The Alliance City: NATO and Berlin, 1958-1963

DISSERTATION

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Abstract

Very few places evoke the Cold War quite like Berlin. A city literally divided between East and West, it represented the international divisions from its capture in 1945 until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Starting in 1958, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev put Berlin back in the center of the Cold War by threatening to end the Western presence in the western sectors of the city. Over the next five years, the status of Berlin remained at the heart of the relationship between the superpowers, and the possibility of war, especially the possibility of nuclear war, hung over the events of the period, including the building of the Berlin Wall and the Cuban Missile Crisis.

This project examines the development of the policies of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in response to the perceived Soviet Bloc threat to Berlin from 1958 to 1963 by placing NATO at the center of an examination of the Western response to the Soviet challenge. The tensions between national and collective interests have been an important theme in Cold War history, but the role of NATO within these relationships has not been examined adequately. By placing NATO at the center of my work, this study shows how it became a central pivot around which allied governments approached the Soviet challenge. Doubts about nuclear strategy during the crisis meant that a conventional deterrent was necessary, and NATO provided that conventional deterrent. NATO’s forces complemented and enhanced the main American nuclear deterrent, and helped to protect Western interests in Berlin and Germany during the
crisis. Without NATO to harmonize Western policy behind the American lead, the Allies would likely not have been able to properly confront the Soviets over Berlin, and the presence in West Berlin could not have been maintained. The loss of credibility from losing West Berlin would have severely damaged Western credibility in the face of the Soviet presence, and the stability of West Germany and Western Europe would have been substantially undermined. Thus, NATO and what it represented were vital to the successful protection of West Berlin, mainly through the prevention of a direct Soviet move on the city.
Dedication

This document is dedicated to my parents.
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Introduction

On 25 April 1945, American and Soviet troops fighting Germany from the West and the East met on the Elbe River in eastern Germany. Although the Third Reich would not formally surrender for another two weeks, the encounter signified the final defeat of Adolf Hitler’s Germany and the start of the post-war era in Europe. At the Yalta conference two months earlier, the victorious powers had decided on dividing lines for Germany and its capital, Berlin. Since Berlin was well within the limits of the new Soviet zone, they also worked out agreements, less formal than those at Yalta, to allow the American, British, and French armies to support and supply their occupation forces (and the general population in their zones of the city). The allies intended those agreements to be short term, since few expected the occupation to last very long. Little did those soldiers on the Elbe know, however, that the line of the river that they had to cross to meet each other would soon form a border between two countries, two halves of the continent, and two sides of the Cold War.

As the Cold War deepened through the late 1940s, the status of Berlin quickly became one of the more contentious issues between the West and the Soviet Union. When the Western allies took steps in 1948 to consolidate the western zones of Germany, Soviet leader Josef Stalin looked to Berlin as a means of fighting back, imposing a
blockade on the city that he hoped would either force the West out of Berlin or convince Western leaders to abandon their actions. Rather than confront the blockade directly, the Americans – with British and French support – mounted an airlift to keep Berlin supplied through 1948 and into 1949. The Berlin Blockade and Airlift marked one of the first major confrontations between East and West in the Cold War and helped set the parameters for the conflict.

Over the next ten years, Berlin remained a point of contention, usually within the context of reaching a settlement to end the division of Germany. The reunification question became one of the central issues that kept the Cold War alive in Europe. Both sides initially planned on German reunification and neutralization, but neither was willing to see such a process benefit the other. For the West, German economic and military power increasingly became important to the ideological containment of Soviet communism, and Western policy thus sought a reunified Germany that would be free to align itself with the West. Conversely, East Germany became an important linchpin to the Soviet development of communist systems in Eastern Europe, and thus Soviet policy sought a reunified Germany that would be socialist in outlook and friendly to the Soviet Union. Since these two goals were essentially mutually exclusive, German reunification saw little chance of fruition.

Berlin was on the frontlines of the conflict between the former allies of the East and West. The division of the city came to represent the division of Europe and the world into separate capitalist and communist camps, and few believed that Berlin could be reunited before Germany could be reunited. But Berlin was not just a symbol of the Cold
War; it was a battleground as well, with diplomatic, espionage, and even quasi-military clashes occurring periodically throughout the Cold War, especially in the first decade of the conflict. The result was a nearly continual state of tension over the city that threatened war at any moment.

In November 1958, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev opened a new diplomatic offensive on the West, aiming directly at the West’s weak point in Berlin. Over the next five years, the level of crisis over Berlin would rise and wane as the two sides jockeyed for diplomatic position, all the while keeping a close eye on each other’s military positions. When Khrushchev increased that tension in 1958, the possibility of war came to dominate international politics, and Western leaders had to approach the situation that Khrushchev’s challenge created knowing that even a minor misstep could precipitate a war – whether initiated by the West or by the Soviets. That such a war could easily turn nuclear (an outcome that would have devastating consequences for Europe and the rest of the world) only increased the stakes.

The Berlin Crisis put Western leaders in a dilemma. If they went along with Khrushchev’s desire to negotiate a peace treaty that included the reunification of Berlin and Germany, then they could lose German strength, and maybe even find neutral Germany tilting towards the Soviets. If they resisted Khrushchev’s call, then they would have little to stand on should the Soviet Union sign a unilateral peace treaty with East Germany, putting tremendous pressure on the West to move forward on German reunification. These were the options for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as it confronted the Berlin Crisis: reopen negotiations over German reunification and risk
losing Germany or stand firm on Berlin and risk war. Generally, the West chose the latter, but the risk of war made the former option viable for many members.

Standing firm on Berlin meant forcing the Soviet Union to uphold Western access rights to West Berlin. The decision to divide Berlin among the main victorious powers, even though it was wholly within the Soviet occupation zone of Germany, meant that arrangements had to be made to connect the Western zones of Berlin to the Western zones of Germany. Eventually, these arrangements settled around a set of corridors – air, rail, and Autobahn – where Western civilian and military traffic had the right to cross East German territory. Following the termination of the Berlin Blockade in 1949, the Soviets had agreed to respect these rights, but Khrushchev’s threat to sign a separate peace treaty with East Germany seemed to threaten them. Such a peace treaty would likely give East Germany sovereignty over the access routes, forcing Western officials to deal with, and thus to recognize, even de facto, the East German regime, something that was thought impossible at the time, lest it weaken West Germany’s pro-West government. The question for the Western powers would then be whether to recognize East German sovereignty, hope for some arrangement with the Soviets that allowed both sides to save face, or open the possibility of using force to keep access to Berlin open. Since the West could not recognize East Germany without losing its credibility in West Germany and the Soviets could not sign a treaty and then back away from its implications, then only the use of force might remain. This scenario might lead to a full-scale war, possibly over the question of who stamped an official’s travel documents as he entered or left Berlin.
Yet the Berlin Crisis was not only about the right of access to Berlin, but also about the German settlement and, ultimately, about the European and world settlement of the Cold War. In order to get a sense of the truly international scale of the period and its issues, it is necessary to place NATO at the center of a study of the Berlin Crisis. This dissertation will examine several key aspects of the NATO reply to Khrushchev’s offensive starting in 1958 and lasting until 1963. Most importantly, Alliance leaders sought to avoid war while protecting their interests in Berlin and West Germany. NATO was the guarantor of Western solidarity and security, and provided the means for the containment of Soviet communism in Europe. Without NATO providing a credible deterrent to Soviet aggression, there seemed little to stop the Soviets from taking over West Berlin, a move that would have put West Germany – and Western Europe – at risk. Thus, in order to both avoid war and assert Western interests, the NATO deterrent had to remain united and credible to both its members and its adversaries. NATO’s response to the Berlin Crisis demonstrates how difficult that could be, but how the Alliance ultimately found ways to succeed.

This feeling of imminent war permeated the entire Western alliance, from the United States, Great Britain, and France – who had direct involvement in Berlin – to the other NATO allies, whose connection to Berlin was less formal.¹ Yet at times it seemed

¹ Officially, the three Western powers who had interests in Berlin were France, Great Britain, and the United States (who were also the leading members of NATO), but for obvious reasons, West Germany was also often included in that group, and thus in Tripartite discussions. It was not until the Kennedy Administration that the Tripartite group was expanded to include West Germany. For the purposes of this discussion, however, the term “Berlin powers” will refer to all four interested powers. As well, the rest of NATO had no official capacity in West Berlin, but regarded it as a de facto part of West Germany, and thus covered by the North Atlantic Treaty. The stationing of British, French, and American troops in West Berlin also meant that NATO could be called upon to assist in the defense of West Berlin,
that the leading powers of NATO were taking their allies for granted, and were not taking
the fears and interests of the smaller powers into consideration. This apparent division
between the larger and the smaller NATO nations was a source of disagreements within
the alliance, and at times looked to threaten its very stability as well. Many of the smaller
allies believed that the United States, Britain, and France were acting unilaterally, and
were taking an intransigent line that risked war over Berlin, a war that was unnecessary in
the eyes of the rest of NATO. The major powers argued that their unique responsibilities
in that city gave them the authority to determine the West’s policies during the Crisis, and
they showed a reluctance to consult fully with their allies, especially on matters of Berlin.
However, all of the allies recognized that a war over Berlin would not be confined to the
United States, Britain, and France, but would automatically involve all of NATO, almost
certainly with nuclear weapons from the start.

The added factor of nuclear weapons further complicated this relationship within
NATO. The United States and Britain were the only Western powers with nuclear
weapons (France would acquire them in 1960), and much of NATO’s strategy in Europe
depended on the deterrent effects of these weapons. However, some of the smaller NATO
powers worried about the consequences of deterrence, especially if war broke out. As the
West’s nuclear advantage seemed to decline in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the
possibility of the Berlin Crisis leading to nuclear war shocked many of the NATO allies,
large and small alike, and pushed them towards a more conciliatory attitude over Berlin.

__under Article 5 of the Treaty, should these forces be attacked by the Soviet Union. Thus, while there was a
legal distinction between the Berlin powers and the rest of NATO, there was very often little practical
distinction.__
one that was often at odds with official NATO policy and with the plans of the United States.

The question of deterrence is important to understanding the role of the Berlin Crisis within the larger Cold War. From the earliest years of its existence, NATO had struggled with the question of how to deter a Soviet attack on Western Europe, settling on a clear strategy of nuclear deterrence in the late 1940s and early 1950s. This strategy required instilling in the Soviet leadership the belief that the West would meet any aggressive act against its territory or interests with an instant and devastating nuclear attack. Yet many NATO countries were never fully comfortable with this strategy, and accepted the risks of nuclear war only so long as they were sure that the deterrent effects of nuclear weapons meant that they would never have to face that eventuality.

Therefore, doubts about nuclear strategy during the crisis necessitated a conventional deterrent, which NATO provided. NATO’s conventional forces complemented and enhanced the main American nuclear deterrent and helped to protect Western interests in Berlin and Germany during the crisis. Without NATO to harmonize Western policy behind the American lead, the Allies would likely not have been able properly to confront the Soviets over Berlin and to maintain their presence in West Berlin. The loss of credibility from losing West Berlin would have severely damaged Western credibility in the face of the Soviet threat, and the stability of West Germany and Western Europe would have been substantially undermined. Thus, NATO and the mutual commitment that it represented were vital to the successful protection of West Berlin, mainly through the prevention of a direct Soviet move on the city.
Ultimately, behind that credibility were nuclear weapons. NATO’s reliance on nuclear weapons had deepened under President Dwight Eisenhower, whose policy of Massive Retaliation was posited on a full-scale and immediate use of American nuclear weapons to overwhelm any Soviet action against the West. NATO had adopted this idea, accepting that only nuclear weapons could deter the Soviets or enable the West to overcome the Soviets’ superiority in conventional forces in Europe. However, American officials had crafted the ideas of Massive Retaliation during a period when the American nuclear arsenal was clearly superior to the Soviets’, thus making the danger of Soviet nuclear retaliation, especially against European targets, less threatening. Yet even by the time that NATO had adopted its strategy, this nuclear balance was changing, and, while it would take several more years for the Soviets to achieve nuclear parity with the West, the nuclear danger to the West, especially Western Europe, was increasing. Officials and strategists on both sides of the Atlantic began to question the efficacy of Massive Retaliation in wartime. And if Massive Retaliation could not assure Western victory in a nuclear war, then its effectiveness as a deterrent was significantly reduced, possibly giving the Soviets an opening to achieve political and territorial gains without the West being able to respond.

In this context, the Berlin Crisis erupted on the NATO allies. With questions arising about their nuclear strategy, they questioned whether any of them, especially the smaller allies with no direct interests in the status of Berlin, would be able to go to war over the city, especially since under NATO’s strategy, it would be nuclear from the start. And if they did go to war over Berlin, would the costs, given the greater Soviet ability to
retaliate against European cities, be justified to protect a small enclave hundreds of miles behind the Iron Curtain? These concerns were less pressing to the Americans, who were largely invulnerable to Soviet nuclear retaliation, but that invulnerability only compounded European fears, since the strategy was largely American-designed. Although these tensions did not rise to the surface during NATO discussions, they clearly underlay many of the smaller allies’ anxieties about the Berlin Crisis. Yet all of the allies recognized that they could not abandon American leadership of the alliance, lest that result in American abandonment of the alliance itself, or at least a pull-back of American forces from the Continent, something that American officials, especially under Eisenhower, often contemplated.

Still, the allies had to be prepared for a potential confrontation over access to Berlin. On the surface, this preparation revolved around the ideas in the Strategic Concept NATO of 1957. However, the Concept’s deliberately vague wording allowed room for the possibility of responses to Soviet actions other than Massive Retaliation and its NATO analogue. These possibilities involved taking limited action in response to limited aggression, but here the vagueness hampered NATO rather than benefited it. Such limited responses implied that NATO had flexibility to respond to differing levels of provocation from the Soviet bloc, while in truth the Strategic Concept allowed for no such flexibility. As the Berlin Crisis developed, it was clear that Soviet action on the access routes – especially administrative action that would not appear very provocative to NATO’s publics – was the sort of limited action that the Strategic Concept anticipated, and insisted the Alliance must meet with a nuclear response. NATO members thus found
themselves confronted with a choice between nuclear war and capitulation in the face of limited Soviet aggression. But while few, if any, members were willing to allow themselves to be put in such a position, they were no more willing to open up NATO’s strategy and allow the nuclear deterrent to be weakened.

Yet by the end of the Berlin Crisis, thinking was beginning to change. American policymakers – first at the tail-end of the Eisenhower administration and then more forcefully under the John F. Kennedy administration – were the first to propose an Allied strategy that relied more heavily on conventional weapons, with the use of nuclear weapons only if absolutely necessary. Officials supporting this view found very little agreement among the European allies throughout most of the Crisis, but the Crisis brought some change by the time the Cuban Missile Crisis erupted in 1962. By then, at least within the narrow confines of Berlin contingency planning, NATO began to contemplate, and come to terms with, the possibility of downgrading the nuclear deterrent and enhancing it with more conventional forces. The Allies would not fully accept these changes until well after the end of the Berlin Crisis, but their introduction shows its effect on these issues.

As these issues surrounding the deterrent developed, Western leaders had to ensure that the deterrent remained credible to reassure the members of the Alliance and to protect the West’s strategic and diplomatic position relative to the Soviet bloc. Throughout the 1950s, the two sides across the divide of the Iron Curtain attempted to come to terms on divisive issues such as German reunification and a European settlement, but never approached a real settlement of the Cold War. Yet while some
Western officials still hoped for the roll-back of communism in Eastern Europe, most others recognized that Soviet control over the region, including East Germany, was not likely to end soon, and that some sort of rapprochement would have to be made with the communist regimes across the Iron Curtain. This rapprochement would include a more open relationship with the Soviet Union, a process increasingly termed détente, involving mutual acceptance of governing regimes, increased trade and cultural exchange, and possibly even the formal recognition of spheres of influence in Europe and the rest of the world. For the West, the issues of deterrence and détente were often connected, and the concerns that manifested themselves during the Berlin Crisis helped spur many NATO leaders toward détente. This move towards détente made negotiations over Berlin not only more acceptable, but indeed more desirable as part of a possible long-term solution to the problems of the Cold War and its resulting strains.

This sentiment was not confined to the smaller allies. The larger allies – especially Britain but including the United States and, to a lesser extent France and West Germany – saw the benefits that détente offered, and thus negotiation was from the first a central feature of the Western response to the Soviet threat in Berlin. The question was how far the West could go in conceding to the Soviets over Berlin, Germany, and détente without losing its credibility as protector of the citizens of West Berlin and West Germany. While the possibility of abandoning Berlin to East Germany was rarely a viable option, some allies saw new arrangements for the city as feasible concessions. Likewise, there were several who could also envision similar new arrangements for Germany and Europe. NATO never fully arrived at an agreement on such new
arrangements (and France and West Germany in particular resisted movement in the
direction of such changes to the status of Berlin or Germany), but the disagreements did
hang over the discussions between the allies. Fortunately for NATO, the Western powers
were never put in a position where they had to make decisions on such issues, for it is not
entirely clear how comfortable some of the allies would have been supporting a more
defiant line, even one backed by the United States.

Despite these disagreements, however, NATO fundamentally needed to retain its
public unity, to assure that the Western powers could negotiate with the Soviets from a
position of strength. Common interests kept the alliance together, even through times of
disagreement and discord. That need for unity meant that NATO members had to walk a
fine line in their discussions. They had to protect their individual interests, while
maintaining the collective interests of the alliance as a whole. Striking this balance
required most allies to subsume some of their concerns over the dangers in the Western
strategy, while for others it required accepting policies that they considered appeasing.
Again, fortunately for NATO, this unity was never seriously put to the test, as the Soviets
deprecated to push the situation to crisis point, where members might have had to choose
whether to follow policies they considered counter to their own interest or to break with
NATO’s unity. Still, the Berlin Crisis contributed to the growing difficulties among some
of the allies, most notably France, in reconciling their national interests against their
collective interests, and it sparked some of the later confrontations that would require a
large-scale reassessment of NATO and its goals in later years.
Still, as NATO confronted the Berlin Crisis, it had to ensure that its political and military strength was sufficient to prevent the crisis from descending into war and to protect its territory should war start. NATO’s role in containing Communism and Berlin’s role as the location most in need of that containment were intimately connected in Western public and official consciousness. From its beginnings, NATO was an agent of the containment policy that emanated from the United States. For NATO’s policy during the Berlin Crisis to succeed – if it was going to avoid war while still maintaining the West’s position in Berlin and Germany – a sufficient NATO deterrent would be necessary. Thus, there was a need to keep NATO and its role in containment relevant by maintaining the allied unity that collective defense and a strategy of deterrence required, to ensure that the allies could approach any discussions with the Soviets, whether formal or not, with confidence.

So long as American leadership remained, though, it allowed NATO members some flexibility, even if just behind the scenes. Ultimately, most NATO allies had enough confidence in the American deterrent that they could stretch the limits of NATO unity in order to pursue, to a limited extent, their own individual interests. They could push for more influence within NATO, seek a more conciliatory policy towards the Soviet Union, or even push independent agendas without fear of being totally isolated, provided they did not break NATO unity or demonstrably contradict Western policy or the American position. Thus, British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan could seek to negotiate independently with Khrushchev, with the understanding that he was acting with his allies’ assent and would not agree to anything without their consent, and so long as he
maintained close communication with his American, French, and West German counterparts. Such actions might annoy other leaders, even to the point of mild public criticism – and harsh private criticism – but they did not seriously threaten Allied unity, and so did not compromise the nuclear deterrent. But every ally remained aware that too much independent action, could present Khrushchev with an opportunity to exploit NATO divisions, possibly weakening the deterrent to the point where there would be no viable response to a Soviet or East German takeover of West Berlin. Once again, it was a fine line for NATO to balance on, but one the allies were successful at navigating, largely because they were never pushed to the decision-point.

As Geir Lundestad argues in his book *The United States and Western Europe since 1945*, the United States clearly had a predominant, even at times hegemonic, position within the Western alliance. But the Americans never truly imposed that position on the rest of their allies; instead the United States was invited by the European powers to assume that position in order to assure the protection of Western Europe. While the Americans were occasionally reluctant to maintain that protection through NATO (Eisenhower continually desired to return American troops to the western side of the Atlantic), few ever really questioned the fundamentals of the relationship between the United States and the Europeans. The empire by invitation remained in place throughout the Cold War, even when individual members such as France rejected it.

Because the United States did not impose its predominance but rather was invited to take up the position it occupied, it was not really in a position to dictate policy or strategy to the other members. Its military and economic strength gave it the ability to
frame and direct Western policy, and that policy usually conformed broadly to American interests. But other countries could easily express and achieve their own interests within NATO, even if not directly. This situation meant that while the Americans could still lead, they constantly had to make sure their allies were following, which meant adapting their strategies to meet their allies’ views. As much as this was a constraint on American policy, it kept American interests in line with its allies’ interests and protected the larger Western geostrategic position in the Cold War, most importantly denying Western Europe to the Soviets.

Although American policy was not the determining factor for Western policy during the Berlin Crisis, the European allies did look to the United States for most of the initiative, and there was little desire to step very far out of line from American interests. Yet the Europeans were not going to follow the Americans blindly, and during the Berlin Crisis, this constraint kept the Americans, under both Eisenhower and Kennedy, balancing between those allies – particularly Britain and some of the smaller NATO powers – who wanted a more conciliatory approach to the Soviet Union to solve the Berlin situation, and those allies – particularly France and West Germany – who would rather maintain the status quo than risk losing West Berlin or West Germany to the Soviets. To many of its allies, then, the United States could be hard to fully follow, adding to concerns that the United States could drag the West into a nuclear war over Berlin, and generating calls from the smaller powers for more NATO consultation and more Allied control over dealings with the Soviets. While these calls rarely accomplished more than token consultation in the North Atlantic Council, they did keep allied concerns
in the minds of American officials who developed policy, and further constrained their ability to craft a suitable solution to the Berlin problem.

In an attempt to begin making the preparations that the Soviet challenge demanded, the United States, Britain, and France began coordinating their planning, cooperating on developing a set of contingencies and responses to various levels of threat. At American initiative, this cooperation became formalized in a separate tripartite military planning organization known by its code-name LIVE OAK, put under the charge of NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR) Lauris Norstad, but otherwise separate from NATO’s military organization and command entities (Supreme Headquarters, Allied Powers Europe – SHAPE). LIVE OAK would come to form the backbone of allied planning, encompass German military staff, and become coordinated with NATO’s own Berlin contingency planning.

In the process of developing its contingency plans, LIVE OAK also gradually became a center for reevaluating NATO’s overall strategic policies. During the Berlin Crisis, NATO countries never directly confronted the contradictions in how they viewed NATO’s nuclear deterrent. While the strategy called for reliance on nuclear weapons in a war with the Soviet bloc, many of the allies were not willing actually to use those weapons, except as a last resort. But their policies certainly recognized those contradictions implicitly, preventing the West from taking a more aggressive stand against the Soviet threats during the periods of more acute crisis. Fortunately for the West, such an aggressive stand was not necessary, as Khrushchev himself proved unwilling to risk war over Berlin.
Still, many of the problems that the Berlin situation presented LIVE OAK – how to respond to limited aggression, at what point to make a nuclear move, what sort of strategic coordination was necessary across the alliance – forced its staff to make adjustments to strategy that would eventually initiate new flexibility for both political and military leaders. Many of these adjustments came about through the need to accommodate the interests and concerns of various allies, even within the relatively small group of the tripartite LIVE OAK organization. When the British raised the dilemma of responding to the closure of the Berlin access routes with either a weak conventional move or a full nuclear move, officers in LIVE OAK had to confront the problem and develop a solution. Their solution introduced a level of flexibility that Massive Retaliation and the Strategic Concept had been silent on, allowing for the use of various levels of conventional force before the allies would need to reach a nuclear decision. Such ideas would soon dovetail into the Kennedy Administration’s ideas on Flexible Response in Western strategy. LIVE OAK’s planning for Berlin contingencies laid the groundwork for a shift to Flexible Response in later years by introducing practical flexible responses to Soviet moves on the ground.

The Berlin Crisis changed Western policy beyond nuclear strategy. If NATO members were not going to be willing to go to war in Central Europe over Berlin, then they would have to accept the continued division of the city, including a de jure recognition of East German sovereignty there. Such a recognition would require NATO states to come to terms with the division of Germany and the continued existence of the communist regime in the East. It would be some time before the West could publicly
accept this position – requiring a fundamental shift in West German policy brought on by Willy Brandt’s Ostpolitik later in the decade. Yet by 1963 the NATO allies had decided that war over the continued division of Berlin, and Germany, was not worth the death and destruction of nuclear war, a decision evident in the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Through the divisions within NATO, the allies came around to staking out these new positions. Though each member had its own national interests to consider, the collective interests of the alliance dictated they had to find some common front, if only to prevent Khrushchev from exploiting rifts between the allies and gaining Berlin without conceding anything to the West. As the threat of nuclear war lingered during the Crisis, several members, including the United States under the Kennedy administration, realized that accommodating the Soviets in East Germany would be preferable to further confrontation. Though its discussions tended to avoid directly dealing with the changes that were happening under the surface – even when forced to confront them under the Kennedy Administration’s public calls for Flexible Response – NATO provided crucial forums for assimilating these changes. Through NATO consultation, the smaller powers could retain their confidence in Western strategy and strength. That same Allied structure gave the larger powers, especially the United States, the ability to lead the West, without having to drag the other allies along unwillingly. Although the results were not perfect, as the fall-out with France would soon show, they reinforced the place of NATO within Western policy and solidified NATO as an essential structure of a stable Cold War.
NATO has always been a part of the story of the Berlin Crisis. But study of the Berlin Crisis started almost immediately upon its inception. Journalists and other observers put together popular accounts of the events, probing slightly into the motives behind the Soviet actions, but focusing more on the ability of the West to stand up to Khrushchev and his allies. As in the early examinations of the Cuban Missile Crisis, books such as Robert Slusser’s *The Berlin Crisis of 1961*, Jean Smith’s *The Defense of Berlin*, and Jack Schick’s *The Berlin Crisis, 1958-1962* seek to demonstrate how Western unity and steadfastness in the face of Soviet threats prevented war and forced the Soviets to back down on their demands. These books did not have very many archival sources to draw on, however, relying primarily on published government material, interviews, and news reports. With the resolution of the Berlin question during the détente of the early 1970s, interest in the Berlin Crisis waned, as issues of nuclear competition and global geostrategy dominated the discussions of the 1970s and 1980s.

With the end of the Cold War by the early 1990s, study of the conflict returned often encompassing Germany and Berlin. Books such as Michael Beschloss’ *The Crisis Years* and Lawrence Freedman’s *Kennedy’s Wars* place the Berlin Crisis within the larger context of the international situation of the late-Eisenhower and Kennedy years. This period featured some of the highest tensions of the Cold War, and the Berlin Crisis often features prominently in these books. However, these studies aim at larger explorations of American or European policy during these years, and thus they tend to subordinate the Berlin Crisis to other global crises, particularly those in Southeast Asia and Cuba. These studies contribute to the larger context under which NATO dealt with the Berlin Crisis,
but do not draw out the impact of the German question on the Western alliance. An exception is John Gearson’s *Harold Macmillan and the Berlin Wall Crisis*, a thorough study of British policy towards Berlin from 1958-1962. However, Gearson’s focus on the effect of the Berlin Crisis on Britain’s relationship with West Germany, and tangentially France, excludes the larger Western alliance.

Other authors have explored the strategy aspects of the Berlin era. One of the most important of these is Lawrence Freedman’s *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy*, first published in 1981. Freedman’s overview of the strategic debates over nuclear weapons is invaluable to understanding the place that those weapons had in Western policy, but once again, its scope is so broad that the Berlin Crisis becomes just one event in a larger process of nuclear strategic thought. Although the latest edition was published well after the end of the Cold War, the importance of the LIVE OAK exercise is largely absent, and thus the issues of alliance nuclear contingencies do not play a large role in the mainly theoretical thinking about nuclear strategy. The practicalities of Berlin contingency planning dictated a more practical approach to nuclear strategy, one that contributed to the eventual adoption of Flexible Response.

Several books have examined different aspects of these strategic policies, from the more conventional side to national approaches to the questions. John Duffield’s *Power Rules* looks at the development of NATO’s conventional strategies, and how the alliance conceived of the conventional forces that would be necessary for their strategy. An often overlooked aspect of NATO strategy, conventional forces were always important, especially after the strategic situation stabilized after the early 1960s. Duffield
concentrates on the early years of the alliance, particularly the transformation of NATO from a vague political alliance to a structured military alliance. Although he does not dedicate much space to NATO’s Berlin years, the recognition of the conventional side of NATO’s strategy is important to understanding the strategic shifts that the West underwent in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Saki Dockrill’s *Eisenhower’s New Look National Security Policy*, Beatrice Heuser’s *NATO, Britain, and the FRG*, Andrew Richter’s *Avoiding Armageddon*, and Jane Stromseth’s *The Origins of Flexible Response* cover various aspects of the strategic field, including aspects of that field during the Berlin Crisis. By tying together the national and temporal studies of Western strategy, they collectively construct the outlines of the debates and changes that were underway by the time the Berlin Crisis hit, and how these continued after its conclusion. However, it is difficult to see in these studies the impact of the Berlin Crisis, especially the effects of tripartite contingency planning on the thinking of the other allies and on their fears of the risks of Western strategy.

Other works look at the approaches of several Western states to the Berlin Crisis. The most notable of these is Gearson’s *Harold Macmillan and the Berlin Wall Crisis*, but others have examined the United States, France, West Germany, and Canada. While these are useful windows into aspects of Western policymaking and perspective, their national focus limits them, and they contribute little towards a broad understanding of Western policy as a whole. A book that comes closest to this goal is *The Berlin Wall Crisis*, edited by John Gearson and Kori Schake. This volume of articles breaks up the Berlin Crisis into studies of Italian, West German, and even Soviet bloc policy, with an element of an
overarching perspective. But as an edited collection, it lacks the central argument to tie all of the pieces into a coherent, full understanding of Western policy.

Instead, it is necessary to look at the location where Western policy was brought together most during this period, namely NATO. The Alliance itself has not received the attention from historians that it deserves. Most of the historiography concerns the creation of NATO. Works such as Lawrence Kaplan, *NATO and the United States* and *The Long Entanglement* and Gustav Schmidt, *A History of NATO* have made NATO a concentration of study, but largely in a broad, Cold-War-encompassing scale. The Berlin Crisis receives little mention. Robert Jordan’s biography of SACEUR Lauris Norstad begins to centralize NATO within the Cold War and even the Berlin Crisis, but his focus on Norstad as an individual limits his analysis of NATO’s policy and strategy, and the relationships between the collective and national interests of the various members.

On a broader scale, the issues surrounding Berlin represented the issues surrounding Germany as a whole. As Marc Trachtenberg makes clear in *A Constructed Peace*, the German Question largely determined the course of the Cold War in its early years, and the informal settlement of the German situation by 1962 shaped the structure of the Cold War (and the peace in Europe that accompanied it) for the duration of that conflict. By extending Trachtenberg’s thesis to looking at the role the German Question (so sharply focused on Berlin in the years 1958-1963) played in NATO’s strategic and diplomatic policy of the time, it is possible to see that the outcome of a stable Cold War based on a divided Europe was not clear through the years of the Berlin Crisis.
members were very concerned with the instability that still existed in a divided Europe, which the Berlin Crisis acutely represented.

A study of NATO in this sense is a multipolar study, one which expands the scope of the Berlin Crisis, while still keeping the important players central. NATO provides a unique lens through which to view the Berlin Crisis and its implications, for both the Alliance and the Cold War. NATO was an important part of the Western response to the crisis, but was also outside of it in a way. And yet without NATO’s presence, the outcome would surely have been very different. By looking at the crisis from a multipolar point of view, it is possible to see some of the changes that occurred in a different light, and to achieve a new understanding of the Western alliance and the Cold War in Europe.
Chapter 1
The Soviet Ultimatum
On 10 November 1958, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev touched off a crisis that would resonate through the Cold War for years to come. In a speech to his Polish communist counterparts, he turned his attention to the status of Berlin – which since 1945 had been divided among the victors of World War II – and the question of post-war Germany. According to Khrushchev, the state of war that still technically existed between the victorious powers of World War II and the two successor German states had been allowed to continue for too long, and it was time to recognize the post-war situation by signing final peace treaties. He threatened that if the West did not agree to such peace treaties, the Soviet Union would sign one itself with the Eastern successor state, the German Democratic Republic, and turn over full sovereignty of that state’s territory to its communist government.

Although these proposals did not seem overly threatening on their face, they represented a direct challenge to the Western position in central Europe by that point of the Cold War. A Soviet peace treaty with East Germany that turned sovereignty over to the regime would put the West in an awkward position. Britain, France, and the United States still maintained occupation garrisons in West Berlin, which was located within the territory of the GDR, but it was the Soviet Union, as the fourth occupation power in Berlin, who controlled the access to the city. As part of their attempts to integrate West
Germany into the Western political, economic, and military system, the Western powers refused to recognize the legitimacy of the East German regime, and thus refused to maintain any contacts with it, including in Berlin. Thus, the assumption of sovereignty by East Germany over the access routes to West Berlin would force the Western powers either to recognize that regime or face potentially losing their hold over West Berlin, a hold that they had fought long and hard to preserve.

To ensure that they did not lose Berlin, the Western allies had to come together under NATO to coordinate their policies. In many ways, this coordination was NATO’s purpose, and had sustained the Alliance through questions of competing interests among its members. But the Berlin Crisis would represent a new level of threat to allied unity, and from early on it was clear to Western leaders that they would have to overcome significant differences in perspective, interests, and goals in order to protect the overall Western position.

At first, there was little trouble coming up with a unified position. NATO had already guaranteed the Western position in Berlin, and no ally saw reason to simply abdicate that position. Before long, however, the possible consequences of a confrontation over Berlin – especially nuclear war – caused doubts among some allies about the wisdom of taking an intransigent line against the Soviet demands. While no member argued against a united Western approach, some (in particular the British) tried to steer that approach in a more conciliatory direction. The potential that such divergence could lead to actual disunity threatened to undermine NATO’s role in containing Soviet aggression in Europe.
Thus, the first need was to keep NATO and its role in containment relevant by maintaining the allied unity that collective defense and a strategy of deterrence required, to ensure that the allies could approach any discussions with the Soviets, whether formal or not, with confidence in their position. Ensuring a cohesive NATO policy required tough internal negotiations before talks with the Soviets could even start. By the time Western leaders met with the Soviet and East German counterparts at a major conference in Geneva, though, they could do so with the confidence that the whole strength of NATO was behind them in support.

**NATO’s strategic background**

NATO in late 1958 was nearing the tenth anniversary of the signing of its founding document, the North Atlantic Treaty. It had expanded beyond its initial twelve members to fifteen members, including the crucial expansion to West Germany in 1955. It had a fully-functioning organizational structure based in Paris and its own military forces under the joint command of the Supreme Headquarters, Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE). Perhaps most importantly, it had established itself as a vital part of Western policy and strategy in the Cold War, including situations like the Berlin Crisis.

Yet while all of the NATO members had recovered from the effects of the Second World War and had rearmed to defend Western Europe from Soviet aggression, much of NATO’s strategy was still dependent on American nuclear weapons. NATO had spent much of its early years developing a common strategy that integrated both the nuclear and conventional forces. The Allies had come up with a set of concepts that were strongly based on Massive Retaliation developed under President Dwight Eisenhower, thus giving American policy-makers considerable influence in the discussions of collective strategy.
and making continued American leadership vital to the directions NATO would take on Berlin.

NATO articulated its strategy in two parallel documents, adopted in May 1957: MC 14/2, “Overall Strategic Concept for the Defense of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Area” and MC 48/2, “Measures to Implement the Strategic Concept”. The Strategic Concept was NATO’s adoption of the Massive Retaliation strategy, formalized into one that applied to the Alliance as a whole.\(^1\) Essentially, these documents outlined a goal “to prevent war by maintaining adequate military strength in being, consistent with economy of effort, resources and manpower, which will demonstrate to a potential aggressor that fatal risks would be involved if he launched or supported an armed attack against NATO and should war be forced upon us, to have the capability to bring it to a successful conclusion.”\(^2\) On the face of it, this strategy lent equal weight to conventional and nuclear forces, and there was still considerable attention given to maintaining and strengthening NATO’s conventional forces deployed in Central Europe. But the reality was that nuclear forces occupied a much higher importance, and really formed the backbone of both NATO deterrent efforts.\(^3\)

In addition, it was the strategic nuclear attack that would determine the course of a war by destroying the enemy’s ability and will to fight.\(^4\) Quite simply, American

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\(^4\) MC 48/2, Measures to Implement the Strategic Concept, 23 May 1957,
policy-makers, from President Eisenhower on down, did not believe that it would be possible to fight a conventional, limited war in the age of nuclear arsenals. Eisenhower’s New Look policy had tried to turn strategy away from conventional means to reliance on nuclear weapons, which had led to the basic strategy of Massive Retaliation: that any act of aggression against the United States (and by extension its allies) would be met with an immediate and large-scale nuclear attack.

The strategic concept was very clear about NATO’s attitude towards nuclear weapons. NATO’s members expected to use nuclear weapons at the outset of a war between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and made sure to stipulate that since “NATO would be unable to prevent the rapid overrunning of Europe unless NATO immediately employed nuclear weapons both strategically and tactically, we must be prepared to take the initiative in their use.” As with Massive Retaliation, there was not much question about the possibility of a limited conventional war, or of escalation in stages from conventional combat to general nuclear war, but rather the expectation of an immediate escalation from outbreak of hostilities to the launching of the strategic nuclear offensive.

The main focus for such a strategy was the deterrence of a full-scale Soviet offensive, one that by 1957 would almost certainly include the use of nuclear weapons on both the tactical and strategic levels. Even with the increase of the Soviet nuclear arsenal through the mid- and late-1950s, this strategic concept displayed the NATO countries’ confidence that American strategic power would be sufficient to deter the Soviets from

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5 MC 14/2, 9.
launching such an attack, so that it could be “assumed… that [the Soviets] will not deliberately launch a general war so long as they know the West is prepared to retaliate with nuclear weapons.” Yet there was a recognition that other Soviet actions might trigger war, even without Soviet use of nuclear weapons, and the strategic concept therefore stated that NATO had to be prepared for “general war arising as a result of miscalculation on the part of the Soviets, a misconstruction of Western intentions, or as a result of military operations of a limited nature which the Soviets did not originally expect would lead to a general war.” In the first two cases, the strategic concept argued that the Soviet Union would likely “turn to planned aggression to realize her aims if she misconstrued NATO intentions, if she believed that the forces of NATO were unprepared or incapable of effective retaliation, or if she believed that she alone had developed a scientific breakthrough which would reduce our retaliatory capability to an acceptable level. In this regard, the Soviets have the advantage of the initiative and surprise,” and so there would be no question about an American nuclear counter-offensive.

The potential for the Soviets starting with limited actions that might escalate raised other problems. Many allies did not feel that a full-scale nuclear attack could be justified in such a case, while others worried about American willingness to risk a Soviet nuclear attack against the United States without a manifest danger to the integrity of Western Europe. In this situation, the conventional “Shield” forces deployed in Central Europe would have an important role to play in providing flexibility that would “permit

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7 MC 14/2, 7.
8 Ibid.
9 MC 48/2, 2-3.
NATO forces to act promptly to restore and maintain the security of the NATO area, without necessarily having recourse to nuclear weapons.”\textsuperscript{11} And even though NATO approved the strategic concept over a year before the outbreak of the Berlin Crisis, officials recognized that Berlin was one of the most likely sites for just that sort of limited Soviet action, and these sections on flexibility provided military commanders some ability to control escalation on the local level, with the “check-mate” move of American nuclear power providing backing.\textsuperscript{12}

At the same time, however, the strategic concept limited some of this flexibility. While it said that NATO should have the recourse to non-nuclear measures, any escalation would have to be just as rapid as in the case of a general Soviet offensive. Thus, “if the Soviets were involved in a local hostile action and sought to broaden the scope of such an incident or to prolong it, the situation would call for the utilization of all weapons and forces at NATO’s disposal, since \textit{in no case is there a NATO concept of limited war with the Soviets}.”\textsuperscript{13} This perspective made the difference between limited and general Soviet actions very small indeed, and reinforced the basic assumptions of the Massive Retaliation strategy. In Berlin, this would mean that minor Soviet moves to limit Western access or rights could easily turn into – at least in Western perception of the situation – the prelude to general war that would warrant the immediate and massive use of nuclear weapons; Berlin could become a trip-wire. This scenario was the shadow that hung over NATO’s approach to the Berlin Crisis, as many allies questioned the position

\textsuperscript{11} MC 48/2, 8.  
\textsuperscript{12} Trachtenberg, \textit{A Constructed Peace}, 180-81.  
\textsuperscript{13} MC 14/2, 11. Emphasis added.
the West should take, for fear that too defiant a stance would quickly lead to a general war that, under NATO doctrine, would necessarily be nuclear.

The 1957 strategic concept was not a significant departure from NATO’s earlier strategies, which had also relied on nuclear weapons as their basis. But it clearly defined the nature of Western deterrence, tied closely with the Massive Retaliation policy that defined the Eisenhower years. NATO members willingly accepted this role as part of the containment of Soviet communism because it fit their notion of how the Alliance worked. The American nuclear umbrella provided the European members with security, and they in turn provided support to American policy toward the Soviet Union. While the European states may not have been comfortable with the consequences of that nuclear umbrella, they were comfortable that the deterrent power it represented would prevent Soviet aggression and would provide the West with space to maneuver diplomatically. While that space might not mean the ideal goal of a reunified Germany allied to the West, at the very least it could avert the worst case goal of a reunified Germany allied to the Soviet Union, or at least a reunified Germany playing West off against East. And for the time being, Western deterrence as expressed in the strategic concept could protect the status quo as it benefitted NATO.

The development of NATO’s strategic concept by 1957 put the alliance in a reasonably comfortable position going into the Berlin Crisis. It provided the Allies with a framework around which to build their military forces – and confidence that those forces could provide the deterrent strength – in conjunction with the American nuclear arsenal, necessary to prevent war. The strategic concept also tied American strategy in with
NATO strategy, ensuring that the American nuclear umbrella would remain in place, even as Soviet strategic nuclear power increased, and opened the door to American sharing of nuclear weapons with the Allies. It thus contributed to Alliance political cohesion, without which NATO’s whole deterrent capability was useless, along with members’ confidence in that deterrent power.\textsuperscript{14} Khrushchev delivered his challenge in Berlin, therefore, to a NATO that on the surface was better prepared to meet it than it had been previously.

**Khrushchev’s First Moves**

The first hint that Khrushchev was preparing a new policy on Berlin came on 10 November 1958, when he gave a speech in Poland accusing the Western allies of breaking the terms of the Potsdam Agreement of July-August 1945. In particular, Khrushchev charged that the integration of West Germany into NATO, along with its economic integration into Western Europe, was a violation of the demilitarization aspects of the Four-Power agreements on the future of Germany.\textsuperscript{15} The only aspect of the Potsdam Agreement that Khrushchev argued the Western Powers were honoring was their right to occupy West Berlin, and so the Soviet leader demanded that the Western Powers “build their relations with the German Democratic Republic, let them reach agreement with it themselves if they are interested in any questions concerning Berlin.”\textsuperscript{16}

In addition, he stated that the Soviet Union would turn over its functions in Berlin to the GDR, as the Soviet gesture stemming from its recognition of East German sovereignty.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{14} Schake, *Britain and The Berlin Wall Crisis*, 23.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, 545.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
Essentially, Khrushchev was attempting to force the West to recognize the East German regime, thereby ensuring its continued survival and placing the Soviets in a better bargaining position for issues related to German reunification. Khrushchev had come to believe that only direct diplomatic pressure could get results in the West. He hoped that using Berlin, a place where the Allies had already invested considerable political capital but where the Soviet Union could apply considerable pressure, would achieve his goals. The Soviets retained their interpretation in the formal note on the status of Berlin on 27 November, once again arguing that the only provisions of the Potsdam Agreement that the Western Powers had kept were those regarding their access to Berlin, and that therefore that agreement was no longer valid. The note also reiterated the Soviet desire to turn over its occupation duties to the GDR, thus acknowledging its sovereignty. The note then added a further proposal, calling for the creation of a “free city” in West Berlin, governed by the United Nations and without interference from either of the German states. Finally, and from the Western viewpoint most worrisome, the Soviets placed a deadline of six months on agreement to such changes in Berlin’s status. If no agreements were made in that time, the Soviet Union would unilaterally sign

19 Ibid, 185.
20 “Note from the Soviet Union to the United States Regarding the Status of Berlin and the Potsdam Agreements”, 27 November 1958, *Documents on Germany*, 552-53. Similar notes went to Great Britain and France, as well as to West Germany.
21 Ibid, 555-56.
22 Ibid, 557.
a separate agreement with the East Germans and turn over its duties in Berlin to the GDR.\textsuperscript{23}

The Soviet note was the most stark challenge to the Western position in Berlin since the Blockade of 1948-49. Legally, the record favored the West’s interpretation, since the most relevant agreements on Berlin were not from the Potsdam Agreement, but from subsequent arrangements between the foreign ministers and in the wake of the Blockade. Yet if the Soviets chose to press the issue by signing the separate peace treaty, such legalities would probably not matter. The Berlin Powers could either deal with the East Germans, and thus open the door to recognition of the communist regime, or they could refuse, and find West Berlin essentially cut off once again. Similarly, there was little to like about the “free city” proposal. Not only was it restricted to West Berlin, a division that the Allies were not then willing to accept, but it lacked guarantees about access and political control that they believed only their presence in the city could provide. Leaving the people of West Berlin without direct Western protection would undermine not only Berliners’ support of the West, but also that of West Germans, potentially weakening the Western alliance fatally. The credibility that the West had staked in Berlin since 1948 meant that no Soviet proposals short of clear guarantees of Western access or reunification of the city under a democratically reunified German state were acceptable.\textsuperscript{24} There may have been some limited negotiating room, but it was clear to Western officials that Khrushchev’s proposals were not in NATO’s interests.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid, 558-59.
These demands did not particularly surprise Western leaders. Certainly since the time of the Berlin Blockade ten years prior, the possibility that the Soviets might put pressure on the West through Berlin already existed, especially since the agreements that ended the Blockade were informal.\textsuperscript{25} Officials knew that Khrushchev had certain goals in mind for his German policy, including protecting the socialist regime in East Germany, enhancing the stature of both East Germany and the Soviet Union in international affairs, and pushing for another summit meeting where he could demonstrate his international standing. From the outset, these factors of Soviet policy affected how the West viewed the Soviet demands.

Beyond the rejection of the basic terms of the Soviet demands, Western officials sought to determine the motivations behind the Soviet move. Although relations had soured since the “Spirit of Geneva” following the summit of 1955 and the Austrian State Treaty, there were no immediate causes of tension between East and West in Europe, and thus no apparent reason for why Khrushchev should choose that moment to renew pressure on Berlin. The situation in Europe had largely solidified following West Germany’s accession to NATO in 1955, and the subsequent formation of the Warsaw Pact under Soviet leadership. While neither side looked to shake the status quo too seriously, both sides did hope for some movement towards rapprochement that might end the tensions that the division of Europe caused. From both sides, proposals such as the Eden Plan and the Rapacki Plan\textsuperscript{26} put forward ideas on German rearmament or creating

\textsuperscript{25} News Conference Remarks by Secretary of State Dulles, 26 November 1958, \textit{Documents on Germany}, 549.
\textsuperscript{26} The Eden Plan formed the basis of the Western peace proposals at the 1955 Geneva Conference. See Saki Dockrill, “The Eden Plan and European Security” in Günter Bischof and Saki Dockrill, \textit{Cold War}
zones of limited or complete disarmament within central Europe, while in Geneva, talks over larger disarmament continued.

The most obvious reason behind the move was that Khrushchev and the Soviet leadership were tired of the situation in Berlin, and had decided to force the Western powers out, just as Stalin had tried in 1948. This scenario was potentially the most dangerous, because it would force a stand-off between the two sides over Allied rights and the status of West Berlin itself, one potentially as dangerous as the stand-off during the Berlin Blockade. While maintaining that the West would do everything to remain in Berlin, Allied leaders were concerned that another blockade could be disastrous, since there was no longer a capability to mount another airlift to supply the population of West Berlin, especially given the dramatically increased standard of living since 1948. This situation would mean that the Western powers would have to take more drastic measures, including military measures, to keep the ground access routes open, raising the possibility of the outbreak of fighting on the Autobahns. Still, they hoped that Western resolve would be enough to deter such an action by the Soviets, and keep the question of access off the table.

