

**Forum: Historical Security Council**

**Issue: The Berlin Crisis (1961)**

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**Positions: President, Deputy President**

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## **Introduction**

The Berlin Crisis of 1961 was when the de facto partition of Germany's capital, Berlin, reached a climax. With the end of World War II in Europe, Germany's capital, Berlin, was divided by the victors. The Soviet bloc controlled the eastern part of Germany, and the Western Allies controlled the western part. Its capital, Berlin, although deep within the soviet sphere of control, was argued to have representation of all the Allied powers and also became divided. This created a scene of a Western enclave surrounded by Soviet controlled territories. With the onset of the Cold War, tensions between the allied powers intensified, and the division of Berlin became a battleground for competing ideologies: communism and democracy.

In 1960, Berlin was experiencing a mass exodus as Eastern Germans fled to the Western regime of Berlin. In the eyes of the Soviet Union, this was a threat to their legitimacy and was leading to a human capital flight. Thus, in 1961, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev pressed for changes to the status of Berlin. He argued for the Western powers and their influence to leave Berlin and allow it to be run solely by the Soviet sphere. However, Western leaders, especially U.S. President John F. Kennedy, insisted on maintaining free access to West Berlin and keeping the city under Western influence.

On August 13<sup>th</sup>, 1961, East Germany began closing the border and constructing a physical barrier between East and West Berlin, sealing off West Berlin from the east. A tense but brief stand-off between American and Soviet tanks occurred at Checkpoint Charlie in October, which ended peacefully. The event resulted in the creation of the Berlin Wall. A symbol of division of the Western and Eastern bloc of Europe for decades to come.

The point of departure for this topic is the Vienna summit, which took place on June 4, 1961. This debate session will serve as the UN version of the Vienna summit in another timeline.

## **Definition of Key Terms**

### **Exodus**

A mass departure of people.

### **Allies of WWII**

An international military coalition formed during World War II. Its principal members were the United Kingdom, United States, Soviet Union, and China.

### **Human capital flight**

The emigration of highly skilled and educated individuals from their home country to another, often to seek better economic opportunities. Also known as brain drain.

### **Berlin Ultimatum**

In November 1958, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev issued the Berlin Ultimatum, proclaiming the post-war arrangements concerning the status of Berlin invalid. He gave the Western powers six months to agree to the neutralization of West Berlin as a demilitarized ‘free city.’ If they refused, he would draft a separate peace treaty with the GDR, cutting off all Berlin access routes to the Western powers. This was a direct attempt to politically and militarily remove Western Allies from Berlin and from any legal justification to remain in the city. This act marked the beginning of a crisis that culminated in Berlin’s crisis of 1961.

### **German Democratic Republic (GDR)**

The German Democratic Republic, or East Germany, was the product of the Soviet occupation zones of Germany. Established as a Socialist Republic on October 7, 1949, East Germany was a satellite state of the Soviet Union and a member of the Warsaw Pact. Just like the rest of the Socialist World, East Germany was governed and controlled by the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED). After the mid-1950 political unification within the GDR, the flow of

the population to the West became a primary concern of the Soviet Union and the East German elite. With the construction of the Berlin Wall the East German leadership, with Soviet approval, made 'legitimate' the illegal state of anti-communist emigration.

## Background

The opening phase of the Berlin Crisis of 1961 is associated with the political and geographical arrangements that were made regarding the unconditional surrender of Germany in May 1945. At the Potsdam Conference in the summer of 1945, the arrangements for allied control were made, which also involved dividing Germany and its capital Berlin into four zones of occupation. By 1949, the US, UK and French zones of Germany were transformed into a capitalist Federal Republic of Germany (FRG or West Germany), whereas the Soviet zone was turned into a communist German Democratic Republic (GDR or East Germany). Although the GDR and the GDR's Berlin were divided, Soviet-controlled East Berlin was also divided, thus creating a capitalist enclave in the middle of the communist east. Such situation caused the area a "bleeding point" for the Soviet to exploit and for the West.

## The Economic Divide and The Refugee Crisis

The division of Germany into the two states in 1949 created profound economic divides that lasted throughout the Cold War. During this time, West Germany became the FRG and integrated into the Western bloc. The integration was accompanied by the Americans' Marshall Plan aimed at boosting the economy. More than 1.4 billion dollars, which is approximately 15 billion dollars today, worth of economic aid, currency reform in 1948, and Ludwig Erhard's Soziale Marktwirtschaft (Social Market Economy)—a blend of free-market capitalism and social welfare—kicked off the Wirtschaftswunder ("economic miracle"). During this period, the West Germany's economy was rapidly growing, wages increasing, and consumerism rising, making it a prosperous nation. Conversely, East Germany, the GDR, fell under Soviet rule. It lost all its industrial base as war reparations to the USSR, where entire factories were dismantled and shipped east. The Soviets implemented a Stalinist model economy, focusing on heavy industries and state-owned collectives while ignoring the consumer goods sector and private businesses. This economy suffered from inefficiencies, innovation lags, and shortages of everything from

advanced machinery to basic foods. The East German mark was worthless outside its borders, and the standard of living lagged far behind that of the West.

