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Author(s): Ernest R. May

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America's Berlin

Heart of the Cold War

Ernest R. May

For the United States, the high Cold War commenced with the blockade imposed on Berlin by the Red Army and, in response, the American and British airlift of supplies in 1948–49. Ordinary Americans then began to think major war a real possibility. That phase of the Cold War came to its climax in 1961–62 with the sudden building of the Berlin Wall and a gunbarrel-to-gunbarrel face-off between American and Soviet tanks at an undistinguished urban intersection known as Checkpoint Charlie; then, most terrifying of all, came a crisis ostensibly about Soviet missiles in Cuba but at least equally about Berlin.

Détente was reached at the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s when the American and Soviet governments and those of the two Germanies accepted the division of Germany and of Berlin as facts to be lived with. The Cold War passed into history when the Wall came down in 1989 and Berlin once again became a united city. For Americans, the Cold War always had Berlin at its center. Without the continuing commitment to

West Berlin, their experience of those decades could have been different—possibly better, but possibly much, much worse.

ANATOMY OF A DIVISION

At the end of World War II, Americans were determined to dictate the peace from Berlin, capital of the despised adversary. They believed it had been a mistake not to have done so in World War I. This belief contributed to U.S. insistence on unconditional surrender by the Nazi regime. It also contributed to wartime agreements regarding postwar occupation zones of defeated Germany. Because the zones' boundaries were drawn on the basis of estimates of where Western and Soviet armies would meet up, the prospective Soviet zone included Berlin and much surrounding territory. The inter-Allied agreements provided nonetheless that the United States, Britain, and France would each be responsible for one of four sectors in Berlin. All the victorious nations could thus presume to be present

ERNEST R. MAY is Charles Warren Professor of History at Harvard University and author, most recently, of *The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House during the Cuban Missile Crisis*.

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in the enemy capital when terms for the future of Germany were laid down.

The final summit conference of the war took place in the summer of 1945 at Potsdam, on the outskirts of Berlin. Bombing had rendered the city almost unrecognizable. Much given to thinking of the present by analogy with the past, President Harry Truman likened Berlin to Carthage. In July 1945 he presided when an American flag was raised over the U.S. headquarters building in Berlin. He would surely have been startled to be told that such a flag would fly until September 1994, when the Four Power military occupation of the city formally ended.

In a breathtakingly short time, the United States evolved from a conqueror of Berlin to the city's protector. Something similar occurred in the relationship with West Germany. American occupation authorities became committed to the economic recovery and political rehabilitation of both Berlin and Germany. In part, this was because the passions of war quickly burned out. Suffering among the German people aroused the compassion of American soldiers and relief workers. As Germans acquired faces and ceased to be simply the enemy, it became easy for Americans to believe that war crimes trials would rid Germany of its devils. In part, too, of course, policy shifted because of the developing rivalry with the Soviet Union. Americans in Germany and in Washington became keen that Western-occupied territory not slip behind what Winston Churchill famously termed the "iron curtain." Knowing something of the brutal despoliation in Soviet occupation zones, American and British authorities hoped to set a different example in theirs. The twin motives of holding off the Soviets

and providing concrete evidence of differences in values worked especially strongly in Berlin, where the Soviet and Western approaches were on daily display.

THE FIRST TEST

The 1948-49 blockade tested America's commitment to West Berlin. The vulnerability of Berlin—located some 100 miles inside the Soviet zone—was obvious on any map. Military planners had studied for some time the possibility of an outright Soviet seizure of the city. That the United States and Britain had demobilized nearly all wartime forces sat heavily on their minds. The counterparts of Willie and Joe, the stubbled GIs of Bill Mauldin's classic newspaper cartoons, had long since gone home. The U.S. troops in Germany and Berlin were mostly green recruits with no combat experience and little combat training. The entire U.S. Army strategic reserve consisted of two and one-third divisions.

Given intelligence estimates that the Red Army had 175 divisions with forward units still in fighting trim, U.S. planners warned that the Western position in Berlin was militarily untenable. General Omar Bradley, the army chief of staff, suggested withdrawing U.S. forces from Berlin before the Soviets put on a squeeze. This, he argued, was preferable to being forced out under pressure, as it would "minimize loss of prestige."

