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CRISIS OVER BERLIN

American Policy Concerning the Soviet Threats to Berlin,
November 1958-December 1962

Part VI

Deepening Crisis Over Berlin: Communist Challenges and
Western Responses, June-September 1961

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of this recommendation in the Quadripartite Working Group Report adopted at Paris see ante, chapter II, p. 49). This did not preclude the United States from advertising these facts about East Germany to the world, however, "in such a manner as not to encourage the East Germans to revolt or to expect US assistance if they do."]

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The Department stated that it would consider plans on meeting the contingencies mentioned earlier. If the GDR should tighten travel controls between the Soviet Zone and East Berlin, the United States could not do much more than help advertise the facts. If the GDR should restrict travel within Berlin, the United States would favor countermeasures, at least with respect to Temporary Travel Documents (TTD's) and perhaps also in the economic field. Finally, in the case of an East German uprising, the United States would decide its course of action in the light of the circumstances at the time.¹

3. The Refugee Tide

Background. In July and in the early part of August 1961, the tide of refugees from East Germany reached such proportions that it became the principal aspect of the crisis of the East German regime. The Communist decision to treat it as their number one problem, requiring solution without delay, created one of the contingencies anticipated by American officials and ultimately brought about a permanent change in the Berlin situation.

Yet the mass exodus from East Germany in the summer of 1961 was only the climax of a development which had gone on for many years, practically since the inception of the East German regime. Particularly since the brutal suppression of the East German uprising of June 1953, flight from East Germany was the only effective way in which the suffering population could demonstrate its opposition to the hated Ulbricht regime. The existence of a free German state in

¹Memorandum by Ausland (GER) to Hillenbrand (GER), July 18, 1961, secret; to Bonn, tel. 172, July 22, secret.

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the West, in combination with the opportunity provided by the West Berlin "escape hatch", worked like a powerful magnet on the oppressed population of the Soviet Zone.

According to West German registration figures for refugees from the Soviet Zone which had been assembled since September 1949, the total of refugees rose from 129,245 in 1949 to a record high of 331,390 in 1953, the year of the East German uprising. The annual figure then dropped to 184,198 in 1954, rose again above 200,000 in the years 1955-1958, and then dropped to 143,917 in 1959. In 1960 the refugee total once more practically reached the 200,000 mark (199,188). Until 1957 a considerable proportion of these refugees entered the Federal Republic by way of regular interzonal travel. Subsequent legislative, administrative, and propaganda measures by the East German regime to prevent the "flight from the Republic" (Republikflucht) severely restricted interzonal travel for East Germans, and as a result West Berlin became the gate to freedom for a large majority of the refugees. In 1961 the number of refugees rose again, to reach 103,159 by the end of June. As the Soviet Union stepped up the Berlin crisis in the wake of the Vienna meeting, 14,279 refugees arrived in Berlin during the first half of July. This figure exceeded the arrivals during the whole month of July in any previous year, except 1953 and 1956.

It was not only the size of the exodus which alarmed the East German regime but also its quality. The percentage of young people between the ages of 18 and 25 among the refugees was 25.7% in 1960 and rose to 27.2% in the first six months of 1961; the share of the 25-45 age group was 23.4% in 1960 and 23.9% in the first half of 1961. Moreover, the share of gainfully employed persons in the refugee total was 60.7% in 1960 and 61.8% in the first six months of 1961.¹

¹Bundesministerium für Gesamtdeutsche Fragen, Die Flucht aus der Sowjetzone und die Sperrmassnahmen des kommunistischen Regimes vom 13. August 1961 in Berlin (Bonn and Berlin, 1961), pp. 15-18; from Berlin, tel. 61, July 18, 1961, official use only.

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East German Countermeasures. To stem the rising tide of refugees, the East German regime tightened controls at the zonal and sector boundaries and also introduced new measures. Most of these were directed against the so-called border crossers (Grenzgänger), i.e., some 50,000 East Germans and East Berliners who were employed in West Berlin. The purpose was, of course, to divert the border crossers, who were mostly skilled workers, into employment in East Germany and thus to alleviate the critical manpower shortage caused by the refugee flow. On July 7 the regime began to enforce a hitherto dormant law of 1953 which required those working in West Berlin to obtain permission from the East Berlin Magistrate. On July 11 the East German regime decreed that all purchasers of scarce durable goods, such as automobiles, motorcycles, boats, TV sets, washing machines, and refrigerators, had to present certificates indicating that they were working in East Germany or East Berlin. Border crossers were also declared ineligible to obtain low-cost housing. On July 14 the East German regime announced that henceforth border crossers would be required to pay for goods and services either in West German currency or to present proof that their East German currency had been exchanged at the legal rate of 1 to 1 rather than at the unofficial rate of 5 to 1. On July 19 the regime instituted a "census" of interzonal vehicle traffic which provided for the checking of documents and interrogation of travellers.

