



CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Khrushchev's Ultimatum: The Berlin Crisis 1958–63

At the Potsdam Conference, the three victors had decided that Berlin would be governed by the four occupying powers—the United States, Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union—which would jointly administer Germany as well. As it turned out, the four-power administration of Germany lasted little more than a year. By 1949, the Western zones were merged into the Federal Republic, and the Russian zone became the German Democratic Republic.

According to the four-power arrangement for Berlin, that city was not a part of Germany—East or West—but was officially under the rule of the four victorious Allies of World War II. The Soviets occupied a large sector in the eastern part of the city, the Americans had a sector in the south, and the British and French had theirs in the west and north. All of Berlin was now an island inside of what had become the German Democratic Republic. As the years wore on, the East Germans and the Soviets

found the three western sectors of Berlin to be a thorn in their side, a showcase of prosperity in the midst of the dismal grayness of the communist bloc. Most important, West Berlin served as a conduit for those East Germans seeking to emigrate to the West: they would simply take the subway to one of the western sectors of the city, and then apply to emigrate.

Amazingly, despite Berlin's obvious four-power status, unambiguous arrangements for access to it had never been negotiated. Although the four powers had designated the various roads and air corridors to be used to reach Berlin, they had not explicitly agreed on the mechanisms of passage. In 1948, Stalin had tried to take advantage of this lacuna by instituting the Berlin blockade on the technical ground that the access routes were under repair. After one year of the Western airlift, access was restored, but the legal authority remained as vague as ever.

In the years immediately following the blockade, Berlin grew into a major industrial center with needs which, in an emergency, could no longer have been met by an airlift. Although Berlin was still technically a four-power city and the Soviet Union was responsible for access, the East German satellite actually controlled the routes from its capital, East Berlin. Berlin's position was therefore highly vulnerable. The road, rail, and air links were easy prey for interruptions so seemingly trivial that they were difficult to resist by force even though they might cumulatively threaten the freedom of the city. Theoretically, all military traffic was supposed to pass through a Soviet-controlled checkpoint, but this was a fiction; an East German guard controlled the gates, and Soviet officers lounged in a nearby shack in the event of disagreement.

Small wonder that Khrushchev, looking around for a spot in which to demonstrate a permanent shift in the correlation of forces, decided to exploit Berlin's vulnerability. In his memoirs, he noted: "To put it crudely, the American foot in Europe had a sore blister on it. That was West Berlin. Anytime we wanted to step on the Americans' foot and make them feel the pain, all we had to do was obstruct Western communications with the city across the territory of the German Democratic Republic."¹

Khrushchev's challenge to the West's position in Berlin occurred at the precise moment when the democracies had convinced themselves once again that the incumbent General Secretary was their best hope for peace. Even so skeptical an observer of the Soviet scene as John Foster Dulles responded to Khrushchev's speech to the Twentieth Party Congress in February 1956 by professing to have discerned a "notable shift" in Soviet policy. The Soviet rulers, he said, had concluded that "the time had come to change basically their approach to the non-Communist world. . . . Now

they pursue their foreign policy goals with less manifestation of intolerance and less emphasis on violence.”² By the same token, in September 1957, less than one year after the crises in Suez and Hungary, Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson reported from Moscow that Khrushchev “really wants and is almost forced to a detente in relations with the West.”³

Khrushchev’s conduct did not support such optimism. When, in October 1957, the Soviets launched the Sputnik, an artificial satellite, into an earth orbit, Khrushchev interpreted this essentially one-shot accomplishment as proof that the Soviet Union was outstripping the democracies in the scientific as well as the military field. Even in the West, the contention that a planned system might ultimately prove superior to a market economy was beginning to gain credence.

President Eisenhower stood nearly alone in his refusal to panic. As a military man, he understood the difference between a prototype and an operational military weapon. Khrushchev, on the other hand, taking his own boasts seriously, embarked on a protracted diplomatic offensive to translate the supposed superiority of Soviet missiles into some kind of diplomatic breakthrough. In January 1958, Khrushchev told a Danish journalist:

The launching of the Soviet sputniks first of all shows . . . that a serious change has occurred in the balance of forces between the countries of socialism and capitalism in favor of the socialist nations.⁴

In Khrushchev’s fantasy, the Soviet Union, besides being scientifically and militarily ahead of the United States, would soon exceed it in industrial output as well. On June 4, 1958, he told the Seventh Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party: “We are firmly convinced that the time is approaching when socialist countries will outstrip the most developed capitalist countries not only in tempo but also in volume of industrial production.”⁵

As a devout communist, Khrushchev was practically required to seek to translate this presumed change in the balance of forces into diplomatic coin. Berlin was his first target. Khrushchev opened the challenge with three initiatives. On November 10, 1958, he delivered a speech demanding an end to Berlin’s four-power status and warning that the Soviet Union intended to turn control of its access over to its East German satellite. From that day forward, Khrushchev vowed: “let the U.S.A., Britain and France build their own relations with the German Democratic Republic and come to agreement with it if they are interested in any questions concerning Berlin.”⁶ On November 27, Khrushchev transposed the es-

sence of that speech into formal notes to the United States, Great Britain, and France declaring the Four-Power Agreement on Berlin null and void and insisting that West Berlin be transformed into a demilitarized "free city." If no agreement was reached within six months, the Soviet Union would sign a peace treaty with East Germany and turn over its occupation rights and access routes to the German Democratic Republic.⁷ Khrushchev had delivered the equivalent of an ultimatum to the Western allies.

On January 10, 1959, Khrushchev submitted to the other three occupying powers a draft peace treaty which defined the new status of both Berlin and East Germany. Later that month, Khrushchev spelled out the rationale for his policy before the Twenty-first Communist Party Congress. Like a confidence man selling his wares, he had in the meantime escalated his assessment of Soviet power even further, suggesting that, together with the People's Republic of China, the Soviet Union was *already* producing half of the world's industrial output; therefore, "the international situation will change radically."⁸

Khrushchev had chosen the point of attack with great skill. The challenge inherent in East German control of the access routes to Berlin was indirect. It confronted the democracies with the choice of recognizing the East German satellite or threatening to go to war over the technical issue of who was to stamp transit documents. Nevertheless, Khrushchev's bluster, to which he was by nature inclined, masked a real weakness in the Soviets' position. East Germany was losing manpower by the hundreds of thousands as its citizens, often its most talented professionals, fled to West Germany via Berlin. Berlin was turning out to be a gigantic hole in the Iron Curtain. If the trend continued, East Germany, a self-proclaimed "worker's paradise," would not have any workers left.

