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THE BERLIN WALL IN RETROSPECT

THE BERLIN WALL closes more than the German Democratic Republic; it closes an era. Before its construction, one pictured the GDR as a temporary relic of Soviet expansion. Its government was unloved and its social system unaccepted; its economy creaked along — a pale comparison to the dynamism of the Federal Republic. In such a context, the epithet “so-called” was doubtless deserved.

In 1961, the position of the Ulbricht regime was precarious. The refugee exodus was draining the GDR's most productive elements, and popular unrest was clearly on the upswing. The increasing labour shortage alone posed grave dangers to the economy, to say nothing of the growing popular disaffection which followed in its train. Add to this the danger of an isolated incident setting off the tinder box and possibly kindling a global conflagration, and the reasons for the border closing become evident.

But if it is true that the Wall originally offered testimony to the popular bankruptcy of the GDR, it is also true that it inaugurated one of Europe's most far-reaching economic miracles — and paved the way for an equally profound shift in popular attitudes. Since 1961, the pace of life has quickened in East Germany. The stark night-and-day contrast with life in the West no longer appals. Industries hum busily, the government enjoys grudging respect, and on the diplomatic front, Bonn's continued adherence to the Hallstein Doctrine has afforded East Berlin a valuable opening. The shock and international revulsion which accrued to the GDR with the construction of the Berlin Wall has been slowly dissipated, and Bonn is increasingly identified in many quarters with territorial revisionism and the rise of neo-Nazi sentiment.

A second effect of the Wall concerns the viability of West Berlin. Before the Wall, West Berlin played a vital role as a link to the Communist East: a showcase for democracy and an escape hatch for refugees. Today, that role is over, and the city searches for a new purpose. Nevertheless, the construction of the Wall involved a curious by-product, and one which has largely gone unnoticed: by building the Wall, by consolidating the frontier of the GDR, the

Ulbricht regime estopped itself from laying legal claim to the territory of West Berlin. If the frontier of the German Democratic Republic runs through the middle of Berlin, one can scarcely argue that the Western sectors belong to the East.

A third point concerning the Wall relates to its effect on East-West relations. Its construction meant that the Communists were abandoning an expansionist policy in Berlin. The Wall arose from weakness, not from strength. Its purpose was to consolidate the GDR, not to menace the Western sectors. And macabre though it sounds, the Wall may eventually contribute to German unity. For until the Wall or its equivalent was constructed, the situation in East Germany could not be stabilized. And until that situation was stabilized, any talk of *détente* between East and West was largely illusory.

In 1961, President Kennedy came to office resolved to put an end to the angry dialogue between Washington and Moscow, and it was in Germany that the issue hinged. The price for such an accord lay in a precise demarcation between East and West. Acceptance of the Berlin Wall therefore became a foregone conclusion. Thus, Kennedy reversed the thrust of American policy on East Germany, and both the United States and Europe, to say nothing of Germany itself, are today reaping the benefits.

Let us consider the history of the German Democratic Republic. In many respects, the impetus for its formation came not from Moscow but from Washington. Until 1949, the Soviets believed that all Germany was within their grasp. And in that case, there seemed to be little reason to establish a rump state in a portion of the country only. Certainly this was true of Soviet thinking in 1945 and 1946—and only gradually, after repeated rebuffs, were they disabused of the idea.

The first shock the Soviets received came in early 1946 when the Social Democrats in Berlin declined to join a Moscow-inspired popular front. Such a merger would have been extremely valuable from the Soviet point of view, for it would have meant that the entire Left in Germany was united under Communist leadership. But the SPD voted down the merger, although the Soviets went ahead with the juncture in their zone, and in the eastern sector of Berlin. The second rebuff to the Soviets came in the autumn of 1946 in Berlin's first postwar election. The new "Socialist Unity Party" (SED) polled less than one sixth of the total vote. And the combination of these two events no doubt convinced the Soviets that they could not capture public sympathy in Germany.

