

Radio and television broadcast by Dwight D. Eisenhower (25 July 1955)

Caption: On 25 July 1955, two days after the end of the Geneva Conference, President Dwight D. Eisenhower addresses the American people and gives an initial account of the East-West dialogue.

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Appraising the Conference at the “Summit”. Radio-Television Address by the President, July 25, 1955.

Good Evening Friends:

Secretary Dulles and I, with our associates, went to the Big Four Conference at Geneva resolved to represent as accurately as we could the aspirations of the American people for peace and the principles upon which this country believes that peace should be based.

In this task we had the bipartisan, indeed almost the unanimous, support of the Congress. This fact greatly strengthened our hand throughout the negotiations. Our grateful thanks go out to all your Senators and your Congressmen in the United States Congress. Aside from this, we had, during the past week, thousands of telegrams of encouragement and support from you as individuals. Along with these came similar telegrams from great organizations, church organizations, business and great labor organizations.

All of these combined served to make us feel that possibly we were faithfully representing the views that you would have us represent. Now peace — the pursuit of peace — involves many perplexing questions. For example:

Justice to all nations, great and small;

Freedom and security for all these nations;

The prosperity of their several economies and a rising standard of living in the world;

Finally, opportunity for all of us to live in peace and in security.

Now, naturally, in the study of such questions as these, we don't proceed recklessly. We must go prudently and cautiously — both in reaching conclusions and in subsequent action. We cannot afford to be negligent or complacent. But, we must be hopeful. We must have faith in ourselves and in the justice of our cause. If we don't do this, we will allow our own pessimism and our own lack of faith to defeat the noblest purposes that we can pursue.

Now, because of the vital significance of all these subjects, they will be exhaustively surveyed by our government over a period of many weeks. Tonight the most that I can give to you are a few personal impressions and opinions that may have some interest for you and certainly have some bearing on the outcome and on the progress of those negotiations.

Of course, an interesting subject that could be taken up, had I the time, would be the personalities of the several delegations, the relationship or apparent relationships of one to the other— the principal considerations that seem to motivate them. These would all have a bearing on this problem. But I forego them and take up instead just two general opinions in which I am sure every American shares:

The first of these, that we must never be deluded into believing that one week of friendly, even fruitful, negotiation can wholly eliminate a problem arising out of the wide gulf that separates, so far, East and West. A gulf as wide and deep as the difference between individual liberty and regimentation, as wide and deep as the gulf that lies between the concept of man made in the image of his God and the concept of man as a mere instrument of the State. Now, if we think of those things we are apt to be possibly discouraged.

But I was also profoundly impressed with the need for all of us to avoid discouragement merely because our own proposals, our own approaches, and our own beliefs are not always immediately accepted by the other side.

On the night I left for Geneva, I appeared before the television to explain to you what we were seeking. I told you that we were going primarily to attempt to change the spirit in which these great negotiations and

conferences were held. A transcript was made of that talk, and I should like now to read you one paragraph from it.

This is what I said with respect to our purpose: "We realize that one ingredient has been missing from all past conferences. This is an honest intent to conciliate, to understand, to be tolerant, to try to see the other fellow's viewpoint as well as we see our own. I say to you if we can change the spirit in which these conferences are conducted, we will have taken the greatest step toward peace, toward future prosperity and tranquility that has ever been taken in all the history of mankind."

During last week in formal conferences, and in personal visits, these purposes have been pursued. So now there exists a better understanding, a closer unity among the nations of NATO.

There seems to be a growing realization by all that nuclear warfare, pursued to the ultimate, could be practically race suicide.

There is a realization that negotiations can be conducted without propaganda and threats and invective.

Finally, there is a sharp realization by the world that the United States will go to any length consistent with our concepts of decency and justice and right to attain peace. For this purpose, we will work cooperatively with the Soviets and any other people as long as there is sincerity of purpose and a genuine desire to go ahead.

In the course of carrying on these discussions there were a number of specific proposals, some of which were items on the official agenda. That agenda contained German reunification and European security, disarmament and increased contacts of all kinds between the East and the West.