The East German state was the most fragile link in the Soviet sphere of influence. Faced with the larger, more prosperous West Germany on its border, and recognized diplomatically only by its fellow Soviet satellite states, East Germany lacked legitimacy. The manpower drain through Berlin threatened its very survival. If something was not done, the leaders of East Berlin reasoned, the whole state could collapse in a matter of years. That would mean a devastating blow to the Soviet sphere of influence, which Khrushchev was attempting to consolidate. By cutting off the escape route, Khrushchev hoped to give his East German satellite a new lease on life. And by forcing a Western retreat, he sought to weaken the Federal Republic's Western ties.

Khrushchev's ultimatum went to the heart of Adenauer's policy. For nearly a decade, Adenauer had rejected all the proposals to advance unification by sacrificing his Western ties. The Soviet Union had dangled

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neutrality before the German public in Stalin's peace plan of 1952, and Adenauer's domestic opponents had supported it. Adenauer had staked his country's future on the proposition that American and German interests were identical. The tacit bargain was that the Federal Republic would join the Atlantic defense system and that the allies would make German unification an integral part of East-West diplomacy. Therefore, for Adenauer, the Berlin crisis was far more than a question of access procedures. It tested the very wisdom of the Federal Republic's Western orientation.

As far as Adenauer was concerned, there was simply no getting around the fact that every enhancement in the status of East Germany reinforced the Soviet claim that unification had to be left to negotiations directly between the two German states. At a time when the Social Democratic Party was still neutralist, such a *de facto* recognition by the allies of the German Democratic Republic would have revolutionized German domestic politics. According to de Gaulle, Adenauer told a Western summit in December 1959:

If Berlin were to be lost, my political position would at once become untenable. The Socialists would take over power in Bonn. They would proceed to make a direct arrangement with Moscow, and that would be the end of Europe.⁹

In Adenauer's view, Khrushchev's ultimatum had above all been designed to isolate the Federal Republic. The Soviet agenda for negotiations placed Bonn in a no-win situation. In return for any concessions it might make, the West would at best receive what it already had: access to Berlin. At the same time, the East German satellite would be given a veto on German unification which would lead either to a stalemate or to an outcome Adenauer described in his memoirs as follows:

... we could not buy the reunification of Germany at the price of loosening Germany from the Western bloc and giving up the achievements of European integration. Because the result would be that a defenseless, unbound Germany in the middle of Europe would be created, that necessarily would be tempted to play off the East against the West.¹⁰

In short, Adenauer saw no benefit in *any* negotiation under the conditions outlined by Khrushchev. However, if negotiations proved unavoidable, he wanted them to serve as proof of the wisdom of his reliance on the West. He strongly objected to responding to Khrushchev's ultimatum

with concessions, and he preferred that the West base its plans for unification on free elections.

Adenauer's views, however, were not shared by his Anglo-American allies, least of all by Great Britain. Prime Minister Harold Macmillan and the British people were reluctant to risk war over the capital of a defeated enemy that had, moreover, been largely responsible for destroying their nation's pre-eminence as a Great Power. Unlike France, Great Britain did not identify its long-term security with the future of Germany. Twice in a generation, Great Britain had just barely been saved by American intervention from German assaults that had conquered most of Europe. Though Great Britain would have preferred to preserve the Atlantic Alliance, if forced to make a choice, it would risk isolation from Europe rather than separation from America. Adenauer's domestic dilemmas concerned British leaders far less than Eisenhower's did; in an ultimate crisis, the latter's ability to command domestic support would have a far greater impact on Great Britain's own survival. For all these reasons, British leaders refused to place any large bets on German unity, and interpreted Adenauer's misgivings as nationalism masquerading behind legalistic pedantry.

Pragmatists at heart, British leaders thought it was bizarre to risk nuclear war over the transfer of authority from Soviet officials to their East German surrogates in the affixing of a transit stamp. In light of the horrendous consequences of a nuclear war, the slogan "*Pourquoi mourir pour Danzig?*" ("Why die for Danzig?"), which had contributed to France's demoralization in 1940, would surely have paled before the much more invidious slogan "Why die for a transit stamp?"

Macmillan thus became a passionate proponent of negotiations—any negotiations—which might "improve" access procedures and would, at a minimum, waste time: "If all the Heads of State were swanning around each other's territories, one could hardly believe that there would be a sudden and fatal explosion," he later recalled.¹¹

Of all the heads of the allies, Eisenhower bore the gravest burden of responsibility, because the decision to risk nuclear war ultimately rested on his shoulders. For the United States, the Berlin crisis brought home the realization that nuclear weapons, which throughout the decade of America's nuclear monopoly and near-monopoly had seemed to provide a quick and relatively inexpensive path to security, would, in the age of approaching nuclear parity, increasingly circumscribe America's willingness to run risks and thereby constrain its freedom of diplomatic maneuver.

As long as America remained essentially immune from attack, nuclear

weapons gave it an advantage never previously enjoyed by any nation. As often happens, the most elaborate formulation of this advantage occurred at the moment when it was on the verge of disappearing. Near the end of the period of American nuclear monopoly, or near-monopoly, Dulles developed the concept of "massive retaliation" to deter Soviet aggression and to avoid protracted stalemates such as Korea in the future. Rather than resist aggression where it occurred, the United States would retaliate against the source of the trouble at a time and with weapons of its own choosing. However, the Soviet Union began developing its own thermo-nuclear weapons and intercontinental strategic missiles just as massive retaliation was being promulgated. The credibility of that strategy therefore began to evaporate rather rapidly—even more quickly in perception than in reality. General nuclear war was a remedy simply out of proportion with most foreseeable crises, including the Berlin crisis. To be sure, the leaders of the democracies took Khrushchev's wildly exaggerated claims of Soviet missile strength far too literally (with Eisenhower as the notable exception). But it was beyond dispute by 1958 that a general nuclear war would, in a matter of days, produce casualties that dwarfed the cumulative totals of both world wars.

This stark equation produced a fundamental incompatibility between the kind of diplomacy required to make the threat of nuclear war credible and what was needed to rally democratic public opinion to confront the apocalyptic nature of the risk. Credibility in the face of Armageddon implied a hair-trigger reaction to challenges and a demonstration of recklessness so beyond normal calculation that no aggressor would ever dare to test it. But what the democratic public wanted, and was entitled to receive, was a calm, rational, calculating, and flexible diplomacy which would also cause the adversary to question America's resolve to go to the extreme of general nuclear war.

Early in the Berlin crisis, Eisenhower decided that it was more important to calm the American public than to shock the Soviet leaders. In press conferences on February 18 and March 11, 1959, he advanced a number of propositions to defuse the nuclear threat which underlay American strategy. "We are certainly not going to fight a ground war in Europe,"¹² he said, and specifically placed the defense of Berlin into that category. It was unlikely, he avowed, that the United States would "shoot our way into Berlin."¹³ In order to leave no loophole, he excluded defending Berlin with nuclear weapons as well: "I don't know how you could free anything with nuclear weapons."¹⁴ These statements surely conveyed the impression that America's willingness to risk war over Berlin was very limited.