There was also the behaviour of the Western Allies. Throughout the war,

Stalin worried about a Western-German alliance against the Soviet Union. But when the war ended and these fears proved unfounded, the Kremlin breathed a sigh of relief and settled back for the anticipated Western withdrawal. American troops had already evacuated Czechoslovakia; and at Teheran, President Roosevelt had indicated that U.S. troops would remain in Germany for one year, or possibly two at the most. In other words, the Soviets had good reason to believe that the West would soon withdraw from Germany, and that the whole country would drop like an over-ripe fruit into their basket. And in this context, the popular electoral defeats which the Communists suffered were embarrassing but not definitive.

One easily imagines Moscow's discomfiture in May, 1946, when General Lucius D. Clay, the United States Military Governor for Germany, recommended that the U.S. and British zone be merged into a joint occupation authority to promote German recovery. In Washington, the transition from the Roosevelt to the Truman Administration was complete, and the United States was on the threshold of a new way of viewing the Soviet Union. The advocates of a Carthaginian peace for Germany had been removed, and Soviet expansion became America's principal concern.

Three months later, Secretary of State Byrnes endorsed Clay's recommendation in a major policy speech at Stuttgart; and the first long step was taken towards the creation of two separate German states. This does not suggest that another course might have been more desirable, for clearly no other course was feasible if any part of Germany was to be saved from Soviet control. It simply indicates that the juridical impetus for the separation of Germany came from the United States as the price of containing Soviet expansion. It was recognized as exactly that at the time, and was deservedly applauded. We should simply be clear about it.

Following bi-zonal merger, the separation of Germany advanced rapidly. Moscow was disabused of its earlier optimism; and in the West, those who longed to resist gradually gained the upper hand. The refusal of the Soviet Union to participate in the Marshall Plan, the synchronization of the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia in February, 1948, and the growing hostility between East and West in Berlin attested to the rapidly deteriorating political climate in Europe. The signature of the European Mutual Defense Treaty in Brussels on March 17, 1948, and the departure of Marshall Sokolovsky from the Allied Control Commission for Germany three days later, signalled that a split was at hand. The Berlin blockade, imposed gradually over the next three months, indicated that the rupture was complete.

In many respects, the Berlin blockade represented the final thrust of Moscow's "one-Germany" policy, and when it failed to dislodge the Western powers, Stalin pulled in his horns and settled for absolute sway over a portion of the country only. If all Germany could not be Red, then at least the Eastern marchland would be, and the Russian policy of two Germanys effectively dates from the failure of the blockade in early 1949.

Again, however, it was the West marching in the vanguard. In September of 1948, when the blockade was three months old, the Western powers convened a "Parliamentary Council" of German politicians to draft a constitution for the political merger of the three Western zones and the creation of a separate West German state on that basis. The move was greeted with considerable skepticism, particularly among the Social Democrats, where opposition to a separate West German state was long and vigorous. The Soviets reacted cautiously in their zone to accomplish the same, but throughout 1948 and 1949, the Communists let the West bear the responsibility for taking the first step. (The blockade, of course, was difficult for the Communists to justify in any context, and probably explains why the Soviets were never able to pin the separatist label on the West.)

When the blockade was lifted on May 8, 1949, the constitution of the Federal Republic was complete. Two weeks later the constitution of the German Democratic Republic was adopted in East Berlin. But again, the timing is significant. At each step in the process the Soviets pushed the West out in front.

From 1949 to 1953 the division of Germany remained frozen. The Federal Republic gradually gained momentum—due in no small measure to the massive infusions of Marshall Plan aid—and "Socialism" was slowly incorporated into the way of life of East Germany. Yet collectivization of the private sector of the economy proceeded fitfully, and the pace was even slower in agriculture. For throughout this period the Soviets appeared unsure how to react, and the German Democratic Republic represented little more than a bargaining card which was to be played at the appropriate occasion.

Nevertheless, it was a bargaining card from which Moscow was determined to extract greatest advantage. On June 6, 1950, the GDR recognized the Oder-Neisse boundary with Poland as permanent and irrevocable. And East Berlin was slowly incorporated into the German Democratic Republic—just as in the West, the U.S., British, and French sectors of Berlin slowly merged with the Federal Republic—although the niceties of Berlin's special status were punctiliously observed on both sides. West Berlin's rep-

representatives in Bonn were present in an advisory capacity only; and East Berlin's representation in the *Volkskammer* was limited to "fraternal" delegates from the Soviet sector.