By the end of July the total of refugees for the entire month had risen to over 30,000 and the daily average to 1,100. On August 1 it was announced that measures would be taken in interzonal traffic allegedly to protect the East German population against a polio epidemic in the Federal Republic. On August 3 the Mission in Berlin report that East German police were harassing border crossers by confiscating their identity cards and refusing to return them until their holders gave up working in West Berlin. On August 4 East Berlin authorities issued a decree forcing the border crossers to register in East Berlin and also to pay East German rents, utilities, and public fees in D-marks.¹

¹Bureau of Intelligence Research, "Current Developments on Berlin and Germany," Aug. 9, 1961, secret; from Berlin, tel. 39, July 12, 1961; tel. 136, Aug. 3; tel. 143, Aug. 4; all official use only.

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On August 3 the three Western Commandants protested the measures taken against border crossers and urged the Soviet Commandant to end the restrictions placed on East Berliners working in West Berlin.¹

Crest of the Refugee Tide. By August 5 the daily refugee total had reached the figure of 1,500, and on August 9, two days after Khrushchev's bomb-rattling speech (see ante, p. 73) the daily total had risen to 1,926. Twenty-nine percent of all the refugees registering in West Berlin were border crossers. On August 11 West German Minister for All-German Affairs Lemmer declared in a speech that, if the refugee flow continued at the current rate, the figure of 200,000, which was the total for the entire year 1960, would be reached by the end of the summer.²

But it became apparent that the Communists were about to take action to prevent the further depletion of their manpower and that such action would have greater significance and scope than harassment of border crossers.

From August 3 to August 5 a conference of the First Secretaries of the Central Committees of the Communist parties in the Warsaw Pact countries was held in Moscow. It issued a communiqué which stated, in its concluding passage, that the meeting had ordered all the officials concerned "to take all the necessary measures in the economic field and in foreign policy, which will assure the conclusion of a German peace treaty and observance of its provisions including those concerning West Berlin as a free city."³ It was believed, however, that this conference also discussed measures to curtail the refugee flow.

¹From Berlin, tel. 131, Aug. 3, 1961, official use only.

²From Berlin, tel. 165, Aug. 10, 1961, and tel. 172, Aug. 12, both official use only; from Berlin, desp. 72, Aug. 7, confidential.

³Historical Office, "Chronology on Berlin, January 1957-June 1962," January 1963, official use only.

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On August 10 Marshal Ivan Konev, one of the Soviet Union's top military leaders in World War II, was appointed Commander of Soviet forces in Germany. On August 11 the People's Chamber (Volkskammer) of the East German regime, according to the East German press, "unanimously approved" statements by Foreign Minister Bolz regarding a peace treaty and by Prime Minister Stoph on the problem of refugees and border crossers. The People's Chamber authorized the East German Council of Ministers to take all necessary measures. The same day East German Volkspolizei began a complete check of all S-Bahn passengers en route from Potsdam into West Berlin and also began to apply rigorous controls at other S-Bahn crossings into West Berlin. Nevertheless, by the close of that day (August 11), 2,290 refugees had entered the Marienfelde reception center in West Berlin, thus setting an all-time record for a single day.¹

B. The Division of Berlin

1. The Closing of the East Berlin Sector Borders (August 13-23)

The increasing harassment of travel between East Berlin and West Berlin in the second week of August foreshadowed the action which the Soviet Union and its East German satellite had decided on in order to stop the mass exodus from the Soviet Zone. In the early morning hours of August 13, units of the East German army and Volkspolizei began to seal off the border between the Soviet sector and the Western sectors of Berlin by erecting barbed wire barriers and other obstacles, digging trenches, and tearing up the pavements.

These were only the most conspicuous among a series of measures taken in accordance with decrees adopted by the East German regime on August 12 and published on August 13. According to the text of these decrees, they were issued on the basis of a declaration of the Warsaw Pact states of August 12, published simultaneously, proposing to the government and people of the GDR that they "establish an order on

¹From Berlin, tel. 174, Aug. 12, 1961, official use only.

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the border of West Berlin which will seriously block the way to the subversive activity against the socialist camp countries, so that reliable safeguards and effective control can be established around the whole territory of West Berlin, including its border with democratic Berlin." Accordingly, the East German regime decreed the introduction of new controls on the East German borders, "including the border along the Western sector of Greater Berlin."