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Related to this possible motive was that turning the access routes over to the East Germans would put pressure on the West to recognize East Germany, even in just a de facto manner, which was a central goal of Soviet German policy at the time.\textsuperscript{30} Again, the question of recognition of East Germany, while a minor diplomatic matter on its face, was central to the Berlin problem. The West had based its policy since 1949 on the idea that, until reunification took place in the context of a multinational peace treaty for all of Germany, the Federal Republic of Germany was the only acceptable representative of the German nation. Recognizing East Germany would not only mean accepting the division of Germany (which was problematic given German public opinion) and the existence of two Germanys, it would also mean accepting the Soviet calculus for reunifying Germany under a peace treaty.\textsuperscript{31} Thus, instead of using all-German elections to choose a constituent assembly to decide the future constitutional status of a single German nation, which would benefit West Germany with its larger population, the Soviets could bring “pressure for Four-Power talks on [a] German peace treaty and talks between [the] ‘two German states’ on reunification,” which would benefit East Germany, since it would be considered an equal of the FRG, regardless of the population differences.\textsuperscript{32} Instead, the West would insist on free elections across all Germany, trusting that both the population disparities between East and West and the weak popularity of the Eastern regime would ensure success for a Western-oriented reunified Germany. Therefore, Western leaders had resolved that it was not possible to deal with East Germany in any capacity, including

as the guarantors of Western access to West Berlin, in order to maintain the Western negotiating position on reunification.\textsuperscript{33}

The timing of the Soviet action raised some speculation, but did not concern Western officials, who regarded it as mainly a propaganda tool for use in East Germany. According to this interpretation, East German citizens were becoming restless with the slow pace of negotiations on German reunification, and that restlessness was contributing to the economic and social difficulties the Eastern regime was facing. The Soviets therefore needed to demonstrate that they were actively seeking solutions, and that it was Western countries who were denying the Germans the right to unify. In the process, the Soviets would “becloud real issues and disguise [their] own intransigence with distortions, threats, and invective. [The m]isrepresentation of situations in Federal Republic and West Berlin are no doubt part of attempt to divert attention from Soviet responsibility re [the] German problem and from [the] situation in [the] Soviet Zone as well as attempt [to] find pretexts for further repression in [the] Zone and excuses for shortcomings of [the] Soviet Zone regime.”\textsuperscript{34} As elections in both East Germany and West Berlin were scheduled for the coming weeks, the Soviet objective was “to demonstrate to [the] population [that] it must not only accept [the] regime but must willy-nilly approve it. Such occasion naturally calls for vigorous beating of propaganda drums. One is inevitably reminded of Nazi election tactics.”\textsuperscript{35} In West Berlin, Soviet officials might hope such tactics would result in better results for the Communists, but officials

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid, 58.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
were doubtful that West German voters would cast more than a few ballots for Communism.\textsuperscript{36}

Another important theory among Western officials about Soviet intentions dealt with the growing status of West Germany within the military alliance under NATO. At the Geneva Summit of 1955, the Soviets had pushed for the reunification of Germany in order to prevent West Germany from joining NATO that same year. The failure to persuade the West that a reunified and neutral Germany was better than a West Germany allied to Western Europe and North America had convinced Soviet leaders that a militarized FRG was a threat, contributing to the decision to create the Warsaw Pact in response.\textsuperscript{37} For the Soviets, however, the situation had only gotten worse since 1955, and by 1958, NATO was considering deploying nuclear-armed Medium-Range Ballistic Missiles in West Germany, and potentially even giving the FRG control over some of these weapons. Western officials recognized that the Soviets would see such a move as a threat to their security, and thus they recognized that the renewed pressure on Berlin might be an attempt on the part of the Soviets to inhibit the “emergence of West Germany as nuclear-capable power with strong influence in NATO,” and possibly even convince NATO to withdraw from West Germany altogether.\textsuperscript{38}

What Western officials seem not to have considered very seriously were the domestic and international perceptions of Soviet leaders, especially Nikita Khrushchev himself. Khrushchev had only assumed complete control of Soviet policy a couple of

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid, 59.
\textsuperscript{37} Fursenko and Naftali, \textit{Khrushchev's Cold War}, 42.
years earlier – and still faced considerable opposition within the Presidium, especially in regard to German policy. The Berlin issue was sensitive for Khrushchev in the leadership. His chief rival immediately after Joseph Stalin’s death, Lavrentii Beria, had tried to assert his power by presenting himself as the peace leader willing to come to an agreement with the West over Germany. In overthrowing Beria, Khrushchev had accused him of abandoning the GDR, and so for Khrushchev to show any weakness on Berlin might lead to similar charges against him from his rivals.  

Taking a tough line on Berlin would reassert the commitment he made to East German sovereignty in removing Beria from power.

Thus, although unknown at the time, Khrushchev’s original intention, as expressed in his 10 November speech, had been to overturn the post-war settlement in Germany by unilaterally declaring the Potsdam Agreement void. But his chief rival in the Presidium, Anastas Mikoyan, still commanded significant influence. Mikoyan was against such risky maneuvers, and he was able to marshal enough opposition to Khrushchev to force the Soviet leader to compromise by leaving Potsdam valid and allowing time to pass before making any moves. Khrushchev could not afford to ignore Mikoyan, which meant that he did not have a completely free hand in Berlin. Thus, while it appeared to Western leaders that Khrushchev was acting rashly and pursuing brinksmanship over Berlin, in fact, the November note was a compromise between

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40 Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War*, 207.
Presidium members vying for power. But Western officials, ignorant of this power struggle, remained convinced that Khrushchev had complete control over Soviet policy.

Some Western officials saw the pressure on Berlin as a way to divide the NATO allies. Yet, other than sowing dissention amongst the capitalist states, they did not give much thought to what the goal of dividing NATO might actually achieve. Examination of Soviet policy, with the help of newly available Soviet documents, shows that Khrushchev was deeply concerned about the state of Soviet power in the world, and was looking for ways to gain advantage while it still appeared that the USSR was in a powerful position. Part of this effort was through his rhetoric – calling for Soviet support to national liberation movements in Africa, Asia, and elsewhere, declaring that communism would prove victorious over capitalism within a short period and exaggerating the strength and capabilities of Soviet strategic nuclear forces. But Khrushchev, seeking to expand Soviet power, perceived Berlin as a means to gain other concessions from the West. From this perspective, it becomes more clear that, while he did not like the situation in Berlin, and was prepared to sign the separate peace treaty with East Germany if the West did not agree to end the occupation of West Berlin, he was willing to accept a non-communist West Berlin if it was within a German settlement that met Soviet interests. But Western estimates concluded that the peace treaty move

41 Ibid, 209.
42 In some ways, that estimate was not too far off. The compromise on the tone of the note was one of the last times Khrushchev made such concessions to domestic rivals, and by 1960 he had all but eliminated opposition, even from Mikoyan. See Zubok, A Failed Empire, 140.
43 C-M(58)144, Trends and Implications of Soviet Policy, 6 December, 1958 (NATO Archives [hereafter NA]), 1.
44 Fursenko and Naftali, Khrushchev's Cold War, 217.
was a bluff, and that Western resolve could meet that bluff without conceding very much.\footnote{Memorandum From George A. Morgan of the Policy Planning Staff to the Assistant Secretary of State for Policy Planning (Smith), 8 December 1958, FRUS 1958-1960, VII, pt. 2 Western Europe, 158.}  

The American embassy in Moscow was the first to offer an evaluation of Khrushchev’s speech. Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson cabled on 11 November that, although the speech was unexpected and could very well be a trial balloon by Khrushchev, he believed that it was the start of a likely program to pressure the Western powers to agree to a summit meeting, rather than to deal with the issues of Berlin itself.\footnote{Telegram From the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State, 11 November 1958, FRUS 1958-1960, VIII Berlin Crisis 1958-1959, 47.} Thompson’s French counterpart, while stressing the point on East Germany, largely concurred about Khrushchev’s efforts to reopen the conversation on the German problem; he wondered if by raising the subject of Berlin under such risky circumstances, Khrushchev might be looking to center attention on the single issue of the crisis.\footnote{M. Dejean, Ambassadeur de France à Moscou, à M. Couve de Murville, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, 13 November 1958, DDF 1958, v. II, 679.} At NATO headquarters outside of Paris, the Committee of Political Advisors in the International Staff included a short analysis of the speech in their report of 8 December. Their focus was on how the move was likely “designed… to enhance the prestige and authority of the ‘DDR’ and to maneuvre the Western Powers into recognizing it.”\footnote{C-M(58)145, The Situation in Eastern Europe, 8 December, 1958 (NA), 2.}

There was little disagreement among the Western allies about the implications of the Soviet note, and so the actual substance of the official Western responses did not deviate from each other.\footnote{The Soviet Note of November 27 and the Berlin Situation, 11 December 1958, RG59 General Records of}
during the ministerial and ambassadorial meetings leading up to January, was to emphasize the refusal of the Western powers to contemplate any changes to their position regarding Berlin. The responses all emphasized the determination of all the powers to remain in Berlin in order to “uphold the security and freedom of the city” and rejected any proposals to make West Berlin into a free city, which would likely undermine their ability to retain their rights there.\textsuperscript{50} The basis remained the legal interpretations of the Four Power agreements that denied any party the right to unilaterally abrogate their responsibilities in Berlin as a whole. This interpretation compelled the USSR to maintain Western access to Berlin, regardless of their recognition of East Germany. The Berlin powers expressed this stand several times over the following weeks, in a joint communiqué from a Quadripartite meeting in Paris in mid-December, with a NATO resolution shortly thereafter, and in separate, but similar, notes in reply to the Soviet note in late December 1958 and early January 1959.\textsuperscript{51}

The Western position was not all negative, however, and the West opened the door to negotiations. Officials were careful to ensure that the response “take a constructive tone and not be limited to a mere restatement of our position and a rejection of the Soviet position,” which would leave the door open to solutions to the Berlin

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid, 2.

Most importantly, the West made clear that a Four-Power foreign ministers’ meeting was not only possible, but would be welcome, so long as it was within the context of the larger German question. The West was also willing to allow concessions from earlier stances, including the inclusion of German representatives to the Four-Power talks, and ways to reduce tensions in Berlin itself. Still, despite the willingness to meet with the Soviets about Germany and Berlin, the basic positions of the Western allies did not change, and there was little expectation that any agreement between the two sides would be possible.

Ideally, Western leaders hoped that new negotiations could open the door to German reunification through free elections. They believed that the communists stood little chance in such elections, and that the German people would choose a non-communist government, one that would align itself with the West. Realistically, though, they recognized that the Soviets read the German populace similarly, and so would never allow such elections to take place, if they could stop them. Instead, the Soviets would press for a reunification arrangement where the communists would have disproportionate power and would be able to protect Soviet interests in Germany. Since this arrangement would likely lead to a neutral Germany that could destabilize Europe, it was not one the West could allow. Thus, the real best case that the Allies could hope for from negotiations was a protection of the status quo, with continued expectations of eventual German reunification. If they could stabilize the status quo, they could remove the danger

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53 Ibid, 3.
to Western security that Khrushchev’s ultimatum presented, and they could also continue to build up West German, and West European, economic and military strength, and maintain the containment system in the long term.

Western officials then were not unduly worried about being able to respond. They based their responses on long-standing policy about the Western interpretation of the Potsdam Agreements, the subsequent Four-Power arrangements from the post-World War II Council of Foreign Ministers meetings, and the Paris accords that had ended the Berlin Blockade in 1949. They felt comfortable rejecting the Soviet interpretation of the Potsdam Agreements, which did not mention Berlin, and presenting their own interpretation of the responsibilities of the Soviets as the proper position.54

NATO’s December Meeting

On the face of things at the end of 1958, NATO seemed to be up to the challenge of the Soviet initiative; there was very little dissension among the Allies about the proper course to take in Berlin, and little thought of abandoning West Germany to Soviet demands on reunification. But underneath that surface cohesion, differing perspectives and differing opinions existed, and these differences threatened NATO’s stance in support of the Western position in Berlin, even as differences began to surface among the Tripartite powers themselves. Because of the connection between the defense of Berlin and the defense of Western Europe, NATO was the main, and most evident, line of deterrence against the Soviets starting a war over Berlin, and the one that leaders looked to first when the threat of war appeared. Thus, NATO found itself facing its most

54 News Conference Remarks by Secretary of State Dulles, 26 November 1958, Documents on Germany, 550-51.
dangerous external challenge to date in the form of the Berlin Crisis, and the question before the Alliance was whether it would be able stand up to the challenge.

Western leaders recognized that the new Soviet pressure on Berlin would probably mean re-opening some sort of negotiations not only over Berlin, but over the future of Germany itself. While Britain, France, and the United States dealt with the immediate legal questions as the occupation powers, the rest of the NATO allies also had to confront the larger implications. Even before Khrushchev issued his note on 27 November, NATO officials were considering the repercussions for the Alliance of the rising Soviet threat in Berlin. At a NAC meeting of 26 November, Canada, Norway, and NATO Secretary-General Paul-Henri Spaak brought up the “intimate relationship [of the] Berlin crisis to [the] alliance,” and insisted that the Berlin powers closely consult NATO about major decisions that would impact their forces.55 Those allies who were not involved directly in Berlin did not have to worry about whether Soviets or East Germans would be stamping their passports when they entered West Berlin, nor how they would supply West Berlin should the Soviets or East Germans block the access routes. But they would have to support any moves made by the occupation powers, whether it was to reject the Soviet ultimatum or to negotiate some sort of new arrangement for Berlin and for Germany. The Dutch representative on the North Atlantic Council (and later Secretary-General) Dirk Stikker “made [the] key point that other NATO members have associated themselves with position of three powers in Berlin and are thus directly

interested.” And perhaps most importantly, NATO would have to support militarily any decision for war, whether incidental or deliberate. Thus members requested that the “NAC should be informed promptly when [contingency] plans [are] completed or [when the] situation otherwise requires.”

There was considerable preparatory work by the Berlin powers leading up to the NATO Ministerial meeting in December. The goal of these preparatory tri- and quadripartite meetings was to develop a position that they could take to the NAC for discussion and approval. The Berlin Powers did not expect that the NAC would be a rubber-stamp for their position, but they also had to ensure that the Western position would be unified right from the start. West German officials in particular worried that it might not be possible to get a consensus in NATO, leading to a watered-down Western position. They argued that it would be necessary for the four powers to put out a communiqué of their own, or at least have one prepared in case the NATO communiqué was not strong enough. For the time being, they released a short statement rejecting the legal basis for the Soviet position and noting that the political implications of the note would go forward to the NAC for discussion by all NATO members.

During these discussions, the first indications of differing perspectives among the Allies appeared. On the one side were the West Germans, tentatively supported by the

French, who argued that the West should make no concessions on Berlin or German reunification, and that the only response to the Soviet note at that time should be an immediate and strong rejection.\footnote{Telegram No. SECTO 9, From USRO Paris to SecState Washington, 15 December 1958, RG59, Conference Files 1945-1963, Box 163B, folder 1170 – NATO Meeting, Paris, TOSEC-SECTO, Dec. 1958 (USNA), 1-2.} Chancellor Konrad Adenauer had based his entire foreign policy on West German integration into the Western camp, most importantly through West German participation in NATO.\footnote{As a corollary to this policy, West Germany was determined to deny international recognition to East Germany. The Hallstein Doctrine (as this policy was known) was as central to the Federal Republic’s foreign policy as reunification was, and found near total consensus across West German Politics. See William Glenn. Gray, Germany’s Cold War: The Global Campaign to Isolate East Germany, 1949-1969 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 5.} To weaken the Western position on recognition of East Germany and on the terms of German reunification would likely lead to the neutralization of Germany, and the complete destruction of his foreign policy. And since Berlin was the symbol of Western commitment to a non-communist Germany, any weakness there could be seen as a weakening of the commitment to the Federal Republic itself.\footnote{Kastner, The Berlin Crisis and the FRG, 1958-62, 126.}

On the other side were the British, who were the most interested in finding some sort of negotiated agreement to the Berlin Crisis. In these initial Berlin Power talks, the British continually sought areas where the West could make concessions (for instance in allowing East German officials to act as agents of the Soviet Union in Berlin) sometimes nearly leading to arguments with the West Germans.\footnote{Telegram No. SECTO 9, 6.} From the British perspective, Berlin was not worth fighting over. While not looking to give up on the city, British leaders did not believe that they could justify going to war, especially nuclear war, simply because East German officials might authorize Western access instead of Soviet officials.
The fact that Britain was more vulnerable to Soviet nuclear attack than the United States was what made Macmillan and his advisors particularly aware of the dangers of being intransigent on the issue, and thus more willing to make some concessions.

The Americans tried to take the middle position, looking to reassure the West Germans about their commitment, while at the same time recognizing the British position that negotiations were not only necessary, but probably also desirable.\textsuperscript{65} For the United States, it was more important to retain allied unity than to make concessions or reject Soviet demands out of hand. Many American officials sympathized with the British viewpoint and saw the benefits of making concessions around the margins of the Berlin issue.\textsuperscript{66} But they refused to give in to Soviet demands, fearing that not only would that invite further demands in Germany and elsewhere, but also undermine American credibility among the allies, weakening NATO and threatening containment. American officials thus sided with the Germans and French, but tempered the latter’s intransigence with the British sense of compromise, and going into the NATO meetings the Berlin Powers coordinated replies to the notes.

The larger Alliance implications took center stage at the regular December North Atlantic Council Meeting in Paris, before Britain, France, and the United States began to think about developing a negotiating position. Although the Tripartite Powers did not worry very much about the possibility of serious dissension within the NATO ranks, the conference threatened to be difficult for the Tripartite members. The other NATO

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid, 3-4.
\textsuperscript{66} Even Secretary of State John Foster Dulles talked about allowing Western officials to deal with East German authorities during a press conference on 26 November. See News Conference Remarks by Secretary of State Dulles, 26 November 1958, \textit{Documents on Germany}, 547-48. He later backed away from the position in the face of West German protests.

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countries were certain to insist that the Berlin Powers took their voices, and interests, into account. Although the NATO members were not averse to defending Berlin militarily, even if that meant a general war in Europe, they hoped that a common stance, backed at the NAC, would help strengthen the Western negotiating position and force a Soviet backdown from the ultimatum.

The North Atlantic Council also found general understanding about NATO’s basic goals in Berlin and Germany, and these overall views aligned closely with those of the Berlin powers. By 1958, Berlin had become a touchstone of public confidence in NATO; in the words of American officials, “not only a symbol but also a concrete assurance that the West will persist in its efforts to obtain a peaceful and just settlement of the entire German question.” The connection between Berlin, Germany, and Western defense were clear to NATO officials throughout the crisis period, despite the technicalities of the official relationship.

Moreover, NATO had formalized that connection in December, 1954, when, in preparation for admitting West Germany to the alliance and for the Geneva summit the following year, the NAC passed a resolution declaring that NATO associated itself with the Three-Power Statement on Berlin. In practice, this association meant that NATO recognized the importance of the freedom of West Berlin and the Three-Powers’ role in

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68 Telegram From the Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and European Regional Organizations to the Department of States, 10 December 1958, Ibid, 164.
protecting the city’s status – and resolved to take collective action should that freedom be endangered.\textsuperscript{70} The fact that three NATO members had military garrisons in Berlin, making direct aggression against British, American, and French forces in West Berlin aggression against all NATO members under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, supported this perspective.

When the NAC opened discussions on the morning of 16 December, West Germany quickly moved to make the situation in Berlin the top agenda item, despite its not being part of the existing agenda. For the next several hours, the members each presented their positions on the threat to Berlin and the steps NATO should take in support of the Western position there. For the most part, the positions did not vary in any substantial way, as each member reaffirmed the determination to maintain the Western position in Berlin, and also to have NATO itself respond to the Soviet note in clear terms to demonstrate this determination. The sitting President of the Council, Foreign Minister Joseph Luns of the Netherlands, stated in his opening remarks to the Council that in “reply to this challenge, the Council will have to take… a clear stand, in word and deed.”\textsuperscript{71}

NATO members recognized that the position they took would be important to ensuring the credibility of the entire Western stance on Berlin. By 1958, West Berlin had a population of over two million residents, and to accept the possibility of those people

\textsuperscript{70} This issue was at the center of discussions between Secretary-General Spaak and Dulles in discussions just prior to the NATO ministerial meeting. Memorandum of Conversation, 13 December 1958, RG59, Conference Files 1945-1963, Box 163B, folder 1169 – NATO Meeting, Paris, Memos of Conv., Dec. 1958, (USNA), 2.

coming under communist rule could undermine NATO’s entire position in the Cold War itself, especially given the lengths the West had already gone to in order to protect the freedom of the city. Even accepting West Berlin as a “free city” under international control was problematic, as this situation would leave West Berliners at the mercy of the surrounding East German regime, and the likelihood of West Berlin remaining free for long was low. NATO’s ministers were conscious that the eyes of West Berliners were upon them, expecting strong support for the continued status of West Berlin under Western control, and that any loss of confidence in West Berlin might bring about a mass exodus from the city, destroying the economic situation of not only West Berlin, but of West Germany as well. As NATO Secretary-General Paul-Henri Spaak stressed at the start of the meeting, “all NATO countries had political responsibility in this matter, though the responsibility of four is a special one. [It was v]ery important that Western public opinion… understand if we abandon Berlin and its 2 and a half million people, it will be beginning [of a] piecemeal advance by Soviet power akin to [the] way Hitler operated.” To prevent even the appearance of Munich-like appeasement, this need demanded a strong public stance that firmly rejected the Soviet position in the note of 27 November.

Spaak’s opinion was important. As Secretary-General, his position represented the counter-weight to the American leadership in NATO. Under NATO’s informal

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72 C-VR(58)61, Verbatim Record of the Meeting of the Council held on Tuesday, 16th December at 10:45am, 16th December, 1958 (NA), 4.
74 PO/58/1548, Berlin Question, 8 December 1958 (NA), 1.
arrangements, the military commander was always an American, while the Secretary-General was always a European. Secretaries-General therefore often found themselves representing the combined voice of the smaller members, especially in the NATO bureaucracy, and Spaak was no different. He was already a distinguished politician and diplomat in his home country of Belgium, having been foreign minister for fifteen years (including World War II) during the 1940s and 1950s, and would go on to serve in that capacity for another five years after leaving NATO. In between, he had served as the first President of the UN General Assembly, the first President of the European Coal and Steel Community’s assembly, and short stints as Belgium’s Prime Minister. He thus was well known within the Atlantic community, but had considerable prestige on the world scale as well. American, British, French, and West German leaders often sought him out for the Alliance perspective, and were more intent on consulting him than they were the leaders of the smaller members individually.

The question hanging over the NAC meetings was: would NATO itself have the confidence to act as a deterrent to the Soviet challenge in Berlin? Although the strategic concept was in place, concerns about the implications of war, especially general nuclear war remained. It was up to Secretary of State John Foster Dulles to ensure that NATO put up a public face of deterrence and to reassure the Allies that a strong stance was the best strategy. During the morning NAC meeting on 16 December, Dulles reiterated that the United States had a nuclear deterrent power far greater than the Soviet arsenal, and suggested that, since American military advisors did not believe the Soviets would start a war over Berlin, Soviet “talk about threatening to devastate Europe if we stand firm on
Berlin is an empty threat which ought not to frighten anyone.” Dulles’ words had “a tremendous effect,” and the NATO allies backed Western policy and presented a strong public position.76

Still, that public position also had to take into account the question of negotiations. Even the West Germans, the most strident about rejecting the Soviet demands, recognized that talks with the Soviets would have to take place.77 There were, however, two conditions that NATO members wanted to see met before those negotiations took place. The first condition was that negotiations could not take place under the Soviet threat, since that would give the Soviets leverage in the discussions, making it difficult for Western viewpoints to gain acceptance, thus making the whole exercise of negotiations worthless.78 The second condition was that the negotiations should not be over the status of Berlin, but on the larger questions of the German situation as a whole.79 Most Western officials recognized that separating the Berlin question from the German question was problematic, because Berlin needed to be part of a reunified Germany. Treating Berlin separately would strengthen the Soviet position on East German sovereignty, and thus allow Khrushchev to demand in the negotiations that any German solution be based on a confederation of the two states leading to

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75 Ibid, 12.
76 Diary Entry by the Ambassador to Germany (Bruce), 19 December 1958, FRUS 1958-1960, VIII Berlin Crisis 1958-1959, 220.
78 Ibid, 5.
79 Ibid, 7.
reunification.\textsuperscript{80} But even if these conditions were not exactly met, the NAC sought to assure the Soviets, and the world public, that the “West was always ready to discuss the problem of Germany and European security.”\textsuperscript{81}

Any differences that appeared at this initial NAC discussion concerned relatively minor issues, such as the method of response, especially the question of a single Three-Power response or separate ones from each power. The greatest exception was the Canadian response, which included the possibility of an interim agreement on Berlin, in order to avoid the implications of the six-month deadline Khrushchev had imposed, and allow time for negotiations on the German question to progress.\textsuperscript{82} Still, Spaak’s summation of the discussion noted the consensus that NATO should issue an immediate communiqué, and that such a communiqué should establish that NATO was not willing to give way to any of the Soviet demands on Berlin, for fear of opening the door to further demands that would undermine the Alliance’s ability to defend its territory.\textsuperscript{83} The meeting ended with a feeling of unity and consensus, with Dulles believing that the Western powers could approach their Berlin policy with “the unanimous backing of [the]

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\textsuperscript{80} Fursenko and Naftali, \textit{Khrushchev’s Cold War}, 191.
\textsuperscript{81} Summary Record of a restricted meeting of the Council, 15. The phrase “European security” usually meant proposals dealing with a general East-West settlement on the composition of Cold War Europe. Under this concept were plans that called for neutralized countries (usually Germany, Austria, and other Central European states), denuclearized zones, limitation on military forces, and other broad mutual security goals.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid, 10.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid, 15.
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European allies.84 This consensus was so widespread that Dulles’ only complaint was that the Canadian statement was “rather soft.”85

NATO thus lived up to its role to support the Three Powers in Berlin and provide the necessary unified deterrence, while also willing to see that deterrence through to a defensive war.86 The basic foundations of NATO policy were in place. The Alliance would stand behind the Three Powers’ rights in Berlin, support the efforts to defend those rights in any negotiations with the Soviets, and if necessary, bring its military force to bear should the Soviets use armed aggression to threaten West Berlin or West Germany. But beyond these basic foundations, there was still considerable disagreement as to how far the Western allies should go to defend their rights in Berlin, what rights could be lost without losing the overall position, and whether war would be worth fighting over any or all of those rights.

NATO stood up very well to its first test under the Berlin crisis. Unity held firm with only a few wavering notes, and certainly nothing threatened the overall Western position. While the Berlin Powers took the lead in making policy on the city, NATO continued to play a vital role, and continued to have input into the direction that policy was taking. Issues regarding consultation still existed, but generally officials felt that NATO’s position would make any negotiations that might take place not only safe for the West, but also potentially beneficial. Most Western leaders were not in a hurry to push

85 Telegram from Secretary of State Dulles to the Department of State, 16 December 1958, FRUS 1958-1960, Ibid, 217.
86 C-M(59)29, Report by the Secretary General of Progress during the Period 1st July to 31st December, 1958, 18 March 1959 (NA), 9.
these negotiations, but neither were they looking to avoid them. The NATO meetings left the West confident that it might withstand the crisis.

Macmillan’s Trip
At the NATO Ministerial meeting, Britain was the leading skeptic regarding the Western position taken on Berlin. Britain was willing to go along with its partners at the Three- and Four-Power and NATO levels, so long as there was no actual danger of a confrontation developing over access and rights in Berlin. British agreement, however, was mostly for show, and behind the scenes they were looking for a way out of the crisis that did not involve confrontation.87

The British had been in favor of negotiations for several years, going back to Prime Minister Winston Churchill’s second period in office, when he had hoped to reduce Cold War tensions by bringing together the leaderships of the main powers as in the Second World War. By the time Harold Macmillan came to power, the Suez Crisis had demonstrated that British power was on the wane. Yet British leaders were not willing to relinquish their influence, and Macmillan, like his predecessors, saw the possibilities for an important role as intermediary between the two superpowers. This need for an accommodation was especially acute over Germany, and preferred a peaceful solution to the German question, even if that meant the permanent division of Germany.

Macmillan remembered well both World Wars, and had fought in the First, and was not going to trust the Germans to maintain the peace.\textsuperscript{88}

In fact, there was still a lot of mistrust of the Germans within the British government, and there was a general reluctance in Britain to go to war over Berlin. Macmillan wondered whether Britain could go to war “for two million of the people we twice fought wars against and who almost destroyed us.”\textsuperscript{89} Thus, he felt that the West “must avoid giving Russia no choice but humiliation or war.”\textsuperscript{90} Although the British accepted the West German regime, and recognized both its pro-West position and its importance to NATO, policymakers remembered the close Soviet-German relationships during the Rapallo and Molotov-Ribbentrop eras and feared German power in the center of Europe.\textsuperscript{91} Thus, they were still looking for some sort of European settlement, which could come only from a summit meeting, that this was a way to keep Germany from becoming too strong and destabilizing Europe by playing East against West for its own purposes.\textsuperscript{92}

Interestingly, however, the British statements in the NAC discussions contained no indication of what it allies would come to see as British weakness. Instead, British officials accepted the American deterrent in the face of Soviet threats.\textsuperscript{93} Britain’s reply to the November 27 note also fit completely into the framework of the agreed response. But

\textsuperscript{89} Memorandum of Discussion at the 445th Meeting of the National Security Council, 24 May 1960, FRUS 1958-1960, IX, 510.
\textsuperscript{92} Marc Trachtenberg, \textit{History and Strategy} (Princeton: 1991), 200.
\textsuperscript{93} Summary Record of a restricted meeting of the Council, 13-14.
the British were not fully behind this position, even coming out of the Paris NATO meeting. British officials continually expressed concern with Western policy, but concluded that it was better to go along with the Americans than to be seen as wavering, in the hopes that the Americans would come around to the British position. Thus, while Dulles saw little to complain about in the talks over Berlin, Macmillan took a different conclusion, fearing that the tough line was leading NATO down a path to nuclear war.94

Since he was unwilling to move too radically within Berlin Power or NATO discussions, the British leader decided act as an intermediary between East and West, hoping to find a way out of Khrushchev’s ultimatum and deliver a diplomatic coup that could open up full-scale negotiations on Germany and European security at the highest level.95 Macmillan’s Cabinet and government colleagues supported his viewpoint. The British government viewed the crisis in simple terms: the West could back down, the Soviets could, the two sides could fight a nuclear war over the status of West Berlin that would destroy Britain, or there could be negotiations for a solution to the Berlin and Germany questions.96 The Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, initially believed that only an arrangement with East Germany would be a realistic option, a viewpoint drastically different from that of his closest allies, who felt that any recognition of the GDR would lose the whole game.97 British officials often had to reassure their American and European counterparts that they would support military action in Berlin, even as they

97 Cabinet Conclusions C.81(58) Min 2, 18 November 1958, CAB 128/32 (United Kingdom National Archives [hereafter UKNA]), Telegram No. SECTO 9, 6.
talked about the need to find a negotiated solution to avoid the risk of war and annihilation.\textsuperscript{98}

Macmillan decided to talk face-to-face with Khrushchev, to convince the Soviet leader to withdraw the deadline on the East German peace treaty so that the West could accept negotiations. Macmillan’s desire to push for summit-level negotiations came from his concerns over the potential for the Berlin situation to go nuclear, and from personal and political motives to be seen as a peacemaker at a time of crisis.\textsuperscript{99} But it was his view of the benefits of détente to both Britain and the Western alliance that saw him go far beyond where his allies were willing to go, and focus his early diplomatic efforts on the Soviet Union rather than on his Western partners.\textsuperscript{100}

Macmillan’s decision to act unilaterally and make the first move by going to Moscow went against the position that NATO had taken just a few weeks before. Although his thinking was not out of line with general Western policy – nor was he planning on accepting Soviet terms for discussing German reunification – it created the potential to weaken the whole Western response to the Soviet notes. This action set off warning lights across the NATO world, as officials watched the events of Macmillan’s trip for any indication that the Soviets might capitalize on it to put even more pressure on the West in Berlin.\textsuperscript{101}

\textsuperscript{98} See for example, Memorandum on the Substance of Discussion at a Department of State-Joint Chiefs of Staff Meeting, 14 January 1959, FRUS 1958-1960, VIII Berlin Crisis 1958-1959, 262, and Diary Entry by the Ambassador to Germany (Bruce), 7 February 1959, FRUS 1958-1960, Ibid, 336.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid, 56.
Macmillan actually had to put considerable effort into convincing his allies that his trip would be worthwhile. Both Eisenhower and Dulles were skeptical that the trip would accomplish anything, and tried to get Macmillan to call off or at least postpone it. At times, their skepticism became outright concern that the trip be futile and possibly also dangerous to the entire Western position. Their view remained tied to the conditions expressed in Paris: that negotiations should only take place outside of Soviet threats and pressure. Thus they felt that Macmillan’s eagerness to talk would demonstrate a weakening of the Paris position, one that Khrushchev would exploit. As Dulles conveyed to the British ambassador Sir Harold Caccia, individual initiatives at negotiations with the Soviets “would be particularly dangerous at a point when there was as yet no firm agreed position as to how to react in Berlin if the Soviets persisted.”

Privately, Dulles was even more critical, telling Eisenhower that the British position was “very disturbing because it indicates a weakness over there which really jeopardizes our NATO planning.” The Americans tried to convince Macmillan to visit Washington for discussions first, but had to settle for Dulles going to London, before also meeting with his French and West German counterparts. Dulles came away dissatisfied with

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102 Memorandum of Private Conversation with Sir Harold Caccia, the British Ambassador, 21 January 1959, #BC00650 (National Security Archive [hereafter NSA]), 1.
103 Telephone Call to the President, 25 January 1959, #BC00671 (NSA).
104 Although the main reason for Dulles’ trip was to coordinate Western position in advance of proposing a foreign ministers’ meeting, he was also interested in doing so before Macmillan’s trip, so as to ensure that Macmillan had a clear basis during his talks with Khrushchev. See Memorandum of Conversation Between President Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles, 26 January 1959, FRUS 1958-1960, VIII Berlin Crisis 1958-1959, 291.
Macmillan’s stance, considering his Russia trip a “solitary pilgrimage,” but resigned himself to waiting out the results of the Moscow trip.\textsuperscript{105}

Other allies expressed concerns about the wisdom of Macmillan’s move. Adenauer had “serious apprehensions as to its consequences,” believing that it was just a cover for British intentions to recognize the GDR.\textsuperscript{106} The French were not even sure that Macmillan knew what he was doing or had a plan of action.\textsuperscript{107} But so long as Macmillan understood that he was only speaking for Britain in Russia, all involved were willing to allow the Prime Minister to pursue his expedition, not wanting to raise a public dispute in the middle of the crisis. The hope was that ultimately the British would overcome their fears and “when [the] chips [were] down, … [the] British [Government] and people would show determination and firmness.”\textsuperscript{108}

Unfortunately for the Prime Minister, his trip foundered following the opening pleasantries. Khrushchev recognized that he had the upper hand, and was aggressive in both his rhetoric and his negotiations with the British Prime Minister, going so far as to give a provocative speech while Macmillan was touring a nuclear power plant. This speech blamed the West for the Berlin Crisis and for trying to tie up the Soviets in useless foreign ministers meetings instead of going for a summit meeting. Khrushchev then went on to criticize Eisenhower, Dulles, and Adenauer, which Macmillan considered

\textsuperscript{105} Telegram from Secretary of State Dulles to the Department of State, 5 February 1959, Ibid, 324.
\textsuperscript{106} Diary Entry by the Ambassador to Germany (Bruce), 7 February 1959, Ibid, 336.
\textsuperscript{107} Telegram from Secretary of State Dulles to the Department of State, 6 February 1959, Ibid, 326.
offensive. Yet, despite his hesitations about Western strategy toward Berlin, Macmillan maintained the agreed-upon line steadfastly, refusing to accept Khrushchev’s arguments about the situation in the city and in Germany. The talks soon degenerated into heated arguments between the two leaders, with Khrushchev accusing Macmillan of insulting him and the West of fomenting war, and he seemed ready to send Macmillan home in disgrace. Abruptly ending talks on 26 February, he declared “That is all!” and departed with the flimsy excuse of suffering a toothache.

The apparent failure of the first series of talks seemed to herald the deepest point of the early crisis over Berlin. If even the conciliatory British could not reach agreement with the Soviets, then it seemed unlikely that West, pushed by the nearly intransigent West German and French positions, would be able to achieve a satisfactory arrangement. Fortunately for Macmillan, he was able to remain in the Soviet Union and find a way to defuse the stand-off. Talks between Lloyd and Soviet deputy foreign minister Vasili Kuznetsov reduced tensions, although at the cost of revealing the British position on recognition of the GDR. When Macmillan returned to Moscow, Khrushchev was once again there to greet him with a conciliatory remark about a British drill relieving his toothache.

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110 Ibid, 598, 610. Macmillan wrote in his diary that his “tough” line on Berlin was “not easy to do, although necessary” to “keep straight with the Western allies.” Ibid, 622.
113 Ibid, 618-19.
Breakthrough came when Khrushchev effectively removed the May deadline from the November note, and agreed to the Western proposal to hold a foreign ministers meeting in advance of a Four-Power summit.\textsuperscript{116} Macmillan returned home with the appearance of a triumph. Despite his allies’ fears, Macmillan had remained tough enough in his discussions with Khrushchev to keep the Western position intact, and had come away with the agreement on the foreign ministers conference, now no longer under the Soviet threat of the deadline.

Still, the apparent success of Macmillan’s odyssey to Russia did not allay the fears of his allies that British policy was weakening and undermining the entire allied stance. Returning from the Soviet Union, Macmillan quickly embarked on a tour of Paris, Bonn, and Washington. In each city, he found his counterparts unconvinced of his success, suspicious of Soviet motives, and unenthusiastic about the prospects for the upcoming foreign ministers meeting’s success.\textsuperscript{117} Still, that meeting was now on the agenda, putting the Allied position on the status of Berlin and the reunification of Germany to the test.

**Meeting again in Geneva**

Through most of the first half of 1959, the primary allied focus on the Berlin and Germany issues was the Foreign Ministers Meeting in Geneva in May-July. Ostensibly, the meeting was about general East-West issues, including German reunification and European security. But the Berlin question was at the center of these talks, and the Geneva conference set many of the terms by which the Four Powers would discuss Berlin

\textsuperscript{116} Gearson, *Harold Macmillan and the Berlin Wall Crisis*, 74.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid, 79.
over the next several years. Most importantly, it set the groundwork for each side’s position; The West would not accept any agreement that threatened its position in Berlin, while the Soviets would not accept any agreement that did not stabilize East German sovereignty over the city.

Overall, the Western position in the Geneva talks varied little from earlier positions regarding the status of Berlin, the reunification of Germany, and European disarmament. The Berlin powers reaffirmed their rights to West Berlin, and resisted Soviet proposals to create a “free city” in the western sectors. In the working group discussions, all parties agreed that a Four-Power agreement that preserved access to Berlin and preserved the occupation rights of the Western powers, should form the basis of a solution.\textsuperscript{118} The Berlin powers were willing to accept East German control over the access, but only if the Soviets associated themselves with a written declaration to maintain all Western rights and access, thereby making the East Germans merely agents of the Soviet occupation regime.\textsuperscript{119} On the larger questions of German reunification, there was some movement on the procedures the West insisted upon. Rather than simply calling for all-German elections, the Western plan called for a delay in these elections for one to three years, during which time a Mixed German Commission would be established to deal with issues of mutual interest, and to draft a law for all-German elections leading to reunification. Since this commission would be based on each Land sending a representative, though, West Germany would retain a twenty-five to ten membership

\textsuperscript{118} Suggested Western Position, undated, folder \textit{Four Power Working Group (2)}, White House Office, National Security Council Staff: Papers, 1948-61 (Executive Secretary’s Subject File Series) [hereafter NSC Staff], Box 10, (Dwight D. Eisenhower Library [hereafter DDEL]), 4.

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid, 5.
advantage.\textsuperscript{120} The plan also included provisions recognizing the “social achievements” of East Germany.\textsuperscript{121} However, the plan did not address Khrushchev’s concerns about maintaining the sovereignty and character of the socialist regime in East Germany, and thus stood little chance of Soviet acceptance. Although the Western powers remained cautious about the possibility of a unilateral Soviet move on Berlin, they considered the likelihood of that happening low, and that as long as negotiations were taking place, the Soviets would hold off on handing over their responsibilities to the East Germans.\textsuperscript{122} Therefore, they felt confident that they could test the Soviets’ resolve to find a negotiated solution, while maintaining their own proposals from prior negotiations largely intact.\textsuperscript{123}

Since these proposals were not in Soviet interests, Western officials recognized that they would almost certainly not gain Soviet agreement. But they served the purpose of presenting a valid Western position, one that the Allies could defend in world opinion, and could hold on to tightly in negotiations. And knowing that the Soviets would not agree to them, there was little danger of an unfavorable change to the status quo. Conversely, however, opening the door to more concessions at that point held little appeal. Such a position might invite further Soviet demands, including insistence on a peace treaty with – and recognition of – East Germany, a demand that the West might not then be in a position to deny. This scenario not only threatened Western control of Berlin,

\textsuperscript{120} To reassure the Soviets and East Germans that the West Germans could not automatically control this body, the plan called for decisions based on a three-quarters majority. Suggested Press Summary, Phased Plan for Germany, undated, folder \textit{Berlin Four Alternative Studies (1)}, NSC Staff, Box 9 (DDEL), 3.
\textsuperscript{121} Statement by Secretary Herter, 14 May 1959, Department of State Bulletin, Vol. XL, No. 1040 (June 1, 1959), 778.
\textsuperscript{122} Special National Intelligence Estimate 100-2/1-59, 17 March 1959, folder \textit{Berlin (3)}, NSC Staff, Box 7 (DDEL), 4.
\textsuperscript{123} Estimate of Soviet Intentions, 21 March 1959, folder \textit{Four Power Working Group (5)}, NSC Staff, Box 11 (DDEL), 4.
but also fundamental West German policy, and so the results could only be the loss of West Germany or the splintering of NATO. Neither outcome was worth the risk, especially since Western officials judged the risk of a unilateral Soviet move very high.

The meeting did not have an auspicious genesis, coming out of a compromise between the American position of no talks unless there were prospects for movement, and the Soviet desire for a Four-Power summit. Here, it was Macmillan’s middle-ground position that brought about the compromise; the British themselves desired a summit, but could only convince their allies that some progress in a foreign ministers meeting would lay the groundwork for that summit. To prepare for the meeting, the Berlin powers would have to return to the discussions that had occupied them in the immediate aftermath of the November notes and the lead-in to the NATO conference. They would once again have to find some common position that would nominally keep open the possibility of German reunification, while at the same time maintaining NATO’s deterrent power, even if this meant keeping Germany divided so that West Germany could remain in NATO.

The Berlin powers and the NATO allies needed to prepare and coordinate their approaches to the negotiations, especially given the differences that appeared publicly in the wake of Macmillan’s trip and the removal of the Soviet deadline. Although the main concerns revolved around remaining in Berlin, insisting on German reunification based on free, all-German elections, and resisting Soviet efforts to disengage NATO from Western Europe, the allied working group would have to maintain adequate contact and

consultation with the NATO members and the North Atlantic Council. As Dulles put it in a telegram to the main European posts in February, it would be necessary to develop “procedural steps [that] could be taken to give NATO [a] fuller participation in dealing with Berlin and German problems.”

Despite this willingness to coordinate with NATO, the Berlin powers were wary of giving other NATO members too much information and input. The French in particular were least interested in doing so; they worried that “distribution… to other NATO countries would increase [the] security problem, which is already causing enough difficulty”, but the Americans and others were not much more eager. While there was consultation, it tended to be provisional, with the Berlin powers generally looking to delay informing the NAC, beyond occasional oral progress reports until they presented their final, summarized, report. Still, there was agreement that the four powers would

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126 Procedural Steps That Could Be Taken to Include NATO in Discussions and Decisions on Berlin, 31 January 1959, #BC00692 (NSA), 1. First, however, the working group had to deal with disagreements surrounding the countries that would participate beyond the Four-Powers. The Soviets not only wanted the East Germans to have their own representatives recognized, but also sought to include the Polish and Czechoslovakian governments. The Western powers preferred a smaller arrangement, with the German governments providing “experts” who would not be involved in the main discussions, and no other countries directly involved. To counter the Soviet proposal, they considered demanding that Italy also be given a place in the talks, and possibly also Belgium and the Netherlands. In the end, a settlement was reached that saw only the Four Powers involved directly, with the German governments given separate tables away from the main discussions. See Minutes of Tripartite Foreign Ministers Meeting of 31 March 1959, FRUS 1958-1960, VIII Berlin Crisis 1958-1959, 551. The details of the logistics of how to seat the respective German delegations were quite involved, right down to the pencil-width distance away from the main table the German tables should be located. Ibid, 686.

127 French Believe That NATO Countries Should Be Given Resume of Working Group Questionnaire, 19 February 1959, #BC00797 (NSA). Department of State Considers the Best Means for Coordinating with NATO Preparations for Talks on Germany and Berlin, 17 February 1959, #BC00784 (NSA). Summary of Meeting with the British, French and Germans on Circulating the Working Group Questionnaire and Analysis, 20 February 1959, #BC00802 (NSA).

128 Meeting with Secretary-General Spaak to Discuss Procedures for Circulating Working Group Paper in NATO, 24 February 1959, #BC00814 (NSA). Need for Advance Understanding on Procedures for Coordination during the Upcoming Four Power Working Group Meeting, 27 February 1959, #BC00836 (NSA).
communicate with the NAC, so that the members of the Council could communicate their views in time for consideration at Geneva.\textsuperscript{129}

These tensions over consultation would be a recurring theme during the crisis. The Berlin Powers believed that, in their legal role as Berlin’s protectors, they alone should decide policy. Along with fears of leaks and loose information security around NATO, this belief tended to make them wary of seeking substantive consultations.\textsuperscript{130} Instead, they preferred to notify NATO after making decisions and to then take NATO concerns under advisement. Over time, this method of consultation frustrated the NATO members, leading to increasing calls for more substantive input into a NATO rather than a tripartite policy. Although these differences did not seriously threaten allied unity, they undermined the Berlin Powers’ relationship with their allies and created acrimony that often burst into public view.

The NAC remained interested in the progress of the working group talks, and continually attempted to inject ideas and proposals into the discussions among the Berlin powers.\textsuperscript{131} In a more detailed NAC meeting of 26 March, several countries tried to push the Berlin powers to adopt a more expansive idea of European security, believing that the Soviet Union was not in position to launch a major war in Europe, but that a small-scale war leading to general war remained a possibility. Therefore, regional security measures

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{129} RDC/59/106, Forthcoming Foreign Ministers’ Meeting with the Soviets, 3 April 1959 (NA), 2.
\textsuperscript{130} The Allies had good reason to be wary of leaks and spies. The Soviets had two agents, one American and one French, with access to NATO plans, including on Berlin. See Michael R. Beschloss, \textit{The Crisis Years: Kennedy and Khrushchev, 1960-1963} (New York, NY: Edward Burlingame Books, 1991), 279.
\textsuperscript{131} See for example PO/59/567, Digest of Observations Relating to Negotiations with the USSR, 13 April 1959 (NA), 1-5. NAC Discussions March 4, Private Session: Berlin, Germany, 4 March 1959, #BC00876 (NSA). NAC Private Meeting March 11--Germany, 11 March 1959, #BC00934 (NSA). NAC Meeting (Private) March 18--Germany, 18 March 1959, #BC01004 (NSA).
\end{footnotesize}
like disarmament, even if not based on a German settlement, might be more useful than the working group allowed.\textsuperscript{132} The smaller powers were clearly more concerned with preventing the Soviets from launching a limited action against the West, where Massive Retaliation might be ineffective as a deterrent and as a defense. Pressing a disarmament agreement on the Soviets might reduce this possibility, and so the smaller members sought more focus on it in the Western position.

The working group presented its final report to the NAC on 26 April, and there was extensive discussion over it, mainly its sections on European security and disarmament, and German reunification. Canada and the Scandinavian members, backed by Secretary-General Spaak, pushed the Berlin powers to adopt a more aggressive stance towards regional security measures, hoping that at the very least the German question would not hamper efforts towards disarmament. This idea brought considerable opposition from the West Germans, who felt that such regional security proposals would unfairly target the Federal Republic, and would leave it open to Soviet interference and espionage. Conversely, the Canadians and Norwegians were concerned that tying German reunification in with larger European security issues would impede any ability to resolve either or both questions.\textsuperscript{133}

There was also significant discussion over the desirability of dealing in some way with the East Germans in order to come to an agreement on the status of Berlin, even if this might mean some sort of \textit{de facto} recognition. Many NATO countries worried that

\textsuperscript{132} NAC Meeting, Private--April 27, 1959--Four-Power Working Report to NAC, 28 April 1959, #BC01226 (NSA), 2-3.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid, 3.
the working group plan was too rigid and did not leave room for practical contact with
the GDR. None of them was willing to concede full recognition, since this was clearly in
the Soviets’ interest, but there was disagreement on how far ideas such as an all-German
commission should be taken.\textsuperscript{134} In the end, however, there was a consensus that the
working group plan was sound and was a strong position from which the West could
negotiate.

The preparations for the Geneva conference had shown some of the strengths and
weaknesses of the allied system. While limiting the Working Group to only those Allies
who had legal positions in Berlin facilitated a cohesive position, it had also created some
tension within NATO, as the smaller powers worried that the Berlin Powers might take
actions in the negotiations that were contrary to the smaller powers’ interests. These
tensions remained at a very low level, focused more on means than ends, but they
indicated the sorts of problems the Western countries would have to overcome in order to
prevail in the Berlin Crisis. For the time being, however, the agreement on the larger ends
that all NATO members wanted to see from the Geneva negotiations, whether in the form
of an agreement with the Soviets or in the form of a denial of Soviet demands, gave the
West a firm foundation to enter those talks.

The Powers spent nearly four months at the Geneva conference spinning their
wheels. Both the West and the Soviets remained firm in their stances on German
reunification in particular, and they made little progress in finding common ground on a
new Berlin settlement. Berlin did form the basis of much of the discussion, but that

\textsuperscript{134} NAC Meeting, (Private) April 27--Four Power Working Group Report to NAC, 28 April 1959,
#BC01227 (NSA).
discussion often went around in circles.\textsuperscript{135} By June, it was clear to the Western powers that “private talks to date have gotten us very little further than the public talks except that... the Russians are now beginning to believe that we will not give up our occupation rights or access rights.”\textsuperscript{136} Discussion among the Allies began to focus on persuading the Soviets to allow an adjournment of the meeting, recognizing that the Soviets would not abandon their own tough line as long as they believed that NATO was about to break up (because of French criticisms) or fall prey to the internal strains from countries like Britain.\textsuperscript{137} Soon, the talks at Geneva were overshadowed by another superpower initiative, this time President Eisenhower’s invitation to Khrushchev to visit the United States and talk face to face about Berlin, Germany, and European security.