In May of 1952, when the European Defense Community treaty was signed in Paris, the Soviets responded by cutting all telephone connections between East and West Berlin, and temporarily closing the sector boundary for twenty-four hours. In contrast to 1961, however, both of these steps were taken by the Soviet Army with only meagre assistance rendered by the East Germans.

With Stalin's death in 1953, one version of Kremlinology depicts the Soviet position on East Germany as undergoing considerable change, and the so-called Beria faction emerging as advocates of a neutralized Germany. Certainly it is true that Beria supported such a policy, and that he later paid dearly for it. What is less clear, however, is that this constituted a shift in the Soviet line. Before his death, Stalin himself seemed eager to liquidate his German holdings in return for an appropriate settlement, and a neutralized Germany seemed an attractive alternative. This would have been in line with Soviet policy on Austria (which came to fruition two years later), and doubtless reflected stresses elsewhere—in the Far East, for example, or in the domestic economy, plus an acquiescence by Moscow in U.S. strategic dominance.

Thus, the year 1953 is of signal importance for understanding the German question, not only because of the East Berlin uprising—which effectively blew the whistle on Moscow's flirtation with a neutralized Germany—but also for the ascension of a new Administration in the United States. It takes two to do a number of things, and the consummation of a diplomatic understanding is one of these. And in the spring of 1953, when Moscow was moving towards a less extended policy in Central Europe, Washington was moving just as fast to "rollback" the Iron Curtain and "liberate" the so-called captive nations. Indeed, one might say that these two policies met head-on on June 17, 1953, in the streets of East Berlin. At any rate, it was so interpreted in Moscow. The Beria faction slid down the abyss, and Moscow decided to go it alone with the GDR.

Walter Ulbricht, who at the time was *persona non grata* at the Soviet Embassy in East Berlin, re-emerged as the defender of Communist order in East Germany; and Moscow made the German Democratic Republic a full-fledged "Socialist" satellite—promoting its economy, and expanding its internal police force and militia into a formidable military organization.

In line with the new thrust of Soviet policy, Molotov—who re-emerged

as Russia's Foreign Minister—proved exceedingly intractable at the meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers convened in Berlin in 1954. In March of that year the Soviet Union transferred full sovereignty to the German Democratic Republic. And in the following year East Germany became one of the original signatories to the Warsaw Pact. In September, 1955, the Soviet Union turned over the control of all traffic to Berlin to the GDR, except for that of the three Western allies.

The next several years saw little change in East Germany's status. The major emphasis in the GDR—as throughout all of Europe—was the restoration of the economy and the establishment of a new social order. And it was the establishment of this new society that was probably the most significant development during the 1950s. Relations between East Berlin and Moscow improved; collectivization went forward slowly in agriculture, and the private sector of industry shrank to almost nothing. In other words, the infra-structure of the GDR approached an institutionalized "Socialism", and those unhappy with their plight fled to the West. Unfortunately, too many were unhappy, and the over-managed economy of the GDR could not get off the ground. The immediate contrast offered by the other half of Germany, and especially by West Berlin—to which all East Germans had access—made the failure of "Socialism" all the more painful.

In addition to the difficulties in the GDR, these were the years of Moscow's silent military and missile growth. And the confluence of these two forces—a sagging GDR, and a renewed Soviet military presence—led Khrushchev to change the Soviet tune on Germany once more in 1958 and, in effect, to resume the strategy of Stalin at the blockade. Maximum success involved driving the Western powers from Berlin and the interim establishment of a neutralized free city. At the very least, Khrushchev could hope for an improved status for the GDR by playing off his bravado for tangible Western concessions. And whether the aim was to drive the West completely from the city or whether it was simply to complete the incorporation of the Eastern sector into the German Democratic Republic is a moot point. For in the end the Soviets once more settled for the more limited achievement.