The mildness of Eisenhower's reaction was due in part to his assessment of Khrushchev, whom he still considered, together with most other American leaders, the West's best hope for peace. Khrushchev's ultimatum over Berlin had not changed Ambassador Thompson's views of two years earlier. On March 9, 1959, Thompson reiterated his impression that Khrushchev's principal concerns were domestic. According to the Ambassador, brinkmanship was Khrushchev's way of developing a pattern of coexistence that would serve as the prerequisite to economic reform and domestic liberalization.¹⁵ How the threat of war established a pattern of coexistence was not explained.

Such analyses made no impression on the other member of the international quartet—French President Charles de Gaulle, who had just returned to office after twelve years in the political wilderness. He did not agree with the Anglo-American analysis of Khrushchev's motivations and was determined that the Berlin crisis should demonstrate to Adenauer that France was the Federal Republic's indispensable partner. He was more afraid of the danger of reawakening German nationalism than of Khrushchev's threats. At a minimum, he wanted to provide Adenauer with an anchor in the West; if possible, he would seek to enlist a disillusioned Adenauer in a European structure less dominated by America.

Whereas Eisenhower and Macmillan tried to find some Soviet demand that might be satisfied with little or no long-term damage, de Gaulle was adamantly opposed to such a strategy. He rejected the "exploratory talks" being urged by his Anglo-American partners because he saw nothing of any benefit to the West available for exploration. He disdained the schemes for a change in procedures that were being elaborated in Washington and London with the argument that they might "improve" access. Khrushchev, after all, had not issued his ultimatum in order to improve the West's access. In de Gaulle's opinion, the challenge had its origin in the Soviet domestic structure, not in any specific Soviet grievance. Eisenhower understood that the Soviet Union was militarily inferior; de Gaulle went a step further and ascribed Khrushchev's ultimatum to an inherently flawed, fragile, and vastly inferior *political* system:

... there is in this uproar of imprecations and demands organized by the Soviets something so arbitrary and so artificial that one is led to attribute it either to the premeditated unleashing of frantic ambitions, or to the desire of drawing attention away from great difficulties: this second hypothesis seems all the more plausible to me since, despite the coercions, isolation and acts of force in which the Communist

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system encloses the countries which are under its yoke . . . actually its gaps, its shortages, its internal failures, and above that its character of inhuman oppression, are felt more and more by the elites and the masses, whom it is more and more difficult to deceive and to subjugate.¹⁶

Soviet military power was therefore a façade designed to obscure the endless internal struggles inherent in the Soviet system:

. . . in their camps the struggle between political trends, the intrigues of clans, the rivalries of individuals periodically lead to implacable crises, whose sequels—or even whose premonitory symptoms—cannot help but unsettle them. . . .¹⁷

Yielding to Soviet pressure would merely encourage Khrushchev to step up his foreign adventures as a way of deflecting attention from the fundamental internal crisis of his system, and it might make Germany “. . . seek in the East a future which she despairs of being guaranteed in the West.”¹⁸

De Gaulle could well afford such clear-sighted intransigence because, unlike the American President, he did not bear the ultimate responsibility for initiating a nuclear war. When push came to shove, it is extremely doubtful that de Gaulle would have been more prepared to risk nuclear war than Eisenhower and, given the vulnerability of his country, he probably would have been less so. Yet, precisely because he was convinced that the principal danger of war was Western irresolution and that America was the only nation capable of deterring the Soviets, de Gaulle felt free to maneuver in ways that would oblige America to stand firm or to assume responsibility for whatever concessions might have to be made. It was not a pretty game, but *raison d'état* teaches hard lessons. And it was on the basis of *raison d'état* that de Gaulle reversed the Richelieu tradition of attempting to keep Germany weak and fragmented, which had been the essence of French Central European policy for 300 years.

De Gaulle had not arrived at his devotion to Franco-German friendship in a sudden fit of sentimentality. Since the time of Richelieu, French policy had been aimed at keeping the ominous German neighbor either divided or weak, preferably both. In the nineteenth century, France learned that it lacked the power to contain Germany by itself; alliances with Great Britain, Russia, and a host of smaller countries were the consequence. In the aftermath of the Second World War, even those options were disappearing. Great Britain and France combined had not been

strong enough to defeat Germany in the two world wars. And with Soviet armies along the Elbe and East Germany a Soviet satellite, alliance with Moscow was more likely to result in Soviet domination of Europe than in the containment of Germany. This was why de Gaulle abandoned the traditional adversarial relationship with Germany and entrusted France's future to friendship with the hereditary enemy.

The Berlin crisis provided de Gaulle with an opportunity to advance his strategy. He carefully positioned France in the role of defender of the European identity and used the Berlin crisis to demonstrate France's understanding of European realities and its sensitivity to German national concerns. De Gaulle's was a complex approach that required the subtlest of balancing acts between showing support for German national goals and not encouraging the Germans to pursue them on their own or in collusion with the Soviet Union. De Gaulle had come to fear that Moscow's stranglehold on East Germany might enable Soviet leaders to emerge as the champions of German unity or to establish a free-floating Germany along the French frontier. France's age-old German nightmare had turned into the nightmare of a possible German-Soviet deal.

De Gaulle responded with characteristic boldness. France would concede German military and economic power, even its pre-eminence in these fields, and would support German unification in exchange for Bonn's recognition of France as the *political* leader of Europe. It was a cold calculation, not a great passion; de Gaulle surely did not die unfulfilled because Germany was not reunited in his lifetime.

Seeking to strike a balance between de Gaulle's flamboyant intransigence and Macmillan's quest for demonstrative negotiations, Dulles resorted to his familiar tactic of confusing the issue by submerging it in legalistic detail, which, to his way of thinking, had served him so well during the Suez crisis. On November 24, 1958, two weeks after Khrushchev's menacing speech, Dulles began exploring options on changing access procedures without actually yielding on substance. He wrote to Adenauer that he would try to "hold the Soviet Union to its obligations" while simultaneously dealing "on a *de facto* basis with minor [GDR] functionaries, so long as they merely carried out perfunctorily the present arrangements."¹⁹ At a press conference on November 26, Dulles put forward the notion that East German officials might act as "agents" for the Soviet Union—a ploy reminiscent of his Users' Association from the days of the Suez crisis (see chapter 21).²⁰

At a press conference on January 13, 1959, Dulles went a step further and signaled a change in America's historic position on German unification. After arguing that free elections were the "natural method" for

unifying Germany, he added, "I wouldn't say that it is the only method by which reunification could be accomplished."²¹ He even hinted that some sort of confederation of the two German states might prove acceptable: "There are all kinds of methods whereby countries and peoples draw together. . . ."²² He strongly implied that responsibility for unification might be transferred from the allies to the Germans themselves, undercutting the essence of Adenauer's policy.