Truman and his secretary of state, George Marshall, rejected that advice. Instead, they pursued efforts to bolster the economies of West Germany and West Berlin, to bind the two more tightly to the West, and to make more manifest the contrast between conditions in the west and in the east. Despite repeated

and increasingly emphatic Soviet protests, accompanied by measures designed as reminders that the Red Army controlled West Berlin's lifelines, the three Western powers announced reforms in June 1948 that joined their occupation zones in Germany and Berlin as an economic unit and, through the introduction of a new currency, blocked the Soviets from continuing to extract reparations from Western zones as well as their own.

Within days the Soviets responded with their blockade—a complete cutoff of road and rail traffic into West Berlin. Here was the crucial moment of the early Cold War. Pentagon officials reiterated to Truman the judgment that Berlin could not be defended. Admiral William D. Leahy, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, inclined to Bradley's view. He wrote in his diary: "American military position in Berlin is hopeless . . . It would be advantageous to United States prospects to withdraw from Berlin." But General Lucius D. Clay, American military governor of Germany and commander of U.S. occupation forces in Europe, called instead for open defiance. He recommended a 200-truck convoy escorted by tanks and infantry. "It is our view," wrote Clay of the Soviets, "that they are bluffing and that their hand can and should be called now."

Truman and Marshall were not of Bradley's and Leahy's mind. Truman said to his advisers, "We're staying. Period." At the same time, he and Marshall rejected Clay's drastic recommendation. They also rejected a third option—that of retracting the currency reform and returning to the bargaining table. Marshall described U.S. policy as "firm" but "unprovocative." He announced that the United

States and other Western powers would, to the extent of their capacity, supply West Berlin by airlift.

The U.S. Air Force and Britain's Royal Air Force, however, estimated that available airlift could meet only a fraction of West Berlin's needs for supplies and fuel. If the Soviets did not relent soon, it appeared, the Americans and their allies would have to evacuate the city, try an armed probe such as Clay had earlier proposed, or back down on currency reform.

West Berliners' defiance of the Soviets was making any form of retreat increasingly unattractive. In addition to imposing the blockade, the Soviet commander in Berlin cut off electricity to western sectors of the city and demanded that Berliners refuse to use the new currency. The Berlin City Assembly, meeting in the Soviet sector and surrounded by Stalin's troops, rejected the order. Some 80,000 Berliners rallied the next day to applaud the assembly's action. Soviet authorities offered full rations to West Berliners who would register as their supporters; only a handful signed up. When the Soviets then interfered with the City Assembly and other noncommunist organizations, an estimated quarter of a million Berliners demonstrated in Reichstag Square. Appropriately, since Social Democrats were the strongest political group in West Berlin, it was the British Labour government's foreign secretary, Ernest Bevin, who spoke for the Western alliance. Bevin declared: "We cannot abandon those stouthearted Berlin democrats who are refusing to bow to Soviet pressure."

Meanwhile, the American and British air forces uncovered new airlift capabilities. Transport and cargo planes from the war came out of mothballs. Showing the

determination and managerial skill that would before long make the U.S. Strategic Air Command one of the most efficient military forces in history, General Curtis LeMay organized round-the-clock flights into and out of Berlin. At the airlift's peak, U.S. C-54s and British Dakotas landed and took off from Tempelhof, Tegel, and Gatow airports once a minute on average, 24 hours a day, unloading daily the equivalent of the cargo of two dozen normal freight trains. The airlift kept West Berlin well supplied for the many months until Stalin signaled willingness to call off the blockade and finally did so in September 1949. Together, the prudent resoluteness of Western governments, the courage and unity of West Berliners, and the logistic success of the airlift prevented the disappearance of West Berlin into the Soviet sphere.

The blockade and airlift catalyzed an American-European military alliance. True, the Brussels Pact of March 1948 had already united Western Europe for defense against the Soviets, and almost everyone anticipated some American backup guarantee, though not necessarily in the form of the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty. True, too, the continuing Soviet military build-up, the Korean conflict of 1950-53, and the consequent militarization of the United States and of U.S. foreign policy accounted for the configuration of NATO as it eventually emerged. Nonetheless, it was the successful defense of West Berlin in 1948-49 that made the security interests of the United States and those of Western Europe effectively inseparable, at least while the Soviet Union remained powerful and hostile.

The outcome of the first Berlin crisis locked the United States into maintaining

an apparently permanent garrison in the most exposed sector of the European continent. So long as this was the case, there could be no question that if an East-West conflict broke out in Europe, the United States would be fully engaged from the very first moment. Until the end of the Cold War, the U.S. commitment to defend West Berlin would differ in no material way from the commitment to defend New York or Los Angeles.