The second Soviet offensive against West Berlin dates from November 27, 1958, the date of Khrushchev's ultimatum. It is unnecessary to describe the manoeuvrings of the next two years, or to chart the artfulness of Khrushchev's performance—alternately blustering and cooing, and keeping the pressure-level in Berlin precisely where he wanted it. The important point is that the Soviets knew that West Berlin was a vulnerable position, and were

willing to use that vulnerability to extract a variety of concessions from the West—*e.g.*, an enhanced diplomatic position for the GDR—which was consummated at the Geneva Conference of Foreign Ministers in 1959; and a visit by Khrushchev himself to the United States—following an invitation which the Chairman angled as a result of the Berlin involvement and for which he politely retracted his previous ultimatum.

In other words, by mid-1959 the Soviets were trimming their sails and speaking softly about Berlin. This suggests that the Soviets were willing to assist Ulbricht verbally, but were reluctant to take positive action, particularly at the price of exacerbating relations with the United States.

In any event, by the time the Kennedy Administration took office the question of Berlin had been seemingly de-activated. The Soviets—to judge by their actions—were intent on avoiding anything that might upset the equilibrium in Central Europe; and the pin-pricks administered periodically by the Ulbricht government emphasized nothing so much as the anguished state of affairs in the GDR. Indeed, the 1950s saw some curious mutations in the way in which both East and West viewed the German problem. The Soviets, who earlier had sought a united Germany on Communist terms, and who in the early 1950s were seemingly prepared to sell out the GDR in return for a quasi-Austrian solution, by 1960 were fully committed to a policy of two Germans and were determined that the Ulbricht regime should survive. The West, which in 1946 and 1947 had taken the lead in the division of Germany (at least in a juridical sense), and had spent the early 1950s in quest of liberation, were equally determined that the Federal Republic should be linked to the Atlantic Alliance. While we continued to advocate liberation, our diplomatic signals—at least after 1956—carefully indicated that the status quo in Germany might be preferable after all. The most compelling restatement of this position was given by Secretary Dulles at his press conference in January, 1959, when he said that a “neutralized” Germany would not work. “Instead of trying to isolate Germany,” said Dulles, “the best way is to tie Germany in.”

But the opposite side of tying the Federal Republic to the West was to tie the GDR to the East. And the cryptic words of Mr. Dulles clearly implied as much. In other words, by the close of the 1950s, we were talking about one Germany based on free elections, but were more than content to accept the reality of two German states. For by that time the first glimmer of a community of interest between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. was at hand. And it waited for the Kennedy Administration to frame its German policy on that basis. Dulles recognized an approaching symmetry and came very close to admitting it—

particularly after he buried the doctrine of massive retaliation before the Council of Foreign Relations. But, aside from his untimely death, he was precluded from operating on that basis.

To briefly recapitulate, by 1961 the Berlin problem was simmering on a back burner. President Kennedy alluded to it neither in his Inaugural nor in his State of the Union message. And Secretary Rusk pointedly ignored Berlin when mentioning the world's troubled spots in his first press conference after assuming office. Nevertheless, Mr. Kennedy—at least if we are to believe his biographers—saw the world haunted by the spectre of nuclear war, and was determined to improve man's chances for survival. In Mr. Schlesinger's words, Kennedy sought a world safe for diversity, and recognized that some type of accommodation with the Soviet Union would be necessary.

That it was Berlin which brought all of this to the surface is the least convincing part of the New Frontier's achievement. For like any Chief Executive, Mr. Kennedy was certainly content to let sleeping dogs lie; and, reportedly, he was shattered when Khrushchev rekindled the crisis so suddenly at Vienna. And, in truth, much of what now appears as purposefulness on Berlin was simply drifting with events while trying to find a way out. Yet there was a difference—and it is this difference that merits a fresh appraisal. For the intellectual framework within which Kennedy drifted—within which he sought a solution—differed materially from that of his predecessors and allowed him to give shape to what at the time seemed a policy of appeasement. Rejecting the sterile categories of Cold War, the White House recognized that it was not Berlin but East Germany which was the key to a rapprochement in Europe—and tailored its response on that basis.