The German reaction was predictable, though no one had predicted it. Willy Brandt, then Lord Mayor of Berlin, expressed his "shock and dismay." Dulles' agent theory, Brandt said, would encourage the Soviets to adopt an even more "uncompromising" stance.²³

Truculence was not Adenauer's normal style. He also greatly admired Dulles. Nevertheless, he reacted to Dulles' musings much as Eden had during Suez. In a conversation with Ambassador David Bruce, Adenauer argued emotionally that Dulles' statements were undermining his government's policy, which had sought unification *through* the West and on the basis of free elections. ". . . [C]onfederation in any form," he insisted, would be "totally unacceptable."²⁴

The difference in perspectives became painfully apparent in mid-January 1959, when Adenauer sent the permanent Undersecretary for Political Affairs of the Foreign Ministry, Herbert Dittmann, to Washington to express "shock" at the Soviets' proposal for a German peace treaty, and to urge a negotiating position based on the West's established policy. Dittmann's counterpart, United States Undersecretary of State Livingston Merchant, made it clear that, in this crisis, Adenauer could not count on Dulles' customary all-out support. Dulles, he argued, wanted to avoid *any* "extreme position," and "to get the Russians to the conference table." The Germans could best contribute by "provid[ing] us with new ideas."²⁵ As the crisis developed, whenever America and Great Britain asked for "new ideas," they were putting forth a euphemism for enhancing the status of the East German regime or for finding a formula to meet some Soviet demand.

It was ironic that Great Britain and the United States should be urging Germany onto a course that would almost certainly lead to greater German nationalism, while Adenauer, having far less confidence in his own countrymen, remained determined not to expose them to that temptation. Eisenhower and Macmillan were placing their faith in the Germans' conversion; Adenauer could not forget their original sin.

Macmillan was the first to break ranks. On February 21, 1959, he journeyed on his own to Moscow for "exploratory talks." Since Adenauer disapproved of the whole enterprise and no allied consensus existed,

Macmillan's "exploration" of what concessions might be offered must have included the already familiar catalogue of "improvements" in access procedures, along with his customary appeal for peace based on personal relations among world leaders.

Khrushchev interpreted Macmillan's visit as another confirmation of a favorable tilt in the balance of forces and the augury of even better things to come. During Macmillan's visit, Khrushchev delivered a boisterous speech reaffirming his demands in an uncompromising fashion. In another speech after the Prime Minister's departure, he dismissed Macmillan's proposition that good personal relations among world leaders would ease the road to peace: "History teaches that it is not conferences that change borders of states. The decisions of conferences can only reflect the new alignment of forces. And this is the result of victory or surrender at the end of a war, or of other circumstances."²⁶ It was a bald-faced profession of *Realpolitik* that might well have come from the mouth of Richelieu or Bismarck.

After Adenauer's blow-up, Dulles pulled back. On January 29, he abandoned the "agent theory" and stopped hinting at confederation as the route to German unity. Dulles' retreat, however, was largely tactical. Convictions had not altered, nor had personalities. As during the Suez crisis two years earlier, American policy depended on reconciling the subtle nuances of difference between the approaches of Eisenhower and Dulles. Given his own analysis of the Soviet system, Dulles in all likelihood understood Adenauer's point of view and must have shared much of it. But, as before, Dulles had to figure out how to relate his strategy to the much more elemental approach of Eisenhower.

For, after all was said and done, most of the issues that concerned Adenauer struck Eisenhower as theoretical, if not irrelevant. It was indeed fortunate that Khrushchev was not privy to Eisenhower's personal ruminations. As early as November 27, 1958—the day of Khrushchev's formal ultimatum—Eisenhower indicated in a telephone conversation with Dulles that he was receptive to the idea of a free city without American troops, provided that both Berlin and its access routes were under United Nations jurisdiction.

When presidential advisers or cabinet members disagree with their chief, they have to decide whether to make their case while the disagreement is still largely theoretical or to wait for the moment of actual decision. The answer determines future influence because presidents are generally personalities of strong will that can be crossed only so often. If advisers choose to challenge hypothetical cases, they may generate unnecessary acrimony since the president may change his mind on his

own. On the other hand, if they wait on events, they run the risk of being stampeded. Dulles opted for a middle ground. Warning Eisenhower against “paper agreements,” he cautioned that keeping Berlin free required the presence of American troops.²⁷ As it turned out, the occasion for an actual decision never arose. By this time, Dulles was terminally ill, and six months later, on May 24, 1959, he died.

On July 1, Eisenhower returned to his theme of accommodation. In a meeting with Soviet Deputy Prime Minister Frol Kozlov, he responded to the Soviet complaint that America’s position with respect to Berlin was illogical. “We admit it is illogical, but we will not abandon our rights and responsibilities—unless there is a way made for us to do so.”²⁸ Maintaining one’s rights until a way can be arranged to abandon them is hardly a stirring battle cry.

At Camp David in September 1959, Eisenhower told Khrushchev that America had no intention of staying in Berlin forever. “Clearly,” he said, “we did not contemplate 50 years in occupation there.”²⁹ Purporting to risk nuclear war on behalf of a city one is looking forward to vacating is not a great battle cry either.

On September 28, Eisenhower went even further, in essence conceding the basic premise of the Soviet challenge—that the situation in Berlin was indeed “abnormal”:

It was brought about by a truce, a military truce, after the end of the war, an armistice, and it put strangely a few—or a number of free people in a very awkward position.³⁰

What might have happened had Khrushchev either pressed the Soviet challenge or formulated some “compromise” based on the numerous hints he was receiving is painful to contemplate. Fortunately, Khrushchev’s limited attention span, his misassessment of his own relative strength, and perhaps divisions within the Soviet leadership all conspired to impart an oddly inconclusive quality to Soviet conduct. Khrushchev’s ultimatums alternated with lulls during which deadlines came and went without the Soviet leader ever insisting on the fulfillment of his demands or on a negotiation. The former would have revealed how determined the allies really were; the latter would have tested the obvious willingness of at least Great Britain and the United States to modify access to Berlin and the city’s status. Khrushchev’s failure to stick to his objective spared the Atlantic Alliance what might have turned into its greatest crisis.

Khrushchev pursued neither confrontation nor negotiation consistently. That alone should have raised a doubt in Western minds about the

coherence of the Soviet system. To threaten nuclear war and challenge the European *status quo* without developing a strategy leading to at least a diplomatic showdown proved to be a foretaste of the paralysis that would grip the Soviet system some twenty years later. Khrushchev was apparently trapped between the "hawks" in his Politburo, who, believing his boasts about a tilt in the balance of power, thought that the West was not offering enough, and the "doves," who, aware of the actual military realities, were unwilling to run even the slightest risk of war with the United States.