Henceforth East Berliners and East Germans would need special permits for going into West Berlin. Border crossers were no longer allowed to work in West Berlin. Direct subway and elevated traffic between East Berlin and West Berlin was halted. Finally, only 13 crossing points between the Soviet sector and the Western sectors remained open compared with about 80 prior to August 13. But the decrees did not prevent West Berliners from entering East Berlin provided they showed their identity cards; nor did they affect foreign nationals and diplomats.

In the days following August 13, the East German army and police units along the sector border were heavily reinforced, and armored troop detachments also made their appearance. On August 15 special permits were required for West Berlin vehicles entering East Berlin. Barge traffic was also halted. The number of crossing points was further reduced with the closing of the Brandenburg Gate on August 14. Gradually the barriers erected on August 13 were reinforced, and on August 18 there began the construction of a six-foot-high concrete wall topped by barbed wire along some portions of the Soviet sector boundary. To isolate East Berlin further, the Communists walled off the entrances of houses in the Soviet sector which faced West Berlin; by August 21 they began to remove East Berlin residents from houses at the sector border and to barricade the houses to prevent further occupancy. On August 23 the East German regime decreed further measures to complete the sealing-off of East Berlin. West Berliners were henceforth required to obtain permits to enter the Soviet sector, and the number of crossing points was reduced to seven. Four of these were specifically assigned to West Berliners, two to citizens of the Federal Republic, and one to foreign nationals including diplomats and members of the Western military forces. At the same time the regime warned the

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population, in the interest of their own safety, to keep a distance of 100 meters on both sides of the sector border.¹

As a result of these measures, what had been a refugee tide before August 13 became a mere trickle after that date. Though more than 2,400 refugees had entered West Berlin on August 12, the last day before the closing of the East Berlin sector borders, only 492 actually crossed the sector borders between August 13 and 18. The total figure of refugees who had fled the Soviet Zone between January 1 and August 15, 1961 was 159,730.²

2. Allied Reaction to the Border Closing

Secretary Rusk's Statement. The first official American reaction to the closure of the East Berlin border came in a statement issued by Secretary Rusk on August 13. It is significant that the Secretary stressed that the measures taken thus far were aimed at residents of East Berlin and East Germany "and not at the Allied position in West Berlin or access thereto." The Secretary made it clear, however, that the limitation of travel within Berlin was a "violation of the four-power status of Berlin" and of the "right of free circulation throughout the city" and that restrictions on travel between East German and Berlin were "in direct contravention" of the Paris four-Power agreement of June 20, 1949. He declared that these violations would be made the subject of "vigorous protests through appropriate channels."³

¹From Berlin, tels. 176, 177, 178, Aug. 13, 1961; tel. 282, Aug. 23; all official use only; tel. 283, Aug. 23, confidential; Documents on Germany, 1944-1961, pp. 721-725; Die Flucht aus der Sowjetzone, etc., pp. 33-36.

²Die Flucht aus der Sowjetzone, etc., pp. 15, 33; "Berlin Chronology and Second Access Problem," Berlin Task Force files.

³Documents on Germany, 1944-1961, pp. 725-726.

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Allied Protests. On August 14 the three Western Commandants in Berlin agreed on a draft letter of protest to the Soviet Commandant with regard to the East German actions. The Mission in Berlin urged that the letter be approved and delivered as soon as possible in view of the "restiveness of West Berlin's population." The letter of protest was handed to the Soviet Commandant on August 15. In it the Commandants declared that the illegal measures of the East German regime designed to turn the boundaries between the Western sectors and the Soviet sector of Berlin into an "arbitrary barrier to movement of German citizens resident in East Berlin and East Germany" were a "flagrant violation" of the four-Power status of Berlin. The Commandants also pointed out the illegal character of the presence of military and paramilitary units in East Berlin to carry out these illegal measures. Furthermore, they declared that prohibiting East Berliners and East Germans from continuing their occupations in West Berlin denied to the working population the elementary right of "free choice of place of employment."¹

Two days later, on August 17, notes of protest by the three Western Allies were handed to the Soviet Foreign Ministry. These notes were coordinated in the Quadripartite Ambassadorial Steering Group, which had been charged by the Western Foreign Ministers at their Paris meeting of August 5-8 (see ante, Chapter II, Section B 4) with formulating and planning responses to anticipated Soviet moves on Berlin. The Western Powers, as the three Commandants had done earlier, denounced the violation of the quadripartite status of Berlin by the East Germans. They also stated that they expected the Soviet Union to end these "illegal measures" and noted, in this connection, that the declaration of August 13 by the Warsaw Pact Powers indicated that these countries were "intervening in a domain in which they have no competence."²

¹From Berlin, tel. 188, Aug. 14, 1961, confidential; Documents on Germany, 1944-1961, p. 726.