In other words, while the United States remained determined to defend its vital interests in West Berlin, it was prepared to admit that East Berlin and East Germany were the primary concern of the Soviet Union. If a precise demarcation between East and West could be agreed to, a major area of conflict would be resolved; and, perhaps, the way to a broader accommodation might be open.

Let us now consider the Vienna Conference in June, 1961. One often hears that it was there that Khrushchev launched his second Berlin offensive, and that Kennedy perhaps may have over-reacted. But the other side of the coin is that Berlin was the only subject on which Kennedy and Khrushchev were seriously at odds. And that the Berlin question kept armies on the alert for the next six months obscures the uniqueness of the encounter. For once

the Berlin problem was resolved—and it *was* resolved—the way was open for the gradual accommodation that we now see at work in Europe.

Kennedy, admittedly, was shocked by Khrushchev's intransigence at Vienna. And for the next ten weeks both confronted one another on the brink of nuclear war. At first, Kennedy sought his footing cautiously. Administration response to Khrushchev's demands effectively acknowledged Communist primacy in East Berlin, and rested its case on the defence of the Western sectors. The same was true of President Kennedy's "Bastogne" speech on July 25, 1961, and of his press conference remarks on August 3.

During the ten weeks between Vienna and August 13, the Kennedy Administration synchronized Allied policy on the coming border closing to the extent that when it came, everyone—with the possible exception of West Berlin's Mayor Brandt—was in perfect step. Indeed, the smoothness of Western response on August 13 elicits admiration. With one fell swoop the Kennedy Administration had reversed Allied policy on Germany and had removed the most serious source of friction with the Soviet Union in Europe—providing, that is, that the Soviets were serious about peaceful co-existence. And to top it all, the East Germans had been made to eat propaganda crow by admitting that the hideous Berlin Wall was required to keep their people in. Or so it looked to Washington in the early days of August.

Unfortunately, it was not so easy. For the one variable overlooked by the White House was the adverse effect of the border closing on West Berlin morale, and it was this which almost upset the applecart. Mayor Brandt had warned of just such a contingency, but his forebodings had been dismissed in Western capitals as cheap and shoddy electioneering. This explains the tardy Western response on August 13 and the days immediately following. Even when it became clear to Allied officials in West Berlin that a crisis of morale was imminent, their warnings were dismissed as coming from those too much involved to have the proper perspective. But by Friday, August 18, when West Berlin morale failed to improve, Kennedy hastily dispatched Vice-President Johnson and General Clay to close the breach. And the 18th Infantry moved over the autobahn as a more tangible symbol of U.S. resolve.

In retrospect, it seems fair to say that the entire crisis which developed in Berlin over the construction of the Wall was primarily a crisis of West Berlin morale. And it was largely of our own making. The signals had been loud and clear beforehand, and timely action on our part, not to open the boundary but simply to convince the Berliners that we were not caught napping, would have served a salutary effect. The panic flight from the city

would have been avoided; the precarious cliff-hanging of the next six months would have been eliminated, and the propaganda victory which the Wall clearly represented would have been unblemished. As it was, the Kennedy Administration was forced to recall General Clay—and it was a desperate gamble whether even he could restore the confidence of the Berliners in Western resolve. And all over Germany, Western inaction on that fateful Sunday was attributed to American timidity.

In other words, had adequate steps been taken on August 13 to provide for the possible adverse effect of the border closing on West Berlin morale, the Berlin crisis of 1961 would be remembered as a triumph of Western policy rather than a horrid catastrophe. For in all other respects—in terms of clearly demarcating the Communist orbit; in terms of restoring stability to East Germany; in terms of cutting off the dangerous refugee exodus—the closing was an unvarnished success. And it was time to recognize it as such.

It should be emphasized that the Wall was not the idea of the Kennedy Administration, nor was there any collusion with the Soviets on its construction. What was acknowledged was that the deteriorating situation in East Germany posed grave risks for both powers, and that somehow the impending conflagration would have to be tamped down. Once that was accepted, the Western powers were estopped from determining the choice of means that the East Germans might use. Had Washington had its way, it certainly would have preferred a barrier around Berlin rather than through it. But from the GDR's point of view this was out of the question.