In the midst of this strange process, Khrushchev permitted his first ultimatum to lapse without having anything more to show for it than a foreign ministers' conference two weeks before the expiration of the deadline. That meeting failed to make progress because Andrei Gromyko, who had recently been appointed as Foreign Minister, used the occasion to burnish his formidable skill at stonewalling, with which he was to torment the democracies' foreign ministers for a whole generation. In fact, deadlock was not what the Soviets needed as the ultimatum was expiring. It did, however, enable Eisenhower to gain some more time, by inviting Khrushchev to visit the United States.

The Soviet ruler toured the United States from September 15 to September 27, 1959, eliciting the same sort of euphoric public reaction that had been evoked by the Geneva Summit four years earlier. Once again, the meeting of the two heads of government emphasized atmosphere over substance, as symbolized by the slogan "the spirit of Camp David." *Newsweek* magazine published a scorecard which indicated that the visit's purported achievements by far outnumbered its failures. And whatever failures there were, it was said, concerned primarily the leaders' inability to make progress on the issue of Berlin—as if that were a minor matter. The list of achievements included cultural exchanges, increased trade, and greater scientific cooperation, none of which required a meeting of the heads of government. The most frequently cited benefit was what the Soviet leader was presumed to be learning about his hosts, which reflected the standard American belief that conflicts among nations are caused by misunderstanding rather than by clashing interests, and that no one could ever come, see, and leave America and still be hostile to its ways.

According to a *Newsweek* poll, Americans believed that Khrushchev had finally understood "that Americans from the President on down genuinely want peace."³¹ If that was Khrushchev's actual judgment, the effect was surely double-edged. In any event, he kept that particular insight a state secret. Speaking a few weeks later, in early December, Khrushchev

boasted that “the capitalist world is shaking under the blows of the Socialist camp. . . . We have the will to win.”³²

Eisenhower too emerged from the summit with much the same conviction with which he had entered it: he remained willing, if not eager, to change the status of Berlin. At the end of the Summit, on October 1, Eisenhower described his idea of an appropriate way out of the crisis to his National Security Adviser, Gordon Gray:

We must remember that Berlin is an abnormal situation; that we had found it necessary to live with it, and that it had come about through some mistakes of our leaders—Churchill and Roosevelt. However, he [Eisenhower] felt that there must be some way to develop some kind of a free city which might be somehow a part of West Germany, which might require that the U.N. would become a party to guaranteeing the freedom, safety and security of the city which would have an unarmed status except for police forces. He reiterated that the time was coming and perhaps soon when we would simply have to get our forces out.³³

With Khrushchev fortunately unwilling to explore these or any other ideas, the Western allies achieved by default their principal objective of gaining time. In 1955, the Geneva Summit had permitted Khrushchev to achieve a relaxation of tensions without making substantive concessions; in 1959, Eisenhower achieved the same result by invoking the so-called spirit of Camp David.

The principal result of Camp David was another delay. Eisenhower and Khrushchev agreed to convene a meeting of the four powers occupying Berlin. But Eisenhower wanted first to consult his allies. De Gaulle refused the summit invitation unless Khrushchev first paid a state visit to Paris. Given all these preconditions, the earliest date for a summit turned out to be May 1960, to be held in Paris. Finally, two weeks before the meeting, an American U-2 spy plane was shot down over the Soviet Union. That flight gave Khrushchev the pretext to wreck the entire conference, which by then had already been over a year in gestation. It turned out to be just as well, since the American fallback position on Berlin had been a plan for a “guaranteed city,” which incorporated many of Eisenhower’s ruminations to Gordon Gray. In practice, the scheme differed from Khrushchev’s free-city proposal primarily in the label accorded to the city’s new status.

Although for several days the Western allies were concerned that Khrushchev might finally have his pretext for a showdown, it very quickly became apparent that the Soviet leader was seeking just the opposite—a

pretext for avoiding a showdown. Verbal truculence became a substitute for the confrontation Khrushchev had threatened just as consistently as he had recoiled from it. Contrary to all expectations, when Khrushchev stopped in Berlin on his way back from the aborted Paris summit, he announced yet another postponement of his deadline, this time until after the American presidential elections.

By the time John F. Kennedy entered office, nearly three years had passed since Khrushchev had issued his first ultimatum. The passage of time had progressively reduced the credibility of his threat and the overall sense of danger. Just when the Berlin issue seemed to be calming down, the Kennedy Administration's failed attempt to overthrow Castro at the Bay of Pigs and its indecisiveness over Laos apparently convinced Khrushchev that Kennedy was a soft touch. At a summit with Kennedy in Vienna in early June 1961, Khrushchev reinstated another six-month deadline, inaugurating one of the most intense periods of confrontation of the entire Cold War.

Reporting on the summit on June 15, Khrushchev told the world that the conclusion of a German peace treaty could no longer be delayed: "A peace settlement in Europe must be attained this year." For one of his speeches, Khrushchev appeared in the uniform of a lieutenant general, a courtesy rank Stalin had bestowed on him during the war. On another occasion, Khrushchev told the British Ambassador that it would take only six atomic bombs to destroy England and nine to obliterate France.³⁴ In September 1960, Khrushchev ended the informal nuclear test ban which both sides had observed for three years. As part of its test program, the Soviet Union set off a monstrous explosion of fifty megatons.

Khrushchev's demands for a postwar settlement were not new. Churchill had urged a postwar settlement as early as 1943; Stalin had proposed one in his 1952 Peace Note; George Kennan had advocated a settlement on Germany in the mid-1950s. But unlike other wars, there was to be no postwar settlement following the Second World War. The American and Soviet spheres of influence would be established step by step and by acquiescence to *faits accomplis* rather than by formal agreements.

The final act in defining the European spheres of influence began in the early hours of August 13, 1961. West Berliners awoke to find themselves virtually imprisoned. The East Germans had erected barbed-wire barricades between the Soviet sector of Berlin and the sectors occupied by the three Western powers, and had built a fence around the entire city of Berlin. Families on opposite sides of that wall were rent asunder. As the days went by, the wall was reinforced; concrete, land mines, and

guard dogs became the symbols of the divided city and of communist inhumanity. The bankruptcy of a communist regime unable to induce its own citizens to remain within their country was revealed to all the world. Nevertheless, the communist leaders had plugged the hole in the dike of the Soviet bloc—at least temporarily.

The erection of the wall brought home to the democracies their Berlin dilemma. They were prepared to defend the freedom of Berlin against overt aggression, but they had not decided on their response below that threshold or, indeed, on how to define aggression. Almost immediately, Kennedy determined that the construction of the wall did not fit America's definition of aggression and decided not to challenge it militarily. The American attempt to play down the building of the wall was shown by the fact that, on the day it was first erected, Kennedy went sailing and Secretary of State Rusk attended a baseball game. There was no crisis atmosphere in Washington.