²To Moscow, tel. 438, Aug. 15, 1961, and tel. 441, Aug. 16, both secret; Documents on Germany, 1944-1961, pp. 726-727.

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The Soviet Commandant on August 18 rejected the Western Commandants' protest as being "entirely out of place" and stated that the East German measures were "entirely within the competence of the Government of the German Democratic Republic" in fulfilling the "normal rights of each sovereign nation to protect its legal interests." The same day the Soviet Union used similar arguments in its reply to the American note of August 17. It also stated that it supported the actions of the East German regime which established "effective control on the border with West Berlin" in order to bar "subversive activity carried out from West Berlin against the GDR and other countries of the socialist community", and that it "categorically rejected" the American protest.¹

Reasons for the Initial American Reaction. The Department's instruction of July 22 to Bonn referred to earlier indicated that closing of the East Berlin border was one of the contingencies anticipated by the United States in connection with the East German refugee crisis. But this instruction likewise shows that the Department was aware that the mass flight from the Soviet Zone might confront the United States with other problems as well, such as an East German uprising and a precipitated showdown over Allied rights in West Berlin.

This is the background against which must be seen the undoubtedly cautious initial American reaction as reflected in the Secretary's statements of August 13 and in the limiting of the Allied response to protests.

The rationale of the American position in the initial stages of the crisis emerges quite clearly from a meeting of the high-level Steering Group, established by the President in July 1961, held on the morning of August 15. After Assistant Secretary Kohler had described the Allied protests that had been issued or were about to be issued, Secretary Rusk observed

¹ Documents on Germany, 1944-1961, pp. 728-729, 735-740.

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that, while the closing of the East Berlin border was a most serious matter, the probability was that, in realistic terms, it would make a Berlin settlement easier. The Secretary also pointed out, however, that the immediate problem was the sense of outrage that existed in Berlin and Germany, accompanied by a feeling that the West should do more than merely protest. But the Secretary felt that it was not easy to know just what could be done.

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It is worth noting that the prevailing opinion expressed in the subsequent discussion was that economic countermeasures would be inappropriate, that they would either be too trivial or might start a chain of challenges and responses which could effect the West's deepest interest, namely, access to Berlin for goods and persons. The specific countermeasures to which objections were raised included those which were soon to be adopted, as shown below, by the Quadripartite Ambassadorial Steering Group. There was more support for one proposed step, namely, the reinforcement of the West Berlin garrison, although the Secretary of Defense expressed the view that such a step, meant as a gesture, was not desirable. But the meeting indicated its agreement with Secretary Rusk's statement that "we must keep shooting issues and non-shooting issues apart" and also agreed with the further proposition that the closing of the East Berlin border was not a shooting issue, and that the problem was therefore one of propaganda.¹

3. German Reaction

Criticism of the Allied Response. Secretary Rusk had correctly identified the "sense of outrage" in Germany as the most immediate problem facing the West following the closing of the East Berlin border. Eventually this sentiment had to be taken into account and, as a result, American policy underwent certain adjustments.

¹Memorandum by Bundy (White House), "Minutes of the Meeting of the Steering Group on Berlin, August 15, 1961," Aug. 16, 1961, secret.

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The closing of the East Berlin sector borders produced a wave of indignation and fury among the people of West Germany and West Berlin. The situation was further complicated by the fact that the crisis occurred in the last weeks of a bitter electoral campaign in which Chancellor Adenauer's Christian Democratic party was facing the challenge of the Social Democratic opposition led by West Berlin's Governing Mayor, Willy Brandt. While the governing party did not wish to over-emphasize the crisis and thus to create a feeling of panic, it was nevertheless forced to respond to the challenge from Brandt and to the mood of public opinion in the Federal Republic. There was indeed growing criticism of Secretary Rusk's statement of August 13 emphasizing that Allied access to Berlin was not affected by the East German decrees, and of the alleged lateness and inadequacy of the Commandants' protest.¹

West German Proposals for Countermeasures. At the instruction of Foreign Minister Brentano, who had already urged on August 14, in a meeting with the three Western Ambassadors in Bonn, the adoption of countermeasures, West German Ambassador Grewe proposed in the Ambassadorial Steering Group in Washington a complete ban on the issuance of Temporary Travel Documents (TTD's). These documents, issued by the Allied Travel Office (ATO) in West Berlin, were required for East German travel to NATO countries. The United States representative in the Ambassadorial Group, Assistant Secretary of State Kohler, referred to the suggested measure as "picayune" and said that his Government was thinking in terms of more effective steps such as increasing the Allied garrisons in Berlin and speeding up the planned military build-up of NATO forces. Other retaliatory measures, such as a cut-off of trade and cultural exchanges with the Soviet Block, were also discussed, but there was general agreement within the Ambassadorial Group that trade countermeasures should be reserved for "more serious developments". The French agreed with the Germans, however, that a complete ban on TTD's should be imposed, while the British favored a selective ban. Against the background of a rising

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¹From Bonn, tel. 335, Aug. 15, 1961, official use only; tel. 343, Aug. 16, confidential.