**Conclusion**

NATO had suffered some setbacks in its approach to the initial stages of the Berlin Crisis, but overall it had managed to maintain a semblance of unity in the face of the Soviet challenge. Thus, when there were problems between the allies – whether in the lead up to the December 1958 Ministerial meeting, during Macmillan’s trip to Russia, or in the tense times of the Geneva talks – they always recognized that these differences had to remain on the level of means, not ends. That unity solidified NATO’s continuing role in Western policy during the crisis, and helped to ensure tri- and quadripartite unity during the crucial negotiations in December 1958 and in the lead-up to the Geneva meetings. As officials recognized, NATO unity contributed to Khrushchev’s decision to

\textsuperscript{136} Telegram From Secretary of State Herter to the Department of State, 2 June 1959, Ibid, 819.
\textsuperscript{137} Delegation Record Meeting, 10 June 1959, Ibid, 870.
withdraw his deadline and accept foreign minister-level negotiations, and helped the Allies get around the challenges posed by differing perspectives, such as Britain’s.  

Behind this unity was a general understanding that, whatever differences of perspective and approaches the allies may have with each other, there was a common goal that NATO had to keep in sight in order to continue to deny the Soviets access to Western Europe. NATO’s deterrent factor was a key ingredient in the response to Khrushchev’s ultimatum and in the Western negotiating position at Geneva, and the members recognized that they should not allow their differences to weaken that deterrent, lest containment itself begin to break down. Fortunately, the differences within the Alliance did not fundamentally undermine the deterrent, especially the need for the American nuclear deterrent that was vital to NATO’s Strategic Concept.

The result was that the West during this early period preserved enough unity to confront the Soviets and force Khrushchev to back down from the most provocative aspects of his new Berlin policy. Therefore Britain, France, and the other allies had to line up behind American policy, although not blindly or under American coercion. Rather, it was an indication of common interests that were best served by unity, even if that gave the United States the lead.

This unity would continue to be put to the test, however, not least by Eisenhower’s rather surprising decision to open direct summit talks with Khrushchev. Although there were signs that such a meeting might take place before the summer of 1959, most observers did not believe that Eisenhower would make the move without

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138 Circular Telegram from the Delegation to the North Atlantic Council Ministerial Meeting to Certain Embassies, 3 April 1959, Ibid, 577.
some progress in Geneva. But like Macmillan months before, Eisenhower decided that he needed to open some larger initiative to break the diplomatic deadlock on Berlin and Germany, and that he could bring the Allies along with such an initiative, as long as it did not overturn the Western position.
Chapter 2
The Rise and Fall of Summits

The failure of the Geneva conference to produce any areas of agreement between the Soviets and the West may have led to a resumption of a sense of crisis over Berlin, especially had Khrushchev used the opportunity to renew his ultimatum in order to develop pressure for a summit conference. It was clear by the end of July that the foreign ministers conference was not going to produce either the diplomatic movement or even the improvement of relations that the United States considered necessary for such a summit to take place. But at the same time, it seemed unlikely that anything short of a heads-of-government meeting was going to be worthwhile by that point. This situation was not without its advantages for the Western governments, since it would maintain the status quo and protect their position in Berlin for the foreseeable future. But that future was foreseeable only as long as Khrushchev held off from issuing another ultimatum, or worse yet, from signing a separate peace treaty with East Germany.

Thus, even as the Geneva conference ground towards an end, the specter of the Berlin crisis continued to hang over the West, and officials recognized a need to find some solution, even a temporary one, to the impasse, and also to be ready should an impasse lead to a direct crisis over Berlin. Western policy thus essentially took a two-track direction. The public track involved continuing negotiations with the Soviet Union, now at increasingly higher political levels after the wind-down of the Geneva talks. This
track started with Eisenhower’s invitation to Khrushchev for bilateral talks, and continued through the ensuing Paris Summit between the Four Powers, despite the latter’s failure in the wake of the U-2 crisis of May 1960. The second track, which was not public or even obvious to outside observers, involved the ongoing preparation of political, economic, and military contingency plans, should the Soviets challenge the West by attempting to change the status of West Berlin and restrict access to the city. These preparations had begun in the immediate aftermath of Khrushchev’s November ultimatum, and had produced the initial progress necessary by the start of the Geneva conference. But their role gained new importance, even as the Crisis abated slightly following Khrushchev’s removal of the deadline.

Although American, British, and French officials remained confident that their position on Berlin and Germany was sound, and effective at confronting the Soviet position, they worried about the possibility of a Soviet move, even without a further six-month warning. There was a distinct possibility that, if Khrushchev decided to force the Allies’ hand in Berlin, a confrontation could ensue that would very quickly lead to war. So, while the diplomatic efforts continued, the Tripartite powers put together a system designed to map out the Allied response to every contingency that might arise with the Soviets over Berlin. This process became known as LIVE OAK, its code-name. It started out as an exclusively American, British, and French operation, but soon came to encompass West Germany as well as NATO members not directly involved in Berlin operations. From the NATO standpoint, contingency responses at the Tripartite level were unlikely to remain confined to just Berlin, but were likely to involve situations that
would require full Allied political, economic, or even military responses as well, and so NATO input and consultation were necessary, even if this involved only rudimentary details. And while the Berlin powers were reluctant to provide very much in the way of detail on the LIVE OAK plans, NATO concerns remained central to the process, largely through the position of SACEUR Lauris Norstad, who headed up LIVE OAK in his capacity as commander of American forces in Europe.

The contingency planning that took place under LIVE OAK was an important feature of the American, British, and French approaches to the Berlin situation, as well as to the NATO approach. The possibility, and even the likelihood, that even minor LIVE OAK operations would quickly escalate to full-scale war involving all Western forces meant that officials working on LIVE OAK in London, Washington, Bonn, and Paris (where the group was headquartered) had to keep in mind NATO capabilities and its role in the deterrence and defense elements of Western European strategy. Norstad in particular considered his role in the contingency planning from the perspective of the commander of American forces in Europe and also from that of the commander of Allied forces from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean, and in fact looked at LIVE OAK as his “third hat”, in addition to his American and NATO hats. It was no coincidence that Norstad was given charge of LIVE OAK, not only because of the “hat” standpoint, but also because of the importance that LIVE OAK took on as a result of being under the aegis of the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe. As a result, LIVE OAK would play an expanding role not only in Tripartite contingency planning, but also in NATO strategy.
Still, the LIVE OAK process was not smooth. From the beginning, France and Britain resisted American desires to formalize contingency planning. They preferred to leave Allied options open, hoping that LIVE OAK plans would never have to go into operation and that the Soviets could be deterred or talked out of taking hostile action in Berlin. British and French officials also worried that rigid American ideas of contingency planning would push confrontation towards general war too quickly and easily. Even though American officials recognized that any blockage of access to Berlin would not constitute grounds for immediate use of nuclear weapons, consciousness of Massive Retaliation hung over LIVE OAK, and convinced the British and French that the plans might be too dangerous. They thus tended to stall the LIVE OAK operation, and to weaken the responses that the contingency plans called for. Norstad especially found his allies difficult to work with at times, and sought ways to push them to accept American goals.

Other NATO members also worried about LIVE OAK. They recognized that the Alliance still based its plans on the fundamentals of Massive Retaliation, expressed at the NATO level by the Strategic Concept, and they were beginning to wonder about the wisdom of such a strategy. Nevertheless, they might have accepted a response grounded in Massive Retaliation more readily than the British and the French; after all, it had been many of the smaller NATO powers who had pushed for a NATO strategy tied to a strong American nuclear deterrent. But a sense was growing among many NATO members that

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1 This situation was one of the bases for the proposal to equip NATO forces with their own, American-provided, nuclear weapons, in the form of a NATO Medium Range Ballistic Missile force. However, by 1959 this proposal was appearing less likely, in face of technical difficulties and political concerns in many NATO countries. In addition, the perception that Khrushchev had launched the Berlin Crisis to prevent the
the Berlin powers were making preparations and decisions for war without them, and that these decisions could draw them into a destructive nuclear war without much prior knowledge. Calls for increased NATO consultation regarding contingency planning appeared, and although they never threatened Alliance unity in any serious way, the United States did have to consider these concerns, along with the existing British and French concerns.

In the end, LIVE OAK plans, like the other major war plans of the Cold War, never went into effect. But their existence sheds light on many of the debates and issues surrounding Western policy and strategy during the Berlin Crisis. The plans were based on the contingency of a breakdown of the status quo in Europe and a violent solution to the German question. They were thus a worse option than the status quo, even if that meant the continued division of Germany, but they were a necessary option all the same.

So while the focus remained on negotiations over the divisions of Berlin, Germany, and Europe, the Allies showed increasing awareness of the possibilities inherent in the failure of the negotiation track, and even increasing willingness to contemplate those possibilities. In order to ensure success in the event LIVE OAK was needed, the NATO deterrent continued to be vital. But LIVE OAK also showed how the American nuclear deterrent behind the NATO deterrent was becoming increasingly uncertain, and questions about the flexibility of contingency plans would eventually lead to questions about the flexibility of NATO’s Strategic Concept itself. Finally, the debates about contingency nuclearization of NATO, and especially the nuclearization of West Germany, seemed to reduce the possibility of the MRBM proposal from going forward in the near term, at least until the Soviet challenge was out of the picture.
planning, both in LIVE OAK and on the NAC, show that some allies were beginning to call into question some elements of American leadership of the Alliance. While these concerns about American strategy never seriously threatened fundamental Allied unity, they did force American officials to adapt their strategy to take Allied concerns into account, both at the Tripartite level, and at the larger NATO level, and as a result, they affected the overall Western approach to the Berlin Crisis.

**Eisenhower’s Summits**

For months, the Eisenhower administration had been adamant that no summit meeting, whether bilateral or multilateral, should take place until there was movement on the basic issues under negotiation, lest a summit meeting be anything other than an exercise in talking past one another. Yet the stalemate at Geneva increasingly demanded something that would offer some potential for progress towards a solution to the German problem, and Eisenhower felt that pressure, especially as his presidency drew to a close. Moreover, many of the allies, especially the British, had long been in favor of a summit, and so Eisenhower could feel confident that his gesture would not only gain public approval, but would not draw much Western criticism. Finally, Khrushchev was already scheduled to make a trip to the United States along with a visiting exhibition and to address the UN General Assembly, and had expressed his desire to host Eisenhower in Moscow that same autumn. And so while he was still not confident himself that a meeting with Khrushchev would accomplish very much, Eisenhower found himself
prepared to accept a summit, and chose to launch the idea himself with a public invitation
to Khrushchev on 3 August, rather than wait for outside intervention.²

The British were hopeful that the bilateral talks would be a first step towards a
larger Four-Power summit, which would open the door to Cold War détente.
Eisenhower’s move also validated the stress that Macmillan had been putting on the need
for a summit meeting. Even the German and French governments offered public support
for the bilateral meeting.³ So while the prospect of a summit closed the door on the
Geneva Foreign Ministers Conference, which officially adjourned on 5 August, the
general expectation was that talks would not only continue, but might even be more
fruitful than the past several months had shown.⁴

Despite this public agreement, many of the European leaders had concerns about
the direction of summit talks. Both Adenauer and de Gaulle were concerned that
Eisenhower was trying to go over their heads to deal directly and unilaterally with the
Soviets, and that he would disregard European interests.⁵ Adenauer seemed particularly
alarmed that the summit meant that Eisenhower was being unduly influenced by the
British position, leading the two countries “to establish a new and dangerously naïve

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suggests that Eisenhower was intrigued by the new opportunity to travel offered by the new *Air Force One*
airplane.
⁵ While the public aura of support dominated the coverage of the summit invitation, the European
apprehension were certainly recognized, for instance in a *New York Times* editorial cartoon showing
Eisenhower preparing to talk to Khrushchev, while telling child-like Adenauer and de Gaulle to play with
their toys, a Berlin teddy bear and a toy missile respectively. *Europe Sees Varied Results From The New*
Anglo-Saxon policy regarding [the Soviet Union].” American officials were also
becoming worried about Adenauer’s attitude and outlook, seeing in him a “deep-seated
fear that the United States and the Soviet Union would one day get together and carve up
the world, including Germany, to suit their own interests.” They feared that this
“irrational, almost pathological, factor” would be “a point of acute hypersensitivity” in
discussions about the Khrushchev talks. To assuage such fears, Eisenhower decided on a
preliminary trip through Europe, in order to talk directly to his Allies and assure them
that he would not give up any of the West’s position in his talks with Khrushchev.

Perhaps because of Adenauer’s hypersensitivity, Eisenhower's first stop was in
Bonn to meet with the West German Chancellor. Arriving on 26 August, he had a series
of meetings with Adenauer on 27 August. The tone of the meetings was generally cordial
and positive, with little hint of Adenauer’s worries about Khrushchev’s visit. Eisenhower
tried to make disarmament his priority, and tried to promote increased contacts, at an
informal level, between East and West Germany. Adenauer, however, was more
concerned with issues of human rights in the Soviet Zone, and argued that disarmament
would benefit the Soviet Union by allowing it to spend money it had used on armaments
for social and economic development and stabilization. Both sides, however, agreed that
some possibilities for a solution, even a temporary one, to the Berlin situation existed,
including making the whole city a “free city” under UN auspices.  

6 Telegram from the Embassy in Germany to the Department of State, 10 August 1959, FRUS 1958-1960,
IX Germany, Austria, 2.
7 Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs (Kohler) to Secretary of State
8 Memorandum of Conversation, 27 August 1959, Ibid, 19-25. Memorandum of Conversation, 27 August
Eisenhower’s frustrations over the situation in Berlin came through more clearly in a more relaxed session with the British leadership at the Prime Minister’s residence at Chequers. In the presence of his wartime companions at dinner, in the wake of yet another rapturous public greeting from the European publics (especially the British people), Eisenhower said that he was “getting tired of standing pat” and wanted the West Germans to take more of an initiative in coming up with solutions to Berlin and reunification.9 The most the Germans had come up with was a moratorium on changes to Berlin until after the next West German elections (scheduled for the autumn of 1961), an idea both Eisenhower and Macmillan were open to, although both recognized the difficulties that such a pause could cause. To Eisenhower, it represented yet another global hotspot that took too long to deal with, and he feared that the Western powers had “a genius for getting in a hole but to protect ourselves we are always having to defend Matsu or some other out of the way place.” Similarly, Macmillan accused the Germans of assuming that the Tripartite Powers would pull their chestnuts out of the fire.”10

Despite his willingness to consider a moratorium, Eisenhower’s desire was to resolve the issue quickly, believing that the division of Germany was “one of the residues of war, which should be cleared up.”11 This belief foreshadowed Eisenhower’s growing conviction that the status of West Berlin was an anomaly that caused more problems than it was worth, an opinion he would later share with Khrushchev. Yet, to reassure his hosts that he would not make any substantial agreements with Khrushchev without proper

9 Memorandum of Conversation, 29 August 1959, FRUS 1958-1960, IX German, Austria, 27.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid, 28.
consultation with them, he affirmed that the only statement he would be willing to make after his meeting would be on a definition of progress prior to a summit, and that “the allies could react as they had a right to do.”\(^\text{12}\) The goal was not to reach a breakthrough on the Berlin or Germany questions, but to lay the groundwork for a possible summit at a later date, a goal Macmillan was only too happy to support, given that it was the objective he had been seeking since even before his own bilateral meetings with Khrushchev in February.

Eisenhower’s meetings with President de Gaulle in Paris were less friendly and relaxed. De Gaulle was likely upset that Eisenhower had issued Khrushchev the invitation unilaterally, and Eisenhower was quick to emphasize that he was not too optimistic of achieving much more than putting Khrushchev “into a more amiable state of mind.”\(^\text{13}\) Otherwise, de Gaulle exhibited broad agreement on the issues of the summit and the American positions involved, even “wryly” agreeing with Eisenhower that, although German reunification was the ultimate goal, the French “were not in too much of a hurry.”\(^\text{14}\)

Eisenhower also had to deal with de Gaulle’s continuing criticisms of the structure of NATO, in particular the weight that American dominance of the nuclear arsenal gave it the capability “to engage upon an all-out war [while] France ran the risk of being committed without even knowing it.”\(^\text{15}\) Though Eisenhower was willing to discuss such matters with Britain and France, he was not willing to institutionalize those

\(^{12}\) Ibid, 29.  
\(^{13}\) Memorandum of Conversation, 2 September 1959, FRUS 1958-1960, VII, pt. 2 Western Europe, 255.  
\(^{14}\) Ibid.  
\(^{15}\) Ibid, 260.
discussions outside of NATO, which was based on equal partnership of all members, and stressed that the United States “would never unleash an atomic war without consultation with [its] principal allies.”\textsuperscript{16} Despite these differences, Eisenhower concluded his meetings with de Gaulle without too much worry about French attitudes towards his new summit policy.\textsuperscript{17}

In meetings with the main NATO officials, at the NAC, at SHAPE, and in private meetings with Secretary General Spaak and several national representatives, Eisenhower was clear that, even though he had agreed to meet Khrushchev directly, notwithstanding the lack of movement in the Geneva negotiations, there was no fundamental shift in U.S. policy underway. The United States would continue to avoid too much rigidity, since it was “necessary at some point to find ways to eliminate the need for occupation forces in Berlin, but as of now the US is going to stand firm.”\textsuperscript{18} Finally, Eisenhower made a visit to the NAC and SHAPE, looking to show the allies that “there was no inner circle or coalition trying to run NATO,” and reassuring his allies that there would be full consultation.\textsuperscript{19}

Clearly Eisenhower unilaterally took the lead. While the other allies recognized that American power, especially nuclear power, gave it a leadership position within the Alliance, they were not always comfortable with that position. American interests did not always translate into Western interests, and members could often find themselves having to choose between accepting an American position that conflicted with their interests or

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, 261.
\textsuperscript{17} Memorandum of Conversation, 2 September 1959, Ibid, 268.
\textsuperscript{18} Memorandum of Conversation, 3 September 1959, FRUS 1958-1960, Western Europe: VII, pt. 1, 481
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, 484.
standing up to the United States and potentially weakening their relationship. Allies also often feared that American interests might take it away from a focus on European security, damaging the security connection between the two poles, especially the nuclear security connection that Europe relied on. Still, there was no thought of challenging American leadership. That leadership brought security and gave the allies an important role in Western policy. For the most part, American officials acknowledged that their position was not absolute, and so they usually looked to consider allies’ interests. Thus, while Eisenhower had already made the decision about the summit invitation, his visit to Europe and NATO was not simply a show, but was a part of coordinating his policy with those of his allies.

Eisenhower returned to Washington on 7 September, ready to meet with Khrushchev and confident that his policy had the backing of all his allies. His main preparations concerned disarmament issues, including a decision not to seek a comprehensive test ban, but rather focus on an atmospheric test ban as more achievable.\(^\text{20}\) Eisenhower’s hope was that the summit would provide him with a chance to make one last great effort towards peace before he left office, and so his optimism about Khrushchev’s visit being successful was high, even if he was not expecting a major breakthrough on any of the issues. When Khrushchev arrived in Washington on September 15, Eisenhower opened with these hopes. At the initial welcome meeting, Eisenhower commented that he looked forward to constructive talks that did not get hung

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\(^{20}\) Ibid., 541.
up on areas of irritation such as Berlin and Laos, and gave his opinion that the situation in Berlin was abnormal and should be cleared up.21

The main point of the talks ten days later, both leaders agreed, was to improve the relations between their two countries so that substantive negotiations on the pressing issues could take place later. “I can assure you,” Khrushchev said in the first meeting, “that I come with wide powers from the Soviet Government to improve relations between our countries and with you personally.”22 In relation to Berlin, the main issue was the question of a time limit for negotiations involving German reunification and Berlin’s place in those negotiations. Khrushchev was worried that if there was no limit placed on the length of these negotiations, the present situation would continue, weakening the East German regime, and making it difficult for him to achieve his strategic goals. Eisenhower, on the other hand, felt that such time limits, including the original November ultimatum, created a sense of a crisis that hung over the West, and “it would be difficult to deal with the bigger problems such as disarmament.”23 Although not fully able to resolve this disagreement, Eisenhower and Khrushchev were able to agree that the “negotiations should not be prolonged indefinitely but that there would be no time limit on them.”24

Although the tangible results of the Camp David summit were small, Eisenhower and Khrushchev revived the spirit of Geneva that had been in abeyance since the end of the 1955 Geneva summit, creating a new spirit of Camp David. Neither side made any

22 Memorandum of Conversation, 26 September 1959, FRUS 1958-1960, IX Germany, Austria, 38.
23 Ibid, 39.
24 Communiqué, Ibid, 50.
concessions to their positions on Berlin, Germany, Europe, or disarmament. Nor did they come to any agreements about how to handle these issues. Yet from the new spirit came momentum for a Four-Power summit, where the possibility of some tangible result could exist. Eisenhower expressed this spirit himself, finding that “on the basis of the understanding reached between Mr. K and himself,... duress no longer existed and therefore he would be willing to go to a meeting at the highest level.”

At the same time, however, the Western allies were not about to relax. While negotiations were ongoing through 1959, the occupation powers in Berlin were also preparing diplomatic, economic, and military options for dealing with a Soviet decision to turn over control of Berlin to the East Germans, and a resultant blockade by the East Germans. These plans, worked out in strict secrecy, formed the basis of the second track of Western action on Berlin, assuring the allies, including those in NATO, that the West would be prepared to deal with the contingencies that the Berlin Crisis might create.

**Early problems of contingency planning**

The Berlin Blockade of 1948-49 had shown the Allies that it was necessary to be prepared for the various situations that could arise over their access to Berlin. Yet ten years later, much of the existing contingency planning was vague and unformed, mostly concerned with the small, low-level types of obstructions that the Soviet authorities occasionally undertook at the crossing points, such as demanding to inspect trucks or detaining convoys for longer than usual. American officials had been calling for discussions with their French and British counterparts to clarify and extend the

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25 Memorandum of Conversation, 27 September 1959, Ibid, 44.
26 Burr, “Avoiding the Slippery Slope”, 181-82.
contingency planning, but found their counterparts unwilling to commit to anything more than the existing plans.  

When the Soviets began harassing Allied convoys in the immediate wake of Khrushchev’s 10 November speech, the need for proper contingency plans became more urgent. Unfortunately, the existing contingency planning had been originally prepared in 1954, and only slightly updated in 1957, and thus officials found it to be almost completely outdated for the current situation, meaning that “serious difficulties may result if we are obliged to implement it at this time”. The basis of these plans was that, if the Soviets were to withdraw from administering the surface checkpoints, the Allies would deal with the East Germans instead, while demanding that the Soviets take responsibility for keeping access to Berlin open. By 1958, American officials had come to the conclusion that “[d]ealing with the GDR to the extent envisaged by our current contingency plans runs counter to our current policy regarding Germany and would tend to undermine the Western position that the USSR remains responsible under four-power agreements concerning Berlin and Germany as a whole. Although a legal case can be made that de facto dealings with GDR checkpoint officials do not connote recognition, the psychological repercussions would be strongly adverse.”

Due to the assumptions of the plans, their use in an emergency could have vast consequences on the Allied position in Berlin, Germany, and Europe. The acceptance of

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27 Telegram from RL Thurston, 16 November 1958, folder Berlin – LIVE OAK 1958-60 (4), Lauris Norstad Papers [hereafter NP], Box 86, DDEL.
29 Ibid, 1.
30 Ibid, 3.
East Germans, even as agents of the Soviets, could give the impression to West Berliners and West Germans that the Allies were preparing to abandon West Berlin to East German sovereignty, which would cause significant political difficulties for the West in the Federal Republic. Officials also worried that ceding control of the checkpoints to the East Germans would spur the GDR regime to enact stricter controls, “no one of which would provide a suitable occasion for a showdown on the basis of the considerations set forth” in the existing rationale.\(^{31}\) Finally, they recognized that accepting East Germans in Berlin would make it difficult to “refus[e] to deal with the GDR on any other matter involving Soviet responsibility in Germany, including reunification,” thus undermining the Western position at any future negotiations on Germany.\(^{32}\)

These problems meant that Allied contingency planning had to start almost from scratch, since not only were the plans themselves out of date, but so were the assumptions behind them. Consequently, the United States drafted an aide-mémoire to Britain and France, raising “as a matter of urgency… the need to reconsider existing contingency plans.”\(^{33}\) The aide-mémoire also proposed a basic framework for discussion of contingency planning, based on work done in the State Department, the Department of Defense, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The proposals were clearly designed to get around the problem of the agency principle that underlay previous contingency plans and were of a more forceful nature than previous plans. This nature would come to cause problems with the British and the French when the time came to discuss contingency planning later.

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\(^{31}\) Ibid.

\(^{32}\) Ibid, 2.

that month, but it reflected the basic American position that a more comprehensive sort of contingency planning was necessary in the event of further Soviet moves in Berlin.

When the Allied foreign ministers met in Paris around the NATO meetings of 16-17 December, renewing contingency planning was one of the topics on the agenda. For the most part, the British and French governments had few disagreements with the American argument that the repudiation of the agency principle allowed for revisiting existing plans. They did however have some objections to the new basis the United States was working in the outline for discussion in the aide-mémoire. In particular, they balked at the implications of the military actions envisioned in paragraph D of the aide-mémoire, and were not ready to consider military action in response to a Soviet handover to the East Germans. Rather, they preferred to leave consideration of such a separate matter to another time. 34 Although Dulles disagreed that paragraph D was a separate matter, believing it instead to be “a show of force to test whether there would be resistance by force,” he agreed to delay its consideration until another time. 35 However, the disparities between the American and European positions were already becoming apparent, with the Americans pushing for a formal set of plans, including the use of military force, while the British, often supported by the French, preferred a more flexible arrangement that concentrated on non-military means. These problems would hamper Allied contingency planning throughout much of the Berlin Crisis.

35 Ibid.
The Origins of LIVE OAK

As the Allies moved towards creating a new set of contingency plans around the possibilities of conflict in Berlin, the need for a coordinating group to handle the development of these plans became more noticeable. The British were interested in setting up a joint command to study the military aspects of contingency planning, but American officials were concerned that this interest was merely a way to delay making a decision about the need for such military measures, and so were reluctant to agree to the British proposal. Instead, the Joint Chiefs proposed placing the coordinated planning under the American commander in Europe, General Lauris Norstad, who was also the Supreme Allied Commander. While the State Department cautioned that such a group could cause problems in NATO, American officials agreed to put Norstad in charge.

However, there were no elements in place to conduct such planning, either on a unilateral basis by the United States, or on a tripartite basis by the Berlin powers. Norstad had been pushing for such a group since December, but complained that even after “3 months have passed since the Russian ultimatum,” the tripartite governments did not have any plans, or even any mechanisms for developing plans. Norstad feared that “if trouble starts the whole military problem, whether on a NATO or national basis, [would] fall squarely into my lap.” Norstad’s frustration was palpable in a handwritten note apparently written about that time, in which he literally underlines the urgency of the

37 Ibid, 262, 263.
38 Telegram From the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (Norstad) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Twining), 17 March 1959, FRUS 1958-1960, VIII Berlin Crisis 1958-1959, 495.
39 Ibid, 496.
situation and states that “[a]lmost all the time we have has been wasted now, and [we] are going to be under increasing demands to produce perfect solutions instantly.” Norstad moved unilaterally to include the British, who, despite their reluctance concerning formal contingency plans, believed that such a group would be a good idea, so long as it “would work on [a] secret concealed basis unless it should appear for political reasons advisable to reveal its existence.” The British were also in favor of including the French, and so Norstad soon opened discussions with his French counterpart General Paul Ely, who agreed to include French officers in the group. Norstad insisted that this group would be under his control in Paris, near NATO’s Supreme Headquarters, Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), so as to “bridge the gap between national and tripartite planning on the one side, and NATO planning on the other.”

By April, the three governments had come to agreement on the basic framework for contingency planning on Berlin, based on discussions by the Tripartite Ambassadorial Group in Washington, the body that would provide the main political direction for LIVE OAK. The outline document established that “in order to provide evidence of the Three Powers’ determination to maintain their free access, the military authorities will plan

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40 Handwritten note, undated, folder Berlin – LIVE OAK 1958-60 (4), NP, Box 86 (DDEL), 1.
41 Telegram from Paris to Secretary of State, no. 3200, 4 March 1959, #BC00878 (NSA), 1.
42 Telegram from Paris to Secretary of State, no. 3295, 11 March 1959, #BC00937 (NSA), 1.
43 LIVE OAK Planning Staff, 14 April 1959, #BC01189 (NSA), 3.
44 The Tripartite Ambassadorial Group was made up of the British and French ambassadors in Washington, along with a senior State Department official. Although political decisions were ultimately in the hands of the respective governments, the Ambassadorial Group had considerable policymaking powers and influence, and were positioned above General Norstad in the LIVE OAK command structure. See Robert S. Jordan, Norstad: Cold War NATO Supreme Commander: Airman, Strategist, Diplomat, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 150-51. The initial thought was that LIVE OAK would be a three to four month exercise (see Telegram from UKNMR SHAPE to BAOR, 2 April 1959, folder DEFE11/248 (UKNA), but the staff would continue in existence for the remainder of the Cold War, only shutting down in 1991 following the reunification of Germany and Berlin.
quiet preparatory and precautionary military measures of a kind which will not create
public alarm but which will be detectable by Soviet intelligence.\footnote{Berlin Contingency Planning, 4 April 1959, folder \textit{Berlin Master Briefing Book (1)}, NSC Staff, Box 8 (DDEL), 2.} Cognizant of the
delicate state of public opinion, especially in Europe, concerning the dangers of war over
Berlin, the three governments were not willing to overtly saber-rattle to deter the Soviets
from action, yet they recognized that not displaying some measure of resolve, even if
only detectable at the covert intelligence level, would not be much of a deterrent. They
walked a fine line, as some of the contingency actions LIVE OAK planners drew up
could seem overly provocative.

Each participant also had a different perspective on the LIVE OAK exercise. For
the Americans, it was a way to coordinate Berlin contingency planning, and thus shore up
the Western position going into negotiations. While they did not see the prospects of a
conflict over Berlin as high, they wanted to make sure that the Allies were prepared
should it come to a conflict. The British, on the other hand, saw LIVE OAK as largely
unnecessary. They saw that contingency planning could have benefits, but expected that
any conflict over Berlin would quickly move beyond the contingency stage, and into
general war involving all of NATO. They based their decision to participate in LIVE
OAK mainly on a desire to keep the Americans happy, and hopefully to exert enough
influence on American planning to keep those plans from going too far afield. Finally, the
French position on contingency planning was similar to the British, but for different
reasons. The French also believed that any conflict over Berlin would mostly bypass the
contingency plans and become a general nuclear war, but they believed that the Soviets
would never push the crisis to that point. Thus, they participated in LIVE OAK mainly for the sake of participating, and did take the process, or the plans it produced, very seriously. These perspectives made LIVE OAK a mainly American concern, but one that linked the British and French closely as well. LIVE OAK thus became a crucial part of not just tripartite planning, but NATO planning as well.

For a start, however, the allies would attempt to continue to send traffic into Berlin on as normal a basis as possible under formal protest, without dealing with the East Germans on any level. Only after such traffic was blocked would the Allies make an initial probe of Soviet intentions with a military convoy, which would fire only if fired upon. At the same time, the allies would go on a diplomatic offensive, seeking to put pressure on the Soviets both in the UN and through other diplomatic channels, and working to gain international support for the Western position. While they would make efforts to keep air access open as well, there were no provisions for a large scale airlift similar to 1948-49, since the Americans considered such an airlift impractical and detrimental to the Western position on Berlin. The paper also outlined the basic responsibilities and coordination mechanisms for the various groups at the political and military levels.  

As the outlines of what would become LIVE OAK were coming into shape, there were problems in coordination right from the start. Norstad found that his allies did not share the same vision for the staff that he did, and was frustrated in his inability to get work underway. Again, there were various reasons for this reluctance, but they boiled

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down to “Anglo-American differences over Berlin tactics” for the British, and for the French “the dogma of General de Gaulle” that focused on planning on the basis of “coordination’ not ‘integration.” Still, despite the urgency that Norstad felt, American officials were not concerned that such differences would have “any adverse effect on this particular operation.”

Fortunately for LIVE OAK, this prediction turned out largely to be true. Through disagreements, work in LIVE OAK generally progressed well. The staff first produced a paper on “Quiet Preparatory Measures” by the end of April, outlining the types of military activities that the Soviets would notice, but which would look routine to the general public. By 13 May, it completed “Initial Probe of Soviet Intentions”, which dealt with the first military steps to be taken should the Soviets actually block ground access to Berlin. This plan proposed a flexible set of responses, ranging from stopping if impeded to attempting to remove the barriers, although these probes would not be authorized to use force unless they were fired upon. Both of these papers elicited little objection from any of the Berlin powers, and the Ambassadorial Group approved them in due course.

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47 Letter from Thurston to Kohler, 20 April 1959, #BC01189 (NSA), 1.
48 Ibid.
50 Berlin Contingency Planning: Initial Probe of Soviet Intentions, attached to telegram from USCINCEUR to CJCS Washington, 13 May 59, folder Berlin Master Briefing Book (2), NSC Staff (DDEL), 3. The paper contained various steps a commander of a probe would have to take in specific situations, including the use of engineering or crowd-control equipment to clear obstructions on the Autobahn.
This smooth operation did not last long, however. As the LIVE OAK staff began working on the next steps, disagreements arose. These next steps covered the deliberate use of military force to open the access routes, contingencies the Ambassadorial Group had put off for discussion in the 4 April paper. The LIVE OAK planners indeed took up that responsibility and presented their paper on “More Elaborate Military Measures” to General Norstad on 2 June. Almost immediately, though, the paper raised the ire of Norstad and his American staff. They believed that the LIVE OAK planners had approached the operation from incorrect assumptions that effectively undermined the exercise from the start. According to the paper, the number of bridges and canals along the ground routes to Berlin, the number of other locations where physical obstruction was possible, the limited size of a probing force, and the general imbalance between East bloc and Western forces in the vicinity of East Germany led to “the conclusion… that no tripartite military action short of a thermonuclear war can, with the existing balance of forces between the two sides, reopen access to Berlin for Allied traffic via the Autobahn after the Soviets have decided to prevent such access.” Even though they did not believe a stronger military stroke was feasible, they did allow that such a move would “demonstrate to the world that the GDR, backed by the Soviets, is using violence to deprive the three powers of their established rights regarding Berlin, to a degree which can only be offset by a resort to thermonuclear war; and… [would] impress upon the Soviets that the three powers are determined to maintain their rights of access to Berlin even at that risk.”

52 Letter from West to Kohler, 3 June 1959, folder Berlin – LIVE OAK 1958-60 (3), NP Box 86 (DDEL), 4.
The “More Elaborate Military Measures Paper” also included requirements for consultation with NATO before the tripartite forces took any elaborate military actions. For the authors, it was “extremely unsound for any tripartite ground forces to violate the East German border by force unless and until the NATO alliance is prepared to find itself at war forthwith,” and so there was a need for full consultation with NATO in order to prepare the Alliance for that war.\(^5^3\) In this situation, “any opportunity to react effectively with measures short of thermonuclear war would probably be lost. As a consequence, the Tripartite Powers, separately and collectively, would be faced with the necessity of submitting to the loss of Berlin, or of initiating total war.”\(^5^4\) It was thus clear that for those in LIVE OAK, the operating basis of NATO Strategic Concept held true, and that no war in Europe could take place without early resort to nuclear weapons based on a collective decision.

From the American perspective, the British view, illustrated in the LIVE OAK paper, was giving up the fight before even beginning, by presenting the situation in such stark and negative terms so as to preclude taking any actions should the Soviets escalate the crisis. British officers had a large role in the preparations of the “More Elaborate Military Measures” paper, and thus this paper reflected “the thinking of the British element of LIVE OAK.”\(^5^5\) The approach they presented meant that “General Norstad can do nothing” to prepare for the military contingencies.\(^5^6\) In the words of Raymond

\(^5^3\) Ibid, 5.
\(^5^5\) Letter from West to Kohler, 5.
\(^5^6\) LIVE OAK Paper ECLO 330/20 (more elaborate Military Measures), 1.
Thurston, Norstad’s political advisor, the planners “draw a tragi-comic picture of a platoon restricted to marching along the Autobahn, for if one soldier puts his foot off the road, that would lead to immediate all out war.” He argued that “there is a distinction between… not be[ing] able to hold the position in Berlin unless we show that we are ready to assume the risk of major war… and the possibility, or even the probability, that certain limited military measures beyond the initial probe would not result in the cataclysmic unleashing of thermonuclear warfare which is so dramatically emphasized in the tripartite study.” He suggested that “the military planners could at least put on the table several additional measures and let us look at them.”

Once again, the differences stemmed from divergent perspectives between the Americans and the British. Norstad disagreed that a stronger military force would be useless, and that nuclear weapons would be needed immediately. Instead, he argued that such military measures would “compel the Russians to face the unmistakable imminence of general war should they persist in obstructing access to Berlin.” For Norstad, the use of a large-scale military operation along the access routes would provide the opportunity for a pause in the crisis, a moment when both sides would be presented with the likely consequences of further escalation, and thus where the West’s deterrent power would be most effective.

The British officials, both military and civilian, did not see the contingency situation the same way. Worried that contingency planning, especially the direction in

57 Letter from Thurston to Kohler, 16 June 1959, folder Berlin – LIVE OAK 1958-60 (3), NP Box 86 (DDEL), 1-2.
which Norstad was taking it, was leading the allies into their nightmare scenario of having to fight, and suffer, a nuclear war for the relatively minor issue of Berlin, they sought to delay the process, not believing that NATO would initiate nuclear war over Berlin.\(^5\)

Norstad and the American officials read the British insistence on NATO consultation as a way to “further complicate and render more difficult an already complicated and difficult problem by introducing the NATO command problem and other related problems which have never been satisfactorily resolved. By introducing the NATO question, the British have, of course, assured themselves of support from other countries.”\(^6\)

Yet although the dispute aggravated Norstad and delayed the preparation of the “More Elaborate Military Measures” paper, it did not represent a real disagreement between the British and the Americans about the nature of contingency planning and the potential for initiating nuclear war. Rather, it showed a British misunderstanding about Norstad’s intentions with the military maneuvers, and his desire to convince the Soviets that the West was willing to risk nuclear war over Berlin, even if it was not ready to go to war. Thus, while Norstad sought to use this element of contingency planning to call any Soviet bluff,\(^1\) he was in reality incorporating a significant amount of bluff into the plans himself. Once the British recognized the flexibility of Norstad’s conception, they agreed to include more room for intermediate actions before nuclear war and reduce the need for

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6 Letter from Thurston to Kohler, 5.
61 Ibid.

The dispute over “More Elaborate Military Measures” highlights the different American and British perspectives of LIVE OAK. The Americans took the plan seriously because they expected that if the Soviets cut off access to Berlin, the Allies might find it necessary to put the plan into operation, and therefore wanted something effective and credible. The British, while not discounting the plan, did not expect it to ever come into use, and so essentially turned “More Elaborate Military Measures” into a NATO action, where the West would use nuclear weapons immediately and massively. These goals were clearly in opposition, and it was not until the British acquiesced in the American desire for credible plans that LIVE OAK could finalize them.

By August 1959, the Geneva talks and upcoming Eisenhower-Khrushchev summit had reduced the sense of crisis that had driven the creation of LIVE OAK, and the pace of planning slowed, with more of a focus on side measures such as a garrison airlift or propaganda measures. The Allies agreed that there was “no need for taking… additional military measures related to Berlin. We should hold the line… and avoid any action of an emergency or spectacular nature until we see what the forthcoming discussions with Khrushchev produce.” Still they did not close LIVE OAK down, since “it would be prudent in any case to keep… planning under review in preparation for possible renewed Soviet pressure.”

62 Air Access – Garrison Airlift, 5 August 1959, folder Berlin Master Briefing Book (3), NSC Staff, Box 8, DDEL. Information Policy Requirements, 1 September 1959, Ibid.
63 Meeting of Interdepartmental Coordinating Group on Berlin Contingency Planning, 31 August 1959, folder Berlin Master Briefing Book (8), NSC Staff Box 8 (DDEL), 1.
NATO and LIVE OAK

The relationship between LIVE OAK and NATO was often tricky, especially for Norstad, who had to balance his responsibilities as the head of LIVE OAK (through his role as USCINCEUR) and those of SACEUR. Because LIVE OAK was a tripartite, and not a NATO, organization, there was no formal connection to the larger alliance, and only the West Germans and Canadians received any liaison information.\(^{64}\) The other NATO members were aware of LIVE OAK, of the contingency planning that went on there, and of the implications that held for them. The potential existed within LIVE OAK for an expanded Alliance planning body that would coordinate the national plans of the Berlin powers, the tripartite plans, and the existing NATO plans. The Alliance’s plans rested essentially on the strategic concept, which contained very little detail about execution. Yet there appears to have been no thought given by either American, British, or French officials to this potential, limiting the value of LIVE OAK plans, especially if the situation escalated quicker than Norstad allowed for. Instead LIVE OAK remained an isolated operation, with walls between it and NATO/SHAPE, and walls between Norstad’s various hats. These walls inhibited LIVE OAK’s efforts, and contributed to resentments, although minor, among some of the NATO members.

As LIVE OAK worked up its plans, there was already consideration amongst all three allies about how to keep NATO informed about contingency planning. Tripartite officials presented a preliminary report to NATO on 1 April, and at a meeting of the Ambassadorial Group, on 10 July, there was general agreement that the NAC should be “informed or consulted before any military action, including a probe of Soviet

intentions.” At the same meeting, there was also agreement that the Ambassadorial Group or LIVE OAK would look to make reports to the NAC, the first one possible later that month. However, there seems to have been little movement to carry out this consultation, and even little discussion about the need or desirability of NATO consultation.

The tripartite powers generally did not seek much NATO consultation on the LIVE OAK exercise. While they recognized that any conflict that started over Berlin would require quick and decisive NATO action as well as tripartite action, there was little enthusiasm for considering what form that action would take, and the occupying powers remained focused on their own role as the legal guarantors of West Berlin. It is possible that, like the issue of consulting with the NAC before the negotiations with the Soviets, the allies – or at least the French – were concerned about security within NATO, and preferred to hold the information closely to prevent it leaking publicly or to the Soviets. The British certainly sought some sort of consultation, as seen in the dispute over the More Elaborate Military Measures paper, but likely only as a way to keep the Americans from jumping to nuclear war too precipitously.

In general, the LIVE OAK planners initially took little notice of NATO, either in terms of political consultation, or when considering the planning that might be necessary to include NATO forces. When they did give such thought, they generally assumed that NATO members would support whatever move the tripartite powers made, and so any

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consultation would be necessary only in order to secure a NATO resolution backing military action to reopen access.\textsuperscript{66} As for practical matters of using NATO shield forces in relation to the Berlin contingencies, the only thought given was that using existing British, French, or American forces in a probe or larger military action towards Berlin would require NATO to replace them, in order to “maintain a sufficient capability to contain a Soviet attack until our retaliatory forces can respond.”\textsuperscript{67} Even early steps in the contingency plans, such as the quiet preparatory measures discussed, did not take NATO into consideration when dealing with matters of mobilization, redeployments, or alert postures, measures designed for the Soviets to notice, but which NATO members would certainly have noticed as well.\textsuperscript{68} Focus remained almost entirely on tripartite action, while officials essentially ignored the larger NATO implications of those actions.

The only time LIVE OAK really considered a NATO position was when thoughts turned to the possible outbreak of a general war. While the tripartite governments would only inform NATO of the need for preparations for general war when that war became imminent, some officials wondered how far the United States and its occupying allies could go in threatening war.\textsuperscript{69} The State Department’s intelligence officials in particular felt that the early contingency planning made “insufficiently clear the attitude to be expected of NATO governments under the assumed circumstances that they have not

\textsuperscript{66} An Analysis of the Political and Military Implications of Alternative Uses of Force to Maintain Access to Berlin, 15 April 1959, folder Berlin Master Briefing Book (6), NSC Staff Box 8 (DDEL), 16.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid, 8.
\textsuperscript{68} Studies of Military and Non-Military Counter-Measures in the Berlin Crisis, 6 April 1959, folder Berlin (2), NSC Staff Box 7 (DDEL), 3. This paper mentions only U.S. actions, or U.S. actions along with its major allies, not actions along with NATO.
\textsuperscript{69} An Analysis of the Political and Military Implications, 32-35. Even in this case, NATO concurrence was not all that necessary, as American officials seemed to have assumed that American willingness to use nuclear weapons, even unilaterally, would force the Soviets to back down. There appears to have been no thought of whether the United States would actually consider general war without NATO backing.
previously agreed to Alternative Four [General War]…. Most of the NATO governments would probably oppose and not join the U.S. in Alternative Four under the given circumstances.”70 Yet this awareness of likely NATO opinion did not significantly influence contingency planning, either at the American level or in LIVE OAK. Nearly a year later, the Ambassadorial Group was still considering whether to draft a report for presentation to the NAC, and it was only in April and September 1960 that NATO received even limited updates from tripartite staff.71

Such a deficiency had the potential to upset the Western alliance. NATO members were already sensitive to a perceived lack of tripartite consultation on Berlin, and one of their chief fears was of being dragged into a nuclear war without even knowing it was happening. LIVE OAK plans contained the idea of consultation, but it was usually an afterthought, and based on the impression that NATO would almost inevitably go along with tripartite decisions, even if they led to war. While this impression may have been correct – and there is no way of knowing since the Cold War never reached that point – the American concerns that NATO members might not join the Berlin Powers if push came to shove was valid, but was one that LIVE OAK planners never fully faced. Meanwhile, the weak connections between LIVE OAK and NATO only served to deepen the feeling among NATO that consultation was weak.

In later work, contingency plans did begin to consider the need to consult or include NATO during the various stages of an acute crisis, but this consideration

70 Ibid, 34-35, footnote.
71 Berlin Contingency Planning, Meeting of Tripartite Ambassadorial Group, 4 February 1960, folder Berlin Master Briefing Book (4), NSC Staff Box 8 (DDEL), 3. Berlin Contingency Planning, Meeting of Interdepartmental Coordinating Group, 5 December 1960, folder Berlin Master Briefing Book (8), NSC Staff Box 8 (DDEL), 3.
remained limited. In a guiding checklist on possible actions for use in contingency planning, the American Joint Chiefs of Staff included five points at which the tripartite governments would consult NATO. Early on, when Soviet action would seem imminent, there would be efforts to report to NATO in order to “maintain a state of readiness to approve tripartite actions and, if necessary, to support them actively.” Should the Soviets turn over access responsibilities to the East Germans, however, tripartite readiness actions would be taken on with the advising of, not consultation with, NATO. Only once the limits on access became unacceptable would there be increased consultation with NATO, “to insure close support of NATO Allies on all phases of the Berlin issue.” Likewise, they would consult with NATO in advance of a ground probe, but they paid little attention to the implications for NATO.72 In the section on adopting general war measures there is little mention of NATO.73

By early 1960, some members were questioning the larger implications of LIVE OAK planning. In April 1960, the West German government circulated an aide-mémoire proposing that it be included in contingency planning, or at least given more information on the progress of planning.74 The West Germans were concerned about the state of contingency planning, and especially about its relation to their government’s role as the guarantor of civilian access between West Germany and West Berlin. However, the tripartite powers discounted the need for expanding LIVE OAK. In responding to the aide-mémoire, they stated that the “planning bodies… were constituted and have

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72 Check List of Possible Military and Non-Military Measures, Berlin Contingency Planning, 10 August 1960, folder Berlin Master Briefing Book (7), NSC Staff Box 8 (DDEL), 4, 8, 9, 15.
74 German Aide-Memoire, 11 April 1960, folder Berlin Master Briefing Book (4), NSC Staff Box 8 (DDEL), 2.
functioned primarily as tripartite bodies because their terms of reference were to plan to deal with harassment of the access of the forces of the Three Powers, rather than that of the civilian population of Berlin.” In recognizing that some aspects of the planning would impact West Germany and the other NATO allies, the aide-mémoire went on to say that “while stand-by plans for the situation after the forcible obstruction of the Allied forces’ access are being developed, the Three Governments have taken no decision regarding the implementation of these plans and it is most unlikely that they would do so except in the light of actual developments.”

The neglect of NATO in contingency planning had turned to dismissal of the need for such aspects. Though some of this dismissal was likely related to the reduction of LIVE OAK planning activity following the reduction of tensions, there was clearly a belief that only three-power planning was necessary. On the first level, only the occupying powers could legally deal with obstructions to Berlin access, and so the tripartite powers were most concerned about the contingencies around that situation. But on a deeper level, they had decided not to pursue in detail the implications of actions to restore access to Berlin, continuing to assume that if war threatened over Berlin, NATO would line up behind them, and the West’s full deterrent weight would then force the Soviets to back down.

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76 An Analysis of the Political and Military Implications, 34. Just in case such support might not be automatic, officials looked to ensure that West Berlin held out against attack for at least a day or two, so that a battle for Berlin could provide a casus foederis for NATO, and the psychological preparation for general war. See Reduction of Allied Forces in Berlin, 22 June 1959, folder Berlin Master Briefing Book (7), NSC Staff Box 8 (DDEL), 2.
Still, by the middle of 1960, Norstad was himself beginning to consider the need for expanded work in LIVE OAK. Most of his attention on the question focused on bringing West Germany into the process. Since the start of LIVE OAK, Norstad had informally reported on its work to the West German National Military Representative at SHAPE, and by August 1960 was looking to formalize the relationship. In his opinion, it had “become apparent… that implementation of Berlin contingency plans will most certainly require some coordination and liaison on the part of the Federal Republic of Germany.” However, he continued to meet resistance from the British and French, who did not accept the basis of the German proposal from April. It would not be until August 1961 that the tripartite powers agreed to make LIVE OAK a quadripartite organization. 