ALTERNATIVE ENDINGS

Given the tendency among scholars to write of the Cold War as if its course and outcome were predetermined and should have been predictable, it is worth pausing for a moment to note how easily this first Berlin crisis could have had a different history.

Individuals were important. If Truman had been a more timid man—one more like Jimmy Byrnes, his secretary of state before Marshall, or Adlai Stevenson, his chosen and defeated successor—he might have reasoned as Bradley and Leahy did. Had he not heard the cautious counsel of Marshall, Under Secretary of State Robert Lovett, and George Kennan of the State Department Policy Planning Staff, he might have acted belligerently, as Clay recommended. Marshall's and Kennan's successors, Dean Acheson and Paul Nitze, would probably have encouraged him to do so. And without the organizing genius of LeMay, Truman would probably have had to choose an alternative policy, for the airlift would not have kept West Berlin alive through the winter.

Important in retrospect is the paradox that Western strength grew from military weakness. A U.S. commander warned that his garrison in Berlin could be overrun

"before you could say 'Politburo.'" A British general, so it was said at the time, was asked what the Russians would need to reach the Pyrenees and the Atlantic; he replied, "Shoes." This state of affairs lent force to the argument made in all Western capitals that West Germany was just about as indefensible as West Berlin. That was Clay's stated reason for dismissing the notion of preemptive withdrawal. "After Berlin will come Western Germany," he wrote, "and our strength there is relatively no greater and our position no more tenable than Berlin." If the boundary of West Germany had been thought more defensible, the proposal to pull the Berlin garrison back to that line might have had more appeal.

Finally, it is surely significant that the Soviet Union had not yet successfully tested a nuclear device. Truman's resoluteness during the crisis and that of the British government as well owed something to faith in America's strategic superiority over the U.S.S.R. and to a presumption that fear of bombing, especially atomic bombing, would deter Stalin from letting matters get out of hand. Clay based his recommendation for an armed convoy in part on this argument. "They are definitely afraid of our air might," he declared. If either Soviet disinformation or misjudgment by Western intelligence services had given rise to belief that the Soviets already had nuclear weapons, political leaders in Washington and London, and perhaps in West Germany and West Berlin, could well have seen the issues differently.