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disappointment in Germany and at the urging of the Federal Republic for speedy action, the United States eventually accepted a British proposal for a selective ban on the issuance of TTD's with the aim of precluding travel beneficial to the East German regime while permitting East German travel if Western interests or sympathies suggested such a course. NATO concurrence, which was essential to the implementation of the measure, was obtained at the end of August.¹

A complete boycott of the Leipzig Fair was another proposal made by the Germans in the Quadripartite Ambassadorial Group on August 24. After the United States had explained that it could not legally prevent participation in this event but that efforts were being made to discourage American and British exhibitors, agreement was reached that the NATO representatives of the four Western Powers should press for a complete boycott of the Leipzig Fair by the NATO countries. But a German proposal for imposing selective restrictions on the Federal Republic's trade with the Soviet Zone met with a reserved attitude on the part of the United States. The latter suggested that the whole relationship between interzonal trade and rights of access to Berlin should be studied and also pointed out that these restrictions should be reserved for use in the event of more serious violations of access rights.²

"Crisis of Confidence" in West Berlin. The cautious attitude displayed by the United States in the Ambassadorial Group with regard to countermeasures against the closing of the East Berlin sector borders was thoroughly consistent with the American position taken up to then. The United States

¹To Bonn, tel. 350, Aug. 14, 1961, and tel. 356, Aug. 15, both secret; tel. 390, Aug. 21, confidential; to Paris, tel. 1004, Aug. 21, secret; from Bonn, tel. 363, Aug. 17, secret; tel. 423, Aug. 25, confidential; from Paris, tel. POLTO 247, Aug. 31, confidential; to Moscow, tel. 460, Aug. 17, secret.

²To Paris, tels. 1050 and 1077, Aug. 24, both secret.

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believed that the East German measures, although in violation of the quadripartite status of Berlin, did not affect the essentials of the Western position in Berlin as defined in the three principles, i.e., presence and security of Western forces in Berlin, security and viability of West Berlin, and physical access to West Berlin; that the real test, therefore, was still to come; and that the main Western goal at the moment was to deter the Soviet Union from carrying out its threat, by strengthening the credibility of the Western non-nuclear deterrent while at the same time showing a willingness to engage in serious negotiations. But initial American reaction to the sealing-off of East Berlin, which was based on this general position, had produced a serious policy divergence between the United States Government and the Government of West Berlin.

From the very beginning, the citizens of West Berlin had reacted most strongly to the new East German challenge and to the alleged Allied failure to respond quickly and effectively. As early as August 13, Governing Mayor Willy Brandt had called for vigorous steps and had asked the Allies to insist that the illegal measures imposed by the East German regime be nullified and freedom of movement within Berlin be restored. He emphasized that mere protests would not suffice. This admonition was reiterated to the three Western Commandants by Mayor Amrehn on behalf of the Berlin Senate on August 14. Referring to the growing disappointment of the people of West Berlin over Allied failure to take immediate steps, Mayor Amrehn said that the Berlin Senate was under heavy pressure to take local measures, such as steps against the activities of the Communist party (SED) in West Berlin and a ban on the propaganda displays of the East German regime in the S-Bahn stations. The Department quickly authorized complying with the latter request of the Berlin Senate on the understanding that it would not result in any public incidents.¹

¹From Berlin, tel. 187, Aug. 13, 1961, secret; tel. 197, Aug. 14, confidential; to Berlin, tel. 122, Aug. 15, confidential.

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As criticism of the Allies and even of the Government of the Federal Republic for alleged failure to act continued in West Berlin, the U.S. Mission felt that the people of the city, for the first time since the blockade of 1948, were in the grip of a real "crisis of confidence." Ambassador Dowling was likewise much disturbed over the crisis of confidence in Berlin, and he endorsed in a telegram of August 17 a suggestion advanced by the Director of the USIA, Edward R. Murrow, that the "psychological climate" in West Berlin should be "corrected". In a telegram of August 16 from Berlin, Murrow had proposed a series of steps which "need not necessarily affect the substance of our position" but which would "evidence our interest and support". He had emphasized that the Allies were not being asked to do anything unreasonable as everybody was aware of the "ring of Soviet military forces" around Berlin.¹

Mayor Willy Brandt made himself the spokesman of the discontent which had spread among the people of West Berlin. In a letter of August 16 to President Kennedy, Brandt declared that the East German measures had destroyed the remnants of the four-Power status in Berlin while the Allied Commandants had limited themselves to a "delayed and not very vigorous step".