Norstad was also considering expanding the knowledge of LIVE OAK even further, to include some form of liaison with NATO itself. Non-tripartite members of the alliance were beginning to inquire on the status of contingency planning, and were looking for more information on what would happen should their territories come under attack in a war. Norstad took these concerns seriously, and proposed to his British and French counterparts that they consider, “very tentatively, whether he should not in some fashion establish an informal liaison with the North Atlantic Council in this matter, probably through Secretary General Spaak.” For Norstad, this was not just a matter of

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78 Federal Republic of Germany Participation in LIVE OAK Planning (S), 22 August 1960, 1.
80 Memo for Record on visit to Norstad by IT PERM REP, 5 July 1960, folder Berlin – LIVE OAK 1958-60 (1), NP Box 86 (DDEL), 1.
81 Letter from Thurston to Dowling, 31 August 1960, 2.
expanding the knowledge of LIVE OAK. He saw a growing need for NATO to be prepared for the contingencies behind LIVE OAK; otherwise, its usefulness as a deterrent might be reduced. In a meeting with Admiral Louis Mountbatten, the British Chief of Staff, he noted that “[f]ull NATO involvement and support would obviously add greatly to the credibility of actions to demonstrate Allied determination on Berlin, and NATO should, the sooner the better, be brought into LIVE OAK planning in general terms.” While Mountbatten agreed that the tripartite powers “would be unable to convince the USSR of our determination to fight over Berlin unless NATO as a whole initiated preparatory actions,” he was not prepared to add Britain's consent to Norstad’s proposal at the time.

Thus, some tripartite officials were starting to recognize that NATO was not just an adjunct to LIVE OAK, but was a necessary contributor to the goals of the exercise. Perhaps most importantly, NATO was a part of the deterrent behind LIVE OAK operations. While LIVE OAK plans were essentially operational plans, they would not be very effective without a larger NATO force behind them. If the Soviets felt that they could challenge a probe without bringing a nuclear retaliation, the probe stood little chance of success. If, however, the Soviets recognized that obstructing or attacking a probe would invite NATO retaliation, even conventional retaliation, they would be more likely to avoid such risk, especially since it represented a crucial escalation towards general nuclear war. The problem for LIVE OAK planners would be how to ensure that

82 Meeting between SACEUR and Admiral Mountbatten, 7 November 1960, folder Berlin – LIVE OAK 1958-60 (1), NP Box 86, 3. Emphasis in text. The question of secrecy was apparently less vital by this time, as Norstad claimed that not only was he receiving inquiries on Berlin planning from allied representatives, but from the press as well.
83 Ibid, 3, 4.
NATO role, without involving NATO in something that was outside its strict legal
purview.

While West Germany would soon become part of LIVE OAK, the tripartite
governments did not put any formal or even informal mechanism for consultation with
NATO in place under the Eisenhower administration. The Berlin powers were intently
focused their own responsibilities as occupying powers, and were prepared to accept the
risk of general war without much collaboration from NATO. While it is likely that the
NATO members would have accepted the situation if general war seemed imminent, and
would have supported the Berlin powers in that situation, there likely would have been
some opposition, which might have weakened the effect of the deterrent.\textsuperscript{84} In the LIVE
OAK exercise, the tripartite powers looked towards collective planning, but continued to
keep their own national interests in mind, thus downgrading the potential behind LIVE
OAK to coordinate tripartite and wider NATO plans, and connect the Berlin
contingencies to NATO strategy already in existence. Fortunately for both LIVE OAK
and NATO, the concerns that members not involved in the operations had about the
direction of Berlin contingency planning were not serious enough to undermine its work,
or NATO’s unity.

\textbf{The Paris Crash}

The Allies did not expect the Four-Power summit in Paris in May 1960 to yield
any major breakthroughs, but they did hope that it would at least stabilize the status quo
in Berlin and Germany and provide breathing space for the West. By 1960, there were

\textsuperscript{84} American officials recognized this possibility, and the potential diplomatic advantages that it could
provide the Soviets, even should they back down. An Analysis of the Political and Military Implications,
33-34.
years of expectations built up behind the renewal of Four-Power summitry, on hold since 1955, and some of those expectations filtered into the Western planning for the conference. Yet none of those involved in the Paris summit, including the NATO allies on the periphery, were willing to see the conference as an indication that a final German and European settlement might be at hand, and or even that the summit might yield something more than had the recent Geneva talks. As it turned out, they were right in trying to downplay expectations, as the dispute over continued American U-2 spy plane flights, and the shooting down of one of these flights just days before the opening of the summit, quickly brought the summit to a close before any substantial talks could begin.

In a way, the failure of the Paris summit was fortunate for the allies. While it kept the main issues of the Cold War open for the foreseeable future, it is unlikely that the two sides could have made any tangible movement on these issues, as neither was yet willing to concede much more than they had in previous negotiations. And while the Western powers were largely agreed on their policy on Berlin access, German reunification, and European security, there was still much official concern that the West might be forced to concede more than it could in order to maintain its position in Berlin, and that the differences on the approaches to getting to those agreements that might prove difficult to reconcile in the context of the summit meeting. From this perspective, the summit stood little chance of success even without the U-2 incident. Neither side was any more willing to budge in its positions than at Geneva a year before, and the best the summit could have hoped for was continuation of the Spirit of Camp David and some prospects for ongoing
détente. While these outcomes would not have been negative for the West, neither was the actual result.

In the initial preparations, Eisenhower, de Gaulle, Macmillan, and Adenauer kept up a steady correspondence to narrow the issues necessary before formally proposing a Four-Power summit, eventually deciding to convene a Western summit in concurrence with the upcoming December NATO meeting in Paris. The main points of contention in these exchanges remained the Europeans’ anxiety about pursuing a summit, and whether even Eisenhower’s decision to speak directly to Khrushchev had been a sign of weakness. Dulles had resigned from the State Department in April 1959 after a recurrence of his colon cancer, and had been replaced by Christian Herter. In a meeting with the American ambassador to Bonn shortly after receiving Eisenhower’s message, Adenauer contended that were “Dulles alive,… Khrushchev would never have been invited,” and questioned whether Herter would be capable of standing up to Khrushchev in a debate. 85 Similarly, de Gaulle wondered what a summit meeting with the Soviets would accomplish “besides highlighting a fundamental disagreement between East and West or surrendering more or less to Soviet claims to Berlin. In the first case, the cold war would very likely be aggravated; in the second, the world might consider such a retreat on the part of the West the beginning of a series of retreats, and the firmness of the Atlantic Alliance would suffer grave consequences.” 86 In return, Eisenhower repeated his argument that the removal of duress from the Berlin situation was indication enough that a summit could

85 Diary Entry by the Ambassador to Germany (Bruce), 30 September 1959, FRUS 1958-1960 IX Germany, Austria, 56.
86 Letter from President de Gaulle to President Eisenhower, 20 October 1959, Ibid, 79.
produce a sufficient result to make it worthwhile, and “that further exploration would now be desirable. Indeed I believe we would be assuming a heavy responsibility if we now refused to meet him at the Summit.”  

The French and German positions were based not on a fear that Eisenhower was looking to weaken significantly the Western position (although Adenauer’s comment about Dulles may have indicated a passing thought in that direction), but a sense that the Soviets were extracting concessions from the West without showing any practical movement on their position on Berlin and Germany. While recognizing that Khrushchev’s removal of pressure was significant, de Gaulle believed that another failed summit meeting might be seen as “disagreement between the Western Powers, particularly with regard to the German question, or, worse yet, their more or less resigned and disorderly retreat, would be a severe blow to our Atlantic Alliance.”  

He argued that the Soviets needed to demonstrate efforts at reconciliation in practice, and that more time was necessary for the Soviets to demonstrate that the West could trust them. De Gaulle preferred a delay before a summit, preferably until the spring of 1960, during which the Soviets could display good behavior in Berlin in order to build the West’s trust. Both Eisenhower and Macmillan opposed this delay, preferring a summit by the end of 1959, but with time running out in the year, Eisenhower agreed on 28 October to a Western summit in December, where the leaders could discuss the timing for a Four-Power summit in 1960.

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87 Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom, 9 October 1959, Ibid, 66. Again, Eisenhower sent similar messages to de Gaulle and Adenauer. See footnote 2, 65.
88 Letter from President de Gaulle to President Eisenhower, 26 October 1959, Ibid, 96.
89 Memorandum of Conversation, 20 October 1959, Ibid, 76.
Still, there were concerns that the Western leaders might find themselves in a position where they would have to give up more than they might want. Eisenhower was particularly concerned that the Soviets might push the Allies in Berlin, but in such minor ways as to make it difficult for the West to resist. He asked “what could be done practically if Soviets, while respecting letter of agreements, created difficulties for the livelihood of the Berliners.” This drew an “emotional” response from Adenauer, who “stated that Berlin was a symbol and yielding there would have fatal results for West.” While the issue did not become a sticking point in the discussions, no real resolution was made, and the incident shows how sensitive Adenauer could be to the possibility of the other allies, especially the United States, abandoning West Germany.

In fact, Adenauer may have had some reason for such concerns. His overriding concern remained German reunification on Western terms, and he was not willing to countenance the acceptance of a divided Germany. Yet in a meeting on 21 December that did not involve him, both the French and the British expressed the opinion that German unification was not desirable in the near term or even in the long term. During a discussion on Germany’s borders, Macmillan “whispered to [French Premier Michel] Debré “‘you don't really want reunification do you?’ and Debré nodded and added ‘Not quite yet.’” But as de Gaulle pointed out, while there was no “great hurry for this[, the] Western Powers must never give appearance abandoning Berlin or Germany. They must support Adenauer.” Eisenhower, while not disagreeing on either point, looked for a

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90 Telegram from Secretary of State Herter to the Department, 21 December 1959, FRUS 1958-1960, IX Germany, Austria, 138.
quicker resolution, since a “permanently divided Germany [was a] source of difficulties in Europe.”

Here was a fundamental difference that may have completely undermined the Western position had the tripartite powers decided to trade a status quo in Berlin for a status quo in Germany (and thus a recognition of East Germany). By 1960, the Western powers had largely come to accept the division of Europe, and to recognize its benefits to their interests. A divided Germany was not the same threat to stability that a unified and neutral Germany might be in Cold War Europe, especially from the French perspective. So long as West Germany was tied to the West, and continued to provide both economic and military support to Western Europe, the status quo was not only acceptable, but maybe even desirable. For Adenauer, however, German reunification was not something he could set aside without serious costs to his domestic political position. No German leader at the time could abandon one quarter of the German nation to Soviet communist domination, and Adenauer personally was not about to concede the loss of East Germany. The Allies had papered over the reunification problem by always insisting that reunification was a goal, but a goal that they could only achieve under certain circumstances that were bound to be favorable to the West, thus making it nearly impossible in the short and medium term. Under enough pressure to avoid a crisis in Berlin, though, Western leaders might find it harder to paper over those cracks, as the tripartite discussions hint.

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91 Quoted in Telegram From Secretary of State Herter to the Department of State, 22 December 1959, Ibid, 145.
Yet Britain, France, and the United States were not willing to open these cracks with West Germany, and decided that supporting Adenauer and German reunification was more important than achieving a Berlin settlement at the Paris summit. A status quo in Berlin, even one that removed the possibility of being drawn into a war over access rights, was not appealing enough for Eisenhower, Macmillan, and de Gaulle to consider destabilizing West Germany and NATO. Their final position was therefore that while “note should be taken of pronouncements of Khrushchev relating to relaxation of tensions and peaceful coexistence,” the “West must not do anything that would result in Berlin's falling into hands of Soviets.”\textsuperscript{92} When they reported to the NAC on 22 December, the NAC undertook to “to play a constructive part in ensuring [the negotiations’] success,” and gave “its full support to the position adopted by the four governments.”\textsuperscript{93} NATO continued in its interest in Berlin, along with its support for the overall Western position, which it found was “slightly better now than it was prior to the Khrushchev visit to the United States.”\textsuperscript{94} The summit meetings, along with the foreign ministers meetings, allowed the Berlin powers to reconcile some of their disagreements, so that de Gaulle and Adenauer could be assured that the West was not rushing into the summit while Eisenhower and Macmillan could be assured that a date for the summit in May could be set.

Once again, quadripartite officials in Washington spent their spring closeted in Working Group meetings, producing a report by 21 April 1960. The main focus in these

\textsuperscript{92} Telegram From Secretary of State Herter to the Department of State, 22 December 1959, Ibid, 152.
\textsuperscript{93} Final Communiqué, 22 December 1959, \url{http://www.nato.int/docu/comm/49-95/c591215a.htm}.
\textsuperscript{94} PO/59/1663, Points made during the Council's discussion held on 17th December, 1959, on the Record of Washington Consultations preparatory to the East-West Summit, 18 December 1959 (NA), 2 (Annex A).
meetings was on the tactics for negotiating based on this position, resulting in some new ideas regarding the offer of a plebiscite in Germany on the opposing reunification proposals and some other negotiation points. As the Working Group reported, “the Western tactic should preferably be uncomplicated and direct so that it can be executed successfully in full. It should, moreover, as far as possibly be flexible enough to cope with Soviet tactics both anticipated and unanticipated.”

The main goal for the Working Group on Berlin was to ensure that the West came up with a minimum position that they could negotiate down to. This minimum position essentially reiterated the basic Western contention that Berlin, and especially the western part of the city, needed to remain under a Western guarantee of its freedom from the East German regime. To that end, the minimum position on Berlin pushed for continued close ties – economic, political, and social – between the city and the West German government. The Working Group thus decided, at the urging of the American government, that a new modus vivendi on Berlin, even a temporary one, would be one area where the West could make concessions, so long as the minimum Western position remained intact.

Again, based on this position, the Paris Summit could likely have achieved little without Khrushchev conceding much of the Soviet position, something he was very unlikely to do. That is not to say that the Western powers were so cynical as to go into the

95 Plebiscite Proposal as Related to the German Peace Treaty Issue, undated, folder Germany – Briefing Book (2) NSC Staff Box 11(DDEL), 1.
96 Tactics on Berlin at the Summit, 4-4-60, folder Germany – Briefing Book (3), Ibid, 1.
summit working toward failure rather than success, but that they recognized that the
likelihood of success was slim, and preferred to retain the status quo rather than risk
negative change. The summit was thus almost an end to itself, since it provided
Khrushchev with the sort of negotiations that he could use to his advantage with critics in
the Soviet Union, East Germany, and the wider communist world, and thus reduced the
odds that he would renew his ultimatum or exert direct pressure on Berlin. There were
some hopes for the summit, but far more there were realistic expectations.

The Working Group remained in contact with the NAC during the course of its
discussions, but there were concerns right from the start that NATO interests would not
find equal expression in the preparations. NATO members worried that there might be
some drift in the negotiating positions, and so sought to ensure that any changes would
not come at their expense.99 Some of the middle powers, including Italy, Canada,
Belgium, and Turkey raised the issue at the NAC in December 1958, concentrating
mainly on the larger questions of disarmament and European security. As a result,
NATO’s International Staff assigned a member as a liaison to the Working Group on
these issues.100 Still, the Working Group tried to limit its reporting to unofficial reports at
wide intervals. This arrangement meant that NATO officials occasionally felt that the
Working Group was not making progress on issues like Germany and Berlin, but the
consultation that the Working group did with the NAC kept those concerns from making

99 PO/59/1461, Discussion of the Problem of the Summit Conference, 31 October 1959 (NA), 1.
100 PO/59/1663, Points made during the Council's discussion held on 17th December, 1959, on the Record
of Washington Consultations preparatory to the East-West Summit, 18 December 1959 (NA), 4. Christian
Nünlist, and Anna Locher, Transforming NATO in the Cold War: Challenges Beyond Deterrence in the
any impact on the direction of the preparations. In response to the reports, the NAC raised very few objections or revisions, apparently agreeing with the consensus that governed the Working Group meetings. Consequently, when the Working Group transmitted its final report to NATO on 20 April, the discussion was inconsequential, and the report adopted with very few changes.

In terms of the summit itself, NATO’s opinion reflected that of the West overall. While the allies were ready for negotiations, there was not much expectation for anything substantial to come from them, even at the summit level, and even with the creation of an atmosphere of détente following the Camp David summit. Already by April and early May, officials were trying to play down both public and allied expectations from the summit, and there was a growing sense that the summit might fail. On the Soviet side, at least from the Western perspective, it seemed clear to many observers that Khrushchev was looking for a way out of the talks, even before he stormed out of the summit in the wake of the U-2 fiasco, fearing the possibility of losing ground on his position.

In truth, he had initially wanted to press forward with the summit even after the U-2 crash, and even though he felt betrayed when it became clear that Eisenhower had personally authorized the U-2 flights, he still flew to Paris ready to continue the summit if

101 Summary of Fifth Meeting of Quadripartite Working Group on Germany and Berlin, 11 February 1960, folder Germany – Briefing Book (4), NSC Staff Box 11(DDEL), 1.
102 Summary of Seventh Meeting of Quadripartite Working Group Germany and Berlin, 23 February 1960, Ibid, 1.
104 PO/59/1663, Points made during the Council's discussion held on 17th December, 1959, 18 December 1959 (NA), 4.
Eisenhower apologized.\textsuperscript{107} But the insult was more than just personal, it was to the Soviet Union as well, which damaged Soviet prestige and undercut Khrushchev’s ability to accept détente.\textsuperscript{108} Even if he had wanted the summit to succeed, that possibility was essentially gone by the time he reached Paris. The summit was over before it really began, and Khrushchev probably recognized that.

It seems unlikely, in truth, that there would have been very much movement on Berlin and Germany. The Working Group had come up with the minimum position, which was not that far from the position that had defined the Western stance on Berlin for years. While the Western powers had held firm once again going into the summit, their position was never put under any serious stress, so it is not possible to determine what sort of concessions they would have made in the talks. Concern that the Berlin Crisis might bring war had made the Allies more willing to consider concessions on the city. But that concern was not deep enough to justify concessions that might have resulted in the end of the Western presence in Berlin. Such concessions, even if there had been desire for them, would have destroyed Western credibility in Berlin, a cost that might have outweighed any gains in peace.

Likewise, while there were risks involved in the plebiscite proposal on German reunification, the Western powers only intended this proposal to be a tactical maneuver, and it likely would not have made much impact on the negotiations themselves. It gave the appearance of Western flexibility on German reunification, an important element in

\textsuperscript{108} Naftali and Fursenko, \textit{Khrushchev’s Cold War}, 282
ensuring support in West Germany. Yet few people could have actually expected Khrushchev to have accepted it, because there was little chance of the German Communists prevailing in such a plebiscite, which would mean the end of the East German regime. With Khrushchev’s declaration after Paris that he would not seek a change to the Berlin situation until after the inauguration of a new American president in 1961, the West could feel assured that the Berlin Crisis would not become acute for at least a short period of time.

**Conclusion**

On the diplomatic front, little changed from the end of the Geneva conference in August 1959 to the failure of the Paris summit in May 1960. Berlin remained under occupation status, with the access routes open, but under occasional harassment. Germany remained divided, and there was no plan between the West and the Soviets to begin the reunification process. Khrushchev’s threat of a separate peace treaty remained, but the specter of a time limit was gone, at least for the time being. On the Western side, coordination remained tight between the Berlin powers, and NATO remained in the loop enough to quell any serious misgivings about the direction of Western policy. While the possibility of war breaking out over Berlin remained, the situation was more like that from November 1958 than after it, and enough of the spirit of détente remained for there to be some expectation that Khrushchev might not reignite the crisis under a new U.S. president in 1961.

Though not as recognized in wider circles, the Western position was stronger than it had been just a few months earlier. With LIVE OAK in place, the tripartite powers were coming to grips with some of the consequences of a showdown over Berlin, and
were dealing with some of the implications for their strategy. Although there were still differences about how to proceed in some cases, direct military action to reopen access the most notable, there was a sense that should push come to shove, there were plans in place to deal with the threat, and these plans were close to reaching an operational level. Hopes and expectations that the Allies would not need these plans persisted. But the confidence within LIVE OAK was high enough that the staff spent “afternoons… swimming in the pool outside the office and even playing tripartite cricket.”

But differences remained. While Massive Retaliation’s hold on American officials like General Norstad was not as strong as it had been, NATO’s reliance on nuclear weapons meant that any escalation in the Berlin contingencies could mean not just war, but nuclear war. For many officials, this prospect made contingency planning potentially dangerous, prompting situations like the divergences over the “More Elaborate Military Measures” paper between the British and American LIVE OAK staffs. From the British perspective, elaborating on such military measures was likely unnecessary, given that any direct conflict over Berlin would result in a quick use of nuclear weapons, and thus a general war that went beyond LIVE OAK’s purview.

In the broader NATO sense, these types of differences spoke to some of the fears still evident about the possibility of nuclear war over Berlin. Although not a part of the LIVE OAK organization, NATO members were aware of the work going on, were aware of the implications these contingencies could have for them, and reacted in different ways. Italy had designs on a bigger role for itself, and resented its exclusion from

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quadripartite activity.\footnote{Leopoldo Nuti and Bruna Bagnato, “Italy and the Berlin Crisis” in Gearson and Schake, *The Berlin Wall Crisis* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 150.} Canada and West Germany did receive informal information on LIVE OAK, but did not contribute to its work. And the broad outlines of contingency planning did make it to the NAC, so that they could play a role in NATO discussions on Berlin. But overall, NATO’s part in contingency planning was essentially consigned to keeping it informed as the occupation powers went through the escalation checklist, and hoping that it would be ready for war should escalation reach that point.

As the Berlin Crisis settled into what would become an interregnum, it was becoming clear that the gap between the LIVE OAK contingencies and the strategic concept in NATO was large enough to require some reexamination of Western strategy. Some of this reexamination was already taking place, as the concept of Massive Retaliation dealt with criticism both from within the Eisenhower administration, and from elsewhere. These criticisms were starting to make their way into NATO, and were slowly affecting the basis of NATO’s strategy, MC 14/2 and MC 48/2. While it would take several years of upheaval within the Alliance before NATO would change the Strategic Concepts, thinking and discussion were changing under the stress of the Berlin Crisis.
Chapter 3
Reevaluating Strategy

The failure of the Paris Summit opened a potentially more dangerous phase of the Berlin Crisis. There had been great hope for the summit, and its failure seemed to provide Khrushchev with an opportunity to carry out his threats on Berlin and the East German peace treaty. Yet Khrushchev realized that the general political situation granted him some time and flexibility. Therefore, even though East German and Soviet officials continued periodically to harass Western traffic into Berlin and Khrushchev continued to make statements and speeches threatening to change the city’s status unilaterally, he also explicitly stated that the Soviets would make no such move until after the inauguration of a new president that following January.

The final months of 1960 thus turned out to be a period of relative calm in East-West relations, an interregnum in the Berlin Crisis that divided it between its two main stages. It was during this period that LIVE OAK downsized its staff, with the remainder finding more time for cricket and poolside activities than for paperwork. The Western allies themselves realized that little concrete work could be done on Berlin, Germany, or any strategy until the American people chose a new president, and that president had time to study and come to grips with the issues involved in the Crisis. In all, there was a chance for the world to catch its breath, and hope that once the interregnum was over, the two sides would choose quick and direct negotiations rather than resume confrontation.
This hope did not mean, however, that Western officials became lax and began neglecting the dangers of the various Berlin contingencies. In fact, the interlude provided these officials with a chance to step back and evaluate the situation, and to gain some perspective on how they had arrived at the stasis of the previous two years, and how they might find new ways to accomplish their goals over Berlin without sacrificing Western strength or determination. This reevaluation did not lead to any major policy shifts or significant new strategies, but it did begin a process that raised significant questions about Western strategy and signaled a shift in Berlin policy that would have important repercussions on the Berlin Crisis itself.

These changes centered on the continuing value of the strategy of massive nuclear retaliation. NATO had adopted this concept early in the Eisenhower administration, and had incorporated it into the basic Strategic Concept by 1957. It was on this basis that NATO policymakers approached the Berlin Crisis a year later, and it remained a fundamental element in Western thinking throughout the crisis. Yet these same officials, both European and American, were uncertain of its effectiveness, and there was growing concern about the consequences of relying on massive retaliation. Two problems essentially preoccupied thinking on Western nuclear strategy. The first was that, should the Soviets resort to minor provocations over Berlin – for instance a limited blockade on the land access routes to the city – the West would have no option but to respond with military, and thus nuclear, force or to back down entirely and lose credibility in Berlin and elsewhere. The second worry was related. Should it become apparent that the Western powers would not be willing to respond with military and nuclear force in such a scenario, the entire deterrent power of massive retaliation would be lost, and the West
would be left in a significantly weakened position in Europe, unable to respond to any Soviet action or initiative on Berlin, Germany, or anything else.

Confronted with this dilemma, Western officials began to approach alternative strategies to massive retaliation. Some of these strategies had already begun to find practical forms, for instance General Norstad’s concept of a pause as expressed in LIVE OAK’s “More Elaborate Military Measures” paper. But these examinations remained at a low level before 1961, since to modify Massive Retaliation would require a fundamental reassessment and adaptation of NATO’s Strategic Concept, something that few of the NATO allies were willing to accept. Their security depended heavily on the deterrent power of the American nuclear umbrella. Anything that hinted at a withdrawal or reduction of that nuclear umbrella was a non-starter in their eyes.

Yet the tension of the Berlin Crisis was forcing even European officials to recognize that the strategic situation was changing. The Soviet Union had demonstrated an ability to launch intercontinental ballistic missiles, for the first time directly threatening the United States mainland with nuclear retaliation in the event of war in Europe. Many Europeans were worried that, should limited war break out in Europe, the United States might now be deterred from initiating the nuclear response Western strategy called for, lest the Soviets target American cities for destruction. A stronger conventional capability might help to fill the gap between Massive Retaliation and its failure, but that might result in larger devastation of Europe, with no appreciable benefits to the Western position.

NATO officials on both sides of the Atlantic were thus caught in a bind. Leaving the basic strategy unchanged, as the strategic situation changed around them, might
provide opportunities for the Soviets to continue pushing on Berlin until they forced the West into concessions that would undermine the Western presence in the city. But changing the strategy might lead the Soviets to question Western deterrence, especially if the allies were themselves uncertain of the new strategy’s deterrent capabilities. Both paths seemed to threaten war, and the prevailing opinion was that the status quo, which had thus far deterred war, should be left intact. But the ongoing potential for trouble starting in Berlin caused doubt among many officials, spurring calls for a reevaluation of the West’s basic strategic assumptions. That reevaluation was slow in coming, and did not reach a tipping point until after the Berlin Crisis had faded away. But during the period between the Paris Summit of May 1960 and the Vienna Summit of June 1961, these ideas were filtering through NATO countries, and they would affect how the West approached the next stage of the Berlin Crisis in the middle of 1961.

In the Wake of Paris
The Paris Summit broke up under acrimonious circumstances. The United States had violated Soviet airspace just days before the meeting was supposed to open, and Eisenhower’s attempts to deny the existence of continued U-2 flights was dramatically repudiated by the public display of the pilot, Francis Gary Powers, and the wreckage of his plane. Khrushchev walked out of the conference, angrily denouncing the United States and any further attempts at détente. The Spirit of Camp David appeared dead.

Yet the world’s worst fears about what that death meant were not realized. Rather than push his rhetoric into actions, Khrushchev instead chose to step back and leave the situation as it was going into the summit. That meant no separate peace treaty with East Germany, no new restrictions on Allied access to West Berlin, and no new pressure on the West to accept a divided Berlin and divided Germany. Instead, he declared that the
Soviet government would postpone any decisions on Germany until after the November elections in the United States, thereby essentially extending his ultimatum until early 1961, when a new president would take office. Paris thus became another bump on the road to the goal of détente, rather than the spark of a potential war.

Western leaders still worried, however, about Khrushchev’s motives before, during, and after the aborted summit. Why had the Soviet leader, who had been so keen on a summit even after landing in Paris, abandoned the idea, even after the United States apologized for the U-2 incident? Western officials saw two main possibilities. The first was that Khrushchev essentially got cold feet. There had been a genuine belief that Khrushchev wanted success at Paris, to show that his pressure tactics over Berlin had brought gains for the Soviet Union. At the same time, though, the West was clearly not prepared to make the sort of concessions that would have allowed Khrushchev to declare such success – in particular some sort of recognition for East Germany that might have stabilized that country. Western rhetoric became more rigid as the summit approached, and it looked less likely that Khrushchev would be able to play the allies off against each other in order to weaken the Western negotiating position.¹ Thus, Western officials clearly saw Khrushchev looking less favorably at the summit the closer it approached. From this perspective, the U-2 incident provided the Soviet leader a pretext for cancelling the summit without losing face, either in the communist world or the wider world.

The second possibility was that Khrushchev was under increasing pressure from several fronts not to seek détente in 1960.² High military officials and hardliners within the Soviet government, the communist Chinese government, and the East German

¹ Note, 28 mai 1960, Généralités de la Conférence de Sommet du 1-6-1960 au 31-8-60, Bonn, 39 (Centre des Archives Diplomatique des Nantes [hereafter CADN]), 3.
² Ibid, 1.
government had reasons for not wanting the Paris summit to succeed, and forced Khrushchev into a position where he could not conduct negotiations without risking his own political standing. In this context, the U-2 incident provided Khrushchev with a pretext to cancel, in this case to show that he had stood up to the West.

Despite the similarities between these two motives, their implications for Western policy were different. If in fact Khrushchev had walked away from Paris because he did not believe that he could get any meaningful concessions from a united and determined West, then Western policy was clearly working, and continuing it would mean an end to Soviet threats to Berlin and Western Europe. If, however, he had walked away because he feared a backlash from within the Soviet government or the communist bloc, then continued Western determination might result in repeated Soviet threats to Berlin perhaps by a more hardline Soviet government. This latter scenario did not mean that Western leaders were willing to appease Khrushchev in order to keep him in power, but did mean that Khrushchev might find himself forced to renew the ultimatum on Berlin and also to carry it through should there be no change in the city’s status once the time limit passed. Western officials thus had to prepare for the resumption of Soviet pressure on Berlin, but they also had to look for new ways to counter that pressure, and ensure that they could continue to protect Berlin while avoiding general war.

There was thus a sense of cautious optimism in the West during the last half of 1960. Officials expected that they could take Khrushchev at his word regarding his delay until 1961, since they recognized that it would make little sense to put pressure on an outgoing American administration. Even Khrushchev’s rhetoric in later speeches within the Soviet bloc, when he returned to similar themes regarding the continued lack of a
peace treaty with Germany and the uncertainly of Berlin’s status, did not alarm them, as they regarded it as mainly for internal communist consumption. Attention turned to other matters, and most discussion over Berlin focused on the possible policy directions each presidential candidate might take.

Still, ongoing concerns over Berlin, both immediate and longer-term, occupied Western officials. Of immediate concern, the growing refugee movement from East to West Berlin put increasing political pressure on the East German government, and, in turn, on the Soviet government. With few physical restrictions between East and West Berlin, the city had always been a magnet for disaffected East Germans looking to escape westwards. West Germany facilitated this movement with a refugee processing center in West Berlin, and free transport for refugees from the city to West Germany. Despite the decreasing tensions in 1960, the refugee movement into West Berlin (and from there into West Germany) picked up speed through the summer of 1960, once again placing the issue on the East German agenda. To Western officials, the refugee flow seemed to be getting acute for the communist regime, which “could not afford the flow to continue unchecked.” While the situation likely was not so dire as to spark immediate action from the Soviets or the East Germans, there was concern that it would force Khrushchev to act aggressively, and early in 1961, potentially before a new administration was up and running on the issue. British officials in particular worried that the Soviets and East Germans were “deeply exercised by the continued leakage,… and that their specific intentions towards Berlin may be conditioned as much by that as by any other single factor. Since the solution that they aim for in Berlin, and the vigour with which they

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pursue it, will clearly be determined to some extent by their estimate of the seriousness of the situation, it is a matter of great interest just how serious it really is."  

Consular officials in Berlin were instructed to collect as much data as possible on the numbers of refugees crossing into the West, and to keep an eye out for signs of trouble in the East over the issue.

In the longer term, Western officials were cognizant that even if Khrushchev did wait until later in 1961, when a new administration was firmly established in Washington, it was very likely that he would again raise the Berlin issue, possibly renewing his six-month ultimatum. As French officials noted, Khrushchev could not allow détente without gaining concessions on Berlin, because for him, the road to détente went through Berlin, and until that situation was resolved, relations with the West could not be stable or orderly. The West therefore had to be ready to counter new demands as soon as Khrushchev presented them, since it might be easier for the Soviets to exploit local incidents in the wake of the failed summit.

This line of thinking was particularly strong in the British government. Macmillan and his advisors had long worried about the long-term ramifications of the Berlin crisis. Potential for war existed, and the problem seemed to be dragging the West deeper and deeper into intractable issues of German reunification, the future of Eastern Europe, and even the future of Soviet communism. While the British were not thinking of abandoning the ideological clash of the Cold War, they were more willing to accept peaceful coexistence and the division of Europe that it implied. The other option, as they saw it,
was to continue an intransigent position on these issues that was becoming increasingly difficult to defend publicly. In a memo written during the Geneva conference the year before, Macmillan’s close advisor Philip de Zulueta encapsulated much of the British attitude. According to de Zulueta, the whole Berlin occupation regime was “a demonstrable sham.”\(^7\) There was value in making sure the Soviets did not just grab West Berlin, but other than that the Western presence served little purpose.

Most importantly, de Zulueta’s comments demonstrated the British attitude regarding the Western position in Europe more generally. The British were not looking to recognize East Germany, but did not believe that doing so would be a high price to pay for an assured peace. As de Zulueta argued, the reality was that Germany was divided, that any reunification would require the West Germans dealing directly with the Soviets (and by implication with the East Germans), and that there was little chance of overturning communism in Eastern Europe or the Soviet Union.\(^8\) In the long term, therefore, it would better serve Western purposes to acknowledge these realities and move on to actual differences with the Soviets than to rest the hopes of the West German people on imminent reunification, the hopes of the Western population on victory in Berlin, or the hopes of the Eastern Europeans and Russians on liberation from communism.\(^9\) This was the attitude that Macmillan had taken with him when he went to meet Khrushchev in February 1959, and it was the attitude that the British would largely maintain throughout their dealings on the Berlin crisis.

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\(^8\) Ibid., 542-43.
\(^9\) Ibid., 544.
Unfortunately, officials expected that they “should be considerably hustled by
Khrushchev in the early weeks of next year,” and so wondered whether they “ought to be
doing some more thinking… about a possible solution of the Berlin problem.”\(^\text{10}\) British
officials recognized, however, that their allies, especially the West Germans, would argue
that acknowledging the division of Germany would weaken the Western position and
legitimate Soviet dominance of Eastern Europe.\(^\text{11}\) At best, Britain could hope that in the
long term, it would be able to bring about a transformation in the Western attitude. But in
the short term, the British recognized that they could not take the initiative with such
ideas, since the British government had a reputation of being weak in the face of Soviet
threats.\(^\text{12}\) The Foreign Office thus proposed to seek a holding pattern in Western policy –
and hopefully the Berlin situation as well – with an opening for talks with the Soviets at
any level, including summits, but no new initiatives for solving the Berlin or Germany
questions. Hopefully, Khrushchev would find such activity useful, and the West would
gain time until the rest of the allies, especially the West Germans, could be brought over
to the position of making some concessions.\(^\text{13}\)

Unfortunately for the allies, there was enough diplomatic activity over Berlin to
keep them on their toes and to intensify international and inter-allied tensions. Two
related issues in particular caused difficulties: a proposed West German \textit{Bundestag}
session in West Berlin, and the question of trade between the two Germanys. The issues

\(^{10}\) WG1015/166. “Berlin Question: Conversation with M. Couve de Murville on Oct. 4 about Berlin…”, 8
October 1960, FO 153987, UNKA, 1.
\(^{11}\) Minute: De Zulueta to Macmillan
\(^{12}\) Ibid, 543-44.
\(^{13}\) WG1015/180/G. “The P.U.S. wishes a study to be made of possible long-term solutions of the Berlin
problem”, 7 October 1960, FO 153988 (UKNA), 3-4.
caused problems regarding the reactions and countermeasures available to the West, and how NATO members would balance their collective interests with their national ones.

The West German government’s decision to hold a session of the Bundestag in Berlin was not unprecedented; such sessions had occurred before. However, in the atmosphere of 1960, even with tensions relaxing after the summit, the decision was bound to get noticed, and sure to trigger objections from the East Germans and the Soviets. In addition to diplomatic protests, the communist authorities threatened to restrict access to Berlin for those West Germans participating in the parliamentary session. All NATO governments saw the danger in escalating tensions during the period of relative lull, although some, like the Americans, argued that to cancel or postpone the Bundestag session would appear to be appeasing the Soviets and would set an unfortunate precedent. In the end, Adenauer decided that it was not worth the trouble to hold the session in West Berlin, and it was postponed until after the West German elections of 1961.

However, to maintain the argument that the West had not backed down to Soviet demands, the West German government responded directly to the increased harassment and restrictions on access to West Berlin. In September, the Federal Republic canceled its inter-zonal trade agreement with the Democratic Republic, essentially threatening a trade embargo on the East. This tactic had long been one of the economic countermeasures discussed at both LIVE OAK and the North Atlantic Council, but there had not yet been any agreement on how such an embargo might work in practice or how the West would

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14 The East German government also objected to two West German refugee organizations staging conferences and rallies in West Berlin. The East Germans considered these groups revanchist and determined to undermine the post-war border solutions, and accused the West German government of supporting them by allowing them to hold their conference in West Berlin.
coordinate trade restrictions. As a result, West Germany – despite the support of the United States – had considerable difficulty convincing its NATO allies that these economic countermeasures were necessary and were in the West’s best interests. Although none of the NATO members had direct diplomatic relations with the GDR, many had commercial relations, and this economic activity, while modest, was important. Thus, states like the Netherlands, Denmark, and even Britain were unwilling to rush to trade sanctions without economic provocation by the East.

Many NATO members clearly remained unsure of how to confront the Berlin problem. While continuing to insist that they supported the strong stance that the United States and West Germany were taking, some of the moves to support that stance upset them, mainly out of a fear that they would touch off a conflict that might lead to war. They thus tended to put pressure on the Berlin powers to avoid conflict, at any level, rather than support them wholeheartedly. The smaller powers did not, to be sure, seek to undermine the Western position or push appeasement on their allies. However, they did often make it difficult for the Berlin powers to seek more confrontational measures, even ones with little risk such as economic countermeasures. This reticence undoubtedly affected tripartite planning, since the British preferred to embrace it in hopes of delaying decisions on contingency plans, while the Americans felt constrained in their options, and the idea of moving with less allied consensus gained ground within the American minds.

The Allies thus needed to deliberate on these countermeasures at the December NATO meeting in Paris. The West German government was out on a limb, since it had already cancelled the trade agreement and prepared to restrict goods going to East Germany. However, officials worried that a unilateral trade embargo by the Federal
Republic would not be fully effective without similar trade restrictions on the part of the other Western European countries. In fact, some even feared that some of those governments would use the West German embargo as an opportunity to improve their trading position with East Germany, completely undermining any leverage the West might have on the access harassment issue. Although this was not a very likely scenario – few Western officials were cynical enough to put slightly increased trade with East Germany above their strategic, and economic, relationship with West Germany – it did introduce additional uncertainty into a NATO meeting already loaded with uncertainty about the upcoming months.

Despite all of that doubt, however, the December NATO meeting was perhaps most notable for lacking in major disagreements. The allies essentially backed the West German decision on the inter-zonal trade agreement, especially when it became clear that the East Germans were alarmed enough about the loss of West German trade to reduce their harassment of Berlin access. In response, the West German government welcomed new negotiations on a renewed trade agreement, and its allies could be confident that the issue would soon be resolved in the West’s favor. And while disparities still existed between allied positions on issues of negotiations with the Soviets, the fundamentals of the Western position on Berlin and Germany, and possible reactions to Soviet moves on the city, the Allies largely papered over those issues during a relatively uneventful series of Council meetings. NATO had decided, like much of the rest of the world, to take a cautious approach to 1961, and whatever further crises it may bring.

**The Strategic Question**

In the meantime, though, NATO was beginning to grapple with the larger and more complicated issue of the nuclear deterrent. The Berlin crisis had brought the
problem of the credibility of the deterrent to the forefront, and not even the language of the Strategic Concept could get the allies around the realities of that credibility problem. The Soviets would likely only need a series of small steps in order to gain West Berlin, and since few of these small steps would justify a NATO nuclear retaliation, the Allies needed to find other means. LIVE OAK had begun to lay out some of these alternatives, restricted to a limited Berlin scenario. The door that the Berlin crisis had opened on the problems of the nuclear deterrent, however, required larger alternatives than the ones that LIVE OAK was only beginning to touch upon.

The fundamental question was how credible the nuclear deterrent would remain under the existing doctrine of Massive Retaliation. The Eisenhower Administration had brought in the concept as part of its New Look strategy upon taking office in 1953, and the concept had formed the core of strategic planning at all levels in the West since. By threatening immediate and total nuclear response to any action taken against the United States and its allies, Massive Retaliation promised a nuclear umbrella over Western Europe, one that would offset the apparent advantages that the Soviet Union and its allies had on the ground in conventional terms. From the very beginnings of NATO, the allies had welcomed, even sought, this nuclear umbrella, and it had become a fact of life within the alliance, determining much of the direction that NATO took during the 1950s.

The Berlin crisis changed that direction. At first, the changes were small, and related to the responses the Berlin powers would make to Soviet moves to block access to Berlin. But as the debate over the More Elaborate Military Measures paper demonstrated, these responses effectively undermined Massive Retaliation. This implication upset the British, leading to their objections to Norstad’s strategic ideas, but they were willing to
accept it in the narrow confines of LIVE OAK. At the same time, however, the implications could not be restricted to Berlin, because the benefits to the Soviets of limited provocation were evident. Increasingly, it seemed disproportionate to use overwhelming nuclear force in response to smaller actions. If an American president lacked the political will to unleash general nuclear war, then there needed to be a response to such limited actions, or the West needed to adjust or augment its nuclear strategy to deter these actions. Officials on both sides of the Atlantic were aware of these problems, and were beginning to grasp the larger implications for Western strategy.

NATO had tried to resolve some of these problems through the Shield conventional forces, but these never reached a point where they could have a deterrent role. Political and economic difficulties kept NATO allies, especially the European allies outside of Britain and West Germany, from contributing their agreed upon share of manpower and equipment, and there were continual calls from American officials for greater conventional defense efforts on the part of the allies. Until that effort appeared, however, NATO’s Shield remained weak at best.

This weakness caused a second problem. As the difficulties in raising NATO’s conventional strength continued, the Eisenhower Administration became increasingly frustrated over the unequal burden it was carrying, and sought ways to reduce its role in the conventional aspects of NATO strategy. Eisenhower asserted that the agreement to deploy American divisions to Europe, done when he was NATO’s commander, had not

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15 Although their contributions were among the largest in Western Europe, Britain and West Germany also had difficulty keeping their forces at expected levels. The deployment of the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR) in West Germany was expensive for the British government, which was always looking for ways to economize in its conventional deployment, including periodic decreases in BAOR’s strength. The German government was committed to providing 12 Bundeswehr divisions, but training had only begun in earnest in 1955, and it would be years until these forces were up to full strength.
implied an open-ended American commitment to conventional defense, and he insisted on the eventual withdrawal of American forces from the Continent. This view, coupled with Eisenhower’s belief that nuclear weapons were a more effective and economical deterrent even should American forces be withdrawn, meant that Eisenhower Administration officials were constantly looking for ways to restrict the American role to a largely nuclear one.\footnote{16}

These issues came to the fore in NATO during the preparation of NATO’s force goals for the 1960s, a document that would eventually become MC-70, “Minimum Essential Force Requirement, 1958-1960,” finalized in May 1958. MC-70 was based on the Strategic Concept and set the framework for the practical implementation of that Concept by NATO’s military apparatus. Thus, MC-70 was explicit about NATO’s role in Western Strategy:

NATO’s chief objective is to prevent war by maintaining an effective deterrent. NATO must present an authentic convincing capability for dealing with situations which might lead to war. That capability must be unequivocal. It must be stern, it must convince Soviet leadership that NATO territory could not be conquered in a war, nor the will of the people to resist be broken, nor the Alliance be dismembered by a succession of hostile local actions. The likelihood of war will therefore be governed by the value the USSR places upon NATO’s ability to do whatever is needed for its defense. That ability, if it is to remain persuasive must rest on adequate and balanced forces-in-being, air, land and sea, highly trained and equipped, properly-deployed for a forward strategy and unmistakably ready. In themselves these forces will be proof to the USSR not only of NATO's military power but of something even more important, the Alliance's determination to act immediately and decisively if need be.\footnote{17}

\footnote{16} The most famous of these plans drawn up under Eisenhower is the Radford Plan in 1956. The plan, conceived by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Arthur Radford, called for the reduction of American conventional military strength, and implied a major drawdown of that strength from Europe. The leaking of the plan to the press caused an uproar in Europe, where it was seen as a return to American isolationism, and the plan was quickly shelved.

But while the Strategic Concept was centered on the nuclear deterrent, MC-70 needed to focus on the conventional aspects, in order to assure that the NATO Shield would be sufficient for the tasks that the Strategic Concept allotted to it. The deterrent did not rest on strategic nuclear capabilities alone but also on forces-in-being (both conventional and tactical nuclear), deployed in a forward strategy both to defend Western Europe and to demonstrate NATO’s intention of deterring invasion.

MC-70 made clear that, by 1958, NATO officials were increasingly worried about the ability of the nuclear deterrent to prevent war, especially limited or localized war. The planners recognized that “[at] no time during the period under review will it be possible for NATO to ignore the threat from conventional weapons, which will continue to form the bulk of the equipment of the Soviet Bloc armed forces.”\(^\text{18}\) While a full-scale use of those conventional forces would necessitate a nuclear response, MC-70 stated that the “Soviets might therefore conclude that the only way in which they could profitably further their aim would be initiate operations with limited objectives, such as infiltrations, incursions or hostile local actions in the NATO area, covertly or overtly supported by themselves, trusting that the Allies in the collective desire to prevent a general conflict would either limit their reactions accordingly or not react at all.”\(^\text{19}\) In these situations, “NATO must be prepared to deal immediately with such situations without necessarily having recourse to nuclear weapons. NATO must also be prepared to respond quickly with nuclear weapons should the situation require it.”\(^\text{20}\) This idea was different from the language of the Strategic Concept – and clashed directly with the doctrine of Massive Retaliation – which stated that NATO had no concept of limited, i.e. non-nuclear, war.

\(^{18}\) Ibid, 6.
\(^{19}\) Ibid, 25.
\(^{20}\) Ibid, emphasis added.
The implications of this perspective were great. If NATO was going to insert a new level of strategy, one that relied on conventional means, then it would need those means to make that strategy effective. While NATO’s conventional strength had increased since the early 1950s, there were still questions about its ability to fulfill such functions. But MC-70 again explicitly outlined a conventional deterrent role for NATO alongside the nuclear deterrent role:

A unique feature of NATO's strength is the Shield which is made up of land, sea and air forces. The Shield serves important functions in both peace and war. It confronts the potential aggressor with a forward barrier. It also serves the vital function of providing stern evidence of our ability to contain and repel any form of lesser aggression which the Soviets might be tempted to undertake…. The Shield thus constitutes an important part of the deterrent. 21

The conclusion MC-70 drew was that a “minimum force must be constantly ready for battle in order to contribute to the deterrent in peace and to bring to a successful conclusion a war forced upon NATO.” 22 Thus the United States could not withdraw its forces from Western Europe, even if replaced with nuclear forces, nor could Western European members ignore their conventional forces by relying on the American nuclear umbrella.

The vague language of the Strategic Concept, however, dominated national planning, and even the more explicit language of MC-70 did not set sufficiently specific targets for the conventional forces. By the time a new administration came to office in Washington in 1961, NATO had 22 1/3 paper divisions, but the reality on the ground actually amounted to only 16 full strength divisions. 23 Moreover, as Dirk Stikker, soon to

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21 Ibid, 47-48.
22 Ibid, 49.
be Secretary-General, noted, “[s]trict interpretation of current NATO strategy seemed to exclude the concept of limited war. However, the relevant texts and the way they had been approved were rather vague,”24 and no one was clear about the relative balance between nuclear and conventional deterrence.

Unfortunately for NATO, there was no consensus around the allied table about whether nuclear or conventional strategy should predominate. Certainly, the nuclear aspect remained important, and most allies still relied on it. As the larger strategic balance between East and West shifted through the late 1950s, however, it became less clear if they should continue to rely on that aspect, or if there should be more ability of the conventional forces to deal with limited actions, and to be a central part of the deterrent itself. Once again, the language of MC-70 suggested the latter, but most members continued to favor the former. This situation presented NATO with a paradox in its strategy; while Massive Retaliation remained the preferred method of deterrence, growing fear of the implications of Massive Retaliation should it be unleashed pushed the allies farther away from it as a basis of their strategy.

In a sense, the Allies were engaging in wishful thinking. They believed that as long as the American nuclear threat remained massive and immediate to the Soviets, it would have credibility as a deterrent, and they would never have to face the implications of relying on a nuclear strategy. But since they could not ignore the implications, given how grave they were even just in terms of likely casualties, they were always uncertain enough with the nuclear strategy to include the conventional forces as an adjunct. In the early 1950s, this adjunct could still be small, since the American nuclear dominance was

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so great. But as that dominance diminished, a small conventional deterrent was no longer sufficient, and the credibility of the nuclear deterrent suffered.