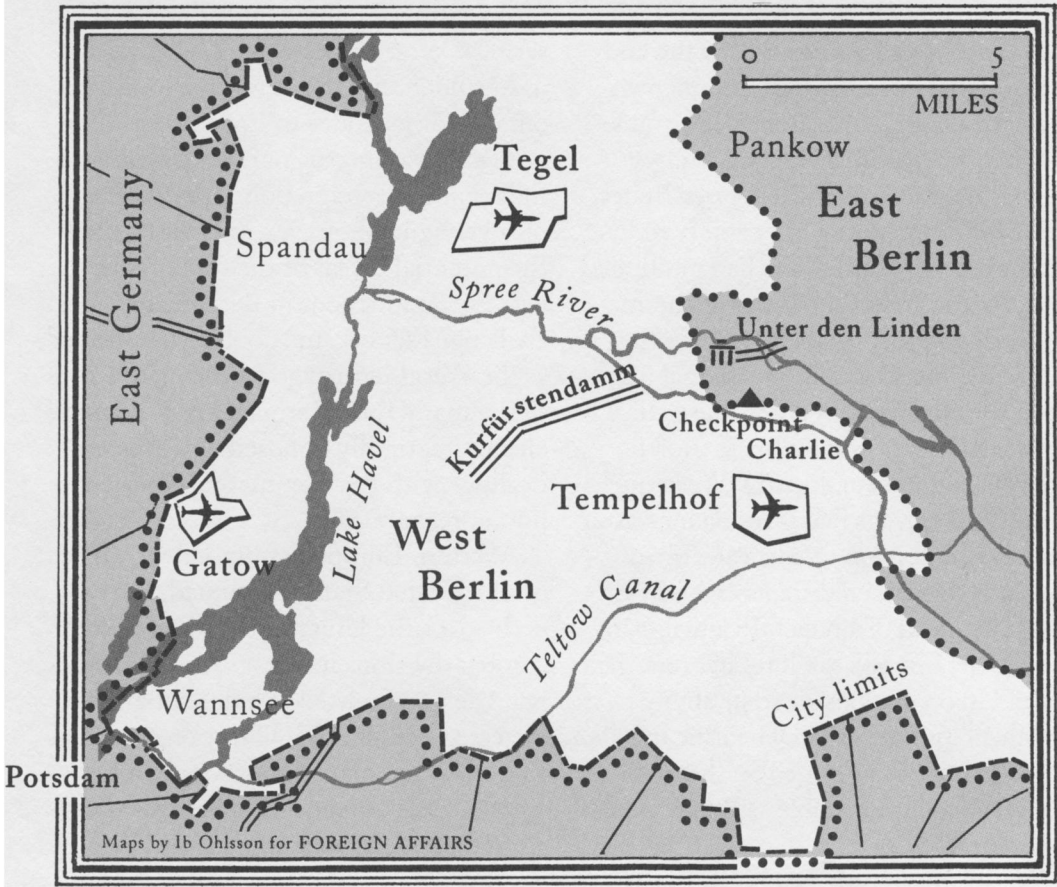
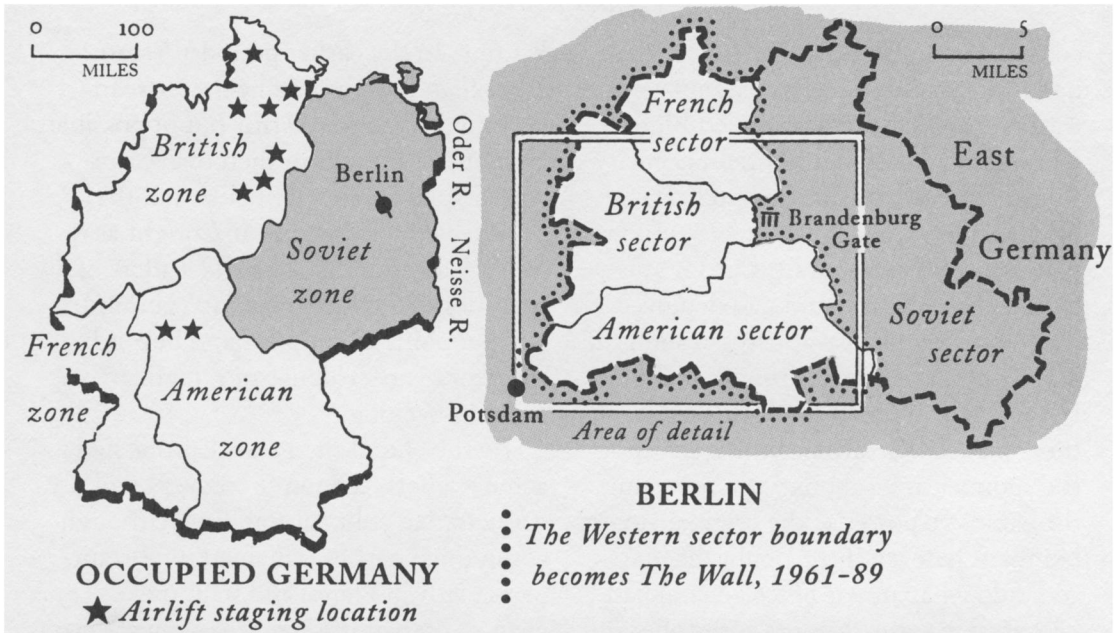
THE CHANGING STRATEGIC PICTURE

When Berlin next became a zone of acute crisis, in 1958-62, conditions had changed. Militarily, Berlin was still isolated and vulnerable. It was now, however, not just

inside a Soviet occupation zone; it was an enclave within a German Democratic Republic which, though clearly under Soviet domination, had a government of its own with reasons of its own for wanting to take over West Berlin. Since East Berlin was the GDR's capital, the fact the city was partly noncommunist was symbolically offensive. On practical grounds, West Berlin was dangerous to the GDR because it was a showcase for the material goods that socialism seemed incapable of producing, and, worse yet, offered an easy escape route from East to West for, among others, the skilled and educated workers whom the GDR most needed if it were to compete economically with West Germany.

Soviet forces stationed in the GDR and surrounding areas still possessed the power to snuff out West Berlin's independence in days, if not hours. The new local conditions posed an additional threat: if GDR police units were to take over functions from the Red Army, the fact of their doing so would challenge the legitimacy of the continuing presence in Berlin of Western military forces. If East Germans rather than Soviets were to examine papers at one of the city's internal checkpoints, they could easily go on to claim within West Berlin other powers that they exercised in East Berlin, for they would not be under the Four Power accords of 1945 that technically governed and limited Soviet activities.