Brandt warned that inactivity and a mere defensive posture could bring about a crisis of confidence with regard to the Western Powers and, on the other hand, could boost the self-confidence of the East German regime. He proposed that the Western Powers, while insisting on re-establishment of four-Power responsibilities, should proclaim a three-Power status for West Berlin. They should also reiterate the guarantee of their presence in West Berlin and, if necessary, have this supported by plebiscites in West Germany and West Berlin. Brandt furthermore suggested that the Western Powers should on their own initiative bring the Berlin problem before the United Nations on the grounds that the Soviet Union had violated human rights by its actions in Berlin. Brandt

¹From Berlin, tel. 210, Aug. 15, 1961, and tel. 217, Aug. 16, both confidential; from Bonn, tel. 354, Aug. 17, secret.

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conceded that the steps suggested by him could not produce any significant material change in the situation but stated that it was all the more important to demonstrate political initiative. Finally, Brandt declared that he would welcome a strengthening of the American garrison in Berlin.¹

4. Allied Steps to Bolster Berlin Morale

Reinforcement of the Garrison: The President's Letter. To prevent further deterioration of morale in Germany, particularly in Berlin, and to demonstrate Western determination, the United States and its Allies put into operation a number of measures some of which had been under consideration in the Quadripartite Ambassadorial Group. The United States announced on August 18 that it would send a battle group of 1,500 men to strengthen the garrison in West Berlin. The British informed the United States that they would send 18 armored vehicles and 16 armored cars to Berlin so that they would arrive by the night of August 18, but that announcement of this step would be made in connection with the British military build-up in West Germany. President Kennedy also decided to send Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson as his personal representative to Berlin, accompanied by General Clay and Ambassador Bohlen. Mayor Brandt received advance information of these measures and was also told that the Vice President would bring along a reply by the President to Brandt's letter.²

In his letter the President told Brandt that "this brutal border closing" represented a basic Soviet decision "which only war could reverse," and that nobody had ever supposed "that we should go to war on this point." The President

¹Letter, Brandt to Kennedy, Aug. 16, 1961, sent as tel. 223 from Berlin, Aug. 16, confidential. Although the letter was to be confidential, it was published in the German press through indiscretion.

²To Moscow, tel. 460, Aug. 17, 1961, secret; to Berlin, tel. 135, Aug. 17, secret.

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declared that the situation was too serious for inadequate responses and that most measures proposed, including those in Brandt's letter, were "mere trifles compared with what had been done." The President believed that a significant reinforcement of the Berlin garrison was the best immediate response as it would underline that the Allies would not be removed from Berlin. Of even greater importance would be an accelerated build-up of Western military strength. The President also declared that proclamation of a three-Power status for West Berlin as proposed by Brandt would imply a weakening of the four-Power relationship "on which our opposition to the border closing depends" and that the Allies should not take such a double-edged step. The President agreed with Brandt, however, that the Western guarantee for West Berlin should be affirmed and expressed himself in favor of an "appropriate plebiscite" demonstrating West Berlin's link with the West. Finally, he reminded Brandt that, painful as the violation of West Berlin's ties with the East was, nevertheless the life of that city ran primarily in the direction of the West, economically, morally, and in the field of military security.¹

Idea of a Tripartite Declaration on Berlin. When the President in his letter to Brandt of August 18 expressed himself in favor of reaffirming the Western guarantees for Berlin, he was actually engaged in an attempt to bring this about. On August 17 President Kennedy had sent similar messages to Prime Minister Macmillan and President de Gaulle pointing out that the West Berliners had been "badly shaken" by recent events and proposing that the three leaders issue a joint declaration. Attached to the message was a draft of such a tripartite declaration, stating that the three Western leaders felt it necessary "to issue a solemn warning concerning the determination of their countries to maintain and preserve at whatever cost their fundamental rights in Berlin and their obligation to those under their protection." According to the draft text, the three leaders would also

¹Letter, Kennedy to Brandt, Aug. 18, 1961, secret.

