

This is but a minor complaint in an otherwise impressive achievement. The various perspectives provided in *Cold War Respite* explain that while the sundry participants at Geneva genuinely hoped to reduce international tensions, the fundamental differences between East and West on matters such as German reunification were wide enough that the "spirit of Geneva" remained more rhetoric than reality. Each of the essays is in itself a thought provoking work that, taken collectively, enrich our understanding of the goals and development of Cold War diplomacy, and suggest why, all too often, it met with only limited success.