In truth, Kennedy's military options were quite limited. If American troops removed the barrier at the sector border, they might face a rebuilt wall a few hundred yards farther back. Would they then enter East Berlin to tear it down? Would the Western public support a war for the cause of free movement *inside* Berlin—when in practice East Berlin had been conceded long before as the capital of the East German communist satellite?

As it became clear that America would not resist the building of the wall by force, West Berlin and the Federal Republic experienced the kind of shock that comes from being confronted with a reality of which one was subconsciously aware but afraid to acknowledge. At the latest after the Hungarian Revolution, it should have been clear that the West would not challenge the existing spheres of influence militarily. Brandt was to claim later that his policy of *Ostpolitik*, which led to the recognition of the East German regime, resulted from his disillusionment with America's reaction to the building of the wall. In all likelihood, however, the Germans' shock would have been even greater had a war resulted from the effort to tear it down. Even Adenauer told Acheson that he did not want Berlin defended by a nuclear war, knowing full well that there was no other means by which it could be defended.

Both superpowers continued to jockey in an effort to define both their commitment and its limits. In July, Kennedy substantially increased the American defense budget, called up reserves, and sent additional forces to Europe. In August 1961, after the wall was built, Kennedy dispatched 1,500 troops on the Autobahn through the Soviet zone, daring the Soviets to stop them. Arriving without challenge, the troops were met with a

rousing speech by Vice-President Johnson, who had flown ahead to greet them. Soon thereafter, General Lucius Clay, the hero of the Berlin blockade of 1948, was appointed as the President's personal representative in Berlin. Kennedy was staking American credibility on the freedom of Berlin.

Khrushchev had again maneuvered himself into the same sort of dead end as during the Eisenhower Administration. His bluster had evoked an American reaction he proved unwilling to challenge. And reports from Colonel Oleg Penkovsky, the extraordinary American mole in Soviet military intelligence, revealed that high-level Soviet officers were quite well aware of their lack of preparedness and frequently grumbled amongst themselves about Khrushchev's recklessness.³⁵ As early as 1960, Eisenhower had seen through Khrushchev's bluff, telling a visitor that, in the event of war, he would be far more worried about nuclear fallout from America's own weapons than about Soviet retaliation. Once he became President, Kennedy also quickly realized that the Soviet Union was inferior in overall strategic power.

This state of affairs favored the side wanting to preserve the *status quo*. At the same time, Kennedy was even more explicit than Eisenhower had been about his reluctance to run even a slight risk of nuclear war over Berlin. On the way back from his summit with Khrushchev at Vienna, he ruminated:

... it seems particularly stupid to risk killing a million Americans over an argument about access rights on an Autobahn... or because the Germans want Germany reunified. If I'm going to threaten Russia with a nuclear war, it will have to be for much bigger and more important reasons than that.³⁶

Eisenhower's strategy had been drawn from the original containment script. He strove to block the Soviets wherever they challenged the West. Kennedy's goals were more ambitious. He hoped to end the Soviet-American conflict once and for all through direct superpower negotiations—and to use the Berlin crisis as the turning point. The Kennedy White House therefore pressed for a more flexible diplomacy on Berlin and, if necessary, a unilateral one. To Eisenhower, Berlin had been a challenge to be endured and outlasted; to Kennedy, it was a way station on the road to his design of a new world order. Eisenhower or Dulles would come up with formulae to defuse a specific threat; Kennedy wanted to eliminate a permanent obstacle to peace.

The two presidents' attitudes toward NATO differed as well. Whereas

Eisenhower had commanded the wartime alliance in Europe, Kennedy had been involved with the war in the Pacific, where the American effort had been much more national and unilateral. Kennedy was not prepared to grant allies a veto over negotiations and, in truth, preferred to deal directly with the Soviet Union, as can be seen from this presidential directive to Secretary of State Dean Rusk, dated August 21, 1961, a week after the Berlin Wall went up:

Both the calendar of negotiation and the substance of the Western position remain unsettled, and I no longer believe that satisfactory progress can be made by Four-Power discussion alone. I think we should promptly work toward a strong U.S. position in both areas and should make it clear that we cannot accept a veto from any other power. . . . We should this week make it plain to our three Allies that this is what we mean to do and that they must come along or stay behind.³⁷

In pursuit of this directive, Dean Rusk abandoned four-power negotiations in favor of a direct dialogue with Moscow. Rusk and Gromyko met a few times that fall at the United Nations. Other conversations took place between Ambassador Thompson and Gromyko in Moscow. Yet the Soviets would not so much as agree to an agenda for negotiations on the Berlin issue.

The trouble was that each side found itself trapped in a dilemma peculiar to the Nuclear Age. They could use their nuclear forces to protect their survival, but these weapons did not lend themselves to bringing about positive transformations. Whatever theoretical level of superiority might be calculated, the risk of nuclear war was out of proportion to any objective to be gained. Even a 5 percent risk of war is intolerable when the penalty involves the utter destruction of one's society—indeed, of civilization. At the end of the day, therefore, each side recoiled before the risk of war.

At the same time, neither side was in a position to substitute diplomacy for power. Despite the mounting tension, the arguments in favor of the *status quo* always seemed to outweigh the impulse to modify it. On the side of the democracies, an allied consensus proved impossible to achieve; on the communist side, Khrushchev's boasting may have raised the expectations of his colleagues to such an extent that even the major concessions the West was prepared to make seemed inadequate to the Kremlin hard-liners. In the end, Khrushchev tried to break the deadlock by his disastrous adventure of placing missiles into Cuba, which showed just how high the stakes had to be raised before military power could affect diplomacy.

These tendencies toward stagnation doomed the efforts of the Kennedy Administration to break the deadlock with diplomatic initiatives. Any concession conceivably acceptable to Khrushchev would weaken the Atlantic Alliance, and any settlement tolerable to the democracies would weaken Khrushchev.

The Kennedy Administration's effort to discover in the Soviet catalogue of demands any that could be met without risk was doomed to failure. On August 28, 1961, McGeorge Bundy, Kennedy's National Security Adviser, summed up White House thinking in a memorandum to the President: "The main line of thought among those who are now at work on the substance of our negotiating position is that we can and should shift substantially toward acceptance of the GDR, the Oder-Neisse line, a non-aggression pact, and even the idea of two peace treaties."³⁸ The memorandum did not state what the United States expected to receive in return.

Such attitudes made it inevitable that Washington would gradually separate itself from Adenauer. On September 22, an Administration leak had stated pointedly:

An authoritative United States source called on West Germany today to accept, in its own interests, the "reality" of the existence of two German states.