Most observers point to the Soviet launching of the first satellite, *Sputnik*, in October 1957 as the key turning point in Western thinking about nuclear deterrence.\(^\text{25}\) The Soviets’ ability to put a manmade object into orbit pointed to an ability to target the continental United States with Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs). This fact meant that no longer could the United States rely on its geography to protect it from nuclear attack; it would be under the same direct threat that Western Europe had been under since the testing of the first Soviet atomic bomb in 1949. To many in Europe, this new reality called into question the credibility of Massive Retaliation, which made the U.S. guarantee less reliable.\(^\text{26}\) As French President de Gaulle famously put it, “No U.S. President will exchange Chicago for Lyon.”\(^\text{27}\) If the Soviets understood the situation in the same way, then the entire deterrent force of NATO’s nuclear strategy would be lost.

The result of this uncertainty, according to Stikker, was that by the end of the 1950s “experts - in both East and West - frightened by the reality of nuclear abundance, had begun to reconsider the use and the political and military control of these weapons.”\(^\text{28}\) But no one was yet willing to consider replacing Massive Retaliation, for fear that it might undermine NATO’s deterrent and invite Soviet aggression.

American officials also recognized that *Sputnik* and the Soviet nuclear buildup reduced the credibility of an American nuclear response to an attack on Western

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27 Quoted in Gregory W. Pedlow, *NATO Strategy Documents, 1949-1969*, 1997, XXI. De Gaulle liked to use this example, also questioning whether the United States was prepared to act “by trading New York for Paris.” Memorandum of Conversation with the President and the Congressional Leadership, 6 June 1961, #BC02083 (NSA), 1.

Europe. The transitional period between the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations marked a turning point in Western strategy, a turning point that would have important effects on the next phase of the Berlin Crisis. American officials recognized the doubts among their European allies about America’s willingness to risk nuclear attack on its homeland, and critics outside and inside of government sought new means to ensure the relevance of the deterrent. Again, changes would not be immediate, nor would they come easily for American or allied officials.

Much of the reappraisal of Massive Retaliation was coming from centers of civilian strategic study, most notably the RAND Corporation think tank. As a product of the Air Force, RAND was deeply involved in the study of nuclear strategy issues, and had produced many of the most important theoretical frameworks for the use of nuclear weapons in war. For most of the 1950s, Massive Retaliation had been an accepted part of these analyses, and most of the debate revolved around the proper method of utilizing nuclear force in the event of a war. However, by the end of the decade, the strategists in RAND were coming to realize that “massive retaliation would only be considered in the context of a major U.S.-Soviet war in Europe – as an initial response – only to a massive attack on Western Europe, or, even more remotely, an attack on America itself.” This meant that, in the words of Albert Wohlstetter, one of the RAND strategists, “strategic deterrence, while feasible, will be extremely difficult to achieve, and at critical junctures in the 1960s, we may not have the power to deter attack.”

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29 Bozo, Two Strategies for Europe, 4.
31 See Trachtenberg, History and Strategy, 26.
32 Ibid, 41-42.
33 Albert Wohlstetter, “The Delicate Balance of Terror,” Foreign Affairs 37, no. 2 (April, 1959): 211-234, 217. Marc Trachtenberg calls Wohlstetter’s article “probably the single most important article in the history
their writings varied within the government, their ideas intersected with similar misgivings about Massive Retaliation amongst government officials.

Interestingly, one of the first officials to doubt Massive Retaliation was John Foster Dulles, one of the originators of the strategy. As early as 1954, Dulles had long wondered whether Massive Retaliation was truly feasible, and by his death in May 1959, he was openly advocating different approaches for responding to limited aggression. By the end of the Eisenhower administration, there was widespread recognition that accepting nuclear war, the basis of Massive Retaliation, was unacceptable, especially if Soviet nuclear strength, as demonstrated by the Sputnik launch, was truly a threat to the United States.

These thoughts led Dulles’ successor, Christian Herter, to commission a report from Robert Bowie, a former Director of the Policy Planning Staff, looking at NATO’s future going into the 1960s. Bowie’s report, released in August 1960, challenged the basics of NATO strategy, including Massive Retaliation, and called for an enhancement of “the nonnuclear capability of Shield forces to resist attack by Soviet forces and substantially lessen their dependence on nuclear weapons.” Bowie believed that such an enhancement was not a significant change from NATO’s strategic goals, and that such a strengthening was possible within the framework of MC-70’s target of 30 combat-ready divisions deployed in Western Europe. Bowie also recognized that the strategic nuclear aspect of NATO’s strategy, especially as supplied by the United States, was still vital to ensuring a sufficient deterrent. However, he argued throughout that changes in the

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strategic balance between NATO and the Soviet bloc made it necessary to adapt the West’s deterrent power, largely through the provision of conventional deterrence.

Bowie recognized the dilemma NATO faced regarding nuclear deterrence. His study of NATO’s current situation led him to conclude that “[g]rowing Soviet missile nuclear capabilities are now eroding the credibility of the threat of a strategic nuclear response to less than an all out Soviet attack. In consequence, NATO Europe may become vulnerable to threats of both limited aggression and nuclear blackmail:

*Europeans will fear both an excessive NATO response to limited aggression and the absence of a US strategic response to greater threats.* The Soviets may seek to exploit this vulnerability for divisive effects.”

The dilemma of relying on nuclear weapons and yet fearing their effects was becoming more apparent to the NATO allies, and that was undermining the very credibility of the deterrent within the alliance. Fears were increasing amongst European allies about “a prospect of Western casualties [in nuclear war] on a scale which makes the threat unacceptable to our allies and incredible to the Soviets.”

Bowie argued that losing the credibility of the deterrent would invite further Soviet provocation at low levels and would also subject NATO to possibly unbearable strain, thus threatening American security directly.

Bowie focused his criticism on the inherent problems of Massive Retaliation. As the Soviet nuclear arsenal increased in size and range, the certainty about an American nuclear response to what he termed “expanded” attack decreased. Because of this uncertainty, he concluded that the West “cannot be confident that threats of massive

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37 Ibid, (emphasis added)
38 Ibid, 42.
39 Ibid, 41.
40 Bowie defined expanded attack as “any hostile local action which is broadened or prolonged by the Soviets and which would therefore warrant use of nuclear weapons under existing strategy.” Ibid, 38n.
retaliation could again be a reliable deterrent against every expanded action in Europe. And, where the stakes are so high, gambling simply will not do.” He thus argued that strengthening the conventional power of NATO would reduce uncertainty, and thereby increase the effectiveness of NATO’s deterrent. Although this line of reasoning appeared to undermine Massive Retaliation, Bowie clearly intended it to supplement the existing strategy, and made sure to state explicitly that the American strategic nuclear deterrent remained the main deterrent against general nuclear attack by the Soviets.

However, the problem Bowie and others were confronting was not about the possibility of a full-scale Soviet nuclear attack, but of the scenario that Bowie described as an extended attack. Thus, Bowie’s recommendations for a stronger non-nuclear deterrent had several benefits, which Bowie was clear to lay out. This strategy first removed some of NATO’s concern about being placed in a situation where the only choices were retreat or nuclear war. Bowie pointed out that in these cases, “NATO need not then choose between either (i) local defeat if it decided against using nuclear weapons, or (ii) tremendous casualties if it uses them. NATO could instead meet greater non-nuclear threats resolutely in kind, with better hope for assuring a favorable outcome.” The new strategy would also provide the West with more control over situations of extended attack, since “the likelihood of any limited hostilities in Europe spiralling [sic] into all-out conflict will be low. For the Soviets would hardly continue in so dangerous a spiral, if the Shield were holding and tactical victory were not close at hand. They would realize that steadily expanding conflict would generate a growing risk of general war by accident or miscalculation and a growing likelihood of the US

41 Ibid, 42.
42 Ibid, 45.
43 Ibid, 46.
threatening strategic retaliation if the conflict were not settled on satisfactory terms."^

Bowie advocated drawing a clear line between limited and general war – a fairly drastic move considering that NATO’s Strategic Concept specifically ruled out limited war as a possibility – so that there was “a conscious decision to expand hostilities through a step that was definable, observable, and of the gravest portent.”^

This proposal outlined a strategy much more aligned to Norstad’s concept of the pause, and thus drew on the experience of the Berlin situation and LIVE OAK’s work.

Still, Bowie had to be clear that reducing the reliance on Massive Retaliation did not represent an increased risk of war, but rather a way to reduce the risk of war, by allowing “such threats or actions to be dealt with by responses more in keeping with their scope. In consequence, allied hesitancy about reacting and Soviet doubts as to whether NATO would react would both be mitigated. Moreover, the Soviets would be deprived of the leverage of blackmail, which provided an added incentive to local aggression.”^

Most importantly, because Massive Retaliation would remain at the higher end of the strategy, “the Soviets would still have to weigh the serious danger that once violence began [it] might get out of hand and escalate into general war. Hence their uncertainty about ultimate costs to them would remain, and would reinforce the certainty of an effective initial NATO response as a deterrent to such actions.”^

As a result, Bowie concluded that “[d]eterrence of general war would be strong.”^

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44 Ibid, 47.
46 In preparing his study, Bowie spent considerable time discussing strategy with Norstad, and the latter’s influences are clear in the report.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid, 51.
The benefits of such a strategy for the Berlin situation were apparent to Bowie. The Soviet pressure on Berlin was clearly not enough to warrant resort to Massive Retaliation, nor would the Soviets likely choose to initiate such actions in the future. Instead, steady, low-level pressure would make it difficult for the allies to respond, and would sow disunity among NATO members. Bowie questioned how the West could respond to ever-increasing pressure, which would exceed the ability of the allies to counter, forcing them into a position of defeat or general war over Berlin. He feared that the Soviets recognized the advantages of their approach in Berlin, and the potential political advantages of lesser actions are increasing because [our] allies would be torn, in the event of such actions, between two fears; (i) that an all-out war response would destroy them for apparently inadequate cause, or (ii) that failure to respond would leave them naked to Soviet power. The USSR might expect that threats of limited action could undermine the Alliance by the interplay and conflict of these two fears, so long as NATO strategy was predicated on an all-out response to any expanded action.

Bowie’s solution of a stronger conventional deterrence would enable NATO to meet such Soviet actions in kind, thus providing another level of deterrence and more options for Western response. Again, Bowie saw this result not as a weakening of Massive Retaliation, but as a strengthening of overall deterrence.

Bowie’s report challenged basic American strategic thinking in the Eisenhower administration in several ways. Eisenhower predicated his strategy on nuclear forces not only because they were cheaper, but because they emphasized deterrence over defense. Bowie’s argument about using conventional forces to enhance the nuclear deterrent, however, fit the growing sense in the administration that Massive Retaliation was losing

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50 Ibid, 41.
51 Ibid, 50.
credibility, and even Eisenhower agreed with its conclusions. The report, combined with a similar report from the Department of Defense, was converted into a National Security Council Document, NSC-6017, in November 1960. Like Bowie, NSC-6017 identified the challenges NATO faced going into the new strategic reality of the 1960s, including “(1) emerging European fears that the U.S. will progressively reduce its force in Europe or will not resort to the use of U.S. nuclear force for European defense; and (2) the question of whether NATO should rely primarily on nuclear weapons to deter Soviet non-nuclear aggression against Europe.” These ideas might weaken the deterrent effect of Massive Retaliation, so that the Soviets’ “possession of rapidly growing nuclear capabilities, in addition to their large conventional forces, may make Soviet leaders feel that the threat, or initiation, of limited forms of aggression will carry less risk of leading to general nuclear war.” NSC-6017 likewise recommended that the West strengthen conventional deterrence, as a supplement to the existing nuclear deterrent.

It is not entirely clear how much of an influence the Bowie Report and NSC-6017 had on American and allied policy. Although Kennedy and his advisors would likely have been made aware of these discussions and their outcomes, their thinking on strategy and deterrence was already headed down the same path. However, it is clear that although Massive Retaliation was still in place by 1961, it was under increasing scrutiny, and many Western officials no longer saw the ideas behind it and its role in Western deterrence as valid or effective.

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54 Ibid, 27.
In fact, there was already an influential analysis of Western strategy in
publication. In 1959, General Maxwell Taylor stepped down from his post as Army Chief
of Staff and retired from the Army, intending on a career in the private sector. He also
wrote a book, published in 1960, that would offer his perspective on the current state of
American strategy and his recommendations for reforming that strategy for the current
situation. *The Uncertain Trumpet* was a highly critical assessment of existing American
strategic assumptions and an important source of new strategic thinking. Taylor had
fought against the reliance on Massive Retaliation while a member of the Joint Chiefs of
Staff, but had found his progress obstructed by the prevailing influence of the Air Force
on the Joint Chiefs.

In *The Uncertain Trumpet*, Taylor harshly criticized what he called the “great
fallacy,” that “the use or the threatened use of atomic weapons of mass destruction would
be sufficient to assure the security of the United States and its friends.”\(^55\) Massive
Retaliation had reached a dead end as a useful policy direction, because it “could offer…
leaders only two choices, the initiation of general nuclear war or compromise and
retreat.”\(^56\) This dead end was not just a problem for the United States, but for the Western
Alliance as a whole. Taylor expressed the fear common among NATO leaders that the
nuclear deterrent was becoming too inflexible, and that because it no longer offered much
benefit to political policy, the allies were beginning to doubt that the United States
“would risk the suicidal possibilities of unrestrained nuclear reaction in order to meet
limited military threats.”\(^57\) For Taylor, these were problems that he had been trying to
overcome since taking over the post of Army Chief of Staff. However, his inability to

\(^{56}\) Ibid, 5.
\(^{57}\) Ibid, 61-62.
affect the larger strategic policy of the American government meant that these problems had only grown, and become more dangerous and more immediate.

Taylor identified the Berlin Crisis as a key condition arising from the continued reliance on Massive Retaliation. Although he did not claim that the inflexibility of Western strategy had invited the Soviet pressures on Berlin, he recognized that the strategy placed the West in a difficult position as the crisis progressed, a position that would be essentially untenable should the Soviets decide to limit or block Western access to West Berlin. The problem, as Taylor described it, was that Massive Retaliation can stultify sensible planning for a situation such as might arise if the USSR or its allies blocked our access to Berlin. In planning for such a contingency, the definitions can be used as an argument against using U.S. ground forces as a probe to determine Soviet intentions and thus to avoid the possibility of our being kept out of Berlin by a bluff. Since such an action might bring U.S. troops into armed conflict with Russians, it could lead to general war.\(^58\)

Since Taylor certainly knew about LIVE OAK’s plans for such a probe, and about the disagreements such planning was causing within LIVE OAK, especially with the British, it is clear that he expected that should the Soviets block access to Berlin, the West would be forced to back down rather than risk the possibility of nuclear war should the Berlin Powers carry out the probe LIVE OAK called for. While Taylor did not directly discuss the probe, he seems to have agreed with Norstad that the probe was necessary to smoke out a Soviet bluff, and that such a probe would not automatically lead to general war, but would offer a pause that the allies could use to their advantage. Under Massive Retaliation, however, the risk of a general war starting over a probe was high, once again forcing NATO’s leaders to consider whether that risk was justified for Berlin. If they

\(^{58}\) Ibid, 8.
decided it was, then war might ensue; if they decided it was not, then the West would have to back down, likely losing Berlin and suffering a tremendous blow to its credibility.

To avoid such a scenario, Taylor proposed a new strategy, which he dubbed Flexible Response, that was largely similar to Bowie’s recommendations.\(^{59}\) He claimed that this strategy could provide “a capability to react across the entire spectrum of possible challenge, for coping with anything from general atomic war to infiltrations and aggressions such as threaten Laos and Berlin in 1959. The new strategy would recognize that it is just as necessary to deter or win quickly a limited war as to deter general war.”\(^{60}\) Like Bowie, Taylor argued that his new approach did not undermine deterrence, but rather strengthened it, fulfilling the objective of “deter[ing] nuclear attack on the United States, [and] deter[ing] or defeat[ing] limited aggression anywhere (including a Communist attack on NATO with conventional forces).”\(^{61}\) This objective would require a stronger conventional force, but most importantly it would require the renunciation of a reliance on Massive Retaliation, in order to provide the allies with the flexibility needed to meet different levels of threat with the appropriate response. Flexible Response did not mean abandoning the use of nuclear weapons, or even the threat to use them immediately in response to a Soviet attack, but introduced the idea of raising the threshold of use, so that there were other, non-nuclear, options available to Western leaders.

*The Uncertain Trumpet* had an almost immediate influence. Kennedy read it during his presidential campaign and he accepted its argument, writing Taylor a letter of

\(^{59}\) It is unknown if Bowie read *The Uncertain Trumpet* and he makes no mention of having spoken to Taylor during the preparation of his report.

\(^{60}\) Ibid, 6.

\(^{61}\) Ibid, 145.
Soon after becoming president, Kennedy invited Taylor to the White House and offered him the position of Special Military Advisor to the President. Although this was not an official position (and paid less than what Taylor was then making as a manager of the renovation of New York’s Lincoln Center), Taylor accepted it, and introduced his ideas of Flexible Response into American strategy.

He found a receptive audience. Kennedy, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara were willing to reopen the question of Western strategy. Kennedy campaigned in foreign policy largely on the idea that the Eisenhower administration had fallen behind on strategic matters, letting the Soviets catch up to the United States in nuclear terms. Although he focused his criticisms on the misleading issue of the allied missile gap, he was also concerned with the apparent inability of the Eisenhower administration to develop new nuclear strategies for the missile age. His reaction to the new strategic environment was very different than Eisenhower’s, who recognized that the West was still in a stronger strategic position, and this reaction affected how Kennedy and his advisors approached ideas like Flexible Response.

The same acceptance was not true, however, for their counterparts in NATO. Although strategists and officials in other NATO countries were raising their own concerns about Massive Retaliation, the general line within NATO governments remained a whole-hearted commitment to the existing strategy, and the existing Strategic Concept. While European leaders were concerned with the growing Soviet missile capability, they still saw the American nuclear umbrella as their strongest and surest protection, and still equated the deterrent with that umbrella. So while there was

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discussion within the Alliance about the effectiveness of NATO strategy, there was very little desire for change, and in fact quite a lot of opposition to change.

The strategic shift that the Bowie Report and *The Uncertain Trumpet* heralded was important to NATO’s place in Western strategy. NATO had long accepted the American nuclear umbrella, and the deterrence that Massive Retaliation provided had been key to NATO’s success both as a part of containment and as a unifying force in Western politics. The European members were comfortable with the ideas of the Strategic Concept, even if they overlooked its implications. They regarded any challenge to those ideas as a threat of losing the American umbrella, or even of losing the NATO connection. Now, however, if the United States accepted Bowie’s and Taylor’s arguments, NATO would have to adjust its role within that system, and it was not clear how that would happen. Most European leaders, however, ignored the repercussions of the new ideas making their way through American discourse, continuing to expect that the Americans would not abandon the core of Western strategy.

By 1960, though, some Europeans were having many of the discussions about Massive Retaliation that Americans were. Professional strategists such as Basil Liddell Hart and P.M.S. Blackett and politicians such as Denis Healy in Britain and Helmut Schmidt in West Germany (both of whom were or would later become defense ministers) criticized Massive Retaliation as not credible, and argued for the introduction of greater flexibility for NATO forces.\(^{63}\) Similarly, Canadian officials worried that Khrushchev was prepared to go to war over Berlin, and that such an outcome would mean nuclear war,

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leading them to distrust NATO’s nuclear strategy. These concerns made their way into NAC discussions, leading to debate over the Alliance’s direction.

In April 1960, Defense Ministers discussed the issues of conventional deterrence implied in MC-70. The British presented a paper that, in the words of Minister of Defence Harold Watkinson, suggested “that all components of our forces together constitute the total deterrent to aggression” and that it was a “false distinction now to treat the long-range strategic nuclear forces as the pet deterrent and to regard the shield force as merely designed to fight war if the major deterrent failed.” In Watkinson’s mind, “the concept of the shield and the sword [the strategic nuclear force] complement one another and perhaps both are becoming a little blurred with the advance of our nuclear equipment.” Although Watkinson was not advocating a renunciation of the Strategic Concept, and made sure to emphasize that he was speaking in the long term, the needs of MC-70 and the increasingly prevalent thinking about strategy clearly affected him.

Other ministers debated Watkinson’s points. Strauss in particular noted in support that “NATO should be prepared for any type of conflict” and that it must “therefore, have the means to repel attacks and also to compel a pause in the enemy’s activity.” By contrast, Canadian Defence Minister George Pearkes, supported by his Dutch counterpart, brought up concerns that raising the size of the conventional Shield was not possible and that increased emphasis on the Shield would shift resources from the American nuclear force. The Turkish representative, Fatin Rüştü Zorlu, raised more
strenuous objections, stating that “the enemy must believe that we were ready to use nuclear weapons from the start. If he was confident that that we should first attempt to bring about a pause without the use of nuclear weapons, he might gain an advantage and it might become progressively more difficult for the West to use nuclear weapons at a later stage.”

Although the Ministers referred the British document to the Military Committee for a report, it was clear that there was no desire, among either the political or the military leadership of the alliance, to reexamine the fundamentals of the nuclear strategy.

Thus, NATO maintained its commitment to the Strategic Concept and the nuclear strategy it entailed. Most of the members continued to believe that war was unlikely as long as the United States retained the nuclear deterrent. In this way, they could avoid having to deal with the consequences of the deterrent’s possible failure, even as it became more clear that its credibility in Soviet eyes was declining. Sticking to the Strategic Concept also allowed NATO countries to avoid their conventional commitments, even at the modest MC-70 levels. Even though by December 1960 Kennedy had come under Taylor’s influence in strategic matters, the Allies did not give much thought to the possibility that the Western strategy might change, and especially to the possibility that that change might be beneficial to them through the enhancement of the deterrent. Instead, they passed the idea along for more study and delayed any decision further.

Still, the uneasiness over nuclear strategy that was becoming more evident in NATO created a certain ambiguity within that strategy, an ambiguity reflected in General Norstad’s approach to the issue. As is apparent in his comments on Watkinson’s paper in April 1960, he was not prepared to throw Massive Retaliation overboard, fearing that

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68 Ibid, 3.
doing so would muddy the waters regarding the use of nuclear weapons, and thus reduce their deterrent effect. But he was clearly looking for some flexibility himself, as demonstrated by his pause concept. By November 1960, Norstad was telling NATO officials that in order for Shield forces to “force a pause…. [those] forces must have substantial conventional capability.” The point, according to Norstad, was to ensure that “the threshold at which nuclear weapons are introduced into the battle should be a high one.”

Norstad was looking for ways to interpret the alliance’s strategy that would provide him with the flexibility to implement his pause concept and continue to assure the allies that the nuclear deterrent remained unchanged. He had to walk this fine line because of the dilemma in which nuclear strategy placed the European allies. They needed to continue to accept Massive Retaliation, because it offered the best chance at avoiding war. With fewer people regarding Massive Retaliation as fully credible, though, the need for flexibility seemed just as obvious. But once NATO introduced that flexibility, the American nuclear guarantee might become decoupled, allowing the Soviets to risk a conventional war in Europe – where it was expected that they would have an overwhelming nuclear advantage – and that war would likely be just as devastating to Europe as a nuclear war. This scenario was particularly worrisome for the West Germans, whose country was the front line in any war, and thus certain to suffer destruction and occupation, even in a conventional conflict. Yet even the Germans were wary of relying on nuclear weapons, and German officials, including Adenauer, did not

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71 Ibid, 310.
believe that NATO could defend Europe with nuclear weapons or that anyone could seriously want to use nuclear weapons, even in a crisis.\textsuperscript{72} Thus, Norstad’s ambiguity, as NATO accepted it, helped the allies bridge this dilemma for the time being. Massive Retaliation would remain the strategy of deterrence, but there would be enough conventional deterrence in the Shield to prevent conventional attacks, whether small incursions or full scale assaults.

NATO officials accepted this ambiguity. Dirk Stikker, the Netherlands representative who would soon become Secretary-General, believed that redrafting the Strategic Concept was neither necessary nor beneficial to the allies, but he also recognized that some reinterpretation of NATO’s strategy would be useful.\textsuperscript{73} Likewise, NATO officials responsible for maintaining alliance strategy were beginning to place limits on the reliance on nuclear weapons, recognizing that there were thresholds below which NATO forces would have recourse without nuclear weapons.\textsuperscript{74} There was still much resistance to these sorts of changes, especially as a new American administration came into office with new ideas and new thoughts about the NATO relationship; countries were unwilling to abandon the status quo, no matter how worrying, for an uncertain new policy.\textsuperscript{75} But when the Berlin Crisis appeared on NATO’s radar shortly into the new year, it was clear that ideas about flexibility and the raising of the nuclear threshold had taken hold, and would affect the West’s continued response to the Soviet challenge.

\textsuperscript{72} Stromseth, \textit{The Origins of Flexible Response}, 125. See also Duffield, \textit{Power Rules}, 162-63.

\textsuperscript{73} Stikker, \textit{Men of Responsibility}, 331.

\textsuperscript{74} Duffield, \textit{Power Rules}, 126.

\textsuperscript{75} Stromseth, \textit{The Origins of Flexible Response}, 49.
Conclusion
The period between the Paris summit and the start of the Kennedy presidency was a relatively quiet period in the Berlin crisis, and one that served as a break between the phases of the crisis. Western officials used the time to reexamine the Western position on Berlin and Germany, but not in any great depth, and without really seeking anything new. They mostly seemed to hope that Khrushchev would forget his intentions in Berlin, or that if he did move toward them again, that he would not push any harder against Western determination. They largely failed to take into account the reasons for Khrushchev’s pressure on Berlin, and the fact that East Germany was becoming less stable as the refugee crisis intensified. Whatever desire there was to move beyond the German problem and find a larger European solution was buried under the stronger desire to retain Allied unity, which called for less activity rather than more.

Yet tensions existed beneath the surface of this Allied unity, especially as the credibility of the nuclear deterrent appeared to erode more. Allied leaders could tell themselves that their determination on Berlin, backed up by that deterrent, would keep Khrushchev from pressing his claims in 1961. But if that deterrent was no longer credible enough, Khrushchev would be less inclined to forget his aims in Berlin and Germany, and more inclined to reopen the crisis once a new president took office. Some officials and other players, such as Bowie and Taylor, began to grapple with restoring credibility to the deterrent, primarily by proposing to increase conventional strength and make it a complementary deterrent. NATO showed itself ready to allow for the beginnings of such a discussion, but not much more. The nuclear deterrent remained primary to the Alliance, and the Allies showed themselves likely to meet any major suggestion otherwise with resistance.
Chapter 4
A New President, A New Ultimatum

When John F. Kennedy became president on January 20, 1961, Berlin did not seem to be at the top of his agenda. Khrushchev had promised after the failed Paris summit to revisit the issue once a new president had taken office, but his original ultimatum had passed long before, and tension stemming from the U-2 incident had been resolved with no lasting effects. Officials thought that Khrushchev might drop the Berlin issue or bring it up in a more measured form. Thus, Kennedy focused on foreign policy issues such as Cuba and Southeast Asia, nuclear disarmament, and the overall European settlement.

Yet the Berlin issue did not go away. Kennedy wanted to tackle it as part of a German or European settlement, and Khrushchev frequently mentioned the city. Therefore, from the time he took office, Kennedy formulated a plan for dealing with Berlin, one that would keep West Berlin free under Western protection, and still meet Soviet demands, even if that meant going further than the West had previously agreed. While Kennedy hoped to persuade his allies to go along with a new American plan, he resolved to act without complete Western agreement.

Kennedy faced the problem that, while a new administration was in power in Washington, little else had changed among the participants in the crisis. Khrushchev was still clearly in power in Moscow, as were his Eastern European allies, including Ulbricht in East Germany. Nor were any of the players different in Western Europe. Macmillan
had already won an enlarged majority in London in October 1959, while in Paris de Gaulle, firmly in charge as president, had ushered in the Fifth Republic in 1958. Adenauer did have to face an election in West Germany in September 1961, but there were few signs that he would lose power, even if he failed to achieve a majority. Change was due at NATO, but the choice of Dirk Stikker of the Netherlands to replace Spaak suggested that both policy and methods would continue as normal at Fontainebleu.

So despite Kennedy’s intention to seek a new policy, even one that differed only slightly from that under Eisenhower, there was little expectation that he would be able to achieve a breakthrough in Berlin without coercing the allies. Yet the direction for the Berlin Crisis was not in Kennedy’s hands. Khrushchev still held the whip hand, and it soon became clear that he was ready to use it once again. Although Kennedy first had to face a crisis in Cuba (which was largely of his own making), a renewal in tensions in Berlin soon overshadowed it. By the summer of 1961, tensions were so high in the city that the refugee flow from the East was reaching unprecedented levels, and Western leaders were finding it harder to preserve West Berlin’s morale. Kennedy found himself going from the potential to seek a more conciliatory policy, to one that might raise the stakes not only in Berlin, but in Germany, Europe, and the world.

Through this tension, the Western allies had to continue to plan for a possible war over Berlin. In fact, in many ways they had to restart these preparations, as processes like LIVE OAK had fallen into near stasis since the failure of the Paris summit. But political and military leaders could not just flip through the files to see what was on hand, because it soon became clear that Kennedy and his advisors – in particular Secretary of State
Dean Rusk, National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, along with former Secretary of State and special advisor Dean Acheson – were intent on remaking American strategy, shifting it away from Massive Retaliation and bringing it more in line with the thinking of strategists like Maxwell Taylor, who would soon join the administration as military advisor and later Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. These men were intent on removing the low threshold for nuclear weapons and making the Western response to a Soviet attack more flexible.

To do so, however, would mean changing American strategy, as well as changing NATO strategy, and it was clear that the rest of the allies still regarded the deterrent power of Massive Retaliation as the best means for avoiding nuclear war. To Kennedy’s administration, however, the Berlin situation exposed the weaknesses of Massive Retaliation. They determined to use the Berlin example to show how a Flexible Response strategy would enhance, rather than harm, the West’s deterrent capacity. These differing perspectives set up a conflict within NATO that would be resolved long after the denouement of the Berlin Crisis.

In the first half of 1961, however, these issues were front and center for the Kennedy administration and for its NATO allies. The revival of the Berlin Crisis in the wake of the failed invasion of Cuba and the Vienna Summit between Kennedy and Khrushchev once again threw Western planning into a state of relative confusion, and while planners did not have to start from scratch, the American move towards Flexible Response shook up much of that preparation, and forced the rest of NATO to begin to modify their responses accordingly. By the time the Crisis reached its peak in the autumn
of 1961, it was clear that significant changes to the Western strategy, both short-term and
long-term, would be necessary. These changes led to a new, larger American military
presence in Europe, a renewed push to rebalance burdens within the alliance, and new
disputes about the direction of Western strategy.

The Return of the Democrats

The election of 1960 had returned the Democrats to control in Washington.

Although the Eisenhower Administration had hardly been ideologically conservative, it
had marked a break with American politics since 1932, and had introduced a whole new
set of personnel in control of foreign policy. With the return of the Democrats under
Kennedy, many familiar faces returned to the State Department and the White House,
including Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Undersecretary Chester Bowles, Ambassador-at-
large Averell Harriman, and, perhaps most notably, special advisor Dean Acheson.

Kennedy did retain some key members from the previous administration, including
Ambassador to Moscow Llewellyn Thompson, CIA Director Allen Dulles, and Secretary
of the Treasury Douglas Dillon. Finally, Kennedy filled out his administration with
officials who would become known as the “best and the brightest”, including Secretary of
Defense Robert McNamara, National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, and Deputy
National Security Advisor Walt Rostow.

This new team took office looking not to shift American foreign policy
fundamentally, but to conduct that policy with some new ideas. But the focus was not
necessarily on Berlin or even Germany. Kennedy recognized the danger that the Berlin
situation posed, having been reminded of it by Eisenhower on the day before the
inauguration. Yet he was more concerned with overall East-West disputes, and saw
Berlin as an issue where concessions might benefit the larger Western position.\textsuperscript{1} Others, such as Rusk, worried more about communist influence elsewhere, including Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Africa, and would have preferred it if the Berlin problem had simply disappeared.\textsuperscript{2}

But the Kennedy administration could not ignore Berlin, not so long as Khrushchev kept it on the table. Still, Kennedy and his team viewed Berlin, at first, mainly through the prism of larger Soviet-American relations, as just a part of a larger European settlement centered on disarmament and possibly eventual German reunification. They saw no way to initiate a positive solution on Berlin, but rather hoped that solutions to the larger problems would yield a solution to Berlin.\textsuperscript{3} The focus, therefore, was more on Geneva, where the disarmament negotiations were ongoing, than on Berlin. Kennedy hoped that if the two powers could achieve some sort of breakthrough on disarmament then the rest of the questions would fall more easily into place, and he was more willing to pursue deeper negotiations on the issue.\textsuperscript{4}

Officials in the new administration were intent on a fresh start in American policy. This approach did not mean that Kennedy wanted to overturn the previous eight years, or even try new policies. Instead, Kennedy looked to reexamine, study, and remake American policy where necessary, or continue it if it was still deemed in the country’s interests. Kennedy did not expect much to change when all was said and done – after all,
he had campaigned in 1960 on a tougher foreign policy plank than his opponent – but neither was he going to accept the current policy simply because that was how it had been done in the past.

In particular, Kennedy wanted to display more of an openness to talk with his Soviet counterpart than had existed previously. Through both official and backchannel approaches, Kennedy made it known that he would be willing to meet with Khrushchev early in his presidency. Khrushchev, for his part, eagerly sought such a summit as a means to reduce domestic and Communist world pressure on his policies. Still, Kennedy had domestic issues of his own. He had won office on a very thin plurality; he could not be seen as being weak on foreign policy, especially given his campaign rhetoric. Nor was appeasement his intention. His own experience, both personal and through his father’s years as ambassador in London in the lead-up to World War II, made him an ardent liberal Cold Warrior. Even though there was more of a recognition that the Soviets were coming closer to achieving a strategic balance than under the previous administration, the Kennedy administration still sought ways to remind Khrushchev that the United States took Berlin seriously, and would be willing to mobilize massive resources in order to defend it. Since Kennedy officials believed that the United States was in a fairly good position to negotiate from strength, opening the door to Khrushchev would be in Western interests.

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5 Beschloss, *The Crisis Years*, 42-43.
This attitude presented the problem of perception. Kennedy had to appear to remain tough on the Soviets, while leaving the door open to negotiations that might be more substantive, and might even concede more, than American allies might be comfortable with. To outside eyes, therefore, the possibility of change and uncertainty dominated the early Kennedy months, and even allies were concerned that significant shifts in American positions were in the offing. But few of the allies wanted, or saw a need, for much change. On the one hand, Macmillan interpreted the success of the West in avoiding Khrushchev’s first ultimatum as a vindication of his policy of conciliation. De Gaulle and Adenauer, on the other hand, saw that success as a vindication of the West’s determination not to buckle under Soviet pressure. Consequently, none saw any need for significant change in the Western position, and they regarded Kennedy as naïve or dangerous for thinking about such change.

These conflicting views brought the United States into a divergence with its main allies. All, of course, played down this divergence, as did Macmillan when he first visited Kennedy in April. Macmillan tried to convince Kennedy that conciliation on Berlin was necessary, but did not push him too far, insisting that negotiations were necessary, and probably desirable. At the same time, American officials believed that the British saw Kennedy as coming around to their position, even though those policies were not quite complete. Thus, when Kennedy asked Rusk and McNamara to look into the British

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8 “The Problem of Berlin”, 23 March 1961, folder Germany - Berlin, General, 2/61, NSF, Countries, Germany, Box 81 (JFKL), 3.
10 Memo for the President, 19 June 1961, folder Germany - Berlin, General, 6/17/61-6/22/61, NSF, Countries, Germany, Box 81A (JFKL), 5.
suggestions during Macmillan’s visit, Macmillan surely regarded it as a success for his continuing approach of conciliation on Berlin.  

There were, however, trouble signs. Dean Acheson, a special advisor to Kennedy, argued that for the West to demonstrate its will to stand up to the Soviets and retain the confidence of the Alliance, it might be necessary to launch a large-scale probe on the Autobahn and likely also to use nuclear weapons. This idea, and especially that Kennedy might take it up under Acheson’s considerable influence, shocked Macmillan and his Foreign Secretary, Lord Home. Hoping for a fresh start with a new president, where he could bring the weight of his experience with Khrushchev – especially on Berlin – Macmillan was not expecting to hear what he had been hearing for more than two years from the Eisenhower administration, perhaps even taken further and more dangerously. Believing that Kennedy was getting bad advice that did not convey the full risks of the Berlin situation, the British warned Kennedy that such a hard line approach, especially in the contingency plans, would almost certainly place the West in the position of either initiating nuclear war or backing down. Instead, the British favored opening negotiations with the Soviets in the event of a renewed crisis, with the goal of coming to a positive understanding with Khrushchev not only on Berlin, but on the European situation in general.

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Kennedy got yet another viewpoint from the other main European allies. In a meeting with Adenauer shortly after the British departed, the West German Chancellor indicated that the policies agreed to in 1958-59 should remain in force, including the rejection of East German authorities, even as agents of the Soviets.\textsuperscript{15} Whatever flexibility Adenauer showed, it was for the purpose of retaining allied cooperation, and thus retaining American involvement. Similarly, in their meeting prior to the Vienna summit, de Gaulle had insisted to Kennedy that the West could not let the situation in Berlin change. De Gaulle made clear his opinion that if “we were to retreat, if we were to accept a change in the status of Berlin, if we were to accept a withdrawal of the Western troops from Berlin, or if we were to accept that obstacles be put to our communications with Berlin, this would be the defeat. It would result in an almost complete loss of Germany and in very serious losses within France, Italy and elsewhere.”\textsuperscript{16}

Unfortunately for Kennedy, however, these visits largely coincided with the disastrous attack on Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. The overall mishandling of the operation, including Kennedy’s public recognition of the fiasco, undermined European confidence in American competence and commitment. All of a sudden, the question of whether the United States would fight across the Atlantic Ocean gained new urgency when it appeared unwilling to do much fighting across the Florida Straits. Kennedy was quickly able to reestablish confidence, however, first with Macmillan (who remained 100 per cent

\textsuperscript{16} Memorandum of Conversation, 31 May 1961, Ibid, 81.
loyal to his colleague), and then with the Europeans during his swing through France on the way to a summit meeting with Khrushchev in Vienna.\textsuperscript{17}

That meeting would turn out to be the crucial point in the relationship between the United States under Kennedy, the Western allies, and the Soviet Union. Kennedy expected Khrushchev to push him, as a test of the new president’s resolve, and coming off of the Bay of Pigs disaster it was harder to be in a strong position for negotiations. But Kennedy felt confident after meeting with his allies that he could at least stand up to Khrushchev. He could hope that doing so would open the door to constructive negotiations that would lead the superpowers down the path towards détente, and finally settle the German and European questions.

\textbf{Vienna}

Although the Vienna Summit provided Khrushchev an opportunity to press Kennedy and to reopen the Berlin question with a new ultimatum, Kennedy’s performance restored a great deal of confidence among Western leaders that his changes would not undermine overall deterrence. His main desire for a summit came from a belief that the United States and the Soviet Union had spent far too long talking past one another, and that it was necessary for each side to come to understand the other’s motivations. For Kennedy, the best way to do so was to talk openly, directly, and personally to each other.\textsuperscript{18} If the two leaders could achieve this goal and understand each other more deeply, then they could reduce the possibility of diplomatic misunderstanding

\textsuperscript{17} Horne, \textit{Harold Macmillan}, 300.
\textsuperscript{18} Beschloss, \textit{The Crisis Years}, 158-59.
and military miscalculation, making the world safer in an increasingly dangerous nuclear age.

Just a few weeks into his presidency, Kennedy called a meeting with his leading Soviet experts, including his ambassador in Moscow Llewellyn Thompson, the former ambassador to Moscow Averell Harriman, and the State Department’s ranking Soviet expert Charles Bohlen. In addition to getting background on current domestic and foreign policy situations in the Soviet Union, Kennedy also sought advice on how to negotiate with Khrushchev, particularly in light of Khrushchev’s requests for a summit. Although the experts advised against any direct meetings between the two leaders, they did acknowledge the benefits of a personal touch with Khrushchev, especially after the blow that the failed Paris summit had given his pride. But despite this advice, Kennedy seemed determined at least to get the measure of his adversary and to reduce the misunderstandings, even if he and Khrushchev made no substantial gains. As Bohlen himself later put it, Kennedy “really felt he had to find out for himself… to get a feel of the type of man he was dealing with and the type of situation he was confronting.”

This official reluctance to hold a summit did not, however, preclude the meeting from dealing with substantive issues. Kennedy was eager to discuss nuclear disarmament, as a way to encourage the success of the ongoing talks in Geneva. He was prepared to offer Khrushchev a compromise on inspections, reducing the American demand from twenty per year to ten. He was also prepared to discuss various inspection regimes,

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20 Charles E. Bohlen Oral History Interview, 21 May 1964 (JFKL), 3.
including a troika of neutral, American, and Soviet inspectors.\textsuperscript{21} Khrushchev, on the other hand, was determined to reopen the Berlin question. He had put it aside after the failure of the Paris Summit, waiting for a new American president to take office. He had then waited while Kennedy settled in and deliberated on the question of an early summit. With Kennedy humiliated and likely weakened by the Bay of Pigs incident, Khrushchev felt he had an opportunity to pressure a young, inexperienced, and weak president into giving in to Soviet demands on Berlin. Even if Khrushchev did not end the Western presence in the city, he believed that he could at the very least reach agreement on the creation of a free city in West Berlin, which would end the occupation regime, reduce the stresses that West Berlin put on East Germany, and thereby solidify the East German regime.

In preparing for the meeting, the State Department encouraged Kennedy to downplay the Berlin situation, and focus on pressing the existing American preference of uniting Germany under free elections before concluding a peace treaty. The baseline was to reaffirm the American commitment to the current status of Berlin, including the commitment to use nuclear weapons to defend NATO areas, including Berlin. But the brief was just as concerned with convincing Khrushchev to avoid a crisis, in order to assure progress in disarmament negotiations.\textsuperscript{22} By contrast, though, Kennedy’s ambassador in Moscow Llewellyn Thompson argued that Khrushchev did not want to avoid discussing Berlin, nor did he want to avoid a crisis. Therefore, it was necessary for

\textsuperscript{21} David Reynolds, \textit{Summits: Six Meetings that Shaped the Twentieth Century}. (London: Allen Lane, 2007), 175.

the President not to make any compromises, starting with how he handled Khrushchev in Vienna.\textsuperscript{23}

This advice was similar to what French President de Gaulle told Kennedy during the latter’s main European stop in Paris before the Vienna meeting. De Gaulle once again reiterated his point that the West’s position was sound, and once Khrushchev understood that it would stand firm, he would back down.\textsuperscript{24} De Gaulle continued to believe that Khrushchev did not want war over Berlin, and would back down if he could maintain Soviet prestige. He attempted to bring Kennedy around to that thinking before the American’s meeting with the Soviet leader. As the American Minister in Berlin, Allan Lightner, put it, in the “psychological duel” that was sure to occur in Vienna, Soviet attempts to convince the United States of their own resolve contained a “large element of bluff” that needed to be countered by a tougher American line.\textsuperscript{25}

The two leaders thus went into the Vienna Summit from 3-4 June with diverging agendas. Kennedy hoped to focus on disarmament, Khrushchev on Berlin. As it turned out, Khrushchev scored points, but was not able to gain the victory over Kennedy that he had hoped. Through the two days of discussions, Khrushchev kept bringing the conversation back to Soviet demands for a peace treaty that recognized the division of Germany. As he had since November 1958, he insisted that if the Soviet Union did not get that peace treaty, it would sign one unilaterally with East Germany, and turn over control of the Western occupation of West Berlin to Ulbricht’s government. Kennedy

\textsuperscript{23} Telegram from the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State, 27 May 1961, Ibid, 77.
\textsuperscript{24} Memorandum of Conversation, 31 May 1961, Ibid, 85.
\textsuperscript{25} Telegram From the Mission at Berlin to the Department of State, 25 May 1961, Ibid, 76.
tried to deflect conversation away from an ultimatum, hoping to convince Khrushchev that such a scenario did not benefit either side. In the end, however, he was forced to concede that he had failed to persuade Khrushchev to accept his understanding of the dangers of continued East-West tension, and found himself leaving Vienna under the cloud of a renewed Soviet ultimatum on Berlin.

Kennedy himself realized the need for a tough line, if not by the time he reached Vienna, then at some point during his early discussions with Khrushchev. The first sessions, which were supposed to move from general East-West relations to specific issues such as Laos, quickly devolved into a dispute over ideology, largely at Kennedy’s prompting. Kennedy continued to believe that he could use reason to bring Khrushchev around to an understanding of the American perspective, but found himself only irritating him. In particular, Kennedy insisted on trying to make Khrushchev understand that even small disputes— in the Third World or Berlin— could quickly escalate into general war through miscalculation. His emphasis on the dangers of miscalculation drove the Soviet leader to exclaim that the West had been using that term “far too often,” and that the Soviet Union would not be intimidated into giving in by fear of “miscalculation.”26 In later speaking to his aide Kenneth O’Donnell, Kennedy gave more color to the exchange than the official record, describing how Khrushchev started yelling how everyone in the West used “that damned word, ‘miscalculation,’” so much that he “was sick of it!”27

26 Memorandum of Conversation, 3 June 1961, FRUS 1961-1963, V Soviet Union, 177.
Kennedy found himself somewhat overwhelmed, asking Thompson “Is it always like this?”, and proved unable to win any agreement from Khrushchev on any topics.\textsuperscript{28}

Recognizing that he had been playing Khrushchev’s game the first day, Kennedy decided on the second day to focus the talks on achieving a breakthrough in disarmament talks. It soon became clear, however, that Khrushchev was not interested in compromise. Instead, Khrushchev wanted to talk about Berlin, and Kennedy once again found himself dealing with Khrushchev on the latter’s terms. The Soviet leader repeated his intention to sign a peace treaty with East Germany if a treaty with all of Germany was impossible. When Kennedy asked if such a treaty would block Western access to Berlin, Khrushchev replied that it would.\textsuperscript{29} Realizing the stakes, Kennedy determined not to lose the “psychological duel”. The discussion quickly escalated, becoming even personal. To Kennedy’s claim that the Western occupation rights were an outgrowth of the victory over Germany in 1945, Khrushchev replied that the Soviet Union had lost many more people during the war, including his own son, Foreign Minister Andre Gromyko’s two brothers, and Anastas Mikoyan’s son. Kennedy then responded that he had lost a brother himself, and he insisted that a threat to Berlin was not just about Berlin, but about Western Europe and the United States as well. Khrushchev countered that the United States must want to remain in Berlin in order to unleash a war from the city. He insisted that if a war started over Berlin, it would be the United States’ doing.\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{29} Memorandum of Conversation, 4 June 1961, FRUS 1961-1963, XIV Berlin Crisis, 1961-1962, 91.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid, 88-94.
Although the morning discussion broke up for lunch, the tension did not dissipate, and Kennedy insisted on trying one more time after lunch to convince Khrushchev of the reasonableness of the Western position, but he succeeded only in antagonizing Khrushchev even more. The discussion spiraled out of control, leading to the final exchange in which both sides implicitly threatened war. Khrushchev insisted on a new status for Berlin, while Kennedy accused the Soviets of wanting to force a change to a stable situation. Khrushchev then repeated that if there was a war, it would only be if “the West imposes it on the USSR,” and he reinstated his ultimatum for signing a peace treaty. Now under threat of a December deadline, Kennedy closed the exchange “by observing that it would be a cold winter.”

The Vienna summit left Kennedy reeling. He told New York Times columnist James Reston that it was the “roughest thing in my life.” He was now faced with the prospect of a full-blown Berlin Crisis. Although de Gaulle had assured him that Khrushchev was bluffing, Kennedy feared otherwise, as his “cold winter” comment suggests. Visiting London on the return trip from Vienna, Kennedy discussed with Macmillan the need to prepare for Soviet political and military actions. Yet there seemed to be few, if any, new preparations that the West could make. While Kennedy may have been more open to some concessions at the margins than his predecessor, he was

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31 Ibid, 97-98. There is some dispute as to whether Kennedy actually used those words, but it seems clear that he meant at least the essence of the words. See Smyser, Kennedy and the Berlin Wall, 71.
increasingly concerned about the perception of losing Berlin, just as he had lost in Cuba.\textsuperscript{34}

On returning to the United States on June 6, Kennedy gave a televised speech in which he called his time in Vienna “a very sober 2 days.” In addition, he noted that the “somber mood… demonstrated how much work we in the free world have to do and how long and hard a struggle must be our fate as Americans in this generation as the chief defenders of the cause of liberty.”\textsuperscript{35} Vienna brought home to Kennedy the importance of the Berlin question, and presented him with a new challenge, one that would, in the short-term, eclipse nuclear disarmament, Southeast Asia, and other issues. He also almost immediately began preparing policy for how to react to the renewed Soviet threat in Europe. Fortunately, he was not starting from scratch. Officials in various departments and across countries been working on these issues for years, and Kennedy’s own inclination to reexamine these policies on taking office had led to the decision to commission a report by former Secretary of State Dean Acheson on the Berlin issues. Acheson’s report was largely complete by the time Kennedy returned from Vienna, and before the month was out, Kennedy had it in his hands, ready for discussion.

\textbf{Renewing Contingency Planning}

Kennedy had come in to office hoping that he would have an opportunity to reach some form of détente with Khrushchev. That was his goal in seeking the summit in Vienna, and it was what he hoped to achieve in that summit. Khrushchev’s renewal of his

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid, 100.
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six-month ultimatum at Vienna discouraged Kennedy, and forced him toward a more confrontational policy on Berlin and Germany. Over the next two months, discussions within the administration centered around the ultimate goal of American policy in Europe, and while Kennedy still hoped eventually to reach détente, he increasingly agreed with those advisors who insisted that the only solution to the crisis was to stand up to the Soviets on Berlin.

