

Europe Sighs With Relief at Superpowers' Shift to Sobriety

By JOSEF JOFFE

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MUNICH, West Germany—How did the "Ron and Mike Show" play in Passau, the Bavarian equivalent of Peoria? Judging from some of the local press here, the Geneva summit ran a close second to Moses coming down from the mountain. "World Breathes Sigh of Relief," one headline proclaimed; "At Last They Talked— We May Hope Again," another trumpeted.

For Europeans sitting on the sidelines of Cold War II (circa 1979-1985), the Soviet-American summit spelled salvation just by virtue of its existence. Unlike many Americans who felt cheated by the decade of detente and arms control, most Europeans positively enjoyed the 1970s.

For them, Angola and Afghanistan were faraway places and the new Cold War, triggered by Soviet forays into these areas, was not really theirs. In Europe the Soviets remained on their best behavior—if you ignore such "minor" transgressions as their buildup with SS-20 missiles in the European theater throughout the '70s.

Trouble started in earnest when Ronald Reagan moved to reverse America's long decline from power—with Pershing 2 and cruise missiles, but also with rhetorical flourishes that suggested an imminent clash of the two nuclear giants. Confusing the sound and the fury with the real thing, the Europeans wished for nothing more devoutly than for a speedy resumption of the Soviet-American dialogue. They got that this week—hence their collective sigh of relief.

So much for the symbols. What about the new reality—if any? Descending from the mountain, Reagan and Mikhail S. Gorbachev presented the world with a long "Joint Declaration" strong on desirables but short on "how-to-get-there" details. Nor should this come as a surprise. Summits, as postwar history demonstrates, do not engen-

der agreement; at best they ratify what the sherpas have previously slugged out in long and arduous negotiations.

The "Joint Declaration" contains the usual suspects. We shall have new consulates in New York and Kiev. Air traffic between the two countries will be resumed. The environment was also deemed worthy of "consultation" and "cooperation." Ditto the fight against cancer. And of course there will be scholarships, student exchanges, sports events and—one must assume—the inevitable Bolshoi Ballet at the Kennedy Center.

The items on this laundry list are neither good (as liberals hope because they evoke a new beginning) nor bad (as conservatives fear because they might lull the populace into a false sense of security). They are just the daily fare of diplomats hard pressed to come up with more solid things to show. The real significance of the Reagan-Gorbachev summit lies elsewhere.

Compare the Geneva parley with its predecessors. One of them, the Paris summit in 1960, ended in a noisy fracas when Nikita S. Khrushchev decided to portray Gary Powers' U-2 overflight as a calculated affront and stormed out of the meeting mumbling dark threats. The good news was that this meeting did not spawn any miscalculations or false hopes—as virtually all the later ones would.

A year later Khrushchev thought that he had put the fear of God into John F. Kennedy in Vienna, only to find out in 1962 that J.F.K. would rather go to war than to suffer a Soviet missile base in Cuba. In the early 1970s a whole slew of Soviet-American embraces suggested friendship evermore. Instead we got Soviet opportunism in the Third World and a fierce American reaction to an "oversold detente"—and never more violent than in the aftermath of the Soviet plunge into Afghanistan, six months after

Jimmy Carter and Leonid I. Brezhnev had sealed SALT II with fraternal kisses in Vienna.

This week's summit was worth the effort not because it came up with any cosmic breakthroughs but precisely because it did *not*. Rather than false harmony, which is impossible among two nations that can annihilate each other, the summit celebrated a new sobriety that was glaringly absent both in the detente-minded '70s and the chilly first half of the '80s.

From the President we got a "dialogue for peace," tempered by "strength" and "realism." And this suggests that Reagan has relinquished a classic American dream—not to deal with the Soviet Union as it is but to transform a noxious system through the sheer weight of American power.

From Gorbachev we got even more astounding signals. Quoting Lord Palmerston, that most conservative of Britain's 19th-Century leaders, the general secretary presented a Soviet Union that was eons removed from Khrushchev's shoe-banging, "we-shall-bury-you" tirades of yore. It seems, then, that both nations have shelved their fondest dreams. The basic message from the mountain is: We shall not try to bury capitalism/undo the "evil empire" but do business. Nor shall we succumb to the opposite hubris of false euphoria.

As far as "new beginnings" go, that blend of modesty and sobriety augurs well—certainly better than sentimental embraces or proclamations of "peace in our time." There is no millennium in the offing but, as Reagan put it before his departure, "there's hard work ahead."

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