The source said West Germany would have better chances of achieving German reunification "by talking to the East Germans" instead of ignoring them.³⁹

In December 1961, Bundy tried to reassure Bonn by referring to the "fundamental" American purpose of ensuring that the German people "shall not have any legitimate cause to regret their trust in us." At the same time, he warned against misinterpreting that reassurance to be a blank check: "We cannot grant—and no German statesmen have asked—a German veto on the policy of the West. A partnership of free men can never move at the call of one member only."⁴⁰

In effect, these conciliatory phrases canceled each other out. Since the stated American and German positions were irreconcilable, and since Germany was totally dependent on the United States for the defense of Berlin, denying Bonn a veto could produce only one of two outcomes: risking war for a cause in which the Kennedy Administration had said it did not believe, or imposing views on Bonn that had been rejected by the German leaders. The former course could not have been sustained in the American Congress or in public opinion; the latter would have

wrecked Germany's commitment to the West and the cohesion of the Atlantic Alliance.

Relations between Washington and Bonn grew progressively more testy. Fearing deadlock and a break with Adenauer, the State Department dragged its feet for several months and did not implement Kennedy's directive to push direct negotiations with Moscow—or rather it held meetings without providing many new ideas. Had Khrushchev possessed a sense of proportion, he might have realized that this was the moment to determine which of all the various Western hints might be translated into hard political coin. Instead, he kept raising the stakes and avoided negotiations.

During this period of suspended diplomacy and inter-allied tension, I was peripherally involved in White House policymaking as a consultant to the National Security Council. Although I was aware of the issues being debated and the various crosscurrents swirling around the President, I did not personally participate in the final decisions. NATO traditionalists—in particular Acheson, who functioned as an outside consultant during those intervals in which his acerbic tongue had not caused him to fall out of favor—were loath to negotiate at all. Like de Gaulle and Adenauer, they could see no conceivable improvement in any new access procedures, and expected only acrimony from attempts to negotiate on the issue of German unification.

As much as I admired Acheson, I did not believe that a strategy of stonewalling could be sustained. Whenever Khrushchev chose, he could force a negotiation; no Western leader, not even de Gaulle, could confront his public with the need for a showdown unless he had first demonstrated that he had explored every means to avoid one. Considering it dangerous to negotiate on the basis of a Soviet agenda, I thought it was vital to pre-empt this by coming up with an American plan for the future of Germany. I feared for the cohesion of the allies if decisions were relegated to a conference or left at the mercy of deadlines. On procedure, I favored negotiation; on substance, I was close to the traditional positions of Adenauer and Acheson.

My brief White House stint during the Kennedy years produced a number of encounters with Adenauer. These painfully served to bring home to me the extent of the distrust which the Berlin crisis had engendered between heretofore close allies. In 1958, shortly after the publication of my book *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*,⁴¹ Adenauer had invited me to call on him, though I was then a relatively unknown junior professor. During that conversation, Adenauer told me emphatically not to be deceived by the appearance of a monolithic communist bloc extending from the Baltic to Southeast Asia: as far as he was concerned, a break

between China and the Soviet Union was inevitable. He hoped, he said, that when it occurred the democracies would be ready to take advantage of it.

I had never heard that proposition before, nor did I believe it. Adenauer must have interpreted my amazed silence as acquiescence, for when he met Kennedy three years later, he concluded a peroration on the inevitability of a Sino-Soviet split by mentioning that I concurred with him. A little later, I received a message from Kennedy to the effect that he would be grateful if, henceforth, I would share my geopolitical insights not just with the German Chancellor but with him as well.

Assuming—perhaps as a result of this exchange between Adenauer and Kennedy—that I was closer to Adenauer than was probably the case, the White House asked me early in 1962 to attempt to ease the Chancellor's increasingly vocal concerns about the Kennedy Administration's Berlin policy. I was to brief Adenauer on the American approach to negotiations, military-contingency planning for Berlin, and, as a special consideration, America's nuclear capability, which, I was told, had never been shared with any ally except Great Britain.

It proved to be a formidable task. I had barely begun my presentation when Adenauer interrupted: "They have already told me this in Washington. It did not impress me there; why do they think it would impress me here?" I replied sharply that I was not a government employee, that I had been asked to call on him in order to ease his concerns, and that he should hear me out before drawing conclusions.

Adenauer was nonplussed. He asked how much of my time was spent working as a White House consultant. When I told him about 25 percent, he replied calmly: "In that case, I shall assume you are telling me 75 percent of the truth." This was uttered in the presence of the American Ambassador, Walter C. Dowling, who, according to Adenauer's formula, would have to have been lying all the time.

But even at that low point in German-American relations, Adenauer demonstrated that, for him, reliability was a moral imperative. Though nuclear strategy was not his consuming field of interest, he deeply appreciated the sign of confidence implicit in the nuclear briefing Washington had conveyed to him through me. Having emigrated from Germany at the age of fifteen some twenty-five years earlier, I did not feel my German vocabulary was equal to a discussion of nuclear weapons, and conducted my part of the conversation in English. Our interpreter was a member of the Chancellor's staff. Twenty-five years later, that official, who by then was quite elderly and in retirement, wrote to me to say that, like any interpreter worth his salt, he had made a record of the nuclear briefing and had presented it to Adenauer. The Chancellor's response was

that he had given his word that the briefing would be kept confidential; therefore, retaining even a single file copy would be incompatible with that promise. And he ordered that all records relating to that part of our conversation be destroyed.

Nevertheless, by April 1962, German-American relations had spun out of control. On April 21, an American plan was leaked calling for the creation of an International Access Authority to control traffic in and out of Berlin. It was to consist of five Western parties (the three Western occupying powers plus the Federal Republic and West Berlin), five communist participants (the Soviet Union, Poland, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic, and East Berlin), and three neutrals (Sweden, Switzerland, and Austria). Unification would be promoted by a number of committees composed in equal parts of West and East German officials.

Not surprisingly, Adenauer was adamantly opposed to creating an Access Authority especially if East and West Germany would have equal status in it. Moreover, participation of representatives from both East and West Berlin would weaken the city's already fragile four-power status and further enhance the role of East Germany. Since the number of communists on the Access Authority equaled the number of representatives of the democracies, three weak, neutral countries subject to Soviet blackmail would have the decisive voice. Adenauer considered all this a poor substitute for an American commitment.

Adenauer decided to lance the boil by taking what was for him the unprecedented step of publicly criticizing his principal ally. At a press conference on May 7, 1962, he emphatically rejected the International Access Authority.