By 1958, the calculus of comparative strategic vulnerabilities had shifted. In the earlier period, the United States and Britain had been woefully weak on the ground but arguably were less vulnerable than the Soviets should war actually come. In addition to atomic bombs, they had had large mobilizable reserves of



conventional bombers. The Soviets had had few that could reach Britain or penetrate the defenses of a revived Fighter Command, and had no evident capacity for direct attack on the United States. A decade later, American strategic air power had expanded immensely. LeMay's Strategic Air Command had deployed medium-range B-47s at bases around the globe and new intercontinental-range B-52s based in the United States. All these planes were armed with nuclear or thermonuclear weapons with many times the explosive power of the original atomic bombs. There was little doubt that SAC could do what an Air Force general had described in the early 1950s as the objective of its targeting—reduce the Soviet Union to “a smoking, radiating ruin at the end of two hours.” And Britain had its own nuclear weapons and aircraft easily able to reach the Soviet homeland.

Neither Britain nor the United States, however, retained its earlier ability to weather a war. The Soviets had multiplied their own stocks of nuclear and thermonuclear weapons. By the late 1950s they had a large fleet of bombers that could reach the British Isles and some that could make one-way flights to North America. Moreover, like the Western powers, the Soviets had invested increasing resources in developing nuclear-armed rockets able to reach distant targets at virtually the speed of a bullet. In late 1957, by putting the Sputnik satellites in orbit, the Soviet Union demonstrated its ability to launch an intercontinental ballistic missile. The United States seemed on the verge of being as totally vulnerable as Britain and the Soviet Union.

Yet another difference between 1948–49 and 1958–62 was the life of Western

Europe. In the earlier period Western European leaders had been in dread not only of the Red Army but of possible communist inroads in their own countries helped by popular belief that the Soviets were irresistible and might as well be accommodated. The leaders had been desperate for American economic aid and political support, and beyond that, for overt evidence of American military backing.

By the end of the 1950s, Europe had achieved both economic recovery and comparative political stability. Although communist parties remained important, particularly in France and Italy, the chances of their turning a Western country into a Soviet satellite seemed nowhere serious. West Germany had become an independent nation. It was beginning to outstrip other states in Europe economically and was increasingly pursuing an independent foreign policy. Its exercise of sovereignty, however, still confronted the potential threat of the GDR taking over Soviet functions in Berlin, a technical challenge that became doubly complicated as the West German government, sensitive to the many East German refugees in the electorate, rigidly opposed any Western dealings with the GDR that might even hint at recognition.

Western Europe's military dependence on the United States continued. In the early 1950s the United States had posted combat divisions in West Germany. They had been committed at a time of greatly increased overall U.S. military preparedness and when the Soviet-sponsored North Korean attack on South Korea was widely viewed as a rehearsal for a comparable effort in Europe. West German military units, as originally envisioned, would

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have been replacements for these U.S. divisions. But when such units actually came into being, they served more as adjuncts for U.S. forces presumed to be on permanent station. When rumors circulated, as in mid-1956, that the United States might withdraw its troops, Europeans reacted with high alarm.

Given the growing nuclear arsenals on both sides, however, Europeans were at the same time fearful that the United States might either trigger a nuclear war that would engulf their continent or, to save its homeland, abandon them in a crisis. Fear that the United States might do either too much or too little became acute after the 1956 Suez crisis. For America then to oppose Britain and France (and Israel) seemed to show that the United States could see its interests as at odds with those of its allies. Increased American-Soviet competition in Asia and elsewhere reinforced this perception and also roused concern that Europe could become a victim of a crisis originating elsewhere. In August and September 1958, for example, the United States seemed to threaten nuclear war against the Soviet Union's ally China to deter Chinese occupation of some barren islands off China's own coast.

RAISING THE WALL

In November 1958 Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev set off the new series of Berlin crises by demanding that a peace treaty for Germany be signed within six months and threatening otherwise to sign a treaty of his own with the GDR, one effect of which would be to transfer to the East German state all Soviet rights and functions in Berlin. He let the deadline lapse without acting. In 1959, when

he visited the United States, he spoke again of the urgent need to change the status of Berlin. This was to be a topic at a Paris summit meeting in May 1960, but Khrushchev walked out of that meeting to protest American U-2 reconnaissance flights over the Soviet Union. He then announced that after the 1960 U.S. presidential election he would insist the new president come to terms over Berlin. When he met John F. Kennedy in Vienna in June 1961 he declared coolly that he was prepared to fight a nuclear war rather than leave Berlin in status quo.