One of those advisors was Dean Acheson, the master of the Democratic foreign policy establishment. As Truman’s Secretary of State, he had led the United States into the Cold War in the late 1940s and early 1950s, putting himself present at the creation (as he would title his memoirs) of the era. He had remained engaged in foreign policy debates throughout the Eisenhower years, and even harbored the hope of a return to Foggy Bottom with the election of a new Democratic president. Although Kennedy did not grant him State, he did seek his advice on the appointment of Dean Rusk, and then formally sought Acheson’s counsel as a special advisor for NATO and Berlin. Kennedy asked Acheson to compose a report on American interests and goals in Berlin, which Acheson readied by June 1961. Although Acheson’s was not necessarily the advice that Kennedy was looking for in trying to set his own stamp on foreign policy, it was something he could not ignore, especially since Acheson represented a strong element of hard-liners in the government.\(^{36}\) Kennedy at least wanted to get an idea of what these hard-liners thought before he decided on his own policy, since even while Kennedy and

his new team sought to improve relations with the Soviets, other officials continued to focus on ensuring confidence in Germany and Western Europe in the NATO deterrent.37

During Acheson’s time as Secretary of State, one of the most important issues he had dealt with was the decision to re-arm West Germany and thus reintegrate it into Western Europe. From 1950 on, Acheson had played a key role in pushing the Western European allies to accept German rearmament, and believed that West Germany’s eventual accession to NATO was largely his success.38 Thus, when he looked at the problem of Berlin in 1960, he saw it in the context of the German problem. For him, the Soviet moves were an attempt to pressure and divide the West. He believed that the Soviets hoped that the United States would sacrifice Berlin, thus undermining its position in Europe and the Western alliance itself. This outcome would allow the Soviets to solidify the East German regime, and to claim all of Berlin and all of Germany as well. As he put it, Berlin “has become an issue of resolution between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R., the outcome of which will go far to determine the confidence of Europe--indeed, of the world--in the United States.”39 Unlike Kennedy, who was looking for points of common interest with the Soviets, Acheson emphasized the need to stand firm on the differences. Acheson did not reject negotiation, but insisted that negotiations were useless unless the West’s deterrent was credible.

According to Acheson, the only way for the deterrent to remain credible was having the proper military preparations and resources available to back it up. Therefore,

37 Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, 380.
38 Dean Acheson, Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department (New York: Norton, 1969), 650.
much of Acheson’s report centered on the need to be ready to go to war should negotiation and deterrence fail. He insisted that Kennedy had to make a decision soon about his willingness to go to war over Berlin, and once he had made the decision to do so (since, for Acheson, any other decision would mean abandoning Berlin and Europe), to stand by the decision both publicly and to the Soviets. Acheson recognized that this would not be an easy decision, but stated that “the success of the course of action here depends on the existence of a core of hard decision, understood in all its grimness and cost.”

If Kennedy did not come to a decision soon, Western leaders would have to make the decision under the threat of an acute crisis, raising the chances of a war through miscalculation, and making that war more costly through a lack of proper preparation.

Acheson was thus very interested in ensuring the preparation of the contingency plans. He acknowledged the difficulties that the plans created, especially the possibility that they were not militarily viable. But, he argued, they had a value beyond their military role, namely as the ultimate demonstration of Western resolve, especially if they opened the door to the use of nuclear weapons. Here, Acheson drew on Norstad’s concept of the pause (likely unwittingly), by reasoning that a strong probe would provide one to two weeks in which the Soviets would come to understand that the West was serious in its commitment to access to Berlin. With the threat of nuclear attack acting as the final level of deterrence, the Soviets would have the opportunity to seek negotiations, in which the West would have the upper hand.

\[40\] Ibid, 142.
\[41\] Ibid.
\[42\] Ibid, 155.
\[43\] Ibid, 156.
Kennedy received similar advice from another outside source he consulted. At the time of the Berlin Crisis, Henry Kissinger was a young professor at Harvard, and his book on nuclear strategy was a national bestseller. His largest contribution to the administration was in a memorandum he prepared in May outlining his thoughts on the Berlin issue. The similarities of his views to Acheson’s were apparent, as Kissinger called Berlin the “touchstone for the future of the North Atlantic Community.” His focus was on the line from Berlin to Germany to Western Europe, with the expectation that a “defeat over Berlin… would inevitably demoralize the Federal Republic…. All other NATO nations would be bound to draw the indicated conclusions from such a demonstration of the West’s impotence.”

The only way to deal with the Berlin Crisis was to convey full determination not to give in on Western rights.

Kissinger had no doubt about the role of the deterrent in showing such full determination. If the Soviets continued to seek a unilateral solution to the Berlin problem, the West would have to make the risks, namely nuclear war, obvious and “must be prepared to face a showdown.” Kissinger called for a clear policy position on this issue. He argued that if the West made it plain before the Soviets took action that any action against Western rights in Berlin would bring retaliation against the Soviet nuclear force, then it was more likely that they would back down rather than risk war. Although Kissinger’s main argument would involve the strategic questions surrounding Berlin (and he would in fact find little influence in the Kennedy administration), his perspective on

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44 “Memorandum for the President, Subject: Berlin”, 5 May 1961, folder Germany - Berlin, General, Kissinger Report 5/5/61, NSF, Countries, Germany, Box 81 (JFKL), 1.
46 Ibid, 27.
the larger political issues aligned closely with what Kennedy was hearing from Acheson and others.47

There were those close to Kennedy who disagreed with Acheson’s viewpoint, however. Special Assistant Arthur Schlesinger in particular believed that Acheson avoided many issues involved in Berlin, chief among these the political moves the West could take in regard to the Soviets before the Soviets acted. Schlesinger argued that the United States and its allies had alternatives to simply standing firm on their position as Acheson recommended. Instead, they should look at other options for a settlement in Germany, possibly framed around negotiation in an all-European setting.48 While this approach fit with Kennedy’s earlier goals in East-West affairs, they did not quite suit the reality that Kennedy perceived coming out of his experience in Vienna.

Immediately after his return from Vienna, Kennedy met with the Congressional leadership to brief them on the results. Kennedy reported his judgment that Khrushchev no longer feared the American nuclear deterrent, since “there is a balance in the nuclear field which prevents us from using nuclear weapons for local purposes” as in Berlin.49 Khrushchev’s belief was making him more aggressive, which would make it difficult, if not impossible, to achieve a new détente. Kennedy, therefore, was already inclined to stand firm on Berlin, and his views were focusing more on the German problem that Acheson and Kissinger emphasized than on the relationship with the Soviets that the

48 “Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant (Schlesinger) to President Kennedy”, 7 July 1961, FRUS 1961-1963, XIV Berlin Crisis, 1961-1962, 174-75.
President had earlier prioritized, and that officials such as Schlesinger called for. By the summer, Kennedy had clearly chosen sides in favor of a more confrontational policy.

Although Kennedy’s instincts and desires had initially pushed him to seek a better relationship with the Soviet Union, he found himself increasingly advised to remain firm on Berlin, even at the expense of his larger goal. While not all of the counsel he received inclined in that direction, events – in particular Khrushchev’s actions in Vienna and after – forced Kennedy to accept the need to take a firm line over Berlin, with the hope that once the crisis had passed, he would be able to resume a foreign policy focused on the Soviet Union, rather than Germany. Thus when the Kennedy administration looked at how the West would stand firm in Berlin, it did so from a Germany-centered perspective.

In essence, Acheson’s report called for a continuation of the West’s policies under Eisenhower, with flexible contingency plans, and contingency planning once again became a priority. LIVE OAK plans were in place, but there was a desire to reevaluate options, especially since there were still questions about the details of the measures. After the lull in the wake of the Paris Summit, LIVE OAK was back in the center of discussion over Berlin, and controversies that Norstad and other officials had thought were behind them turned out not to be. As in 1960, the disagreement centered on the level of conventional action that the allies would take in the event of the Soviets cutting off their access, before they would have to reach a decision on using nuclear weapons. Under Kennedy, however, this disagreement would deepen, as the new administration tried to turn American and NATO strategy in a new direction.
For Kennedy and his advisors, the point of reopening contingency planning, even before Vienna, was not to pull back from the plans already made, but to push those plans further. Norstad, among others, was indeed frustrated by the unwillingness of both the British and the French to move forward on the planning. What they found instead was the expectation that, should the access situation come to a real crisis point, the United States would fall back on nuclear deterrence rather than take the risk of a fight breaking out while trying to gain access. It was this ambiguity in contingency planning that Acheson and Kissinger were pointing to when they highlighted the need for an early decision on taking action in the face of the Soviet challenge to Western access. The basic question was whether the West would rely on the nuclear deterrent – as had been the idea before LIVE OAK put together its plans – or if the Allies would undertake a strong probe, beyond just an initial test of the Soviet obstruction, involving larger conventional units.

The problem that faced Kennedy had not changed from its first appearance under Eisenhower, and State Department officials brought it to the President in stark terms. Without definite plans in place to deal with every contingency, they feared, the West might find itself in a confrontation that “has somewhat inelegantly been described as a matter of ‘who would chicken-out first.’” Fearing that the Soviets questioned the West’s resolve to use nuclear weapons, the State Department argued for the need for using conventional means, but recognized that few experts questioned whether the Soviets

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50 They also looked to expand LIVE OAK by including West Germany in the formal planning and increasing NATO consultation. “Memorandum of Conversation, 15 April 1961, FRUS 1961-1963, XIV Berlin Crisis, 1961-1962, 54.
could prevail in a conventional conflict.\textsuperscript{52} But without those conventional steps, there was a growing recognition, at least among American officials, that the nuclear deterrent would be worthless. In response to a Defense Department paper that largely ignored conventional means of deterrence, Henry Owen of the National Security Council argued that Khrushchev “does not believe that the West would wage nuclear war over Berlin,” and that the only way to change that view would be “evidence that the U.S. was planning substantial use of non-nuclear force to reopen ground access to Berlin.”\textsuperscript{53} McNamara echoed these sentiments, arguing that existing national security policy on Berlin was out of date and did “not reflect new developments in U.S. strategic thinking,” specifically “the use of substantial conventional force before considering resort to nuclear weapons and other general war measures.”\textsuperscript{54}

Thus, the Kennedy administration pushed to increase the strength and effectiveness of NATO’s conventional deterrent. Although Kennedy did not jump right to Flexible Response, one if his first priorities for contingency planning was to put in place as many conventional steps in the escalation, in order to raise the threshold of the nuclear response. For Kennedy, that meant having a completely clear idea of what was involved in the contingency plans, and completely clear agreement with the allies, increasingly including West Germany, about those plans. As he told Adenauer in April, he wanted to be sure that “each country… understands its duty to be in concerted action, so that it will

\textsuperscript{52} "The Problem of Berlin", 5.
\textsuperscript{53} Memorandum, Subject: Berlin and Conventional Forces, 17 May 1961, folder Germany - Berlin, General, 5/61, NSF, Countries, Germany, Box 81 (JFKL), 2.
\textsuperscript{54} Memorandum for the President, Subj.: Military Planning for a Possible Berlin Crisis, 5 May 1961, folder Germany - Berlin, General, Report by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Part I, 5/5/61, NSF, Countries, Germany, Box 81 (JFKL), 1-2.
be possible to know exactly how each country is going to respond to the pressures that might arise.” That goal included the American desire to strengthen the military probes.55

Kennedy had talked about an increase in conventional forces during his election campaign. The impetus clearly came from the growing sense of vulnerability to the deterrent that the new Soviet strategic power caused. Even though Kennedy knew by the time he assumed office that the United States still had an overwhelming advantage in nuclear weapons, the mounting ability of the Soviets to threaten not only Europe but the American mainland made apparent the need for a new deterrent. Thus, the Kennedy administration emphasized from the start the “possibility of developing and strengthening deterrents other than the pure threat of ultimate thermonuclear war.”56 By May, the fundamentals of the Eisenhower strategy were inconsistent with the thinking in the Kennedy administration. Secretary of Defense McNamara began a restatement of American strategy, especially regarding Berlin contingency planning.57

The process of coming up with that new policy began shortly after Kennedy’s return from Vienna. In National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) 58, Kennedy instructed the Secretaries of Defense, State, and Treasury to “prepare recommendations to be taken to create a capability for… large scale non-nuclear ground action within four months of such time after October 15 as it may be ordered--with tactical air support, as necessary--assuming appropriate use of forces in Europe and assuming reinforcement from the US as necessary to permit the use of two, four, six, and twelve divisions in

55 “Memorandum of Conversation, Subject: Berlin Contingency Planning and Related Matters”, 13 April 1961, folder Germany - Berlin, General, 4/61, NSF, Countries, Germany, Box 81 (JFKL), 1, 2.
57 “Memorandum from Secretary of Defense McNamara to President Kennedy”, 5 May 1961, Ibid, 62.
The goal was to “achieve (i) maximum deterrent effect with respect to the Soviets, and (ii) the agreement and maximum cooperation of our Allies.” The decision to formally seek a new strategy – one similar to Taylor’s Flexible Response – represented an acknowledgement that Massive Retaliation was no longer viable in the Berlin situation, and that there needed to be new ways to control both the military and the political stakes involved in a confrontation over the city.

The problem then was how to control the escalation. Here, the Americans drew on what they were hearing from their British counterparts, even while the British continued to believe that Kennedy was risking deterrence by subscribing to the LIVE OAK probe plans. The British had always favored a path of graduated escalation of Western responses to belligerent Soviet actions, although on a lower level than what LIVE OAK proposed. Essentially, British planners wanted to see the escalation proceed through Western steps, up to the final preparations within NATO for general war, before considering whether to send the probes. The Americans, on the other hand, saw the probes as part of the escalation, as an intermediate step between diplomatic protests, economic countermeasures, and full-scale nuclear war. From the American perspective, the “key doctrine of the Kennedy Administration, one preached… by Bob McNamara, [Assistant Secretary of Defense] Paul Nitze and voiced by the President himself, is… of avoiding ‘automatic escalation’ of trouble.”

59 Ibid, 164.
60 “Berlin Contingency Planning and Military Staff Talks”, folder Berlin Contingency Planning: Possible Quadripartite military staff talks , 23 June 1961, FO 371/160487 (UKNA), 1.
61 “Memo for the President”, 19 June 1961, folder Germany - Berlin, General, 6/17/61-6/22/61, NSF, 187
similarities to British thinking and the misunderstandings between the two countries, and that they would have to acknowledge to the British that the two allies were in agreement, while at the same time convincing them that they were not looking to downplay the nuclear role in deterrence.\textsuperscript{62}

The American government was thus settling into a better idea of where it wanted to take contingency planning, drawing on Norstad’s earlier work in LIVE OAK, but expanding on it based on Bowie’s and Taylor’s recommendations and the new understanding of what would retain the credibility of the Western deterrent. At the same time, the administration sought to ensure that it could bring its allies along with it. American officials knew that they would face disagreement over the new policy, and that they would have to convince their partners of its credibility, starting with its effectiveness in Berlin contingency plans. But they were determined to get a more flexible and graduated strategy put into place, and were willing to drag their allies along if necessary. As the renewed contingency planning gained steam, American officials on both sides of the Atlantic pushed hard to get their allies to agree to Flexible Response, with little more than limited success at first.

**Renewing Contingency Planning with the Allies**

Unfortunately, while there was considerable Anglo-American accord on escalation, much of the rest of the Alliance would clearly regard the shift away from Massive Retaliation with suspicion. The French remained wedded to the idea of the *force de frappe*, and believed that their independent nuclear force, just coming into play by

\begin{flushleft}
Countries, Germany, Box 81A (JFKL), 2.  
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid, 5.
\end{flushleft}
1961, would enhance the West’s nuclear deterrent by introducing another element of uncertainty into Soviet minds. They especially had strong support from the West Germans, who remained concerned that more conventional arms would only weaken deterrence and open the door to a destructive conventional war on German territory.\textsuperscript{63} American officials recognized these doubts, but believed that they could overcome them by convincing the allies to “follow the leader” towards their own best interests.\textsuperscript{64}

In the meantime, however, contingency planning would resume with a new focus on adding conventional steps to the escalation, in order to gain increased control over that escalation. General Norstad was of course central to this process, and he sought a stronger connection between the political and the military sides of contingency planning, something that the British and the French had been delaying since the completion of the first sets of plans in 1959. While not in complete agreement with the move towards a conventional buildup that was already appearing in the new administration,\textsuperscript{65} Norstad argued for ways that would benefit existing deterrence “by conveying to the Soviet the impression of calm, deliberate preparation for a serious response,” while simultaneously leaving the West “at all times in a position of flexibility.”\textsuperscript{66} Norstad’s emphasis on flexibility, already seen in LIVE OAK’s work, played into the Kennedy administration’s argument for a stronger conventional force, and provided it with leverage to confront supporters of Massive Retaliation.

\textsuperscript{63} Duffield, \textit{Power Rules}, 156-57.
\textsuperscript{65} Norstad’s disagreements with the Kennedy administration on strategy will be covered in a later chapter.
\textsuperscript{66} “Telegram from the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (Norstad) to the Joint Chiefs of Staff”, 27 June 1961, FRUS 1961-1963, XIV Berlin Crisis, 1961-1962, 137.
It was not long after Kennedy took office that the main disagreement came to light. The problem revolved around the implementation of the More Elaborate Military Measures paper. This paper had put in place the plan to launch a larger probe towards Berlin, with the possibility of using units as large as a division. Norstad hoped that his main ground commander, British general James Cassels, would quickly implement the measures in the paper, including preparations such as training the units that would be involved. However, he found resistance from Cassels, and from Cassels’ superiors in the British Chiefs of Staff Committee and in Whitehall.

In its early briefing papers, the State Department indicated that it was clear the British in particular were looking to reopen contingency planning issues, despite the existence of well articulated plans. The British did in fact have this desire, seeing the advent of the new administration as an opportunity to get their voice heard on contingency planning. The Chiefs of Staff continued to view the More Elaborate Military Measures contingency, in particular, as “dangerous military nonsense”, and hoped that by avoiding the issue of detailed plans for the large scale-probe (now code-named TRADE WIND), they could get the Americans to drop the very idea.

The British remained concerned that such a large operation was suicidal to the military units involved and served no military or political purpose. They believed that, should the Soviets force back an initial probe, the allies should instead concentrate on

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keeping the Berlin garrisons supplied by an airlift, while putting the entire NATO alliance on a full war alert status. They thus remained wedded to, yet fearful of, the nuclear deterrent, hoping that during the delay the NATO buildup would provide, the threat of nuclear war would lead the Soviets to seek negotiation rather than push the Berlin issue further. This outlook frustrated Norstad and his advisors, and presented the new Kennedy administration with a problem in contingency planning that would plague their efforts to craft clear policy, especially once the new ultimatum came up.

But British officials were wary about pressing the Americans on the point, fearing a repeat of their experience under the Eisenhower administration, where their efforts in LIVE OAK were seen as evidence of weak resolve on the contingency plan issue. Instead, they tended to avoid the very philosophy of contingency planning, refusing to commit to actually putting the plans into force unless it became absolutely necessary. Instead, they knew that the Americans would not just drop the plans for a probe, and that their avoidance of the issue was complicating their relationship with the United States. The British, as a result, equivocated on contingency planning, hoping that somehow things would turn their way. Instead, that equivocation came across to their American counterparts as a desire to reopen contingency planning, something that was also on their minds as they took office.

71 Berlin, Berlin Contingency Planning: Detailed Paper attaching Foreign Secretary’s comments, 30 May 1961, FO 371/160486 (UKNA), 4-5.
The French also harbored doubts about the current LIVE OAK plans. In general, the French took less of an interest in contingency planning than their Anglo-American counterparts. They had to be convinced to join LIVE OAK in the first place, they did not take the actual process as seriously as the British and Americans did. However, they agreed to the plans LIVE OAK drew up, and so were just as committed to their implementation. By 1961, though, they were looking at ways of getting out of those commitments, especially those associated with the More Elaborate Military Measures paper. The possibilities included abandoning the operation entirely, with the argument that it was not militarily effective, or accepting the military plan but delaying acceptance of the political aspects, thus not committing to French participation. While the French did not take any of these more drastic steps, preferring to maintain the tripartite links, it is clear that they too were uncertain about the role of contingency planning in the current situation.

Contingency planning did move forward, as a result, but not as quickly as the Americans likely would have preferred. Yet because LIVE OAK had already laid the groundwork for the types of changes in strategy that the new administration was making, supporters of a more flexible approach were making progress. Kennedy may have hoped early on that getting contingency planning in line would help him in his pursuit of détente, but after Vienna it was clear that its focus would have to remain on maintaining the position in Berlin, and thus ensuring the security of West Germany and Western Europe. Whether the contingency plans would have succeeded in deterring Soviet

aggression before the conflict went nuclear is impossible to know, but at least in the Americans’ minds, the further development of the plans went far in enhancing the deterrent with a new focus on conventional forces in addition to nuclear ones. Whether they could translate this modest success into a larger success in NATO remained to be seen.

That same April, the Kennedy administration made clear to its NATO allies that conventional forces were going to gain in importance. In a presentation to the North Atlantic Council on 26 April, U.S. Permanent Representative Thomas Finletter outlined the new strategy. The United States was now looking for “balanced forces” in NATO, meaning that conventional forces would be getting higher priority than they had before. The goal was to “be able to force a pause in the event of a substantial Soviet conventional aggression, and to prevent any Soviet miscalculation of our intentions.” Finletter assured the Council that this approach “should not require any revision of the political directive or the strategic concept,” but rather should reinterpret these documents in support of this approach, “along the lines that SACEUR [Norstad] has been developing.”

The American emphasis on new conventional forces did not make an immediate impact on the NATO members. In a NAC ministers meeting in May, German Foreign Minister von Brentano focused on the American commitment to keep (not increase) forces in Europe. He also welcomed the continued commitment to order the use of nuclear weapons, not only in response to Soviet nuclear attack, but “if the NATO forces

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75 Statement made by the United States Permanent Representative…”, 28 April 1961 (NA), 2.
were faced with a non-nuclear attack they were unable to repel.”

While a few other members agreed with the general idea of strengthening NATO conventional forces, there were no specifics, and few NATO countries seem to have given much thought to the American proposal. Whether they discounted it or believed that they could ignore it as one more call for them to pick up more of the burden is unclear, but it was clearly not same priority.

One of the focuses for this conventional increase was in the probe envisioned in the More Elaborate Military Measures paper. In its original conception, the probe topped out at a brigade size, out of deference to British concerns about the military value of the probe itself. But Norstad had always intended there to be a probe at the division level, and much of his pressure on Cassels to put together the details of TRADE WIND revolved around training a division-sized force for probing the Autobahn. Coming in, Kennedy assumed that, if the Allies were going to make a military challenge to a blockade, it would have to be at the level of a division. Thus, his expectation was that if LIVE OAK needed more conventional strength, it would start at a division and increase from there. Among his advisors there was concern that a force smaller than a division would not be able to stand up to even East German forces, which would undermine the point of determination that the West was trying to make. Contrary to British fears, they believed that a division would be able to make military progress without prompting a nuclear response from the Soviets. In fact, they were thinking beyond a division by this

77 “Memorandum for the President, Subj.: Military Planning for a Possible Berlin Crisis”, 5 May 1961, folder Germany - Berlin, General, Report by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Part I, 5/5/61, NSF, Countries, Germany, Box 81 (JFKL), 7-8.
point, wanting to reinforce the probe with a second division in reserve, in case the first
division found itself caught in a heavy firefight.

Unfortunately, a force of such size created problems for NATO. The conventional
forces were so thin in Europe that shifting American, British, and French forces from
their peacetime stations to the land routes to Berlin would significantly weaken the
NATO Shield, possibly inviting Soviet action elsewhere that would precipitate general
war.78 Some State Department officials downplayed these concerns, pointing out that the
strength of the Shield was increasing, especially with the appearance of new West
German divisions, thus allowing NATO to contribute to “providing an alternative of
some degree of non-nuclear conflict.”79 Still, Kennedy recognized that there would be a
need for more conventional forces in Europe, and that the United States would probably
have to take the lead in providing those forces.80

The decision to strengthen the conventional Shield in Europe had profound
implications for NATO’s strategy, and the Kennedy administration recognized that the
Massive Retaliation of Eisenhower’s time would have to give way to a more flexible
strategy. At its core, this shift was based on the belief that Khrushchev and the Soviet
leadership no longer believed that the United States would use nuclear weapons to defend
the Western position in Berlin, thus all but eliminating the deterrent effect of those
weapons. Instead, officials argued that the West could continue to deter Khrushchev with
“evidence that the U.S. was planning substantial use of non-nuclear force to reopen

Soviet attack on Hamburg was usually the scenario that critics cited.
79 Memorandum for the President, Subj.: Military Planning for a Possible Berlin Crisis, 5 May 1961, 19.
80 Memorandum from Secretary of Defense McNamara to President Kennedy, 5 May 1961, FRUS 1961-
ground access to Berlin. Khrushchev would be the first to realize how quickly large scale-ground fighting in the heart of Europe could escalate into nuclear conflict.” Like Bowie and Norstad at the end of the Eisenhower administration, American officials, soon right up to Kennedy himself, saw the expansion of conventional deterrence as a supplement to, not a detraction from, nuclear deterrence.

The White House, not the NAC, decided to increase the size of NATO’s Shield. Kennedy had decided that the situation demanded action before consultation. On July 17, he authorized his staff to begin work on a request to Congress for an additional $4.3 billion in defense spending, including the possible addition of 64,000 U.S. troops to NATO forces in Europe. The United States would ask its allies to increase their own contributions to Shield forces, with the aim that “by January 1, 1962, NATO would be prepared to launch non-nuclear warfare on a scale which would indicate our determination and which would provide some additional time for negotiation before resorting to nuclear warfare.” Getting NATO on board would be difficult, but necessary, since Kennedy’s military advisors told him straight out that a U.S. buildup would not be enough to effectively meet that goal of launching non-nuclear warfare. Kennedy would thus have to initiate a campaign to convince the American public, the Allies, and even some members of his own administration that a new strategy based on Flexible Response was not only wise, but necessary.

81 “Memorandum, Subject: Berlin and Conventional Forces”, 17 May 1961, folder Germany - Berlin, General, 5/61, NSF, Countries, Germany, Box 81 (JFKL), 2.
84 Ibid, 216.
Kennedy goes on TV

Kennedy’s experience with Khrushchev in Vienna marked a significant turning point in his thinking on the Berlin Crisis. Before Vienna, he had been most concerned with improving relations with the Soviets overall, hopeful that issues such as disarmament, Berlin, and German reunification would eventually fall into place. The confrontation with Khrushchev had left him shaken, and convinced that Khrushchev saw him as weak and would thus press his advantage in Berlin to score a victory over the West. On his return to Washington, Kennedy resolved to show that he was not weak, and that Khrushchev could not push him or the West on Berlin and score that victory. As a result, Kennedy was clearly more focused on issues of deterrence rather than détente in the summer of 1961, from reopening contingency planning to restructuring American strategy around a more flexible, and hopefully more credible, deterrent.

Kennedy knew, however, that he could not unilaterally change NATO doctrine. Not only was the Strategic Concept just three years old, but most NATO allies still saw it as the best guarantor of peace and security in Europe. The new American stance did not run contrary to the Strategic Concept, but it was a significant shift, and one that would have profound repercussions on the Alliance. If the Allies saw the new strategy as diminishing the nuclear role in deterrence, their faith in American credibility, especially in situations like Berlin, would diminish, weakening NATO’s ability to maintain cohesion and containment.85 Kennedy would have to convince the Europeans to agree that increasing conventional strength would increase overall deterrence, and would also

85 “Nuclear Weapons and Berlin”, 20 July 1961, folder Germany - Berlin, General, 7/19/61-7/22/61, NSF, Countries, Germany, Box 81A (JFKL), 1-2.
have to convince them to contribute to that larger conventional force, since he knew that the American increase would not be enough to fulfill the terms of the new direction in strategy. But as officials noted, “Berlin presents an opportunity for progress toward our long-term military goals.”

July 1961 opened up a long campaign through which the Kennedy administration (as well as the succeeding Johnson administration) undertook to pull NATO towards Flexible Response, to ensure that the new strategy was not a unilateral American concept.

But in July 1961, Kennedy chose to start that campaign unilaterally, and made the decision to increase defense spending and reinforce American units in Europe with little consultation with the allies. In fact, there was a fear that if the United States simply asked its NATO friends for more troops, they would refuse, thus undercutting the whole buildup itself. Therefore, Kennedy and his advisors opted to make the first move, and then look to bring the rest of the Alliance along. The United States had told the Allies in April that deterrence required a strong conventional capability, but European officials were unsure of the details, including the desire to raise the actual manpower numbers.

Kennedy unveiled those details in a televised speech on July 25. After explaining the basics of the Berlin situation, he explained the significance of Berlin in terms that would have sounded familiar to Dean Acheson: “West Berlin… has now become – as never before – the great testing place of Western courage and will, a focal point where our solemn commitments stretching back over the years since 1945, and Soviet ambitions

87 “Memorandum for the President, Subject: This Afternoon’s Meetings”, 19 July 1961, Ibid, 1.
now meet in basic confrontation." Finally, he made the point that while some claim that Berlin is militarily untenable, so were Stalingrad and Bastogne.

Kennedy then introduced his proposal to increase American forces in Europe, noting how this move was part of the larger buildup in strength that he had promised since the first days of his term. After detailing some of the actions, he stated that they would meet the West’s need for “the capability of placing in any critical area at the appropriate time a force which… is large enough to make clear our determination and our ability to defend our rights at all costs…. We intend to have a wider choice than humiliation or all-out nuclear action.” After covering a new civil defense initiative, Kennedy ended his proposals by affirming American desires to seek a negotiated solution with the Soviet Union.

The European allies had mixed reactions to Kennedy’s proposals. Generally, there were objections to the plan, even after Kennedy sent letters to de Gaulle, Macmillan, and Adenauer explaining his rationale and Rusk personally discussed the measures with both his quadripartite and NATO counterparts in early August. The British were most understanding of Kennedy’s ideas, seeing them as an attempt to find a reasonable means to discourage any dangerous Soviet military adventures if they failed to produce a negotiated settlement. Macmillan, though, still worried that the tone would sound too

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belligerent and would raise tensions more than reduce them.\textsuperscript{93} In early August, the cabinet agreed to shift units from Hong Kong and the British mainland to the British Army of the Rhine.\textsuperscript{94} However, the British were not willing to increase their own military position in Europe more substantially, arguing that they could not maintain even a modest increase in the size of the BAOR. Only if the Berlin situation deteriorated were the British willing to make any further manpower commitments.\textsuperscript{95}

The smaller NATO countries were less inclined to follow the American lead. They felt that the United States had not properly consulted them before making the decision, and that it was not in line with agreed allied strategy or methods. At his meeting with the North Atlantic Council on 8 August, Rusk found an unreceptive audience, as members pushed for increased consultation on the Berlin plans. There was some general agreement with Rusk’s speech, but most of it focused on the need for negotiations with the Soviets, rather than on specific steps countries would take to meet the American proposal for increased conventional strength. Some members criticized the idea, noting that it could lead to a Soviet counter-buildup in response, which would only increase tensions, rather than open the door to negotiations.\textsuperscript{96} NATO continued to maintain surface unity, but cracks were beginning to show between the American and European sides.

By August 1961, the West found itself in a situation very similar to that of November 1958. Berlin was still divided, but increasing numbers of East German

\begin{footnotes}
\item[94] Military measures to meet the Berlin situation, 3 August 1961, FO 371/160488 (UKNA), 1.
\item[95] Berlin Contingency Planning: Negotiations…., 1.
\item[96] Berlin Contingency Planning: Mr. Rusk’s statement to the NAC, 8 August 1961, FO 371/160488 (UKNA), 1-2.
\end{footnotes}
refugees were crossing the dividing line into West Germany. There was a new Soviet ultimatum on the table, and the threat of war following the deadline once again hung in the air. The Allies were prepared for war, but few leaders actually believed that it would come to that, and fewer still believed that it would go nuclear. But whatever path the Crisis took, the outcome was still unknown, and the best that the Allies could hope for seemed to be maintenance of the status quo, even after the ultimatum expired.

There were differences, though, from the 1958 situation. The strategic situation seemed to have tilted towards the Soviets, even if one did not take the calls of a missile gap seriously. That new strategic situation made the reliance on nuclear weapons for deterrence and defense more precarious, resulting in questions about Western strategy. There was a new president in office in Washington, one who seemed to have different ideas about confronting that changed strategic situation, with an emphasis on reducing Cold War tensions to limit the need for nuclear deterrence and defense.

Yet even with this emphasis on what would become known as détente, Kennedy found himself having to rely on a strong deterrence position in order to keep the Berlin Crisis from exploding. At the end of his speech on 25 July, his language took on a tone of anti-appeasement: “If we do not meet our commitments to Berlin, where will we stand? If we are not true to our word there, all that we have achieved in collective security, which relies on those words, will mean nothing. And if there is one path above all others to war, it is the path of weakness and disunity.”

The echoes of the Munich Conference reverberated, and Kennedy was clearly looking to make sure that his own attempt at

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97 “Radio and Television Report to the American People on the Berlin Crisis”, 539.
negotiation in Vienna did not result in even the appearance of a Munich-like appeasement.

Conclusion

Although the introduction of a new American president was the only significant change to the situation, the Berlin Crisis opened a new phase in the early months of 1961. Khrushchev had put the crisis on hold after Paris in anticipation of the new administration, and there was little reason to suspect that he would let the Berlin question drop without challenging the fresh American president. At first, Kennedy did not appear to be up the challenge, especially after the Bay of Pigs fiasco weakened his foreign policy position. The decision to meet with Khrushchev at the Vienna Summit therefore carried with it considerable risk, particularly since Khrushchev paid such close attention to the idea of prestige on the international stage.

The results from Vienna were mixed for Kennedy. Although he had not backed down in the face of Khrushchev’s verbal assault, his attempt to bring his Soviet counterpart around to a notion of a stable and divided Cold War world opened the door to Khrushchev’s renewed ultimatum on Berlin. Although Kennedy came into office seeking a new approach to the Cold War in Europe, one based on coming to a grand settlement with the Soviets that would eventually include Berlin and Germany, after Vienna he found himself having to base his European policy on the defense of Berlin and Germany first and foremost. This attitude meant relying on deterrence before détente, which meant assuring that the deterrent remained credible not only to the Soviets, but to the allies as well.
The administration had already been reexamining some of the issues behind the existing policies and strategies, with an eye towards introducing changes and new initiatives that officials hoped might make the deterrent more credible and reduce the danger of nuclear war. On the one hand, their conclusions led them back to the basics of Eisenhower’s Berlin and Germany policies, especially the need to stand firm in the face of Soviet threats to Western rights in Berlin. On the other hand, their conclusions led them away from the basics of Eisenhower’s nuclear strategy, namely Massive Retaliation, as no longer a sufficient deterrent.

Kennedy and his advisors operated under this perception, and it drove their Berlin policy, even before Vienna. Under the influence of Taylor, Acheson, Kissinger, and others, Kennedy, Rusk, McNamara, and Bundy moved towards the enhancement of conventional deterrence, not at the expense of nuclear deterrence, but as a supplement to it. They were convinced that the only way to keep the West’s commitment in Berlin, Germany, and Europe credible was to introduce more control over the escalation of a conflict, by showing determination through conventional means and raising the threshold of nuclear war. By August, this strategy was coming into action through Kennedy’s decision to increase the size of the American conventional force in Europe, and the expectation that NATO would follow suit.

These changes had an impact on the West’s contingency planning as well. Although Kennedy’s plans fit fairly well with the existing LIVE OAK plans, and were in some ways an expansion on them, they did not fully find favor in allied militaries or governments. In fact, the British were looking to scale back LIVE OAK plans, and even
the French were having their doubts about the land probe. Kennedy, however, was
determined to make sure that there were clear understandings about the steps the Allies
would take in the event of a conflict over Berlin access, and so the Americans continued
to push LIVE OAK and wider contingency planning. By August, there was a larger
agreement that LIVE OAK would need to coordinate more closely with NATO, leading
to a decision to move the operation under SHAPE authority, so that Norstad’s position
between NATO and tripartite responsibilities would be clearer.  

The Soviets, though, still held the initiative on Berlin, and Khrushchev was
apparently not intimidated by Kennedy’s tough talk and military buildup. The Soviets
had lived under strategic inferiority for the entire Cold War, and Khrushchev was much
more concerned with the United States’ nuclear forces than its conventional ones. In
Khrushchev’s eyes, these forces would be useless, since they would only serve to
entangle the United States in nuclear war if Kennedy used them in Berlin. Since he did
not believe that Kennedy would be willing to risk a nuclear war, he did not believe that
the conventional buildup was important. Instead, Khrushchev saw Kennedy’s actions
as a response to the President’s weakness in the face of hardliners in the Pentagon, and he
had some room to act in Berlin without Kennedy being able to respond. This
interpretation fit with the East German perspective, which was increasingly wary of

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98 Berlin Contingency Planning: The Western position after the political programme - …, 3 August 1961,
FO 371/160488 (UKNA), 1-2.
99 Zubok, A Failed Empire, 140.
100 Fursenko and Naftali, Khrushchev’s Cold War, 357.
Khrushchev’s hollow brinksmanship and looking to take more initiative on the Berlin issue.¹⁰¹

By August, it was evident that the Soviets would have to respond not only to Kennedy’s actions in reply to the new ultimatum, but also to the deteriorating situation in East Berlin and East Germany. Although Khrushchev had timed his ultimatum for the end of 1961 – and few Western officials expected him to act before September’s West German elections and October’s Communist Party Congress – there was increasing pressure on him from various sides to act before then. The decision he made, just weeks after Kennedy’s speech, in response to those pressures changed not only the Berlin Crisis, but the entire nature of the Cold War going forward.

¹⁰¹ Zubok, A Failed Empire, 140-41.
Early in the morning on 13 August 1961, William Smyser, a young diplomatic staff in the American mission in Berlin, received a phone call that something was going on in East Berlin. Accompanied by an officemate, he set off in his convertible to get a first-hand look. What they saw was East German police and militia stringing barbed wire across the streets that linked the eastern and western parts of the city. After arguing their way past the guards, they drove around East Berlin recording the East Germans cutting off dozens of other streets. They also found the elevated and subway train stations packed with East Germans desperate to flee the city before the authorities prevented them. By that time, however, the police had shut down the trains, leaving the thwarted refugees sitting on their possessions and weeping uncontrollably. The two Americans, on the other hand, could return to West Berlin, although they had to maneuver around growing crowds, police and military vehicles, and water cannon-armed trucks at the crossing point. West Berlin was being cut off.¹

The Berlin Crisis reached its height in the fall of 1961. From its start in November 1958 through that point, the crisis had essentially followed a pattern: Khrushchev raised the stakes with an ultimatum or threat, the West responded and pushed for negotiations, those negotiations stalled or failed, and the situation settled down. Within the Western

¹ Smyser, Kennedy and the Berlin Wall, 101-03.
community, the Berlin effort had largely developed through the preparations for the various negotiations and the contingency planning. The West would remain determined in its objective of retaining access to West Berlin, and would be prepared to meet Soviet actions to restrict that access with diplomatic, economic, or military means. Although Kennedy’s shift to flexibility and stronger conventional forces upset some of the thinking about those means, the underlying policies did not change very much.

The appearance of a wall dividing Berlin threatened to disturb those patterns. Between August and October, the world watched as the United States and the Soviet Union faced off across a new Cold War barrier, the Berlin Wall. The Wall was partially Khrushchev’s response to Kennedy’s conventional buildup at the end of July. However, as Hope Harrison has clearly shown, Khrushchev was not the dominant actor in the decision to raise the Wall, but rather acquiesced in a decision by East German leader Walter Ulbricht, who regarded the Wall as the first step to resolving East Germany’s political and economic difficulties. The most pressing of these difficulties was the refugee problem, which reached its height in the summer of 1961 as thousands of East Germans reacted to the increased tensions by fleeing westward. But Ulbricht also saw the Wall as a way to assert East German primacy in Berlin and to increase the pressure on the West to accept East German sovereignty over all of Berlin.

In Ulbricht’s scenario, the building of the Wall was merely a precursor to the Soviet peace treaty, which would hand over control of Berlin’s access to East Germany, forcing either a Western recognition of East Germany, or a confrontation possibly leading to war. It appears, however, that only Ulbricht regarded the Wall in this manner.
Khrushchev was still willing to keep the peace treaty and the ultimatum on the table, but was growing concerned that the United States and the West were not buckling under the pressure, and that Ulbricht’s path might lead to war. He thus slowly backed away from confrontation over Berlin, just as he had in 1959-60.

Leaders in the West likewise did not see events moving from the Wall to a peace treaty to confrontation, although they realized that that possibility might exist. Instead, they saw the Wall as Khrushchev’s admission that his pressure on Berlin was not working in the face of their steadfast policy. Thus Western officials decided not to relax on Berlin. Nor did they believe that they had won the issue and the crisis would now pass. While there was a sense of relief across Western governments, there was also a sense of renewed crisis, accompanied by fears that acceptance of the Wall would undermine the confidence of the West Berliners and of the West Germans. Some circles also saw the Wall as a challenge to the Western position in Europe, and looked for ways to tear it down. Others feared that an assault against the Wall might be the spark that ignited the war the West was trying so hard to avoid.

Those fears spiked in October, when a minor confrontation between an American official and East German guards swiftly expanded to a stand-off between Soviet and American tanks across the dividing line at the Checkpoint Charlie crossing point. Most observers predicted that one wrong move by anyone on either side would spark a fight between the two forces that could rapidly spiral into general war. Recent research has shown that both Kennedy and Khrushchev were in close control of their forces at the checkpoint, and both worked hard to ensure that the standoff ended quickly and
peacefully. But in the context of late 1961, when the Berlin crisis was about to enter its fourth year and the Wall had introduced a new and unknown element into the confrontation over the city, the Checkpoint Charlie episode represented just how easily a small event in Berlin could explode into a general war between the superpowers.

This reality meant that Berlin contingency planning needed to continue, as did planning for negotiations with the Soviets that might lead to a new agreement on Berlin, and possibly even larger issues. In the increased tensions caused by the building of the Wall, contingency planning certainly took on new urgency, focused mainly on how to integrate the American and NATO conventional buildup into existing and new plans. The Kennedy administration was particularly keen on restarting work in LIVE OAK, on the basis of what it hoped would be a new NATO strength. But the realities of Alliance politics dashed officials’ hopes, as both the NATO buildup and renewed contingency planning consistently fell short of what the Americans expected. The Allies were unwilling to spend the money and resources necessary to increase their conventional strength on the front lines, and they were also concerned that such a buildup would undermine nuclear deterrence, and were thus intent on getting Kennedy’s assurance that the basis of NATO strategy, that is early use of nuclear weapons, was still in place.

Conversely, though, Kennedy found himself under pressure from the Allies to undertake new negotiations with Khrushchev after the Wall went up. Kennedy himself was not averse to such negotiations, and indeed hoped that sending more troops to Europe (and getting more troops from European countries) would put the West in a more advantageous position for negotiations. Having learned from his experience in Vienna,
Kennedy wanted to make sure that the next time he met Khrushchev – whether one-on-one or in a larger summit – he would have more leverage to keep Khrushchev from applying the same pressure he had in their first meeting. Thus, he was eager to open whatever channels of communication with the Soviets that might lead to an agreement on Berlin. Yet while most of the Allies supported, and even advocated, negotiations, de Gaulle opposed the idea, insisting that Khrushchev’s moves – including the Wall – were entirely bluff, and that negotiating on that was counterproductive for the West. Not only did De Gaulle’s position cause difficulties for Kennedy, it also allowed Adenauer to take a similarly intransigent line, and made any talks into which the Americans entered seem like a betrayal of their German partners. So although Kennedy saw an opportunity in the autumn of 1961 to push détente in Berlin, Europe, and elsewhere as well, he found it still largely impossible to move beyond the German-centric stasis that the Cold War had reached.

But the underlying elements of the Berlin Crisis had changed by the end of 1961. The Wall solved the most pressing element of the Crisis up to that point, the East German refugee flow, while also providing Khrushchev with enough action to salvage his prestige and stabilize the East German regime. The Soviet Union had scared the West, and brought about a change to its diplomatic policy and also to its strategic direction. But the West remained strategically superior to the Soviet bloc, especially in the strategic nuclear field, and Berlin had not solved that problem. By early 1962, Khrushchev realized that Berlin could not solve the problem, and looked to new locations even as he wound down
pressure on Berlin. Berlin would play a role once the new crisis broke out, but once the repercussions of the Wall died out, so did the centrality of the Berlin Crisis.

The Wall Appears
On the night of 13 August 1961, East German police and border guards began blocking the roads, transit lines, and even houses connecting East and West Berlin. Stringing barbed wire and anti-vehicle obstacles along the zonal dividing lines, they began implementing the first steps of Ulbricht’s “Operation Rose”, the construction of a barrier to separate the Western zones from the surrounding city and countryside. Not really knowing what was going on, some Western officials began driving around the city trying to understand just how detailed the East German actions were, and they began cabling their observations to their governments within hours.\(^1\) By morning it was clear that the East Germans and their Soviet backers had decided to drastically change the situation on the ground in Berlin.

Although the operation to close the border came together quickly, Khrushchev and Ulbricht had agreed to the decision months before. The refugee problem was the catalyst, but the decision fit into Khrushchev’s larger goals for Berlin and Germany. Stemming the flow of refugees from East Germany would put the East German economy on a better footing, reducing its reliance on Soviet economic aid and making it more independent.\(^2\) Therefore, securing East Berlin would help to secure East Germany, making it more difficult to deny East Germany’s sovereignty, especially in the context of

\(^1\) Smyser, *Kennedy and the Berlin Wall*, 101-03.

German reunification. Khrushchev could also use a wall to prod the West toward signing a peace treaty, or at least to make signing a separate treaty more feasible.³

Through the summer, there were hints that something would happen in Berlin soon. Western officials in Berlin noted throughout July and August that the East German police were cracking down on East German citizens who worked in West Berlin, the so-called Grenzgänger. These workers were supposed to be registered with the East German government, but it was estimated that at least half were not. Starting in early July, the government declared that those who had not registered would have to, and those who failed to do so would face severe penalties. On 1 August, East German officials began telling Grenzgänger that they would have to give up their jobs in West Berlin by 1 October.⁴ Western officials missed some clues about the East German plans. Most famously, East German leader Walter Ulbricht, asked at a press conference if he had any plans to change the situation in Berlin, answered that no-one was talking about building a wall, confusing both the assembled journalists and officials in Western capitals.⁵ Yet no-one made the connection between his remark and any plans of the East German regime and the Soviets.

The Soviets and East Germans went to great lengths to keep the operation secret. Khrushchev and Ulbricht informed their Warsaw Pact allies of the move only ten days before it took place, and Erich Honecker, the East German security minister, ran the

³ Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev’s Cold War*, 374-75.
⁴ “Grenzganger situation: Letter of July 31 from Mayor of East Berlin proposing immediate negotiations”, 1 August 1961, FO 371/160509 (UKNA), 1.
operation himself with just a small staff. To prevent leaks, no telephone or cable traffic mentioned the closure. Khrushchev moved Soviet forces toward Berlin, but kept them outside the city. Even though they had to collect thousands of kilograms of wire, concrete, and timber, the East Germans made sure that the West did not notice any disruptions in construction in East Berlin.

Despite the tensions through the summer, the secrecy meant that Western leaders were not expecting the East German moves: Kennedy was on vacation that weekend; Macmillan was hunting in Scotland. News of the Wall’s construction spread quickly through Western capitals, but few officials felt much urgency, some even going back to sleep. Dean Rusk, when hearing the news later that morning, decided to attend a baseball game rather than stay in the office to handle the situation. What response he allowed was in the form of a rather standard official protest, and the official Allied protest from Berlin did not come until forty-eight hours later. Kennedy met with some advisors, but did not interrupt his sailing before returning to Washington. Macmillan decided not to interrupt his shooting vacation. De Gaulle said nothing official, and most of the French government was away from Paris for August vacations.

In fact there was little the Americans, British, or French could do on the ground. The Soviets made sure that the Wall went up only on the eastern side of the zonal

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6 Harrison, Driving the Soviets up the Wall, 205.
8 Harrison, Driving the Soviets up the Wall, 188.
10 Ibid., 105. Harrison, Driving the Soviets up the Wall, 207.
11 Cate, The Ides of August, 392-93.
boundary, and that, while access to East Berlin was restricted, it was not cut off entirely, nor was access to West Berlin along the West German access routes at all affected. Thus, Kennedy, Macmillan, and their advisers did not see much wrong with the Wall in terms of their interests in Berlin, and knew that any actions directed against the Wall itself, or even overheated rhetoric against the Wall, would be seen as overly provocative, views which held across NATO.\(^{14}\) In fact, leaders quickly saw it as more positive than negative, stabilizing the refugee situation and potentially even the larger situation in the city itself.\(^{15}\)

But the West could not completely ignore West Berlin, and Kennedy was aware that the Allies would have to do something. The residents of West Berlin expected the Berlin Powers to do more in the face of the Soviet moves. As nothing but diplomatic protests appeared, morale in the city dropped, and discontent towards the West increased. On 16 August, West Berlin mayor Willy Brandt gave a speech, in front of more than 300,000 West Berliners, denouncing the Western response. Newspapers ran full-page headlines screaming, “The West Does Nothing”.\(^{16}\) Fearing the effects on the West Berliners and West Germans as well, Kennedy decided that he had to take more drastic action. On 18 August, he sent Vice President Lyndon Johnson and retired general Lucius Clay, the hero of the 1948-49 blockade, to West Berlin to demonstrate American resolve.