Most of these conference meetings were given wide publicity and even some of the specific suggestions made in those conferences likewise were publicized. In any event, I can assure you of one thing:

There were no secret agreements made, either understood agreements or written ones. Everything is put before you on the record.

Outside of these conference meetings there were numerous unofficial meetings — conversations with important members of the other delegations and, of course, very specifically with the Soviet delegation.

In these conversations a number of subjects were discussed and among them the Secretary of State and I specifically brought up, more than once, American convictions and American beliefs and American concern about such questions as the satellites of Eastern Europe and the activities of international Communism. We made crystal clear what were American beliefs about such matters as these.

Now to take up for a moment the items on the official agenda.

Probably no question caused us as much trouble as that of German reunification and European security. At first we thought that these could be dealt with separately, but the American delegation concluded that they had to be dealt with as one subject. We held that Germany should be reunited under a government freely chosen by themselves, and under conditions that would provide security both for nations of the East and for nations of the West — in fact in a framework that provided European security.

In the matter of disarmament, the American government believes that an effective disarmament system can be reached only if at its base there is an effective reciprocal inspection and overall supervision system, one in which we can have confidence and each side can know that the other side is carrying out his commitments. Now because of this belief, we joined with the French and the British in making several proposals. Some were global, some were local, some were sort of budgetary in character. But all were in furtherance of this one single objective, that is, to make inspection the basis of disarmament proposals.

One proposal suggested aerial photography, as between the Soviets and ourselves by unarmed peaceful planes, and to make this inspection just as thorough as this kind of reconnaissance can do. The principal purpose, of course, is to convince every one of Western sincerity in seeking peace. But another idea was this: if we could go ahead and establish this kind of an inspection as initiation of an inspection system we could possibly develop it into a broader one, and eventually build on it an effective and durable disarmament system.

In the matter of increasing contacts, many items were discussed. We talked about a freer flow of news across the curtains of all kinds. We talked about the circulation of books and particularly we talked about peaceful trade. But the subject that took most of our attention in this regard was the possibility of increased visits by the citizens of one country into the territory of another, doing this in such a way as to give each the fullest possible opportunity to learn about the people of the other nation. In this particular subject there was the greatest possible degree of agreement. As a matter of fact, it was agreement often repeated and enthusiastically supported by the words of the members of each side.

As a matter of fact, each side assured the other earnestly and often that it intended to pursue a new spirit of conciliation and cooperation in its contacts with the other. Now, of course, we are profoundly hopeful that these assurances will be faithfully carried out.

One evidence as to these assurances will, of course, be available soon in the language and the terminology in which we will find speeches and diplomatic exchanges couched. But the acid test should begin next October because then the next meeting occurs. It will be a meeting of the Foreign Ministers. Its principal purpose will be to take the conclusions of this conference as to the subjects to be discussed there and the general proceedings to be observed in translating those generalities that we talked about into actual, specific agreements. Then is when real conciliation and some giving on each side will be definitely necessary.

Now, for myself, I do not belittle the obstacles lying ahead on the road to a secure and just peace. By no means do I underestimate the long and exhausting work that will be necessary before real results are achieved. I do not blink the fact that all of us must continue to sacrifice for what we believe to be best for the safety of ourselves and for the preservation of the things in which we believe.

But I do know that the people of the world want peace. Moreover, every other individual who was at Geneva likewise felt this longing of mankind. So, there is great pressure to advance constructively, not merely to reenact the dreary performances, the negative performances of the past.

We, all of us, individually and as a people now have possibly the most difficult assignment of our nation's history. Likewise, we have the most shining opportunity ever possessed by Americans. May these truths inspire, never dismay us.

I believe that only with prayerful patience, intelligence, courage and tolerance, never forgetting vigilance and prudence, can we keep alive the spark ignited at Geneva. But if we are successful in this, then we will make constantly brighter the lamp that will one day guide us to our goal — a just and lasting peace.

Thank you. Good night to each of you.