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"reaffirm their will and commitment" to defend the people of West Berlin against any East German or Soviet attempts to infringe and impair the rights and liberties of the people of West Berlin, including those of "access to and from the West."¹

President de Gaulle replied on August 18 that he would be glad to join in such a declaration but that he found it hard to understand what point there would be in "in undertaking at present negotiations with Moscow on Berlin since our position is going to be so categorically fixed and publicly stated." The French President therefore wished to submit his own draft text, which, he said, differed but little from the one proposed by President Kennedy. De Gaulle's draft contained a final paragraph, however, stating that, while the problems of Germany and Berlin might one day be taken up in negotiations at a time of a genuine relaxation of East-West tensions, the Allied leaders considered that "initiatives such as those which had just been taken in the Eastern sector of Berlin prevent any attempt at settlement."²

De Gaulle's reaction to the President's letter reflected, of course, the growing disagreement regarding the proper moment for East-West negotiations on Berlin, which had developed since the Paris Foreign Ministers meeting of August 5-8 and which will be further discussed later on. As neither President Kennedy nor Prime Minister Macmillan was willing to agree to a tripartite declaration encumbered with a ban on negotiations, the idea of such a declaration with the aim of reassuring the West Berliners had to be abandoned.

¹To London, tel. 817, Aug. 17, 1961; to Paris, tel. 933, Aug. 17; both secret.

²From Paris, tel. 907, Aug. 18, 1961, eyes only, secret.

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The Vice President's Visit to Germany. During his two-day visit to Bonn and Berlin August 19-20, Vice President Johnson and his party met with an enthusiastic response by the people as well as the leaders of West Germany and West Berlin. -

In Bonn, Vice President Johnson told Chancellor Adenauer that his presence in Germany as representative of President Kennedy—who was unable to leave the country—indicated the President's concern over the recent disturbing developments. Pointing to the fact that the President had asked General Clay to accompany him, the Vice President emphasized that it was well known that General Clay would not advocate a retreat. General Clay himself spoke to Chancellor Adenauer of his firm commitment to the freedom of Berlin and said that the American people were entirely firm regarding Berlin.¹

In Berlin, the Vice President and his party were received in an atmosphere of tremendous popular enthusiasm and emotion which was heightened by the arrival of the 1,500 men of the US battle group on August 20.

In several speeches Vice President Johnson reiterated the determination of the United States to honor its commitments on Berlin. Particularly significant was his address before the West Berlin House of Representatives on August 19 when he declared that "to the survival and creative future of this city we Americans have pledged, in effect, what our ancestors pledged in founding the United States: 'our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor!'"²

¹Memorandum by Cash (GER) of conversation among Johnson, Clay, Adenauer, and others, Aug. 19, 1961, secret.

²From Berlin, tel. 271, Aug. 21, 1961, official use only; Documents on Germany, 1944-1961, pp. 740-744.

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The great boost in German morale as a result of the Vice President's visit and the arrival of the US battle group was noted in the reporting of the Embassy in Bonn. It was emphasized that the visit, though not changing the facts of the situation created since August 13, was the beginning of a Western psychological counteroffensive. Moreover, the United States had graphically demonstrated to the people of Berlin that the new barriers between East Berlin and West Berlin did not signify the beginning of a period of capitulation to Communist demands.¹

Speaking for the people of West Berlin, Mayor Brandt expressed his thanks to President Kennedy in a letter of August 22 for the decisions that the President had taken and for having "reiterated the American pledges for Berlin in such an unmistakable way." Brandt expressed the same sentiments in an address broadcast over RIAS the same day, praising particularly the arrival of the US battle group and parallel British and French measures to reinforce their garrisons.²

It should be noted in passing that there was an aspect of German domestic politics to the crisis of confidence which affected West Germany and West Berlin in the wake of the closing of the border of the Soviet Sector. The Embassy in Bonn expressed the view on August 21 that Chancellor Adenauer and the CDU were irritated that "Brandt had stolen the headlines during the last few days" and that the Chancellor resented anything that distracted the voters from what he considered the main issue, namely, the choice between his leadership and that of the leader of the Social Democratic opposition, Mayor Willy Brandt. In a retrospective comment a few weeks later, the Embassy also noted that at the height of the crisis the Berliners

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¹From Bonn, tel. 387, Aug. 21, 1961, confidential; tel. 388, Aug. 21, official use only.

²Letter, Brandt to Kennedy, sent as tel. 297 from Berlin, Aug. 23, 1961, official use only; from Berlin, tel. 274, Aug. 22, official use only.