\(^{15}\) Gelb, *The Berlin Wall*, 174. Kennedy commented to his aide Kenneth O'Donnell that the Wall showed that Khrushchev no longer expected to seize West Berlin, and so it was “a hell of a lot better than a war.” O'Donnell and Powers, *Johnny, We Hardly Knew Ye*, 303. Macmillan likewise believed that Khrushchev was seeking a solution to the Berlin problem that avoided war. Macmillan, *Pointing the Way*, 393. De Gaulle saw the Wall as proof the Soviets “had given up hope of frightening the Americans, the British, and the French into allowing them to lay hands on the city.” de Gaulle, *Memoirs of hope*, 260.

to maintain the city. Clay would then remain in Berlin as Kennedy’s personal representative, with the rank of ambassador, to keep Kennedy apprised of the situation in West Berlin and help maintain the residents’ morale. Finally, Kennedy decided to reinforce the Berlin garrison by sending a battle group of 1,500 soldiers to the city. The reinforcement was purely psychological, as there was still little thought of conducting a serious defense of West Berlin in the face of a Soviet attack. But Kennedy felt that the appearance of more American soldiers on the Autobahn would help boost West Berlin’s morale.

Dispatching Johnson, Clay, and the battle group also provided an opportunity to advance Western diplomatic interests. If the West could change the story from one of Soviet gain to one of Western gain, then negotiations were not only possible, but desirable. The message that the Vice President and the President’s adviser carried to Berlin was that the Wall was a defeat for the Soviets, an admission that they had to go to such radical lengths to keep their population from fleeing to the freedom of the West. Once that message was in place, the stability that the Wall seemed to bring to the Crisis opened the door to new negotiations that might easily result in a settlement.\(^\text{17}\) So despite some reservations within the administration, the drive to open negotiations that started soon after Kennedy’s July speech barely missed a beat.

Kennedy knew, however, that he was taking a risk in sending a large force down the Autobahn. The Soviets could use the movement of the troops along the access route as a pretext to take further measures, including blocking the access routes themselves. In

some ways, the action was related to LIVE OAK’s contingency plans, even though it was not a tripartite response to blocked access to West Berlin. But a military move up the Autobahn was essentially what LIVE OAK called for, and the possibility of fighting breaking out as the battle group made its way towards Berlin was high. Kennedy ordered that the Army’s European command keep in direct contact with the battle group, and regularly report the progress directly to the White House, especially once the force reached the Berlin entry point. By that time, he might have recognized that Khrushchev was being cautious with his moves, and would likely not interfere with access, but he was still risking an incident.

Kennedy notified Norstad of the decision on 19 August, emphasizing that he did not intend it as a probe in the LIVE OAK sense, but only as a way “to provide concrete political and psychological demonstration of US attitude.” The same instructions, however, noted that the possibility of Soviet resistance existed, and that the commander of the battle group should disengage and withdraw if he felt in danger of being cut off or losing his force. Norstad was acutely aware of the danger the movement raised, and the position the commander would be in if he faced any resistance. Underneath those instructions, he put a question about whether the commander should withdraw only if he faced annihilation, or if he should avoid any casualties altogether. In Norstad’s opinion, while the reinforcement was not a probe, “the Soviets or East Germans could control

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18 Ibid, 118. American Army commander General Bruce Clarke kept both the White House and Norstad at NATO headquarters informed of the convoy’s progress.
21 Ibid.
whether or not it would become one.” Should that happen, NATO would, in the words of Stikker, “clearly enter a new phase.”

In fact, the White House had already considered such a possibility and decided that the action was worth the risk. If the Soviets or East Germans resisted the battle group’s movement, American forces “would shift into... existing contingency plans.” According to LIVE OAK procedure, the battle group likely would not have opened fire on the Soviets obstructing them (unless the Soviets fired first), but would withdraw to West Germany. However, the West could not allow an obstruction to remain, and the next probe, likely strengthened into a tripartite force, would have had authorization to clear the obstacle, again only returning fire if the Soviets shot first. At this point, the operation would cross into the next phase of the LIVE OAK plans, which authorized military action, and escalation would have been more likely. Although the British or French might have convinced Kennedy not to push beyond the first probe, or the Soviets might not have resisted a subsequent movement, the battle group clearly had the potential to spark a general war.

Kennedy gambled that the battle group would go in unopposed and that the psychological rewards for the West Berliners were worth the risk of being wrong on that count. The risk paid off, as the battle group moved unharassed along the Autobahn,

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24 “Minutes and Assignments of August 18 Meeting”, undated, folder Germany - Berlin, General, 8/17/61 Berlin Task Force, NSF, Countries, Germany, Box 82 (JFKL), 2.
25 Since LIVE OAK did not have plans regarding the battle group probe that Kennedy dispatched, this sequence is drawn from the general LIVE OAK “Initial Probe” and “More Elaborate Military Measures” papers examined in Chapter 2.
arriving to a rapturous welcome among the West Berlin population on 19 August. Nor was the action an American movement alone. The British agreed to a symbolic reinforcement of their own, although they did not move as quickly or as publicly. Instead, they sent eighteen small armored vehicles and sixteen armored cars by rail, but they declined to send any soldiers along with the vehicles for fear of the effects on the British Army of the Rhine in West Germany.\textsuperscript{26}

Yet while the dispatch of Johnson, Clay, and reinforcements succeeded at raising West Berlin’s morale and preventing serious political consequences, the Wall remained in place, and the West would have to find ways to respond to it. Just a day after hearing that the Wall was going up, Kennedy worried that it might increase military tensions and put pressure on him to take a hard military line.\textsuperscript{27} At the very least, the West would have to take some sort of countermeasure, possibly cutting of travel permits for East Germans visiting Western Europe.\textsuperscript{28} The British recommended such a step, and it likely would have found ample support in NATO if done quickly.\textsuperscript{29} The problem was not just military, but political. While everyone agreed that the Wall presented little infringement on Western rights in Berlin or on the Western position in Central Europe, there was concern that the East Germans would use the Wall as a step towards asserting their sovereignty over Berlin, changing the status of West Berlin, and initiating action to drive the Western

\textsuperscript{26} Berlin Military Planning: Latest Measures, 16 August 1961, FO 371/160489 (UKNA), 1.
\textsuperscript{27} Memorandum for Secretary of Defense, 14 August 1961, folder Germany - Berlin, General, 8/11/61-8/15/61, NSF, Countries, Germany, Box 82 (JFKL), 1.
\textsuperscript{28} Memorandum for the President, Subjects: (1) Berlin Negotiations and (2) Possible Reprisals, 14 August 1961, Ibid, 1.
\textsuperscript{29} “East German measures on access to West Berlin: Comments on French and German views”, 14 August 1961, FO 371/160509 (UKNA), 1.
forces out of Berlin.\textsuperscript{30} The Wall gave the Soviets the initiative, and as Norstad and others noted, they could control the timing of the next phase, whether it was obstructing traffic on the access routes or asserting East German sovereignty between West and East Berlin.\textsuperscript{31} The dispatch of Johnson, Clay, and the battle group was useful in the short term, but the long-term presented new threats, especially when coupled with Khrushchev’s Vienna ultimatum, which still hung in the air.

Thus, not long after the Wall went up, officials turned their focus towards the idea of negotiations. The day after the East Germans began work, McGeorge Bundy wrote to Kennedy that there was unanimity among the White House staff to push for negotiations on the status of Berlin and Germany, and that the Wall only strengthened that view.\textsuperscript{32} Since encircling West Berlin was something that the Soviets and East Germans could always do, the responsibility for the Wall was entirely theirs, and building it in fact demonstrated Soviet weakness in Berlin.\textsuperscript{33} If the West could exploit that weakness to demonstrate the problems in the GDR, it could then gain an advantage in the negotiations, independent of the renewed strength from the conventional buildup.\textsuperscript{34} The British too saw the opportunities in the situation, arguing that “the Communists are in an exposed position through being compelled to put barbed wire round [sic] their own

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{30}{“Intelligence Note: Significance of Soviet-East German Actions in Berlin”, 18 August 1961, folder \textit{Germany - Berlin, General}, 8/18/61-8/20/61, NSF, Countries, Germany, Box 82 (JFKL), 2.}
\footnotetext{31}{Memorandum for Mr. Bundy, Subject: Berlin, 14 August 1961, folder \textit{Germany - Berlin, General}, 8/11/61-8/15/61, NSF, Countries, Germany, Box 82 (JFKL), 1.}
\footnotetext{32}{Memorandum for the President, Subjects: (1) Berlin Negotiations and (2) Possible Reprisals, 14 August 1961, Ibid, 1.}
\footnotetext{33}{Ibid, 2.}
\footnotetext{34}{Ibid, 1.}
\end{footnotes}
populations,” making it a good time to propose negotiations.\textsuperscript{35} In their eyes, putting up the Wall was an admission by the Soviets that they could not control the situation in East Berlin, and not building it would have left Khrushchev with little choice but to risk a \textit{fait accompli} of a separate peace treaty or backing down and losing his personal and political prestige.\textsuperscript{36} The Wall was therefore a way out of that bind for the Soviet leader.

Yet the existence of the Wall now limited Western movement within Berlin, making it harder for American, British, and French officials to travel to East Berlin. Superficially, this restriction was not a serious problem, since the Soviets had been responsible for the eastern zone since the division of the city in 1945. But during that period Western officials had been able to move freely around the whole city, including the eastern zone, and to accept the limitation on that movement would be to accept the loss of East Berlin and its residents. While the Western leaders may have been willing to accept this loss, they could not do so publicly, out of concern that the West Berliners and West Germans would believe that they might be next to lose their protection. Therefore, tension at the crossing points remained high, especially as the East Germans moved to assert their sovereignty by taking control of the access to East Berlin. In October, this decision led to a tense and public confrontation between the two sides.

**Checkpoint Charlie**

The stand-off between Soviet and American tanks at the main crossing point in the Berlin Wall in October 1961 was one of the most tense events of the Berlin Crisis, if not the entire Cold War. While in retrospect neither side had any interest in actually firing

\textsuperscript{35} “East German measures on access to West Berlin: Mr. Rusk’s statement to the press on Aug. 13”, 13 August 1961, FO 371/160509 (UKNA), 2.

\textsuperscript{36} “East German measures on access to West Berlin: Comments on French and German views”, 14 August 1961, FO 371/160509 (UKNA), 1.
shots, and in fact went to great lengths to keep the incident from escalating, at the time the possibility of war, even by accident, seemed high. For Western planners, the stand-off was just another example not only of how dangerous the situation was, but of how many different ways the crisis could explode into war. In terms of strategy, it also showed some of the difficulties in planning the course of events, and in controlling the escalation that might follow. At the same time, however, the incident remained outside of the normal expectations of contingency planning, and thus ultimately had little effect on its direction.

The incident started on the evening of 22 October, when Allan Lightner, the chief political officer in the American mission in Berlin, attempted to go to the theater in East Berlin with his wife. As a civilian official driving a civilian car, Lightner found himself held up by the East German police, even though the car had U.S. government license plates, making it immune to harassment by the East Germans under the Four-Power agreements. Lightner was one of the more aggressive officials when it came to dealing with the communists, and so he decided to make it a point not to accept the East German police’s authority, and demanded to speak to the Soviet officer on duty. When no officer appeared, Lightner drove past the police checkpoint, but was stopped again. He also called for an American military police escort, and used that to finally gain access to East Berlin (and then, having missed the show, return to the American sector). After Lightner

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37 Raymond Garthoff, “Berlin 1961: The Record Corrected”, *Foreign Policy*, 84 (Autumn, 1991): 152. Of particular note was Kennedy’s backchannel messages to Khrushchev, which suggested that if the Soviet tanks withdrew, the American tanks would quickly follow suit.
took several more trips in and out of East Berlin, the incident ended, but having taken
four hours, it attracted the attention of the press, making it a very public situation.

Not wanting to exacerbate the situation, the American government decided to
suspend civilian crossings. The officials on the ground, particularly Lightner and Lucius
Clay, disagreed.\textsuperscript{38} It was Clay who made the decision to escalate the incident by
continuing to send American civilian vehicles through the checkpoint, and then to move
tanks up to the American side of the crossing.\textsuperscript{39} Clay’s intention was not to spark
violence, or to use the tanks to escort vehicles. Instead, he expected that moving the tanks
into position would force the Soviets to do likewise, thus demonstrating their ultimate
responsibility for regulating traffic in Berlin, as per the Four-Power agreements.\textsuperscript{40}

Beyond that, he may have had ideas of finding an opportunity for forcing the Soviets on
the defensive in East Berlin, and possibly reversing the apparent setback of the Wall.\textsuperscript{41}
His gambit was successful in forcing the Soviets to take responsibility, but it raised the
stakes on the issue, which Kennedy, Rusk, and others did not consider vital to the
Western position in Berlin.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{38} Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs (Kohler) to Secretary of State
\textsuperscript{39} Although Clay was outside the normal chain of command, he often took the authority to order
movements along the access routes, to Western enclaves, or along the Wall or crossing points. When he
had first departed for Berlin, Kennedy had given him assurances that Clay could have access to the
President in order to make these sorts of moves without having the local commanders interfere. Jean
Edward Smith, \textit{Lucius D. Clay: An American life} (New York: H. Holt, 1990), 652. He seems to have used
this access to move the tanks up to Checkpoint Charlie that day. See Smyser, \textit{Kennedy and the Berlin Wall.},
137.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid,138.
\textsuperscript{41} Garthoff, “Berlin 1961”, 147. Garthoff notes that Clay set up a replica of the Wall in West Berlin as a
testing ground for methods to knock it down, and concludes that Clay was ready to exceed his authority in
Berlin. It is hard to know if Clay was eager to knock down the Wall, but he showed willingness to exceed
his authority by moving the tanks towards the checkpoint early on.
\textsuperscript{42} Telegram From the Department of State to the Mission at Berlin, 26 October 1961, FRUS 1961-1963,
However, Clay was not only looking to draw the Soviets to the checkpoint, but also to probe for an opportunity to deal with the Wall itself. On his own authority, he had set up a training area in West Berlin, complete with a replica section of the Wall, to prepare for the possibility of knocking over the Wall itself if necessary. When Kennedy caught wind of this activity, he quickly put a stop to it, but it once again showed how difficult it was to control the situation.\(^{43}\) While Clay was not planning to use the tanks, even to knock over the Wall in that instance, he was prepared to use armored vehicles to push through obstructions within the checkpoint itself, should it come to that.

Norstad initially supported Clay’s tank movement, and saw the rationale behind it in much the same way as the latter.\(^{44}\) Likewise, he was prepared to use force against the Wall, for “nosing [it] over” in his words, if it became a center of contention over Allied rights.\(^{45}\) But Norstad was likewise worried about the issue of control of events, especially with Clay in the city. Because Clay was Kennedy’s personal representative, he was technically the highest ranking official in Berlin. But at the same time, the chain of command continued to run through the Berlin Commandant, to the American Army commander in Europe, to Norstad and the President. Norstad had already sent a lengthy memorandum on the issue of command problems, and felt that Clay was taking too many risks in provoking the Soviets in Berlin. In fact, the Allied commander feared that not only would Clay’s actions precipitate an incident, but that Clay would use it to take

\(^{43}\) Harrison, *Driving the Soviets up the Wall*, 208.
\(^{44}\) Telegram from Norstad to Lemnitzer, October 26 1961, folder *Germany - Berlin, General, 10/26/61-11/6/61*, NSF, Countries, Germany, Box 83 (JFKL), 3.
\(^{45}\) Ibid.
control of the American forces in Berlin, and use them for his own ends.\textsuperscript{46} There was palpable tension between the two men, making coordination of American actions in Berlin and in Europe difficult, especially during the hours of the stand-off. The issue was only fully resolved when Clay’s time in Berlin ended in early 1962.

However, Kennedy’s backing of Clay during the Checkpoint Charlie stand-off raised some potentially dangerous problems for Western contingency planning. Clay had a personal line direct to Kennedy in the Oval Office, and used it to bypass Norstad and the Allies as he made each move.\textsuperscript{47} Although Clay assured the president that he would not use the tanks in an offensive role, there was widespread agreement even before the incident that the United States could use armored vehicles to remove or break down obstructions in the crossing area itself.\textsuperscript{48} This action clearly would have been an escalation, and given both Kennedy’s and Clay’s inclinations, the next steps of escalation would have included the use of the Berlin garrison in a conventional role. For Norstad and other Western officials, this was not the role of the Western forces stationed in the city; they were effectively trip-wires that would bring full NATO action against the Soviets if they were attacked.\textsuperscript{49} Part of Norstad’s worry about Clay was that his actions in

\textsuperscript{46} Telegram to CJCS, 9 October 1961, folder \textit{Berlin – LIVE OAK 1961} 1 Sep. - 31 Dec. (3), NP, Box 86 (DDEL), 5.
\textsuperscript{47} Smyser, \textit{Kennedy and the Berlin Wall},125-26. At about the time Clay brought tanks up to the crossing point, he telephoned Kennedy to discuss the situation. Since no record of the call exists, it is not clear if Clay specifically discussed, and got prior authorization for, the tank movement. But General Albert Watson, the U.S. commander in Berlin, urgently telegraphed Norstad to assure him that U.S. forces would not probe the border before the following Monday, 30 October. Once the tanks were in place, however, Kennedy did offer his support for Clay’s actions. See Lucius D. Clay Oral History Interview – 1 July 1964, \url{http://www.jfklibrary.org/Historical+Resources/Archives/Summaries/col_clay_lucius.htm} (JFKL), 7.
\textsuperscript{48} “Reaction to Closure of Friedrichstrasse Crossing Point”, 9 October 1961, folder \textit{Germany - Berlin, General, 10/5/61-10/12/61}, NSF, Countries, Germany, Box 83, JFKL.
\textsuperscript{49} Memorandum for the President, Subj.: “Military Planning for a Possible Berlin Crisis”, 5 May 1961, folder \textit{Germany - Berlin, General, Report by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Part I, 5/5/61}, NSF, Countries,
Berlin might weaken the nuclear deterrent, undermining the Western position in Europe and possibly inviting the sorts of Soviet reactions that he had warned Kennedy about earlier.

However, these issues did not rise to the surface in the wake of the stand-off. The main reason was that the Allies did not consider access to East Berlin to be a vital part of their access to the city as a whole. In accepting the building of the Wall, they had effectively given up on their rights in the eastern part of the city. This acceptance did not mean that they would stop entering the Soviet zone, but rather that they would not make it an issue to fight over. The decision to suspend movement after Lightner’s initial incident demonstrated that position, and it meant that LIVE OAK and other contingency planning would not cover such a scenario. Thus, there was no reason to reevaluate LIVE OAK plans after the stand-off, and the work there continued to focus on access to West Berlin only.

Therefore, once the initial furor over the Wall died down, its importance receded into the general backdrop of the Crisis itself. It remained a sore point, especially for West Berliners, and would remain so for the rest of the Cold War. Its role in the Berlin Crisis was not finished, yet the building of the Wall seemed to be the furthest that Khrushchev was willing to push the West over Berlin, and the most dramatic action that he was going to take. The threat of the separate peace treaty remained as long as Khrushchev was going to keep it on the table. But already Western officials were looking beyond the ultimatum,
trying to find yet another new way to reconcile the position of Berlin within the changing Cold War.

**Searching for Negotiations**

The Kennedy administration had already decided that it would need to initiate negotiations on some level before the Soviets and East Germans built the Berlin Wall, and the appearance of the Wall did not measurably affect that decision. The situation presented Kennedy an opportunity to return to his goal of détente, especially if he could argue that his decisions in the summer had proven to the Soviets that the West was determined to stay in Berlin. If Khrushchev was in fact giving up on the idea of pushing the West out of Berlin, then there might be a window for the two sides to settle their differences over the city and over Germany. And Kennedy and his advisors could also now be more prepared to accept new ideas and approaches to gain the agreements.

Perhaps the most striking new approach was a willingness to accept the division of Germany, and thus of Europe, as an established fact. The United States would seek an objective in Central Europe of an increasingly stable *modus vivendi* that would reduce tensions and eventually allow for the normalization of contacts across the East-West divide.\(^{50}\) This was a fundamental shift in American policy, which may have recognized the existing situation, and even the benefits of it, but which held out for German reunification as the ultimate goal of negotiations with the Soviets. However, the Kennedy administration was not abandoning reunification entirely, nor was it going to make an acceptance of a divided Germany and divided Europe an explicit part of its policy. To do

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\(^{50}\) “Negotiations Arising out of the Berlin Crisis”, 29 July 1961, folder *Germany - Berlin, General, "Negotiations Arising out of the Berlin Crisis”*, NSF, Countries, Germany, Box 82 (JFKL), 4.
so would have undercut West German support of the West, something that was still essential to basic containment in Europe. Instead, officials were looking for ways to accept the status quo in Europe without appearing to make concessions to the Soviets in return for nothing. One of the popular ideas was for the West to recognize the Oder-Neisse river line as the eastern German border in return for explicit Soviet guarantees about West Berlin and access to it, even in the event of a Soviet-East German peace treaty.

The question was how to undertake those negotiations. Kennedy did not want to subject himself to the trouble of another bilateral summit, especially if Khrushchev showed no signs of wanting to come around to Kennedy’s vision of the world in the Cold War. Even if a Four-Power summit were any more appealing, getting the allies on board seemed a slim possibility at best. There was some consideration given to a large peace conference, especially if it could forestall the Soviet-East German peace conference that Khrushchev kept threatening, but that was a last-ditch option at best. The most likely scenario involved low-level meetings to set up another round of Four-Power foreign minister talks, with a distant goal of a summit remaining on the horizon. But even here Kennedy and those allies who supported some form of negotiation ran into difficulties in coordinating not just the negotiating positions that the West would carry into such talks, but even simply how it might be possible to approach the Soviets about such talks. In the absence of a way to move forward, Kennedy opted to go it alone, expecting that even if he could not get the whole Alliance to back the American lead, he could at least bring along enough of a consensus to make the effort worthwhile.

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Not only would the United States push forward with talks with the Soviets alone, but Kennedy made it clear, and his advisers largely agreed, that simply falling back on the positions from the last round of foreign minister talks in Geneva in 1959 would not be enough. While the principles of the West’s policies on Berlin, Germany, and Europe would not change, some of the substance behind them would have to. This put officials in a difficult position, because the peace plan that the Berlin Powers had offered at Geneva was already seen to be a maximum position, and so any further concessions would open the door to accusations of appeasement, and possibly a break in the West’s unity as a result. Still, the Kennedy administration approached the German problems from a new direction, one that had the potential to open a new opportunity for agreement with the Soviets, even if only in the short term.

Yet such proposals were controversial, especially in light of West German objections to the recognition of the Oder-Neisse line. As such, the new American approach included concessions to the West Germans designed to give them the feeling of a closer relationship within the Western sphere. American policy would look to make clear to the West Germans “that ‘they can be trusted’ with a higher degree of flexibility with respect to East Germany; and that we believe such flexibility is in the common long-run Western interest.”51 In a sense, the United States – along with Britain and France – would step back to a degree from European affairs, acknowledging that most inter-German issues could, and should, be handled by the two German states (even if the West

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still did not formally recognize the GDR). This move would give West Germany a bigger say in inter-German policy, as well as the larger European policy.

The decision to shift American policy towards a recognition of the status quo in Central Europe was not simply a matter of looking for concessions from the Soviets in order to gain more stability in Berlin. Rather, American officials were increasingly confident that economic, political, and social forces were in their favor in Central Europe, and so it was in the West’s interest to reduce the tensions that only served to strengthen the Soviets’ hand in Germany. As policymakers stated, the United States believed “that Western unity is now so solid that we can continue to build it while extending our influence to the East via negotiations with the East Germans; [and] that the West German-East German economic and political balance has shifted so radically in favor of the West that West Germany will surely exert the greater net influence in any such negotiations.”

The United States, though, had to make the shift in this direction without undermining German confidence in the United States and NATO. American officials were still keenly aware of the West German sensitivities about reunification and the status of Berlin, and the raising of the Wall – along with the seemingly tepid Western response – made it more difficult to explore new options that might be anathema to Adenauer and his people. They also faced public criticism from West Berlin mayor Willy Brandt, who was also Adenauer’s political rival. There was hope that the Germans

53 Brandt would remain central to the Berlin story even after he left West Berlin politics for federal politics in the mid-1960s. His policy as Chancellor of Ostpolitik opened West German foreign policy to a détente
could be made to see the benefits of the plan, and that they might already recognize the realities regarding reunification, at least in the short run. But as long as the long-term goal of reunification remained, it would be difficult to propose anything that might obstruct that goal, since, as Walt Rostow put it, “men live by long-run visions.”

The Wall thus complicated the short-term goals, and some officials were concerned that pressing forward with negotiations would play into Khrushchev’s hands by splitting the West Germans from the allies.

Kennedy knew that he did have some support for talks. The British had been pushing the negotiation route since the start of the Berlin Crisis, and so there was no convincing necessary to gain their support. In fact, Macmillan and his government were becoming increasingly concerned about the direction the Crisis was taking. Nearly three years had passed since Macmillan had originally opened the door to a new agreement with the Soviets during his trip to Moscow, and yet the situation remained just as dangerous as ever, if not more so. In British eyes, the problem was not that the West was in danger of giving away too much to the Soviets, but that it was in danger of finding itself involved in a war for want of conceding a deal. And the consequences of that war weighed too heavily on British minds to ignore. During one of the foreign ministers meetings to discuss the possibility of negotiations, Foreign Secretary Lord Home argued: “It is clear to the British that we must negotiate with the USSR and while it is true the line of the USSR is hard, we must be prepared to a certain extent to accept this or run the

with the Soviet Union and East Germany, and facilitated both wider détente between East and West and the resolution of the Berlin question in 1972.

54 Memorandum for Mr. Bundy, “Subject: Berlin and German Unification: A Problem in Balance and Time”, 16 August 1961, folder Germany - Berlin, General, 8/16/61, NSF, Countries, Germany, Box 82 (JFKL), 1.
risk of becoming ‘atomic dust.’ The longer we delay our assent to negotiate, the higher tensions will arise.” 55 While the Americans did not share this level of fear about the situation, the British push to negotiate clearly bolstered Kennedy’s own thinking on the point.

The difficulties of getting allied agreement on these negotiations, however, also continued in August. The French, though, were becoming increasingly wary of talking to the Soviets, especially as signs about the readiness of the Americans to accept the status quo in Germany and Europe filtered out. De Gaulle continued to believe that Khrushchev was ultimately bluffing about Berlin and the peace treaty, and that it was only necessary for the West to say to the Soviets: “‘No, we will not change the status of Berlin. We will not have our rights interfered with. We are there legitimately. We have been there for sixteen years. If you change the status of Berlin by force, we will reply by force.’” 56 For him, preparing for new negotiations was a waste of time, since the Western position was clear, and Western leaders had made it clear to the Soviets on many occasions.

In fact, de Gaulle was becoming increasingly exasperated that his allies were so preoccupied with negotiations, which he saw as driven by public opinion rather than national policy (and he was far more willing to ignore public opinion than were his Anglo-American counterparts). He refused Kennedy’s many entreaties (including several personal phone calls) to join in tripartite negotiations with the Soviets, and seemed annoyed that his allies continued to press the matter. At an early August meeting with Rusk, he condescendingly told the Secretary of State “[p]lease go on with your

56 Memorandum of Conversation, 8 August 1961, Ibid, 313.
[diplomatic] probing, we have nothing against it. Tell us if you find some substance in these negotiations and we shall join you.”

De Gaulle’s attitude did not change after the East Germans put up the Wall. If anything, the Wall hardened the French president’s view of the situation, demonstrating to him that if the West continued to hold firm against Khrushchev’s bluffs, the communists would be left only with actions that did not affect the Western position. Although one could have expected de Gaulle to be among those demanding action against the Wall itself, he seemed little troubled by its building, and like his Anglo-American counterparts, he did not react dramatically to the news. Instead, he showed his continuing support to Adenauer and West Germany by maintaining his rigid position on negotiations, arguing to Kennedy that opening negotiations under the circumstances would look like appeasement or abandonment of West Berlin and West Germany, and thus the President should not consider it.

More than his allies, De Gaulle continued to tie the Western position in Berlin to the maintenance of West Germany in the Western alliance. While Kennedy and Macmillan certainly were not considering abandoning West Berlin, they were willing to concede issues that the West Germans considered non-negotiable, at least in the short term (such as the Oder-Neisse line). De Gaulle, however, was opposed to even discussing such concessions, believing that it would undermine West German confidence in the Alliance, possibly leading Adenauer to seek his own deals with the Soviets at the expense

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57 Ibid.
58 Letter from de Gaulle to Kennedy, 16 August 1961, folder Germany - Berlin, General, 8/26/61-8/28/61, NSF, Countries, Germany, Box 82A (JFKL), 2.
of Western unity and NATO’s position as a whole.\textsuperscript{59} In the face of the American and British determination to seek negotiations in the fall of 1961, de Gaulle sought to stall the movement by toning down the language of the approach, and when that failed, France disassociated itself from the initiative, although it kept its ear to the door throughout.\textsuperscript{60}

Without full Allied consensus on negotiations, Kennedy was faced with two possibilities. He could either delay negotiations and continue to push Adenauer to accept the concessions that would be necessary, hoping that the NATO members’ desire to see negotiations would put pressure on the French and bring them on board. Or he could move forward with negotiations unilaterally, with support from the British and acceptance from the rest of the Alliance. His advisers were largely in agreement that negotiations, even without the French, were necessary and would benefit the Western position, whereas if the United States did not take the initiative, the Soviets would do so, and the West would lose out.\textsuperscript{61} Kennedy agreed, and by the end of August had decided to pursue negotiations, and was pressing his staff to take a stronger lead on them, not believing that Four-Power support was possible or even necessary. For Kennedy, it was “the time to act.”\textsuperscript{62}

As it turned out, however, de Gaulle need not have worried about the Soviets gaining anything of substance from talks. In informal talks between Rusk and Gromyko at the United Nations, followed by lower-level talks between American ambassador Thompson and Gromyko in Moscow, the Soviets held firm to their demand that West

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{60} Memorandum of Conversation, 5 August 1961, FRUS 1961-1963, XIV Berlin Crisis 1961-1962, 276.
\textsuperscript{61} Record of Meeting of the Berlin Steering Group, 2 August 1961, Ibid, 262.
\textsuperscript{62} Memorandum From President Kennedy to Secretary of State Rusk, 21 August 1961, Ibid, 359.
Berlin be made a free city, rather than allowing a new status or new guarantees for all of Berlin. These were the same issues that the Geneva conference two years prior had hung up on, and the possibility of broaching a *modus vivendi*, a step beyond previous Western positions, did not even come up. Unable to get anywhere on the simplest of issues involving the two sides, the Americans did not feel able to reach for the bigger guns of the Oder-Neisse line and *de facto* recognition of East German sovereignty, and the talks once again stalled.

For Kennedy, the opportunity to move beyond the German question still hung in the air, but the climate was still not right for reaching the kind of East-West relations that he had come into office seeking. Both sides were still too stuck to their positions, and Khrushchev still saw little reason to change his assessment of Kennedy from Vienna, and so saw little reason to change his bargaining position. While Kennedy was willing to move closer to the Soviets in return for a deal, backed by what he felt was a new Western strength under the American-led NATO buildup, he recognized that Allied unity was still too tenuous for the United States to push too far, especially if the Soviets were not going to meet them. But the desire to negotiate about Berlin and Germany remained strong in the Kennedy administration, even as it looked for better ways to support that position militarily.

**SIOP, War Games, and Contingencies**

Kennedy’s desire for negotiations was of course based on his belief that the Western strategic position was stronger than the Soviet one, and that his buildup was

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63 Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to President Kennedy, 2 October 1961, Ibid, 461.
augmenting that advantage. This lead was not only true in terms of nuclear armaments, but also increasingly from a conventional standpoint. Although the West’s conventional forces were not as large as what the Soviets and their allies could bring to bear in Central Europe – nor were they intended to be – Kennedy and his advisers believed that the new conventional forces that the West was building up would provide enough of an increased deterrent for a better negotiating position. With this in mind, Kennedy could once again seek his new Cold War arrangements without having to worry about facing a repeat of Vienna.

The problem, however, was how to calculate the balance between nuclear and conventional forces. For the first decade of NATO’s existence, that calculation had been relatively simple: only small conventional forces were necessary in conjunction with a dominant nuclear force. However, the changing strategic situation of the early 1960s had already begun to show some of the problems of this calculation, leading to the decision to move towards a more flexible strategy, even if only through the buildup of new conventional forces. As Kennedy became increasingly aware of the bases of Western strategy, though, the impetus for rearranging that balance grew, and quickly spread beyond the White House, throughout the American government, and into the allied governments as well. In the fall of 1960, several factors came together to drive the strategic movement in a more flexible direction, one explicitly less reliant on nuclear weapons.

The Pentagon’s Single Integrated Operational Plan (SIOP)-62 war plan was the first factor that brought these issues to a head. The SIOP plans were the basic American
nuclear war plans from the 1950s on. Designed to make the initiation and conduct of nuclear war as simple as possible, SIOP-62 outlined Soviet, Warsaw Pact, and Chinese targets for attack by American nuclear missiles and bombers. SIOP-62 was the first of these plans drawn up, coming out of discussions in the final months of the Eisenhower administration in 1960, it went into effect just months into Kennedy’s term. However, it was not until September of that year that Kennedy finally got a briefing about what was in the SIOP, and the full implications of the plan hit him and his top advisers.

The issue was that SIOP-62 came out of Air Force planning efforts, and thus that branch’s promotion of Massive Retaliation heavily influenced it. The plan assumed that in the event of nuclear war, the United States would launch most of its nuclear weapons against any and all communist targets, with little room for choices for either political or military leaderships. There was no flexibility, since the goal of the plan was to reduce options and increase the deterrent effects of a nuclear strategy. However, the very idea of the deterrent power of Massive Retaliation began to fall out of favor at the end of Eisenhower’s years, and lost credibility in the Kennedy administration. Still the Air Force and its supporters inside and outside government were wedded to the strategy, and SIOP-62 reflected that perspective.

The Pentagon’s war plans had been a concern to the administration from early in its term. In commenting on Henry Kissinger’s memorandum in early July, McGeorge Bundy noted how it reflected growing a consensus in the White House and State Department about the problems with strategic war planning. Bundy called the main plan “dangerously rigid” and argued to Kennedy that it “may leave you very little choice as to
how you face the moment of thermonuclear truth…. In essence, the current plan calls for shooting off everything we have in one shot, and it is so constructed as to make any more flexible course very difficult." This interpretation fed into the desire for introducing new flexibility to nuclear strategy, and probably influenced Kennedy’s decision to expand American conventional capabilities in Europe later that month.

Still, Kennedy had not been shown the full impact of American nuclear strategy. And so on 13 September Kennedy, McNamara, Taylor, and Walt Rostow received a briefing on SIOP-62 from General Lyman Lemnitzer, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. During the briefing, Lemnitzer outlined how under the SIOP, American nuclear forces would target 3,729 Sino-Soviet installations at 1,060 locations (called Designated Ground Zeroes, or DGZs, in the plan’s language). The result would be a 75-90 percent destruction of Soviet nuclear capabilities, the minimum requirements of the Maximum Retaliation strategy. In order to ensure this high probability of success, the plan called for the cross targeting of aircraft and missiles on high priority installations, route coordination of the attacks, targeting sequence, and other measures. By hitting Soviet forces on alert first, and then following up with further attacks, the SIOP could achieve its goals. Lemnitzer acknowledged that the SIOP could not guarantee the complete destruction of the Soviet nuclear arsenal, and so the possibility of a counter-strike still

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64 Covering Note on Henry Kissinger’s memo on Berlin, 7 July 1961, folder Germany - Berlin, General, Kissinger Report 7/7/61, NSF, Countries, Germany, Box 81A (JFKL), 1.
65 Briefing for the President by the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, on the Joint Chiefs of Staff Single Integrated Operational Plan 1962 (SIOP-62), 13 September 1961, #CC00107 (NSA), 5.
66 Ibid, 8-10.
existed. But the Joint Chiefs felt confident enough in the plan to state that SIOP’s success would mean victory in a general nuclear war.\textsuperscript{67}

SIOP-62 was a drastic improvement over previous American and Allied war plans. Those plans had tended to be uncoordinated and vague, often put together by local or regional commanders-in-chief based on their own forces and intelligence resources. This structure led to overlapping targets and the potential for missed targets, which may very well have left much of Western Europe and North America open to Soviet nuclear attack, even if the West launched a preemptive strike. The military designed the SIOP process to overcome these limitations, and the plan that Lemnitzer provided Kennedy in September seemed to respond to that purpose. Certainly, the military leaders were confident that SIOP was the optimal course for handling the question of fighting a general nuclear war, and that confidence comes through in the SIOP briefing papers.

Yet the Pentagon had clearly designed SIOP with the Massive Retaliation strategy – one especially untainted by any thoughts of flexibility – in mind. As Bundy had noted in July, the plan was predicated on a full-scale launch of nearly all American nuclear weapons at once, and there was little thought given to options beyond this idea. Thus, although SIOP included fourteen different options for the president to choose from, these largely differed in terms of the timing of the attack rather than the attack itself (for example, Option 1 posited a surprise attack, while Option 7 gave a six-hour warning).\textsuperscript{68}

Beyond that, the only flexibility within the plan was whether the United States would use it preemptively or in retaliation to a Soviet attack, and whether it attacked some target

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid, 19.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid, 14.
countries or not. However, Lemnitzer stressed that withholding any attack severely weakened the plan to “the point that the task essential to our national survival might not be fulfilled.” SIOP was designed, Lemnitzer said, “for execution as a whole.”

This idea of flexibility was definitely not the same as what Kennedy and his advisers had in mind, and there is little wonder why Bundy and others had such problems with SIOP-62. Rather than looking for ways to manage the new strategic environment of the apparent Soviet threat to the American heartland, and the sense of insecurity about the deterrent effect of Massive Retaliation that such a threat brought, the military planners instead fell back on the accepted strategy of Massive Retaliation. Not only did this approach not show any imagination or innovation to a new president (and there is a sense in the briefing that Lemnitzer was presenting the plan as something that Eisenhower would have automatically approved of, and so Kennedy should accept it on that basis alone), it also did not play to the audience of a president who was looking to reformulate national strategy on a basis of expanding flexibility.

Moreover, because of this inflexibility, SIOP-62 would leave Kennedy with the choice of backing down in a crisis or consigning millions of Americans, Soviets, and Europeans to nuclear death, something that he was clearly trying to avoid. Although conventional war in Europe would likely not have been much of a better option, it did not carry the moral weight that nuclear war did, and it even presented the potential to prevent superpower war from going nuclear. That potential was part of the attraction of

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69 Ibid, 16.
70 Ibid, 17.
conventional deterrence for Kennedy, but was not one that appeared in the military’s SIOP briefing. The result was that Kennedy left the briefing visibly shaken, saying to Dean Rusk as he walked out: “And we call ourselves the human race.”

Kennedy and Rusk were not the only ones who saw SIOP-62 as inadequate and problematic. Carl Kaysen, a Harvard economics professor serving as Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, also had criticisms, which he had already elaborated to Bundy (helping spark Bundy’s note to Kennedy in July). Along with two analysts with backgrounds at RAND, Henry Rowen and William W. Kaufmann, Kaysen began a thorough analysis of SIOP-62, especially in light of the weakening of Massive Retaliation, which he passed on to Maxwell Taylor right around the time Kennedy was getting his briefing from Lemnitzer. Taylor was obviously a receptive audience for these kinds of criticisms, since they aligned closely with his own criticisms in The Uncertain Trumpet.

Kaysen’s memo, entitled “Strategic Air Planning and Berlin” shared the same revulsion with the effects of SIOP-62 as Kennedy demonstrated. One of the considerations that most gave Kaysen pause was the possibility of a false alarm leading to the launching of SIOP, essentially making nuclear war (and destruction) a mistake. But Kaysen also analyzed how appropriate SIOP-62 was, especially in the case of the Berlin Crisis. SIOP-62 called for an attack that would “kill 37% of the population of the Soviet

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72 Rusk, *As I Saw It*, 246-47. Rusk does not specifically date the briefing where Kennedy made this remark, but based on his description – the first briefing shortly after the administration entered office – it is safe to assume that he meant the September meeting.

Union (including 55% of the urban population)” with just the alert force, or “54% (including 71% of the urban population)” with the full force.\(^{74}\) Such devastation would make it difficult, the paper argued, for an American president to launch a SIOP attack in the context of a Berlin conflict, where at most three divisions would be fighting at the moment of decision, especially since Soviet retaliation against American and European cities was inevitable.\(^{75}\) Although Kaysen did not know it, these were the sorts of questions that preoccupied Kennedy, and were some of the driving forces behind his desire to change American and Western strategy.\(^{76}\)

Like Kennedy, Kaysen arrived at the conclusion that a new strategy was needed, one planned for the circumstances of Berlin especially. Kaysen’s main point was to argue that should nuclear war ensue from an incident in Berlin, a more limited strike aimed mainly at Soviet strategic military targets would provide a deterrent to Soviet retaliation, thus breaking the cycle of escalation that was likely from the Berlin contingency plans.\(^{77}\) While not necessarily intended to provide more conventional flexibility, the ideas in “Strategic Air Planning and Berlin” did support such an idea by making the nuclear side of the equation seem more rational, and even more avoidable (especially the consequences of SIOP-62). Perhaps most importantly, it made it easier for the president to use the threat of nuclear attack in the Berlin Crisis, because even after a limited strike, the remaining deterrent would be sufficient to protect the United States, and possibly

\(^{74}\) Ibid, 2.  
\(^{75}\) Ibid, 2-3.  
\(^{76}\) Ibid, 247.  
\(^{77}\) “Strategic Air Planning and Berlin,” 1,2.
Kaysen hoped that the consideration of how the West should use its nuclear striking power would give more flexibility overall, especially in response to a conventional reverse. For Kaysen, SIOP-62 was “a blunt instrument” – and the bluntness reduced the deterrent effect of the American nuclear arsenal, rather than enhancing it. Only by adapting Massive Retaliation could the United States ensure the continued credibility of that deterrent.

Taylor forwarded the memo to Lemnitzer, and had one of his staff members, Major William Y. Smith, write an appreciation of it for the White House. And perhaps recognizing Kennedy’s discomfort with the SIOP-62 briefing he had just received, Taylor sent the president his own thoughts a few days after the meeting, arguing that military planners needed to look at alternatives to SIOP-62, especially in the context of Berlin. The analysis struck a chord with Kennedy, who asked Taylor to pass on a list of questions about SIOP to Lemnitzer, including: “Is it possible to get some alternatives into the plan soon, such as having alternative options for use in different situations?”

Although Lemnitzer and SIOP’s drafter, Air Force General Thomas Powers, both largely rejected Kaysen’s analysis, and Kennedy’s concerns, the realities of nuclear war were

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79 “Strategic War Planning and Berlin”, 3.
81 Although it is not clear whether Lemnitzer or the briefing’s authors read the memo before September 13, their awareness of some of its criticisms of SIOP-62, including the question of limiting the scope of the strike, are clear from the briefing itself.
82 Memorandum from the President’s Military Representative (Taylor) to President Kennedy, 19 September 1961, FRUS 1961-1963, VIII National Security Policy, 127.
83 Memorandum to General Lemnitzer, “Strategic Air Planning”, 19 September 1961, Box 34, Memorandums for the President, 1961, Records of Maxwell Taylor, RG 218 (USNA [accessed at http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBBS56/BerlinC3.pdf]), 1. Kennedy also pulls other questions from Kaysen’s memo, including issues of false alarm and the secondary strike capabilities left to the Soviets after a SIOP level attack.
clearly paramount in the president’s mind as he tried to find a way to confront the crisis situation that continued in Berlin.\textsuperscript{84}

Another incident illustrated the difficulties the Kennedy administration was having in facing nuclear strategy. On 22 August, the Department of Defense’s International Security Affairs office under Paul Nitze proposed holding a “decision” game for officials from Defense, State, the White House, the CIA, and the Joint Chiefs. Members of RAND would design and run the game, which would give participants some idea about the interactions between each side’s decisions, helping them get a grasp of some of the countermeasures and counter-countermeasures that might be needed in a Berlin conflict.\textsuperscript{85} The game was scheduled for 8-11 September at Camp David. While realizing that no game could properly replicate what might happen in the real world, the planners hoped their game would give policymakers “insight and experience… into the character of the planning and decision problem.”\textsuperscript{86}

The game’s designers came up with three separate scenarios for the game, each based on an increase of tension in Berlin over the short term (Scenario 1 and 2 were set in February 1962, Scenario 3 in October 1961). Through accident and miscalculation, the East and West would find themselves on the brink of war, in some cases with shooting

\textsuperscript{84} Powers seems to have ignored Kennedy’s questions, and showed hostility towards criticisms of SIOP-62. See Memorandum of Conference with President Kennedy, 20 September 1961, FRUS 1961-1963, VIII National Security Policy, 130. Lemnitzer replied to Taylor’s memorandum, calling SIOP-62 “not the ultimate in strategic planning… [but] far better than anything previously in existence.” He acknowledged the need for flexibility, but only seemed to consider flexibility in terms of the targets on the list, not in terms of strategic control. See Memorandum for General Taylor, Subject “Strategic Air Planning and Berlin (U)”, 11 October 1961, RG 218, Records of Lyman Lemnitzer Box 1 (USNA [accessed at http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB56/BerlinC5.pdf]), 1-2.

\textsuperscript{85} Memorandum, Subject: “Proposed Game on the Berlin Situation”, 22 August 1961, folder Germany - Berlin, General, 8/23/61-8/24/61, NSF, Countries, Germany, Box 82A (JFKL), 1-3.

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid, 5.
already having broken out. The scenario ultimately used at Camp David involved
Khrushchev signing a unilateral peace treaty with East Germany in October 1961,
resulting in the closure of surface access routes to Berlin, and an Allied airlift in
response. After several incidents involving the Soviets forcing Allied planes to land in
East Germany, with several crashing as a result, tensions in the city reached fever pitch,
and war seemed inevitable. Eventually, a revolt broke out in Berlin, bringing harsh
military action from the Soviets (Red team in the language of the game), and forcing the
West (Blue team) to make decisions regarding support for East Berliners and East
Germans, with the consequence of war with the Soviets.\(^\text{87}\)

As the game played out, it became clear that the Blue team was not willing to
support an East German uprising against the Soviets at the risk of war. The game’s
operator, Thomas Schelling from RAND, observed that this reluctance came from several
factors, most notably a difficulty in using Western military power “flexibly and
effectively for tactical purposes.”\(^\text{88}\) After the game, many of the Blue team participants
stated that there were options for using the Berlin garrison to support East German rebels,
but that the risk of war inhibited their decision to follow this course.\(^\text{89}\) The result was that
the Red team was able to put down the uprising with little difficulty, while the West’s
position in Berlin was weakened as unemployment in the city reached 30 percent and
thousands of West Berliners fled west.\(^\text{90}\)

\(^\text{87}\) “Comments by T.C. Schelling on the Berlin Game Played at Camp David September 8-11”, undated,
folder Germany - Berlin, General, 9/17/61-9/22/61, NSF, Countries, Germany, Box 83, JFKL.
\(^\text{88}\) Memorandum for the President, 22 September 1961, folder Germany - Berlin, General, 9/17/61-9/22/61,
NSF, Countries, Germany, Box 83 (JFKL), 1.
\(^\text{89}\) Ibid, 3.
\(^\text{90}\) “Comments by T.C. Schelling”, 16.
However, both sides came out of the exercise feeling that their team had won. Although West Berlin was unstable, the Blue team had succeeded at maintaining the Allied presence in the city, and they were taking steps to reopen access and guarantee it on a longer term basis. The Red team likewise felt its position in Berlin stable, with the added benefit of making gains against the West in the city.\textsuperscript{91} The evaluation of the exercise tended to favor the latter view, though. The point of the game was to anticipate how American and Western leaders might react in a crisis situation, but the outcome was not ideal from the American perspective. The game pointed to a difficulty in achieving allied agreement on actions, disagreement about the advisable course of action amongst the players, and an overall sense of weakness of purpose in relation to the Red side. And since the Blue team had focused too much on the question of access to Berlin, rather than on the city itself, the Red side had undermined the confidence of Berliners, weakening the West’s position in the city. The peace that was achieved was to the advantage of the Red side.\textsuperscript{92}

Perhaps the most striking breakdown on the Blue side was a reluctance even to contemplate nuclear war. Part of this reluctance surely came from the nature of the scenario, where most of the crisis was focused on East Berlin and East Germany, and thus not technically part of Western interests. But the spark of the East German uprising was the tension created by the Soviet peace treaty and the restriction of access to West Berlin, two factors that were a part of Western interests. The Blue team put LIVE OAK contingency plans into effect, initiating a battalion probe along the Autobahn as a test of

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid, 8.
\textsuperscript{92} Memorandum for the President, 22 September 1961, 3.
the Soviet position. East German forces stopped and surrounded the probe, although no fighting actually broke out. Under LIVE OAK, at least according to the American interpretation of the plans, the next step would have been a reinforcement of this probe, since the Allies could not allow the East Germans alone to stop them. Instead, however, the Blue team allowed the probe to return to West Germany after the Red team granted passage. The nuclear threat did play a role, as the Blue team put various strategic forces, including the Strategic Air Command, on high alert, but the officials shied away from actually using their nuclear forces, even in an imaginary situation.93

Despite the value of the lessons contained in the game experience, one of the criticisms of its results was that not enough high ranking members of the administration took part. Most of the participants were mid-ranking officials, and there was a suggestion to re-run the game with top-level officials like Maxwell Taylor, Paul Nitze, Walt Rostow, and McGeorge Bundy.94 A second game was held a few weeks later with some higher level officials, although most of the main decision-makers once again did not participate.95 The results were essentially the same, so that Robert Komer, one of the participants from the White House who wrote up the summary, decided that it was not worth expanding on the previous analysis. He did, however, highlight more explicitly the reluctance to use nuclear weapons. He found each side determined to avoid war, and a “dominant assumption on both sides that neither was going to nuclear war.”96 This

93 “Summary History of Berlin Political War Game”, undated, 13-18.
94 Memorandum for the President, 22 September 1961, 4-5.
95 Memorandum to Participants in ISA Conference (29 September -1 October), 27 September 1961, folder Germany - Berlin, General, 10/5/61-10/12/61, NSF, Countries, Germany, Box 83 (JFKL), 26. McGeorge Bundy is listed on the Tentative List of Participants, but only with limited participation.
96 Memorandum for the Record, Subject: Berlin War-Game, 27-29 September 1961, 5 October 1961, Ibid,
situation left the Blue side at a disadvantage, because its conventional forces were weaker, leaving it with “very few military options that Red can’t overmatch.” The West needed a way to enhance the credibility of the deterrent on the ground; otherwise the only resort was to nuclear weapons.