It seems to me that this whole plan cannot be implemented. You know that in the end three countries, namely, Sweden, Austria, and Switzerland, are to have the decisive voice since the votes of the people from the East and West will probably balance out. Well then, I should like to ask you whether these countries would answer in the affirmative if they were asked whether they liked this role? I don't think so!⁴²

To underline the extent of his displeasure, Adenauer added a bitter dig at the Kennedy Administration's attempt to assign a higher priority to the developing world:

I am also against colonies and I am all for development aid. But I also demand that 16,000,000 Germans [in East Germany] be allowed to live their own lives. We shall tell that to our friends and our enemies.⁴³

These differences were never resolved. On July 17, 1962, Kennedy was still telling Anatoly Dobrynin, the new Soviet Ambassador, that "there might well be other issues on which we would be willing to press the Germans quite hard, such as, for example, on the structure of an access authority."⁴⁴ Since Adenauer had already publicly explained in great detail his objection to both the composition and the function of such an authority, Khrushchev should have known that he held the key to unleashing a major crisis within the Atlantic Alliance.

Amazingly, just as Soviet success seemed imminent, Khrushchev veered off course. Trying to achieve in one stroke the breakthrough which had eluded him for the past three years, Khrushchev placed Soviet intermediate-range missiles into Cuba. Khrushchev had obviously calculated that, if he succeeded in that adventure, his bargaining position in an eventual Berlin negotiation would be overwhelming. For the same reason, Kennedy could not permit such an extension of Soviet strategic power into the Western Hemisphere. His bold and skillful handling of the crisis not only forced Khrushchev to withdraw the Soviet missiles but, in the process, stripped his Berlin diplomacy of whatever credibility still remained to it.

Recognizing that he had run out of expedients, Khrushchev announced in January 1963 that the "success" of the Berlin Wall had made a separate peace treaty with Berlin unnecessary. The Berlin crisis was finally over. It had lasted five years. Through it, the allies had preserved their position on all the most essential matters—albeit with many a vacillation. For his part, Khrushchev had achieved no more than to build a wall to keep East Germany's unwilling subjects from bolting the communist utopia.

It was fortuitous for the West that Khrushchev had overplayed his hand, for the Alliance had come perilously close to breaking. The American position during both the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations was based on the traditional American maxim that America was resisting change through the threat of force, not change as such. As an academic statement, this was unexceptional, provided only that there was a general understanding that the outcome of the crisis would be judged by substance, not method.

And in terms of substance, the various schemes under consideration within both the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations were extremely risky. All had the common drawback of altering the existing framework in the direction urged by the Soviets. Nor could it have been otherwise, for the Soviet Union had surely not started the crisis in order to worsen its position. Every proposed *quid pro quo* would have obliged the Soviet Union to trade a threat it never should have made for some objective

improvement in the status of its East German satellite and the modification of existing access procedures. Adenauer's twin nightmare—that the East German communists might acquire the means to exploit Berlin's vulnerability, and that a gap might arise between Bonn's obligations to the Alliance and its aspiration for national unity—was inherent in any of the proposed negotiating schemes.

Dean Acheson, who had, in his words, been “present at the creation” of the postwar alliance system, saw this clearly. In a letter to Truman on September 21, 1961, he predicted a humiliating Western defeat over Berlin “dressed up as statesmanship of the new order.”⁴⁵ If such a defeat became unavoidable, argued Acheson, the future of the Western Alliance would depend on who assumed responsibility for the debacle. “It is better,” he wrote to General Lucius Clay in January 1962, “to have the followers desert the leader, than to have the leader follow the followers. Who then picks up the pieces? Who is trusted to lead in a new start?”⁴⁶ It was the de Gaulle strategy in reverse.

In the course of the Berlin crisis, German priorities shifted. Throughout the postwar period, Adenauer's principal reliance had been on the United States. A year after Khrushchev's ultimatum, that was no longer the case. A State Department intelligence report of August 26, 1959, noted Adenauer's distress at the lack of unanimity among the allies. According to the report, Adenauer still hoped for a restoration of allied unity. But if a “US-UK combination appears to be moving toward an understanding with Khrushchev, Adenauer will be forced to shift his main reliance to France.”⁴⁷

Throughout the crisis, Khrushchev behaved like a chess player who, having made a dazzling opening move, sits back in the expectation that the opponent will surrender upon contemplating his dilemma without playing the game to the finish. In reading the diplomatic record, it is difficult to comprehend why Khrushchev never explored any of the innumerable negotiating options that were offered, debated, and so often hinted at. Among these were the Access Authority, the two peace treaties, and the “guaranteed-city” concept. In the end, Khrushchev never did act on any of his deadlines, or on the many options he had had to engage the Western allies in a negotiation. After three years of ultimatums and blood-curdling threats, Khrushchev's only real “success” was the building of the Berlin Wall, which ultimately came to symbolize the failure of the Soviet Berlin policy.

Khrushchev had snared himself in a tangled web of his own creation. Trapped, he found that he could not hope to achieve his demands without war. For this he proved never quite ready, and yet he dared not take the

West up on its offers to negotiate lest he be accused by the "hawks" in the Kremlin and his Chinese cohorts of having settled for too little. Too weak to steer his "doves" toward a more confrontational course, too unsure of his standing to impose concessions on his "hawks," Khrushchev procrastinated as long as he could, then staked everything on a desperate roll of the dice by placing missiles in Cuba.

The Berlin crisis—together with its culmination in the Cuban missile crisis—marked a turning point in the Cold War, though it was not perceived as such at the time. Had the democracies not become so consumed by their internal disputes, they might have interpreted the Berlin crisis for what it was—a demonstration of latent Soviet weakness. In the end, Khrushchev was obliged to continue to live with a Western outpost deep within Soviet territory, having failed to achieve any of the goals he had trumpeted when he launched the crisis. Thus the division of Europe into two blocks was reaffirmed again, as it had been in the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Both sides would complain about that state of affairs, but neither ever attempted to alter it by force.

The cumulative result of the failure of Khrushchev's Berlin and Cuban initiatives was that the Soviet Union did not again risk posing a direct challenge to the United States, except during a brief flare-up at the end of the 1973 Middle East War. Though the Soviets assembled a vast force of long-range missiles, the Kremlin never deemed these sufficient to mount a direct threat to established American rights. Instead, Soviet military pressure veered off in the direction of supporting so-called wars of national liberation in such areas of the developing world as Angola, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, and Nicaragua.

For a decade, the Soviets made no further attempts to impede access to Berlin, which was continued under established procedures. In that interval, recognition of the East German regime came about gradually and as a West German decision supported by all the major German parties, not as an initiative imposed by the United States. In time, the allies exploited the Soviets' eagerness for the recognition of East Germany by insisting on the precondition that the Soviet Union put in place ironclad access procedures to Berlin as well as confirm its four-power status. The Soviets formally accepted these conditions in the Quadripartite Agreement of 1971. There was no further challenge to Berlin or the access routes until the wall was pulled down in 1989, leading to German reunification. Containment had worked after all.