The widening economic gap, together with the political pressure and East German state supervision, made life on the East increasingly hard. The result was a tremendous and constant outflow. Between 1949 and the summer of 1961, an estimated 2.7 million people, about one-sixth of the entire East German population, fled to the West.

One of the most important and symbolic escape routes was the one through the four-power city of Berlin. Even when the city was politically divided, the movement of East and West Berlin was mostly free. Fleeing from Eastern Germany does not require the crossing of any hazardous border crossing through plain fields or rivers, refugees could simply travel through the two sectors by subway, city train, or even by foot. Once in West Berlin, they could immediately declare West German citizenship and receive benefits and West Berlin refugee processing centers, including accommodation and cash assistance.

This constant “hemorrhage of population” was selective and a severe weakening of the GDR. Young, educated, and skilled holders of the personnel central to fashioning and sustaining a modern state were the main proportion of the population drain. This state of affairs not only compromised the vulnerable competence of the state healthcare and education systems, but it also posed a potential collapse of the East German state

### **Soviet Demands and Failed Talks**

Anger over the refugee problem and Western control of Berlin frustrates Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev. He issued the Berlin Ultimatum, insisting the West leave the city, in 1958. The West's refusal to leave, and subsequent meetings between world leaders, none of which succeeded, complicating matters further. In 1961, John F. Kennedy, the new US President, met Khrushchev in Vienna. The meeting was not constructive for developing solutions, and further intense the conflict.

### **Major Parties Involved**

## **Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)**

Also known as the Soviet Union. The USSR was one of the “Big fours” in the Allies of WWII, they were also one of the two superpowers of the Cold War. After WWII, they controlled the eastern portion of Germany leading to the formation of the communist GDR and till 1955 had almost complete political oversight of GDR. Until German reunification in 1990, the USSR maintained a large military presence and significant influence on the GDR. As Communist state, they were the main opposing voice of Berlin, having a Western presence, as they believed it would be unsustainable for the Soviet-backed East German

### **Nikita Khrushchev**

Born 15 April 1894, died 11 September 1971. Khrushchev was the first Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1953 to 1964 and the Chairman of the Council of Ministers from 1958 to 1964. He was the main spokesman of the USSR in conferences and had wanted to implement structural changes to Berlin numerous times before the 1961 Berlin Crisis.

### **John F. Kennedy**

Born 29 May 1917, died 22 November 1963. Kennedy was the 35th President of the United States from 1961 until his assassination in 1963. His administration oversaw the peak of the 1961 Berlin Crisis. He pursued a strategy of flexible response and took a firm stance on Berlin, declaring the city's defense an essential commitment. His famous "Ich bin ein Berliner" speech in 1963 was a painting of Western solidarity with the people of West Berlin, delivered after the Wall had been built and the immediate crisis had subsided.

## **United states of America**

One of the two superpowers of the Cold War and a founding member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The USA, along with the United Kingdom and France, formed the Western Allied powers controlling West Berlin. Following WWII, the USA was committed to the policy of containment, aiming to prevent the spread of communism. During the 1961 Berlin Crisis, it strongly affirmed the Western right to be in Berlin, as they saw a free and secure West Berlin as a critical symbol of democracy.

## **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)**

A collective security alliance formed in 1949 by Western nations, including the United States, United Kingdom, France, and Canada, to counter the Soviet threat. NATO's foundational principle was collective defense stating that an attack on one member is an attack on all. During the Berlin Crises, the alliance provided the crucial military and political backbone for the Western front in support of West Berlin's freedom. The Soviet actions were seen as a direct challenge to the entire NATO alliance.

### Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
<b>April, 1948-May, 1949</b>	The Berlin Blockade: The Berlin Blockade refers to the first Cold War crisis which took place between April 1948 and May 1949. The Soviets tried to expel the Western Allies from the city by blocking all overland and waterway access to West Berlin. In counteraction, the Berlin Airlift utilized the unprecedented method of supplying the entire city with food and fuel by air, which took place over almost an entire year. The Soviets lost the airlift battle which enabled them to end the blockade, but the clash guaranteed the continued division of Europe and directly resulted in two separate German states.
<b>November 27, 1958</b>	The Berlin Ultimatum: Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev initiates the Berlin Crisis as an Ultimatum to the Western powers. Khrushchev demands the withdrawal of Western troops from West Berlin and the transformation of West Berlin into a demilitarized “free city.” He gives the Western powers six months to comply with the withdrawal and makes the threat to sign a separate peace treaty with East Germany afterward. This treaty would allow East Germany to control all routes to Berlin. It would also leave the West’s presence in Berlin to the whims of East Germany, which the West did not recognize.

<b>May-August, 1959</b>	Geneva Conference: In response to the ultimatum, the US, USSR, UK and French Foreign Ministers met in Geneva to devise a solution, which the conference failed to do so. The fundamental divide was again irreconcilable. The West insists as a legal right over Berlin and German reunification through free elections, while the Soviets are solid in their will to promote the division of Germany and reduce the Western presence, which the Soviets view as a potential threat.
<b>May 1, 1960</b>	U-2 Incident: An American U-2 spy plane pilot, Gary Powers, was shot in the Soviet territory, which was during the cold war. This incident causes Khrushchev to lose all trust he once had in the US and demands an apology from President Eisenhower, who refused.
<b>May 16, 1960</b>	Paris Summit Collapses: Other leaders were about to start their conference, just as the major summit between Eisenhower and Khrushchev, in Paris. Khrushchev lost interest in the summit, walked out angrily, due to the U-2 incident, and claimed to not participate in the meeting unless Eisenhower promised to cease any further spy-plane flights. The hopes for diplomatic solutions to the issues involving Berlin are left to the next American president.
<b>July 3-4, 1961</b>	Vienna Summit: Kennedy, the new American president, and Khrushchev attended a two-day talk in Vienna regarding to this issue. Khrushchev re-enacts the Berlin Ultimatum then pulls and signs a peace treaty with East Germany. This leaves the inexperienced Kennedy shaken and convinced by Khrushchev. The lack of unification leaves the talks in failure, as it fails to address any common grounds. The conclusion of this summit clearly suggests that a peaceful solution to this conflict is extremely difficult.
<b>August 13, 1961</b>	The Construction of the Berlin Wall: GDR forces, conducting a secret overnight operation, began constructing a barbed-wire barrier, and subsequently, a fully-fledged concrete wall severing East and West Berlin.
<b>August 17, 1961</b>	As the first concrete blocks are laid, the Berlin wall starts taking a definitive shape.

## **Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue**

There weren't any explicit UN binding documents to resolve the Berlin crisis; however, both long-term and short-term political and military approaches simmered the crisis. With the most popular accepted resolution being a confrontation on the crossing of the Berlin Wall.

On October 27<sup>th</sup>, a standoff between Soviet and US tanks happened on arguably the most famous crossing of the Berlin Wall, Checkpoint Charlie. The standoff ended peacefully 16 hours later as both sides withdrew tanks coordinated through back-channel diplomacy and real-time communications. This reduced the risk of military tension turning into full-blown military conflict. This incident highlights the value of direct military communication in crisis and underscores the importance of crisis management mechanics to avoid escalation. This also served as a tactical agreement from JFK about his willingness to keep the status quo, his agreement to the wall. The status quo being, the west would defend West Berlin but would not challenge the Soviet/East German control over East Berlin and the GDR.

## **Possible Solutions**

Delegates are required to draft a resolution for this issue. The time period that council would start with would be before the Vienna Summit. Please address the resolutions accordingly. The following are some possible solutions that delegates may consider.

### **Formalize and Guarantee Allied Access Rights**

A frequent source of conflict and contention was the access routes between West Germany and West Berlin. Delegates could argue about the possibility of suggesting a formally recognized, enforceable contract between the Four Powers that overtly stipulates the air, road, rail, and river access to the city. It would relieve one major Western concern and not require the GDR to formally acknowledge the situation.

### **Negotiating a Limited Troop Reduction in Berlin**

To minimize the chances of a military face-off, delegates would discuss the possibility of having, and verifying, a mutually agreed to the reduction of military personnel in Berlin. This would



relieve tension and give the city a less military-controlled presence, while the core garrisons would remain to symbolize the Allied rights.

### Utilizing the UN as a Neutral Intermediary

In the face of the Security Council's deadlock, delegates could give the UN Security Council the ability to appoint a neutral third party, and possibly, assign the UN secretary General, to mediate, or station UN military observers along Berlin's access routes to observe for violation of any agreement and militarily report any access-related interference. This would add fairness to the agreement.

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