Sources now accessible in the former Soviet Union reveal that Khrushchev was under pressure from the government of the GDR, which was suffering an exodus of refugees that swelled almost by the day. These sources also show that, in view of the widening split with China, Khrushchev was deeply concerned about seeming unwilling to stand up to the Americans. An important new element was Fidel Castro's success in Cuba; Khrushchev was desperately afraid of a Cuban tilt toward the Chinese.

In August 1961 Soviet and GDR forces suddenly put up the Berlin Wall. Concrete blocks and bricks were deployed overnight, then the hideous structure rose in stages—fence posts and coils of barbed wire, then a high cement-block wall; behind that, a second wall with a deep trench and dog runs; the whole surveyed by watchtowers with searchlights and machine guns like those in a penitentiary. President Kennedy had already been careful to make clear that the United States did not claim any control over the Soviet sector of Berlin. He had said that the United States was committed to defend “the frontier of freedom,” but

he had spoken of that frontier as including only *West* Berlin. For theatrical effect, Kennedy sent General Clay back to the city. American soldiers conducted maneuvers in which they tore down replicas of parts of the Wall. At this juncture the American and the Soviet tanks confronted each other at Checkpoint Charlie. Nothing happened. Kennedy and Khrushchev communicated privately, Soviet tanks turned around, and American tanks did likewise.

Some analysts, at the time and long after, concluded that the building of the Wall had ended the protracted Berlin crisis—in Moscow's favor. In fact, the Wall solved few of the problems Khrushchev and his East German allies faced, and made other problems worse. While the Wall prevented more people from leaving for the West and shuttered the Berlin showcase of Western capitalism, it served as an open confession that the GDR could hold its population only behind a prison barricade. For leaders in the GDR, the Wall was no substitute for control of the entire capital. And for Khrushchev, the building of the Wall did little, for he had not achieved the long-sought Berlin settlement, and he had gained nothing in his struggle with the Chinese for predominance within the world communist movement.

In the winter of 1961–62 the Pentagon intensively conjured up scenarios for dealing with a Soviet or an East German move against West Berlin. All these scenarios involved at least heightening the threat of nuclear war. Some called for demonstration nuclear strikes on relatively unpopulated targets in the Soviet sphere.

At the Soviet Party Congress of October 1961 Khrushchev declared that he would

sign his own German peace treaty by the end of the year. Once again he let his deadline pass, but in a personal letter to Kennedy he wrote imploringly, "You have to understand, I have no ground to retreat further, there is a precipice behind." After continuing to make threats throughout the spring and summer of 1962, Khrushchev informed Kennedy that he would wait until after the November congressional elections and then "give him a choice—go to war or sign a peace treaty." Returning from a visit to Europe, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara said publicly that conditions in Berlin were as tense as at any time since the Korean conflict.

CUBAN MISSILES

In October 1962 Kennedy discovered that Khrushchev was speedily and secretly setting up strategic missile launchers in Cuba. Though some historians have been inclined to accept Khrushchev's post hoc justification that he acted primarily to help defend Cuba against a possible U.S. invasion, chances are that his explanation arose from the fact that all he got from the resultant crisis was a renewed but still conditional U.S. pledge not to invade Cuba. At the time he decided to turn Cuba into a missile base, Berlin was the dominant foreign policy issue in Moscow. Anatoly Dobrynin, who was just leaving to become Soviet ambassador in Washington, recalls that "Germany and Berlin overshadowed everything."

Intertwined with the Berlin issue were new questions about the strategic balance. In October 1961 a Pentagon spokesman had said quietly but publicly that the alleged "missile gap" was nonexistent. Satellite photography proved what U-2

photography had merely suggested—that Khrushchev's claims about turning out ICBMs "like sausages" were largely bluff. This disclosure was not only an embarrassment for Khrushchev diplomatically, but affected the Soviet position vis-à-vis the Chinese, for one count in Beijing's indictment of Khrushchev had been failure to aggressively develop the communist world's overall capabilities for nuclear war. When Khrushchev's experts told him that placing shorter-range missiles in Cuba would partly remedy the strategic imbalance, it had to be welcome advice. No expert on Cuba suggested that these missiles would make Cuba safer; indeed all the specialists warned that Castro might resist because of fear that they would make Cuba more of a target for the United States. But Khrushchev might well have thought, nonetheless, that the missiles would contribute to Cuba's defense. Trying to sort out his motives is like discerning those of a gambler who bets all he has on a single cast of the dice.