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were no less critical of Adenauer than of the Western leaders and that they resented particularly "his failure to appear in Berlin."¹

5. Further Expressions of Allied Determination

Actions Against East German Provocations. By the time the Vice President and his party left Berlin, the crisis of confidence had been largely overcome and the wave of indignation over alleged Allied failure to act gradually subsided. The three Western Powers, too, had realized the importance of quick and dramatic action even if the basic facts of the situation could not be changed. This was clearly demonstrated on August 22 and 23 when the East German regime, anxious to restrict demonstrations along the sector border after completing its series of measures to seal off East Berlin, warned people to keep a distance of 100 meters on both sides of the sector border. The three Commandants, in addition to issuing a protest, decided to deploy Allied military units, including armor, on the Western side of the sector border. The Western Commandants also gave their approval when the Berlin Senate expressed the desire to retaliate against the East German regime by taking various local measures. Such measures provided for the closing of travel offices which the East Germans had newly set up at the S-Bahn stations for the purpose of issuing permits for entry into East Berlin; controlling the entry of "undesirables" (i.e., SED party officials) into West Berlin; and closing SED offices in West Berlin.²

¹From Bonn, tel. 387, Aug. 21, 1961, confidential; tel. 606, Sept. 13, secret. For a more detailed account of West German sentiment during the August 1961 crisis and its relation to the campaign for the elections to the Bundestag, see the study by the Historical Studies Division entitled "West German Reaction to the Berlin Wall and to the American Response, August 1961," Research Project No. 655, December 1963, secret.

²Documents on Germany, 1944-1961, p. 753; from Berlin, tel. 285, Aug. 23, 1961, official use only; tel. 295, Aug. 23, confidential; tel. 339, Aug. 26, confidential.

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Nevertheless, an atmosphere of tension continued to exist along the border of the Soviet sector, especially since the East German police became increasingly aggressive against the West Berliners who continued to demonstrate on the Western side of the closed sector border. According to the U.S. Mission in Berlin, the East German police attempted to "enforce a 100 meter no man's land" on the Western side of the border, and there were several instances when Volkspolizei fired tear gas grenades, water cannons, and even warning shots at persons approaching the border on the West Berlin side. Ignoring orders by the West Berlin police to withdraw, the Communist police even pointed their submachine guns at them. The use of loud speakers on both sides contributed to the growing crowds of demonstrators, but the West Berlin police, supported by Allied forces, was able to prevent serious incidents.¹

The tense situation at the sector border was discussed in the Ambassadorial Steering Group on August 28. It was agreed that the Department of State would instruct its missions in Bonn and Berlin to raise this question with the British and French. Accordingly, the Department asked its representatives in Berlin and Bonn to take up with the Allies the following recommendations for action:

1) The Soviets and East Germans had no right to order establishment of a cleared strip along the West Berlin side of the sector boundary. 2) Shooting water cannons, tear gas, etc. across the sector border must cease and, if continued, should be met by counterfire from the Western side. 3) It ought to be made clear to the Soviet Union that the tactics referred to above could only exacerbate an already "dangerously tense situation" and that the West would determine the nature of an appropriate response.

The United States believed that an approach along these lines should be made to the Soviet Commandant by the three Western Commandants. At the same time, however, every effort

¹From Berlin, tel. 351, Aug. 28, 1961, confidential.

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should be made by Allied forces and West Berlin police to prevent West Berliners "from throwing objects across the boundary", even though "verbal insults" could not be prevented.¹

Appointment of General Clay. As a result of the events that shook Berlin in August 1961 and in view of the continued tense situation facing this city, President Kennedy decided to appoint General Clay as his "Personal Representative, with the rank of Ambassador, on temporary assignment to Berlin."

In his letter to Clay of August 30, the President expressed the hope that Clay would be able to take up his duties by September 15 and to serve through the immediate period of crisis which seemed to be ahead. President Kennedy explained that General Clay would be the senior American official in Berlin and would communicate directly with the Secretary of State and the President. The President made clear, however, that the regular military chain of command and the political responsibilities of Ambassador Dowling as Chief of Mission in Berlin would not be affected by General Clay's appointment. Yet the President stated that he expected to authorize General Clay to carry out special tasks and to exercise authority as indicated by the President. General Clay, the President further stated, would be free of routine responsibility, and a particularly important aspect of his work would be to interpret American policies to the leaders of West Berlin as well as the latter's attitudes to the United States. Finally, the President expressed the expectation that he would have General Clay's "prompt counsel in the consideration of anticipatory actions and effective responses to any sudden Soviet or Communist moves in the Berlin area."²

¹To Bonn, tel. 478 (to Berlin, tel. 209), Aug. 28, 1961; tel. 479 (to Berlin, tel. 210), Aug. 28; both secret.

²Letter, Kennedy to Clay, Aug. 30, 1961, no classification indicated.

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