Unfortunately, the precipitous decline of West Berlin morale altered the crisis completely. And because Washington's misjudgment was so catastrophic, it was difficult to perceive that the twenty-year standoff in Germany had been eased, and that in the long run the border closing would work to mutual advantage.

By 1963, Mr. Kennedy himself was sufficiently convinced to hazard a trip to Berlin, and his remarks on that occasion— together with his very moving American University address— heralded a new era of U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union. Kennedy actually made two addresses in Berlin: the City Hall speech before a huge audience of Berliners, in which the President, like so many statesmen before him, was overwhelmed by his reception and interjected some rather bellicose remarks; and his more deliberate speech later that afternoon at the Free University. According to members of the President's entourage, Mr. Kennedy was as surprised as anyone by what he said at City

Hall: "And there are some who say . . . we can work with the Communists. Let them come to Berlin."

As the President was leaving the platform, he laughed and told General Clay that he now understood what it meant to be a Berliner. Kennedy thereupon set Sorensen and McGeorge Bundy to revising his afternoon's oration to redress the damage. The result was the following paragraph which was added to the conclusion of his Free University speech: "As I said this morning, I am not impressed by the opportunities open to popular fronts throughout the world. I do not believe that any democrat can successfully ride that tiger. But I do believe in the necessity of great powers working together to preserve the human race, or otherwise we can be destroyed."

In other words, Kennedy modified his City Hall injunction against working with the Communists to apply to domestic politics only. It was an artful revision, and the message was clearly understood.

The Berlin Wall has made a very real difference in the life of the average East German. Until then, people could well believe that the Ulbricht regime was transitory, and that union with the West was in the offing. There was no reason to co-operate, for co-operation was unnecessary—and the spectre of decommunization loomed large in the East. In addition, the running sore in West Berlin placed restraints on the Communists; there were limits to synchronization. And no Communist system has ever consolidated its position with open frontiers. But the Berlin Wall makes it very clear where life must be spent—and the people of East Germany finally realized that talk of "rollback" and "liberation" was primarily for U.S. domestic consumption, and that the West would do nothing to achieve it. And that realization helped trigger a disaffection with the West.

As in Hungary, the previous apathy which pervaded the GDR disappeared, and people settled down to make the best of their present situation. If it can be said that the Hungarians have won their revolution, it can also be said that the Wall has improved the material life of the average East German. This change in popular attitudes is probably the most striking aspect of the contemporary East German situation. For no other country in Eastern Europe is so exposed to the variety of Western television and radio as the German Democratic Republic—and no country has moved so far in the past five years in popular acceptance of Communist government.

Indeed, today one even hears guarded praise for the border-closing itself. Until then, people say, we did not know what to do. Now our mind has been

made up. And this sentiment is true even among the older generation, which until recently had been hostile to the government. "The Wall came five years too late," is a refrain which one hears frequently today in the GDR.

What significance does all of this have for the United States? To begin with, there are several facts to be recognized. First, the German Democratic Republic is not going to collapse or disappear. And second, as the pressures rise in West Germany for closer contacts with the East, some negotiation with the government of the German Democratic Republic will become mandatory. This is not a question of diplomatic recognition. The declarations exchanged at the Nine Power London Conference in 1954 at the time of West Germany's ascension to NATO effectively preclude such a possibility. But within the limits imposed by this restriction there is considerable room for manoeuvre.

First, we should encourage all efforts to diminish the inhumanity of the division of Germany and all efforts to make the Wall more porous. This would serve two purposes: to provide a safety-valve for the feelings of personal anguish in Germany, and to decrease the extent to which each German state is isolated from the other.

In this sense, a policy of contact between the two Germans has much to recommend it. Contact restores the consciousness of being German. It preserves the essence of German unity, if not its reality. When buttressed with economic credits, contact improves the life of the average East German and suggests a tangible interest in his fate. When buttressed with trade, contact develops mutual dependency. Taken together, contact, trade, and economic credits promote a viable infra-structure of joint endeavour. And above all, contact assists the evolutionary forces already at work in the GDR toward the development of a more tolerant, liberal, and progressive state—albeit a Communist state.