Kennedy interpreted the discovery of missiles in Cuba as the opening of a new Berlin crisis. He found confirmation when Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko visited Washington just before the discovery was made public. The microphones that Kennedy had secretly installed in the Oval Office and the Cabinet Room captured on tape his report to the Joint Chiefs of Staff the morning after his meeting with Gromyko: "What's basic to them is Berlin— In every conversation we've had with the Russians, that's what— Even last night we talked about Cuba for a while, but Berlin—that's what Khrushchev's committed himself to personally."

THE IMPOSSIBLE STATUS QUO

The dilemma Kennedy faced during the missile crisis had inhered in the American commitment to Berlin ever since 1948-49. There was no conceivable way in which the city could be defended or retaken simply by local use of conventional military force. The only deterrent to a Soviet or East German takeover was a threat of military action elsewhere, almost certainly with air power and eventually, if not immediately, with nuclear weapons. As nuclear arsenals on both sides grew, this increasingly involved a likely if not inevitable escalation to general nuclear war.

The threat to do something militarily in response to Soviet or East German action against West Berlin had been only faintly credible in the period of the U.S. nuclear monopoly. A transfer of B-29s to bases in Britain during the 1948-49 crisis was a bluff by Truman on a par with that of Khrushchev later, for it was evident to the naked eye that these planes and their bases were not equipped to handle the then-boxcar sized atomic bombs. Eisenhower had said privately, considering the possible use of nuclear weapons to defend Berlin, "You might as well go out and shoot everyone you see and then shoot yourself." Nevertheless, he saw no choice but to continue to voice the threat, for the alternative was to concede that the United States could do nothing to prevent two million West Berliners from becoming unwilling subjects of the GDR. A key to U.S. actions during the first half of the Cold War is found in the inability to protect Berlin by any means other than a bizarre proposition: preserving microscopic credibility for an inherently incredible threat.

Before the missile crisis, Kennedy had groped for some alternative. He had said

to one of his aides: "It seems silly for us to be facing an atomic war over a treaty preserving Berlin as the future capital of a reunited Germany when all of us know that Germany will probably never be reunited . . . God knows I'm not an isolationist, but it seems particularly stupid to risk killing a million Americans over an argument about access rights." After the crisis, he spoke of Berlin as "an impossible situation" and pressed his advisers to come up with formulas offering some hope of escape. He did not move far along this line before his assassination in November 1963. The outcome of the missile crisis, fortunately, made it almost impossible for Khrushchev to act adventurously again. His colleagues removed him from office in 1964, accusing him of having "damaged the international prestige of our government, our party, our armed forces, while at the same time helping to raise the authority of the United States." Khrushchev's eventual successor, Leonid Brezhnev, occasionally protested Berlin's anomalous status but precipitated no new crises.

Kennedy had not been the first American policymaker to seek some alternative to defense of West Berlin by threat of nuclear war. Kennan had pleaded for such thinking during his last days as head of the Policy Planning Staff in 1950. In 1953 Eisenhower's supposedly hard-line secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, suggested that the United States propose to the new post-Stalin Soviet government a mutual military pullback, neutralizing Germany, with Berlin, perhaps, as capital.

It was not until 1966 that the effort to find another policy finally bore fruit. In an artful speech in New York, President Johnson declared that the dominant

American interest in Central Europe was peace and stability. The "one great goal of a united West," he said, "is to heal the wound in Europe which now cuts East from West and brother from brother." But, he continued, the wound "must be healed with the consent of Eastern European countries and the consent of the Soviet Union." While his words did not imply abandonment of the ideals of national self-determination and individual freedom of choice, they did imply that the United States was prepared to accept the reality of two Germanies, and of the two Germanies assuming primary responsibility for the status and future of Berlin.

This shift in stance by the United States anticipated but was not independent of the shifts in West Germany that generated a Grand Coalition, eventually made Willy Brandt chancellor, and enabled Brandt to pursue his *Ostpolitik*, establishing a live-and-let-live relationship with the GDR. Like many Johnson administration initiatives, the one on Germany and Berlin was stifled by the Vietnam War and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Like others, such as the first Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT I), it came to fruition in the Nixon administration. Complicated two-power and four-power accords of 1971, deftly orchestrated by Henry Kissinger, seemed to give permanence to the division of Germany and of Berlin, their new status accepted by all parties. In his memoirs Kissinger details the many intrigues required to overcome resistance from foreign offices, military commands, and other bureaucracies habituated to the rigidities of the Cold War. He comments accurately: "Henceforth, Berlin disappeared from the list of international crisis spots."

LET THEM COME TO BERLIN!

From 1948 to 1971 a commitment to Berlin had been a crucial factor in U.S. foreign policy. The success of the airlift left the United States for all these years holding the most advanced military outpost in Western Europe. The need to preserve some degree of credibility for the U.S. pledge to defend West Berlin's population greatly limited Washington's flexibility with regard to any part of the earth in dispute with the supposed Sino-Soviet bloc or, after the bloc's evident fracture, with either the U.S.S.R. or China. That need contributed to the American government's reacting as strongly as it did to, for example, Guatemala's leftward tilt and China's moves to take control of the Quemoy and Matsu islands. It helps account for Eisenhower saying to Kennedy during the 1960-61 transition that landlocked, impoverished Laos was a crucial theater of East-West competition. It also helps account for the conviction carried over into the Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon administrations that any sign of U.S. weakening on South Vietnam could jeopardize American credibility around the world. One can argue, in other words, that the success of 1948-49 and the consequent commitment to Berlin created a straitjacket for the United States for the duration of the high Cold War.

One can also argue, however, that the commitment to Berlin contributed importantly to the Cold War's becoming what the historian John Lewis Gaddis terms "the long peace." Seeing U.S. tenacity in risking all-out war for such an exposed site may well have had a cooling influence in Moscow and even in Beijing. Strategic theorists argue that nuclear

deterrence gains effectiveness if one side thinks the other not entirely rational. Such assessment may have figured into the Soviet government's refraining from intervention in Yugoslavia, agreeing to negotiated withdrawal from Austria, and exhibiting great caution in the 1950s and 1960s with regard to the Middle East.

Fear of provoking some Soviet move against Berlin certainly made the United States wary about attempting overt action elsewhere, most obviously against Castro's Cuba. After the missile crisis Kennedy's tape recorder caught him musing to one of the chiefs of staff: "What we're trying to do is think of something about Berlin— Because Berlin is really paralyzing— Because everything you want to do, you say, 'Oh, well it will screw us in Berlin.'" Absent the American commitment to West Berlin, the Cold War might more often have verged on hot war. Unquestionably its course would have been different.

After the accords of 1971, Berlin nonetheless retained great symbolic power for Americans. The Vietnam War and attendant demographic and social changes at home had by then created a strong current of doubt that the Cold War was another "good war." But re-runs of pictures of Berliners cheering the airlift helped keep some of the old faith flickering. It was hard for any American—even a doctrinaire "revisionist"—to see the Berlin Wall and not come away convinced that there was some moral difference between the Cold War rivals. Visiting Berlin in 1963, Kennedy declared, "People who really don't understand, or say they don't, what is the great issue between the free world and the communist world—let them come to Berlin!" President Reagan

visited Berlin in 1987 and looked upon a new Soviet regime ostensibly committed to change. Standing a hundred yards from the venerable Brandenburg Gate of old Berlin, he said: "General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace—if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe—if you seek liberalization, come here, to this gate." Then, with the world's television cameras trained on the newer, barbarous barrier dividing the city, Reagan demanded, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall."

For most Americans, the end of the Cold War came as their television screens in November 1989 showed the jubilation of Berliners tearing down the Wall. Though historians may identify demonstrations in Leipzig or other events as more critical turning points, the images that endure are those of Berliners wielding their hammers and wire-cutters. The transition to an era yet unnamed is symbolized by photographs of President Bill Clinton and Chancellor Helmut Kohl walking arm in arm through the open Brandenburg Gate. In this new era, Berlin is restored as the capital of a united and democratic Germany.

How all this history will be recalled a generation or more from now is hard to foresee. During the Cold War, the United States and Germany were partners. The partnership persists, and Berlin's being the capital may provide reinforcement. Americans may remember Berlin's defiant maintenance of its own independence and freedom, and Germans may have more reason to be reminded of the enduring value of the Cold War relationship with the United States. But books and films also keep vivid for Americans images of Berlin as the city of Hitler, swastika

banners, and Stormtrooper jackboots. And Germans, Berliners included, have a very old and very lively tradition of interpreting American actions as selfish and exploitative. For Germany and Berlin to be once again synonymous could cause Americans or Germans or both to be reminded more of differences and past conflicts than of the closeness between the two peoples after the airlift.

Events could tip the balance either way, and events will control. But the parts of history people best remember tend to be those that are the subjects of lively writing and well-crafted movies and television programs. Perhaps Americans and Germans interested in continuing partnership should invest in making the history of Berlin in the Cold War as unforgettable as its history in the Nazi era.🌐