What the administration got most out of these exercises was a continued need for more flexibility, both military and political. This lesson fit into the direction that U.S. policy was already heading, which Kennedy wanted to push even further. The analysis of the games found an inability of the Blue team to break out of the narrow policies regarding Germany, including reunification, non-recognition of the GDR, and the Oder-Neisse line. To go along with a military flexibility aimed at “making a real application of force in a carefully graded and controlled manner,” it was necessary to introduce more flexibility into political positions. And once again, the United States would have to take the initiative and to “assume a degree of independent leadership which corresponds more nearly with the degree of responsibility we bear for the final result.” Whether or not Kennedy read or assimilated these reports on the RAND game, they clearly show a prevailing attitude within the administration to increase both military and political options in order to make the deterrent more credible. And to complement taking the lead in negotiations, Kennedy began pushing for American military officials to take the lead in the military side, especially building up NATO’s forces and in contingency planning.

1-2. Emphasis in text.
97 Ibid, 2.
98 Ibid.
99 Memorandum for the President, 22 September 1961, 2.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
An expanded LIVE OAK

Although the American buildup, and Kennedy’s call for a concurrent NATO buildup, was not centered around LIVE OAK plans directly, it did have a bearing on the contingencies around Berlin. The initial LIVE OAK plans came out of a strategic foundation based on Massive Retaliation, although one tempered by Norstad’s concept of the pause to add some flexibility, while the buildup was leading towards a foundation of Flexible Response. Thus, for the Kennedy administration, the LIVE OAK work done up to that point was merely the starting point for the whole planning process. Eventually, Kennedy and his advisors saw contingency plans encompassing a wide range of possible scenarios and actions, centered around a concept of graduated escalation from the smallest response all the way up through large-scale conventional action to full-scale nuclear war. The British and the French, however, regarded LIVE OAK’s work as mostly done. Contingencies were in place to deal with the most likely scenarios, and anything beyond that would be dealt with through nuclear weapons, either deterrence or use.

Norstad was caught in the middle of these two visions, wanting to see more work done on LIVE OAK’s plans – especially larger conventional probes – but wary of the idea of graduated escalation and the effects it would have on the deterrent.

The Wall should have had some effect on contingency plans, since LIVE OAK was not prepared for such a scenario. By and large, though, LIVE OAK was untroubled by the Wall, with the planners involved largely concurring with the general belief that the Wall did not affect access to West Berlin, and so it was more an East German internal matter than a Western matter. As noted above, the dispatch of the battle group did draw
minimally on LIVE OAK, but the situation in August 1961 never even got to the point of preparatory contingency measures.

Any further activity in LIVE OAK was almost entirely at the initiative of the Americans. Aside from Kennedy’s desire to get his buildup more closely tied into a new series of contingency plans, U.S. officials were also looking to expand LIVE OAK by including West German officers in more than just an observer’s role, and connecting LIVE OAK more closely with NATO, at both the military and political level. The exclusion of the West Germans was becoming more difficult to justify as West German forces took a more central role in NATO’s Central European forces, and both France and Britain agreed to including the FRG fully in contingency planning, which Norstad did on 26 July.102

Additionally, while NATO still had no direct connection to Berlin (other than its statement to consider an attack there an attack against the Alliance), the Kennedy administration was more open to the argument that any conflict over Berlin would quickly escalate to a wider conflict, requiring NATO to be informed and ready. However, NATO was not going to be a part of LIVE OAK, even at the observer level. The Berlin Powers remained worried that widening LIVE OAK to include NATO members would risk the security of the operation and lead to leaks. More fundamentally, the difficulty in getting agreement from NATO on often minor issues made Britain, France, and the United States wary about expanding the LIVE OAK discussions, lest the planning get

102 Letter to General Friedrich A. Foestach, 26 July 1961, folder Berlin – LIVE OAK 1961 thru 30 Aug (3), NP, Box 86 (DDEL), 1. The Allies made sure to make explicit that West German forces would not be included in the actual execution of the plans until fighting broke out, since the FRG still had no legal standing in Berlin.
further bogged down and impractical. Thus, NATO members did not learn the full extent of LIVE OAK preparations, and tensions remained between the Allies over lingering problems of consultation, coordination, and burden sharing.

The decision to exclude NATO from the operation made sense considering the difficulties the tripartite countries had getting consensus in LIVE OAK among themselves. Since no other NATO member (excluding West Germany) had a direct stake in Berlin like Britain, France, and the United States, their interests in the situation, especially should it get to a crisis point, could often differ, as the debate over economic countermeasures in 1960 showed. At the same time, however, nobody expected that any LIVE OAK operation would be confined to just the tripartite level, and NATO would have to be involved in some form. In addition, the NATO members did have many of the same interests in Berlin that the Berlin Powers did, especially in ensuring that the Western presence remained in Berlin to protect the West’s credibility in West Germany. So while there were practical reasons for limiting LIVE OAK consultations, the tripartite members missed an opportunity to bring the Alliance closer to the Berlin issue, and keep intra-NATO tensions in check.

The Berlin Powers did take steps to reduce some of these tensions. By August, there was increased talk about integrating LIVE OAK and NATO military planning more closely. Norstad supported this move as a simplification of his role as both commander of LIVE OAK and SACEUR, and a way to smooth the transfer of the contingency operations from tripartite control to NATO control. Norstad also saw LIVE OAK as a source of expertise for NATO’s own contingency planning, and so walling off the two
organizations no longer made much sense. And like the decision to involve the Germans more closely, the movement of LIVE OAK to SHAPE actually generated little opposition among the tripartite councils, allowing a relatively easy decision later that month. However, this move did not mean that NATO gained control over contingency planning for Berlin. As Norstad and others noted, the tripartite powers were still the only ones with the legal right to send convoys along the Autobahn, and there was also no desire to throw contingency planning into the often contentious venue of the North Atlantic Council, where one or more of the smaller powers could significantly delay decisions. Thus, while the Berlin Powers did not intend closer coordination with NATO to be a token gesture, some within the Alliance took it as such, further increasing internal tensions.

These tensions nearly burst into the open in September. The British in particular seemed attuned to the criticisms of their allies within the NAC, including a fear that de Gaulle might achieve his goal of an institutionalized tripartite NATO leadership, excluding the rest of the Allies. By this time, NATO members were increasingly seeing the Ambassadorsial Group, which had political control over LIVE OAK and other Berlin issues, as a threat to their standing. As British officials reported back to London, “many members of the Council, including the Secretary-General, have become seriously concerned at what they consider a tendency on the part of the four governments… to

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104 Memorandum of Conversation, Subject: “Four-Power Ambassadorsial Group Meeting”, 26 August 1961, folder Germany - Berlin, General, 8/26/61-8/28/61, NSF, Countries, Germany, Box 82A (JFKL), 3.
attempt to predetermine NATO planning…. They have derived the impression that the Washington Ambassadorial Group… considers itself entitled to act as a kind of NATO Steering Group.”

Although the Berlin Powers themselves did not seek this kind of position, they certainly tended to take the NAC for granted, and made little effort to ensure that they addressed the growing resentment to this treatment within the Alliance.

This resentment emerged at a NAC meeting in late September in which the Four Powers gave yet another briefing on their latest meetings. Feeling that this report lacked any substance, the other Allies “were goaded to something like sarcastic fury.” Led particularly by the Italian delegation, the NAC pressed for more information about the decisions the Ambassadorial Group was making, as well as other tri- and quadripartite planning. Likewise, the Canadian delegation insisted that NATO had “signed no blank cheques” for the Berlin Powers, and that if the Four wanted NATO be associated with their plans in war, they needed to inform NATO in peace. The British were able to deflect some of the pressure through a larger oral report, and the NAC discussed some contingency planning at its meeting, but the question remained about whether the central powers would be able to convince the smaller powers to delegate some of their authority, even in wartime, in order to execute the LIVE OAK plans.

Once again, this uncertainty revolved around the question of NATO’s strategy towards the Berlin Crisis. Although the LIVE OAK plans were relatively small-scale —

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107 Berlin – NATO concern at Four Govts’ attempts to predetermine NATO planning to meet an emergency over Berlin, 22 September 1961, FO 371/160492 (UKNA), 1.
108 Ibid, 2.
109 Line taken with the Italians about the work in the Ambassadorial Steering Group, 2 October 1961, FO 371/160493 (UKNA), 1.
111 Ibid, 6.
especially when compared to the plans the Americans were pressing on the British and French, and considering themselves, by then – they still contained the distinct risk of nuclear war. Many Allies clearly felt that the LIVE OAK decisions were weakening deterrence without leaving the door open to negotiations, a combination that could prove disastrous if tested. British officials noticed this reluctance, fearing that if it became necessary to execute LIVE OAK, the smaller powers would only delegate their authority in “limited circumstances, where the execution of the plans involves relatively small risk of general war.” \textsuperscript{112} Since the only parts of the plans where there was small risk were those dealing with economic countermeasures, most of the military options could have been taken off the table, leaving the West in a weakened position. While the British may have been sympathetic to these concerns, they also recognized the risks of not having the military options on the table, something that the French and Americans would not have accepted during a standoff with the Soviets. Increased NATO and LIVE OAK coordination, along with some better communication between the Berlin Powers and the NAC, reduced these risks, but did not remove them entirely.

Another issue of friction within the Alliance centered around the American decision to increase its conventional strength in Europe, and Kennedy’s call on the European allies to follow suit. From the American point of view, the reaction to this call was less than overwhelming, and the administration quickly became dissatisfied. \textsuperscript{113} The American delegation criticized some of the allies, and tried to persuade them to increase

\textsuperscript{112} Governmental decision to Execute NATO Military Counter-measures: French request for Tripartite discussions, 27 September 1961, FO 371/160494 (UKNA), 1.
\textsuperscript{113} Memorandum for the President, Subject: “Status of Berlin Planning and Build-up”, 25 August 1961, folder Germany - Berlin, General, 8/25/61, NSF, Countries, Germany, Box 82A (JFKL), 1.
their contributions, but few of the Allies were willing to make much more than a token gesture towards the buildup.\textsuperscript{114} But without a NATO contribution, American officials did not believe that a conventional buildup would be fully effective.

The main problem remained Allied concern over the shifts in strategy that were becoming more apparent. The European allies remained wedded to the existing strategy, which de-emphasized conventional forces, since there was no likelihood of limited war. In the Americans’ eyes, though, this was not facing the realities of the situation. McNamara worried that the Allies continued to believe that they would not have to face the choice of nuclear war, instead of accepting the American argument that it was necessary for NATO to attempt all other actions before nuclear war. He hoped that they would “look the problem in the eye,” and come to the same conclusions the Americans were reaching.\textsuperscript{115} In a sense he was right, since the Europeans placed more faith in nuclear weapons deterring war rather than defending against it, while the Kennedy administration no longer saw the nuclear deterrent as effective. This view was behind its push to make strategy more flexible, and NATO’s continued resistance to larger conventional contributions was essentially resistance to a strategy of Flexible Response.

As part of the move to make Western strategy more flexible, the Kennedy administration also began pushing for an expansion of LIVE OAK’s plans beyond the agreed-upon measures. In the wake of the building of the Wall, American officials put to their British and French counterparts the idea of looking at a wider range of military


\textsuperscript{115} Memorandum for the President, Subject: Status of Berlin Planning and Build-up, 25 August 1961, NSF, Countries, Germany, Box 82A, folder Germany - Berlin, General, 8/25/61 (JFKL), 2.
possibilities. The rationale was increasing flexibility, and integrating Berlin planning into “a general, over-all strategy applicable on a worldwide scale and comprising military, diplomatic, economic, psychological, military, and paramilitary measures.” The Americans had already begun drafting a new directive to Norstad in LIVE OAK, which built on the original directive of April 1959, but gave him more authority to explore these wider measures. LIVE OAK would now draw up plans for expanded non-nuclear ground operations in East Germany, limited tactical nuclear operations, and expanded non-nuclear air and naval operations. As before, American officials saw these new operations as “necessary to give the Allies the capability to determine the range of force which the Soviets/GDR are willing to employ in order to block Allied access,” or in other words, to give the Allies more flexibility to press the Soviets on the access routes.

While the British and the French accepted the expansion of LIVE OAK’s plan in the general sense, there was still some resistance to the idea of increasing flexibility. The British remained skeptical of the whole LIVE OAK operation, continuing to argue that the plans that Norstad and his staff had drawn up were unrealistic and

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116 Memorandum of Conversation, Subject: “Four-Power Ambassadorial Group Meeting”, August 26, 1961, folder Germany - Berlin, General, 8/26/61-8/28/61, NSF, Countries, Germany, Box 82A (JFKL), 6.
117 Memorandum for General Norstad, Subject: “Jack Pine” Plans (U), undated, folder Germany - Berlin, General, 8/29/61-8/31/61, NSF, Countries, Germany, Box 82A (JFKL), 2.
118 Telegram from JCS, 24 August 61, folder Berlin – LIVE OAK 1961 thru 30 Aug (1), NP, Box 86 (DDEL), 3.
119 Ibid, 5-6.
120 Telegram to SEC STATE, 19 August 61, folder Berlin – LIVE OAK 1961 thru 30 Aug (2), NP Box 86 (DDEL), 3.
121 Memorandum of Conversation, Subject: “Four-Power Ambassadorial Group Meeting”, 26 August 1961, 6.
unsatisfactory. British military leaders in particular believed that it was difficult to envision “how limited operations anywhere in Germany would contribute to re-opening of access to Berlin,” and felt that instead, these operations would merely give the Soviets pretense to react more violently, either against Berlin or against the Western forces.

Adding to their worry was a directive from Norstad to NATO’s CINCENT, West German General Hans Speidel, instructing him to draw up plans for NATO’s role in an acute crisis.

This time, the British believed that they had a new ally in their objections. In informal discussions with a British counterpart, a West German general mentioned some of the worries within his government about the current direction of the crisis. In analyzing his comments, the British interpreted them as a clear sign that the Germans were trying to “assure [the British] of German support in opposing the wider ideas put forward by the Americans…. They seem to want to encourage us to press our views, with which they fully agree, as strongly as possible.” Certainly, the Germans had some concerns about the proposed increase of conventional forces, but there was little other evidence that Adenauer and his government were shrinking away from confrontation and seeking the kind of concessions the British wanted, especially given Adenauer’s continued distrust of British motives over Berlin. And while the British may have pressed

123 Ibid, 2.
124 Telegram to JCS, 17 August 61, folder Berlin – LIVE OAK 1961 thru 30 Aug (2), NP_Box 86, DDEL.
125 Berlin contingency planning: U.S. and air access planning, German view, 8 September 1961, FO 371/160491 (UKNA), 3.
126 Memorandum of Conversation, Subject: “Berlin”, 22 October 1961, folder Germany - Berlin, General, 10/20/61-10/25/61, NSF, Countries, Germany, Box 83 (JFKL), 3.
a bit more in the tri- and quadripartite discussions, they accepted that if they did not participate in extended planning, the U.S. military would go ahead unilaterally.\footnote{Berlin Contingency Planning: Directive to Gen. Norstad, 22 August 1961, FO 371/160491 (UKNA), 2.} Once again, the British prioritized their relationship with the United States, and the role that it gave them in the decision-making process, over their own concerns regarding strategy.

The British were not the only ones with objections to LIVE OAK’s direction. Norstad was concerned about the Kennedy administration’s fascination with flexibility, and raised doubts about the wisdom of attempting to control the escalation of the conflict. On the face of it, it would seem strange that the man who was so in favor of flexibility within LIVE OAK during Eisenhower’s administration would write memoranda to Kennedy arguing against trying to rely on flexibility when drawing up contingency plans. At first, there did not look to be much daylight between Kennedy and Norstad on the issue, and Norstad initially praised Kennedy’s efforts.\footnote{Telegram to DA, 25 July 1961, folder Berlin – LIVE OAK 1961 thru 30 Aug (3), NP, Box 86 (DDEL), 2.} Yet there was a small, but significant, difference in how the two men regarded flexibility and escalation, a difference that spoke to the changes Kennedy was initiating by moving from Massive Retaliation to Flexible Response.

Norstad’s biggest concern with the new administration’s ideas was the concept of graduated escalation. This scheme suggested that the United States could control the level of escalation, ensuring that the West demonstrated its resolve to the Soviet Union without running undue risk of sparking general war. This outcome was the goal of Flexible Response: having the capabilities at both the conventional and nuclear level to control what sort of conflict NATO fought. Kennedy and his advisers believed that expanding
these capabilities would give that control, thus increasing deterrence while at the same
time reducing the possibility of miscalculation or unwanted escalation. While there was
some doubt about the exactly how graduated escalation would work, it was a fundamental
part of Kennedy’s strategy, and featured prominently in the decision to reinforce NATO
in July 1961.

While Norstad had little problem with the reinforcement and the increased
conventional flexibility that it would bring (especially since it brought NATO forces
more closely in line with the requirements of MC-70 that he had laid out), he had strong
doubts about the ability of the West to properly control escalation in the way that
Kennedy envisioned. In evaluating the July buildup, he cautioned that while flexibility
was good, there was a tendency in the new American proposals to try to plan out the
course of a conflict, which “would call for opposite but greater reactions and thus quickly
lead to hand-over-hand escalation which, even at an early stage, could commit us to a
road from which there could be no turning except by resort to all-out war or by
acceptance of defeat.”129 In a later letter to Kennedy, Norstad reiterated this point in more
stark terms, stating that the “use of armed force, even in limited quantity, risks the danger
of explosive expansion to higher levels of conflict, including the highest level.”130 The
danger here, for Norstad, was not that the conflict would escalate, but that it would
happen faster than American planners were considering, quickly putting events out of
their control and almost certainly forcing them to use nuclear weapons or risk losing on

129 Telegram to JCS, 27 June 1961, folder Berlin – LIVE OAK 1961 thru 30 Aug (4), NP, Box 86 (DDEL),
3.
130 “SACEUR's Instructions to SHAPE planners”[attached to letter to President], 16 November 1961, folder
the ground. Conventional weapons were fine, he was trying to make clear, but without retaining the unambiguous option to use massive retaliatory force, the Soviets would simply take control of the conflict at the conventional level, where the West was still inferior.

When Norstad came to Washington for his first meeting with Kennedy in October, this difference was high on the list for discussion. According to General Taylor, Norstad’s position was that “Allies cannot unilaterally control any conflict with the USSR and thus may not be able to enforce a gradual, controlled development of the battle…. Consequently, the U.S. must be prepared for explosive escalation to general war.”

Taylor recognized Norstad’s doubts about graduated escalation, focusing mainly on the effects it might have on the Soviet Union: “The USSR should not be allowed to think that they can become involved without running the risk of incurring nuclear war at once. He favors having a catalog of contingency plans ready but opposes the idea that we will necessarily run through them in ascending series.”

Norstad was not only looking at the strategy from the standpoint of an American commander, but also as the commander of allied forces, and thus he felt it necessary to ensure that the Allies’ voices were heard in strategic discussions in Washington. Thus, Norstad was sure to raise the point that while the conventional buildup was positive, it would only bring NATO forces up to levels approaching those called for in MC-70, “which are the minimum which will provide a solid defense provided nuclear weapons

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131 Memorandum for the President, 28 September 1961, folder Germany - Berlin, General, 9/23/61-9/30/61, NSF, Countries, Germany, Box 83 (JFKL), 1.
132 Ibid, Emphasis added.
are available.” If he could not rely on the ability to use nuclear weapons, even at an early stage before graduated escalation had occurred, Norstad recognized that the “Allies will derive no comfort from a strategy which may suggest (even mistakenly) that in the conduct of conventional operations we are prepared to trade large areas of Europe for time to negotiate and to avoid spreading the war to the United States.” While Kennedy did not view the delay between the opening of fighting and a Western decision to use nuclear weapons as a way to avoid the war reaching American shores, Taylor recognized that many European leaders still saw that prospect behind American strategy, and Norstad would be inclined to advocate that view, not just for them, but from his own mind as well.

Once again, an issue that Kennedy and Norstad would seem to have agreed on the surface, that of a pause before committing to nuclear weapons, was in fact one on which the two men disagreed. Norstad had introduced the concept of the pause in LIVE OAK’s planning in 1959, and had fought to get the British and the French to accept it. Kennedy’s own idea of a pause contained much of the same reasoning as Norstad’s: it introduced a level of flexibility to contingency planning, it allowed the West to show determination to the Soviets on Berlin, and it opened a window for negotiations to de-escalate the conflict before reaching general war. But when Kennedy and his advisers envisioned a pause, it was one with a duration of weeks, or even months, during which the two sides might very well continue fighting a conventional war. Norstad, on the other hand, saw a pause in

133 Ibid, Emphasis in text.
134 Ibid, 2.
terms of a few hours or days at most, where the two sides would stand off against each other, but would not be fighting. These distinctions seem minor, but were in fact a result of fundamental differences over the direction of Western strategy. In trying to increase flexibility and reduce the risk of a conflict over Berlin quickly escalating to nuclear war, the proponents of Flexible Response were ready to wage a full-scale conventional war in Europe, and believed that the West could win such a war, or at least hold its own long enough to convince the Warsaw Pact that NATO was determined to fight, and it was in the Soviets’ best interest to negotiate. Tactical nuclear weapons might be necessary, but so long as escalation was controlled, the use of small nuclear weapons within Central Europe would not automatically lead to the use of thermonuclear weapons in the Soviet Union or United States. Norstad and the skeptics of Flexible Response argued that the West could not fight a full-scale conventional war, or that at the very least such a war would be too destructive to West Germany and other territories to make it in NATO’s best interests. If the West initiated conventional action, the Soviet response was likely to be “swift and massive enough to produce the conditions in which the President would direct the initiation of nuclear war by the US.” The goal of Norstad’s pause, therefore, was not to force a military reaction, but to give the Soviets “both motive and opportunity for

135 Memorandum of Conversation, 4 October 1961, folder Germany - Berlin, General, 10/1/61-10/4/61, NSF, Countries, Germany, Box 83 (JFKL), 1. 136 Memorandum for the President, 5 December 1961, folder Berlin – LIVE OAK 1961 1 Sep. - 31 Dec. (1), NP, Box 86 (DDEL), 2. The memorandum, signed by Rusk and McNamara, quotes Norstad from a letter of a few weeks earlier. Norstad suggests that the type of action the Soviets might take includes the “overwhelming assault on Hamburg, Munich, and Berlin.”
changing their course.”

In the meeting, Norstad emphasized his view that without the readiness to use nuclear weapons, the deterrent would be meaningless. A long pause was dangerous, because in order to provide the Soviets with motive and opportunity to change course, the nuclear threat had to remain immediate.

This point brought some disagreement between the two sides during their White House meeting. When Norstad made clear that his idea of escalation went rapidly from the LIVE OAK battalion probe to nuclear war, Secretary McNamara challenged him about that road to war, arguing that there would be “many other actions in between”. Norstad questioned whether the European allies would follow such a road, but Secretary Rusk made it clear that the administration believed that they would. The meeting did not resolve the issue, and just a few weeks later, Kennedy was once again urging Norstad to accept a sequence of graduated responses, especially at the early stages, with the purpose to “initiate them and keep them going long enough so that the next response may, if necessary, come in when needed.” While he accepted Norstad’s argument for keeping nuclear weapons on the table, he saw more of a role for conventional forces, since the American “nuclear deterrent will not be credible to the Soviets unless they are convinced of NATO’s readiness to become engaged on a lesser level of violence and are thereby made to realize the great risks of escalation to nuclear war.” Norstad remained unconvinced, however, and emphasized that the European allies, especially the Germans,

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137 Ibid.
138 Memorandum of Conversation, 4 October 1961, folder Germany - Berlin, General, 10/1/61-10/4/61, NSF, Countries, Germany, Box 83 (JFKL), 3.
139 Ibid, 4, 6.
“wanted no part of it” and continued to fear the consequences of conventional war in Central Europe.  

Still, in the fall of 1961, the differences seemed minor. There were many areas of concurrence, including the need for a catalogue of plans, the need for a U.S. and NATO buildup, and the basis for planning in both LIVE OAK and NATO. And while it was obvious that there were some differences, there was no desire to emphasize them. McGeorge Bundy suggested that if Kennedy felt that the two men were not being clear enough for each other, the president should ask the general to remain behind after the meeting in order to discuss what nuclear war meant to each of them, and try to come to some sort of agreement about what that meant for NATO. Norstad was raising doubts about the new policy ideas, but was largely positive about the buildup and in the increased flexibility it would bring. He was also a strong voice within NATO pressing the allies to increase their contributions to the conventional buildup. Whether Kennedy and his supporter would succeed in their goals remained to be seen.

Yet the Checkpoint Charlie incident was a turning point in the Berlin Crisis all the same. At the same time that American and Soviet tanks faced each other across the crossing point, the Soviet Communist Party was holding its Party Congress in Moscow. During a speech to the Congress, Khrushchev once again effectively removed his ultimatum of a deadline on the East German peace treaty, returning the crisis to its open

141 Memorandum Prepared in the Department of State, 9 November 1961, FRUS 1961-1963, XIV Berlin Crisis 1961-1962, 559. The possibility of a Soviet attack on Hamburg was once again Norstad’s prime example of these consequences.

142 Memorandum for the President, Subject: “Norstad Meeting”, 3 October 1961, folder Germany - Berlin, General, 10/1/61-10/4/61, NSF, Countries, Germany, Box 83 (JFKL), 1.

143 Ibid, 3.
ended nature. Soviet harassment of Allied vehicles and planes entering Berlin continued over the next several months, keeping tension levels higher than normal, but not presenting the West with any acute problems. By the middle of 1962, it seemed as though the Berlin Crisis might be settling down, entering a pattern of minor harassments and protests, but not returning to a central feature of the Cold War. But as tensions outside of Europe, particularly in the Caribbean, rose to new levels, Berlin returned to the center of crisis.

The building of the Berlin Wall changed the nature of the Berlin crisis literally overnight. For years, the West had been determined not to allow the Soviets to change the status of Berlin, lest it undermine Western rights in the city and force the West down a path either to abandoning Berlin (and possibly Germany) or war. Yet when the Soviets did change the realities in Berlin, the West found that it offered something of a solution to the crisis, especially since the Soviets refrained from acting in West Berlin or affecting access to the Western zones. While the Allies did have to relinquish any notion of protection for the residents of East Berlin, that protection was already nominal by 1961, and the Wall simply reinforced that reality to a more visible degree.

The Berlin Wall, though, also represented the continuing tensions over Berlin. West Berliners, West Germans, and some others in the West were not willing to accept the existence of the Wall, and saw it not as a Soviet and East German admission of failure, but as an American, British, and French admission of capitulation. The reaction of West Berliners and West Germans to the Western response, or lack thereof, to the Wall, sheds light on the stakes for the West in the Berlin crisis. Western acceptance of an
agreement ending their occupation status in Berlin would have magnified the loss of credibility that the Berlin Powers suffered because of their tepid reaction to the Wall. In this light, Kennedy’s decision to send Johnson, Clay, and the battle group to Berlin in the days after the Wall’s appearance took on greater meaning, and showed how even small gestures could have significant power to reassert credibility.

Even though the Berlin Wall brought some measure of relief to Western leaders, they did not lose sight of the continuing threat to the city that Khrushchev’s challenge retained into 1962. They needed to reassure the people of West Berlin, West Germany, and Western Europe that NATO remained in place along the same lines, and that it continued to deter Soviet aggression, whether limited to Berlin or across the region. The standoff at Checkpoint Charlie demonstrated both the dangers and security that NATO could continue to provide. Although the standoff was tense, and represented one of the only times where American and Soviet tanks leveled their guns at each other, it was also a clear show of strength for the West, and a clear sign that the Americans, the Berlin Powers, and NATO still saw Berlin as a lynchpin of Western security.

In order to ensure that they could protect their interests in Berlin, the Allies had to resume and intensify their contingency planning. Under the new American administration, emphasis turned towards aligning LIVE OAK planning with the new conventional build-up that Kennedy had announced just before the Wall went up. The SIOP experience and the war game exercise convinced Kennedy and his advisors that Massive Retaliation had lost its credibility, and that only by adding a conventional deterrent could the West ensure that its overall deterrent kept the Soviets from pushing
even harder on Berlin or elsewhere. Even though the Americans still provided much of that conventional force, LIVE OAK had to take into consideration more of the larger NATO issues than before, which meant expanding the operation and its links. Thus, the tripartite members brought West Germany more closely into the planning decisions, and increased the connections between LIVE OAK and NATO. For many NATO members, however, these steps did not go far enough, and inter-allied tensions remained high.

The Berlin Wall also seemed to offer a new opportunity for negotiations, especially from the American point of view. At Vienna, Khrushchev had focused the discussion on Berlin and Germany, frustrating Kennedy’s efforts to get beyond those problems and come to a larger superpower understanding. The Wall, though, was more of a step in the direction of getting past the German question, since it settled one of the key pressure points of the division of Germany and Berlin, the movement of East Germans to West Germany. It did little to bring the two sides closer to agreement on reunification, but with one of the key points removed, the rest of the issues took on less importance – at least in the short term – and the notion of the status quo became that much more acceptable. But without his East German peace treaty, or free city of West Berlin, Khrushchev was still not willing to formally settle the Berlin problem, especially since the Wall reduced his leverage against the West at the negotiating table. Although he claimed the Wall as a victory, as part of a larger Soviet success on Berlin, to his allies it was more an admission of defeat, especially when he followed it up not with a separate peace treaty, but with a withdrawal of his ultimatum. Building the Berlin Wall gave
Khrushchev the initiative once again, but not in a direction he wanted. To secure the settlement in Germany he wanted, he now had to turn his initiative to another location.
Chapter 6
Cuba and Berlin

As 1962 opened, there appeared to be a window for the Berlin Crisis to cool down. Khrushchev’s latest ultimatum from the Vienna summit had passed without any changes, the tension over the building of the Wall had died down, and routines once more governed the relationship between the two sides of the city. Occasionally incidents bred concern that one wrong word or action would trigger crisis. But for the most part, there appeared to be little desire on either side to make Berlin much of an issue.

Meanwhile, other areas of tension moved to the forefront of the Cold War. Fighting continued between communists and anti-communists in Indochina, and the possibility of neutralizing the conflict in Laos diminished. Both the United States and the Soviet Union continued to conduct nuclear weapons tests, even while engaged in disarmament talks in Geneva. And the Soviet Union increased its political and military support for the new communist government of Fidel Castro in Cuba, while the United States sought to overthrow Castro.

As was the case with many of the conflicts in the Cold War, the global ideological struggle between East and West tied these separate issues together. But it was Cuba that would become most closely connected with Berlin, especially when the Cuban Missile Crisis of October thrust Berlin to the forefront of Western policy. While most of the
world focused its attention on Cuba, officials kept a close watch on Berlin, expecting the Soviets to follow any American move in Cuba with a counter-move in the German city. Kennedy and his closest advisors – organized as the Executive Committee of the National Security Council, or ExComm – were particularly concerned with the potential for a Soviet reaction in Berlin, and this concern heavily influenced Kennedy’s decision to pursue a less risky blockade of Cuba rather than air strikes or even invasion of the island.

In many ways, the Cuban Missile Crisis marked the high point of the Berlin Crisis. It saw the greatest and most immediate fear of nuclear war not only among governments, but populations as well, and brought tensions across the East-West border running through the city to some of their highest levels. At the same time, however, the Cuban Missile Crisis was a sign that the Berlin Crisis was already in its denouement. The building of the Wall a year earlier had solved the most immediate causes of conflict surrounding the city, as the East German and Soviet governments no longer had to be as worried about the refugee problem. It had also largely solved Khrushchev’s desire to stabilize East Germany both internally and internationally. With the refugee problem gone, the East German government could feel more confident in its internal position and reduce pressure on the Soviets to act in Berlin. The West may not have been any more inclined to recognize East Germany, but that issue was not as crucial so long as Ulbricht’s regime did not feel threatened internally. Once both sides accepted the reality of the Wall, which was largely the case by early 1962, the urgency of solving the Berlin problem declined.
Athens and Michigan

The problem of nuclear war that was still a part of the Berlin Crisis remained central to the Kennedy Administration’s policymaking. The Checkpoint Charlie standoff had underlined much of the problem of keeping a minor incident from escalating to a general war, and put new impetus behind the administration’s desire to introduce more control through more flexibility. To that point, there had only been hints about new strategy, and even moves like the increase in NATO’s conventional forces were accompanied by assurances that they were not part of abandoning Massive Retaliation. However, American officials were preparing just such a new strategy, based on Taylor’s ideas of Flexible Response, for unveiling to their NATO allies early in 1962. This period would mark a key turning point in the evolution of Allied thought towards nuclear strategy, as the Allies slowly came around to the thinking that conventional deterrence could enhance, not detract from, nuclear deterrence.

American policymakers, including Secretary of Defense McNamara, had decided by this time that Massive Retaliation had lost its credibility as a deterrent, and that even the European allies were unsure of its credibility, although they were not willing to say so yet.¹ That De Gaulle could question the American president’s willingness to use nuclear weapons in the event of a European war simply underscored this doubt, and meant that the United States would have to find a way to buttress nuclear deterrence, lest the Soviets see an opening somewhere like Berlin.² Just as Bowie and Taylor had argued that more

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¹ Record of Conversation between the Secretary of State and the Minister of Defence in the House of Lords on Thursday, 22 June 1961, Berlin Contingency Planning: Draft brief prepared for Secretary of State/Minister of Defence talk, undated, FO 371/160487 (UKNA), 2.
flexibility could provide such an enhanced deterrent, McNamara now sought to convert the increased conventional strength in Europe into a new Western strategy that could restore credibility to nuclear deterrence.

However, to do so meant convincing the Allies that they should agree to a new strategy, something that was easier said than done. The NATO Strategic Concept was only four years old, and NATO strategic thinking going back to the Alliance’s very founding nearly fifteen years before reinforced it. NATO members had based their own national strategies on the provision of American massive retaliation, and few were willing to reassess those strategies, especially if it meant higher conventional defense budgets. Moreover, they would see any American proposal to rely less on the nuclear deterrent as a move to decouple American security from European security, undermining NATO from its roots. McNamara’s job, then, was to present the new strategy as an enhancement of nuclear deterrence, and of the American defense commitment to Western Europe, and then to bring the rest of the Allies on board.

McNamara made his initial pitch at the Athens NATO Defense Ministers meeting in May 1962. He began by presenting the strategic situation in stark terms, highlighting the changing nuclear landscape since NATO’s founding, and the potential for 75 million European and 115 million American deaths from a Soviet nuclear strike in 1966. Under the current strategy, McNamara argued, nuclear war was not militarily feasible, and so had little deterrent power, since the Soviets could calculate that the West would rather


make concessions than face the threat of such losses. In order to make fighting – and winning – a nuclear war more feasible, McNamara proposed “programs which will enable the Alliance to engage in a controlled and flexible nuclear response in the event that deterrence should fail.” And once the Alliance could be secure that it could actually fight – and win – a war that went nuclear, then its deterrence posture would be stronger, and the likelihood of such a war would in fact decrease.

McNamara made certain to reassure his audience that he was not proposing an end to nuclear deterrence, and that the United States was still prepared to launch immediate retaliation against a Soviet nuclear attack or full-scale conventional attack. But he also made clear that more ambiguous attacks were not only possible, but highly probable, and that using nuclear weapons in such ambiguous circumstances might not be politically possible, especially if it meant those kinds of casualties. In particular, he highlighted Berlin and the recent events there as a prime example of such ambiguity, and of just how unattractive nuclear response was politically. The problem was that in “such a crisis the provocation, while severe, does not immediately require or justify our most violent reaction. Also as such a crisis develops, as military force is threatened or becomes engaged – even in limited quantities – the increasingly alert nuclear posture of the belligerents makes the prospective outcome of a nuclear attack for both sides even less attractive.”

Thus, McNamara argued, it was necessary for the Alliance to differentiate between different levels of response. Some cases would require nuclear retaliation, and so

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5 Ibid, 277.
the United States would maintain powerful nuclear forces in service to NATO. But other cases would call for lesser responses, either with tactical nuclear weapons rather than strategic forces, or with non-nuclear forces. McNamara played down the reliance on tactical nuclear forces, fearing their dispersal among troops in the field might make them less controllable and more politically dangerous. But he played up non-nuclear forces, and gave them a deterrence role that fit in with the new strategy of nuclear deterrence as well.\(^6\)

In assessing non-nuclear forces, McNamara laid out two scenarios: one in which NATO conventional forces were weak and thinly spread, and one in which those forces held a forward front firmly. He argued that the first scenario, with NATO forces acting as a trip-wire for a massive retaliation, provided more invitation to the Soviets to press NATO with a series of actions that could slowly erode the Western position. On the other hand, he argued that the second position would make it politically possible for NATO to resist small Soviet pressures, and thus maintain its interests, since its forces could “guard positively from the frontier against any quick strike or ambiguous aggression.”\(^7\) Anything large enough to throw back those stronger conventional forces would be large enough to merit a nuclear response, one the United States, he claimed, would not hesitate to make.

Again, McNamara used the Berlin scenario as an example of how strong non-nuclear forces could provide more flexibility to the Alliance, as well as enhance the larger deterrent. The Soviets were able to apply their pressure on Berlin because they believed that the West would not be determined enough to counter them. Instead, though,

\(^6\) Ibid, 278.
\(^7\) Ibid, 280.
the West built up its conventional power in response to the pressure, making it more
difficult for the Soviets to threaten action, and also clearly demonstrating its
determination to maintain its position in Berlin. According to McNamara, it was “not
simply the substantial increase in NATO manpower…, but the meaning which their
addition conveyed of our determination that may have given the Soviets second
thoughts.” While the crisis may not have been over, the lower state of tensions certainly
gave McNamara the confidence to present his interpretation of its outcome as support for
his argument for a new Western strategy.

McNamara also gained confidence from what he saw as clearer views of Soviet
strength, especially relative to Western strength. New intelligence had confirmed that the
Soviet missile forces were still struggling to get large numbers of weapons operational,
and that the missile gap between Soviet and American strategic forces remained heavily
tilted towards the United States. Yet the Soviets still had large numbers of shorter range
nuclear weapons that threatened Western Europe, and provided them with the ability to
put pressure on the West through smaller-scale actions like in Berlin, while not creating
very much likelihood of an American strategic retaliation. This situation, to McNamara,
reduced NATO’s flexibility, and increases in Soviet long-range nuclear forces were not
likely to improve NATO’s strategic position. Thus, the decision to have Deputy Secretary
of Defense Roswell Gilpatric publicly deny the existence of the missile gap contributed
to McNamara’s goal of moving from Massive Retaliation to Flexible Response.9

8 Ibid.
9 Beschloss, The Crisis Years, 329.
The reaction of the Allies to McNamara’s Athens speech was mixed. The West Germans continued to fear that downplaying Massive Retaliation would open the door to a war, either nuclear or conventional, fought on German soil, leading to the devastation of the country and its population.\footnote{Christoph Bluth, \textit{Britain, Germany and Western Nuclear Strategy} (New York: Clarendon Press, 1995), 109.} The British and the French were concerned that the new American turn was directed more to reducing the importance of their own nuclear forces and deterrents, and to further centralizing Western strategy under American control.\footnote{Ibid, 131. Circular Telegram from the Department of State to Certain Missions, 9 May 1962, \textit{FRUS} 1961-1963, XIII Western Europe and Canada, 392-93.} The smaller allies continued to associate the reduction of the importance of the nuclear deterrent as a sign of American decoupling, and resented McNamara’s associated calls for even larger increases in NATO’s conventional manpower.\footnote{Lawrence S. Kaplan, “McNamara, Vietnam, and the Defense of Europe”, in Mastny, Holtsmark, and Wenger, \textit{War Plans and Alliances in the Cold War}, 287.}

These reactions grew more heated after McNamara decided to publicly unveil the new strategic thinking shortly after the Athens meeting. At a commencement ceremony at the University of Michigan on 16 June, he largely repeated his speech from Athens, with more of a focus on the relationship between the alliance deterrent and national deterrents. Notwithstanding the American efforts, both public and private, to convince the Allies that the Western strategic advantage remained significant despite recent Soviet gains and claims, NATO governments were convinced that the Soviets were stronger than they in fact were, including in conventional forces. This belief helped reinforce the Allies’ preference for relying on nuclear forces rather than building up conventional strength.\footnote{Memorandum From William Y. Smith to the President's Military Representative (Taylor), 9 August 1962, \textit{FRUS} 1961-1963, XV Berlin Crisis, 1962-1963, 267.}
Yet NATO’s move towards a more flexible strategy was underway even before McNamara began his push. The work going on in LIVE OAK that was turning contingency planning into strategic planning was spreading into the larger space of NATO planning, aided by doubts about the credibility of the deterrent that had begun to appear around the North Atlantic table. Part of this movement was a deliberate effort to coordinate LIVE OAK and NATO planning over Berlin, but the implications of the results went far beyond Berlin, even without the Allies recognizing them. By early 1962, Norstad was putting into place plans that would dovetail closely with McNamara’s grander ideas about Western strategy, further opening the door to NATO’s acceptance.

The first step was the decision to move LIVE OAK’s offices closer to the main SHAPE headquarters outside Paris. Although LIVE OAK remained a separate organization staffed only by American, British, and French officers, it would now coordinate its plans with SHAPE, with the goal of making a seamless transition between the two staffs in a time of crisis. McNamara in particular was worried that NATO plans were deficient, and that Norstad and LIVE OAK needed to prepare plans for the Alliance as widely as possible. There were few problems with this process, although debates over the timing of such a transition continued well after the move. As with earlier LIVE OAK debates, this one centered around the place of NATO within the larger Berlin deterrent, with the British arguing that NATO would be needed early in an access crisis to lend credibility to moves to reopen access, while the Americans contended that doing

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so would merely slow down LIVE OAK operations and weaken the West’s show of resolve.\textsuperscript{15}

Once LIVE OAK and NATO planning were more closely tied, however, NATO planning needed much more detail, especially in case of a Berlin situation. Thus, in October the NAC authorized Norstad to put together detailed plans for various Berlin contingencies. This directive, formalized on 9 November as NATO document C-M(61) 104, revealed that NATO thinking about flexibility in strategy had moved far. Like the basic LIVE OAK concept, the goal of the NATO plans was to put the Alliance into a military position that would demonstrate the West’s determination to maintain Berlin.\textsuperscript{16} However, NATO did not previously think these detailed plans were necessary, since the nuclear deterrent was intended to provide that demonstration. By 1961, though, concern over the credibility of the deterrent was sufficient to make NATO planning necessary.

Most notably, C-M(61) 104 called on Norstad to draft “a catalogue of plans from which appropriate action could be selected by political authorities in the light of circumstances and with the aim of applying increasing pressure which would present with unmistakable clarity to the Soviet the enormous risks in continued denial of access [to Berlin]. These plans would involve conventional forces, and allow “the Soviet Government as many opportunities as possible to pause and re-assess the desirability of continuing on a dangerous course of action.”\textsuperscript{17} This idea clearly draws on Norstad’s

\textsuperscript{15} Berlin Contingency Planning, Note by the Secretary, 29 August 1961, DEFE 7 2254 (UKNA), 2.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, 4.
concept of the pause developed in earlier LIVE OAK planning, planning that had drawn strategy away from Massive Retaliation.

The conventional focus of the NATO action was apparent in C-M(61) 104’s language. The main caveat that the Council imposed on actions taken to restore access to Berlin was that they “not commit capabilities to the prejudice of the overall capacity to defend NATO territory.” The defense of Western Europe was the main consideration for the Allies, and this proviso echoed earlier LIVE OAK concerns that too many troops sent down the Autobahn early in a crisis might weaken NATO elsewhere, opening up the Alliance for attack at a weak point. Thus, NATO’s build-up of conventional strength was a key consideration in drawing up the new plans, one that the Council emphasized. The Council also stressed that, while nuclear options were still vital, the plans would only consider nuclear use if the Soviets went nuclear first, the conventional war was going badly for NATO, or nuclear weapons were necessary to show the political resolve of the Alliance.

On the face of it, C-M(61) 104 was not a particularly provocative document. Only three pages long, its scope was broad and designed to leave Norstad as much room as he felt he needed to draft the new plans. However, the very existence of these plans said quite a bit about how far the Alliance had come in strategic thinking. While the 1957 Strategic Concept had made clear that there was no room in NATO strategy for the concept of limited war, C-M(61)104 contained specific instructions to NATO’s commander to prepare for a limited war. The decision for NATO planning had elicited

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18 Ibid.
19 Ibid, 4-5.
some discussion on the Council, and Norstad had provided a more detailed briefing of LIVE OAK plans, but the Allies largely accepted the shift without much controversy.\textsuperscript{20} They did not fully recognize how far they had moved from the basis of the Strategic Concept, but if they did, they likely fit it into the broad interpretation of that concept that Secretary-General Stikker had previously noted. Regardless, the situation in Berlin had called for new measures, and NATO was now willing to provide the plans for these new measures, even if now based on a partially conventional, as opposed to fully nuclear, strategy.

The results of the planning also demonstrate the increased importance flexibility had in NATO. The Berlin Contingency plans, or BERCONs, covered land, sea, and air preparations, and fit into the graduated catalogue that C-M(61) 104 had called for. The BERCON Alpha plans covered air scenarios and called for non-nuclear battles for air superiority in the air corridors to Berlin or over all of Germany, while BERCON Delta plans covered similar situations for naval scenarios.\textsuperscript{21} The heart of the BERCONs, however, were the BERCON Charlie plans, which dealt with ground operations. There were four levels of the Charlie operations, ranging from a one division attack along one axis, to a three division attack along a wider line.\textsuperscript{22} All of these operations were strictly conventional, and Norstad believed that they could “indicate the willingness of NATO to engage in ground action on an increasing scale.”\textsuperscript{23} The flexibility would provide the West the ability to escalate in a controlled fashion, including to the nuclear levels. All of the

\textsuperscript{20} PO/61/765 NATO Planning for Berlin Emergency, 27 September 1961 (NA), 1.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid, 10-11.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid, 11.
BERCONs contained a nuclear annex that NATO could put in place at any point in the implementation of the plans, and BERCON Bravo called for the use of a small number of low-yield nuclear bombs away from population centers to provide a demonstration of resolve.24 But it was clear that the BERCON plans did not envision the use of nuclear weapons unless NATO deemed it necessary, at least according to the criteria the Council had outlined in October.

There was a strong connection between the BERCONs and the LIVE OAK plans. The strongest connection was between LIVE OAK’s division-sized JUNE BALL operation (approved in mid-1961) and the BERCON Charlie plans. The connection was so close that when developing the BERCON plans, Norstad delineated that while the assembly of the division would be under tripartite control, the implementation of the plan would be under NATO control, and thus the overlapping of forces and capabilities would have to be taken into account.25 Therefore, the BERCONs expanded NATO planning on Berlin, and also helped to clarify the distinctions between tripartite responsibilities and NATO responsibilities, and thus brought NATO closer to confronting the Berlin Crisis.

During the February briefing, Norstad also made clear that the plans demanded a new strategy in terms of the defense of the NATO area. Previously, NATO’s defensive strategy called for the Allies to hold most of the forces behind the inner-German border, with only light covering forces up front. However, this arrangement would impair the Alliance’s ability to react to Soviet moves on Berlin, and so Norstad noted that he was now convinced that defense needed to start in force on the inner-German border. He

24 Ibid, 9-10.
believed that this “new concept of forward defence [sic] would enable a better use of conventional weapons as well as nuclear resources and would provide greater political flexibility.”

Clearly, Norstad was arguing that conventional forces would augment the nuclear deterrent, not detract from it, one of the key foundations of Flexible Response. Although he was not calling for a total shift in NATO’s deterrent strategy, there was an obvious swing away from the Strategic Concept and Massive Retaliation.

NATO members did raise concerns over the BERCONs and extended Berlin planning in general. Some of these concerns involved the practical ability of NATO to implement a forward defense, and whether the Soviets would see it as provocative and aggressive as opposed to defensive. There were other questions about the inevitability of escalation once NATO used nuclear weapons, for example in the BERCON Bravo scenario. Norstad made sure to note that he was not asking for authorization to make changes or to use nuclear weapons, but that these decisions would have to come from political levels. From these discussions, it becomes evident that NATO members were less concerned about the effect such conventional plans would have on the West’s deterrent and more concerned with the consequences of nuclear use. It is in this sort of change in thinking that it is possible to see how the Berlin Crisis allowed NATO to explore more flexible strategies and eventually accept McNamara’s push for Flexible Response.

Crisis Over?

26 Ibid, 13-14. Emphasis added. Although there were still questions about the Alliance’s ability to hold a more forward line, Norstad believed it would be possible through increases in French troops relocating from Algeria, American troops flying in as reinforcements, and the increased motivation German troops would have to defend more of their homeland.

Tensions remained relatively high as 1962 opened. The East Germans were still in the process of making the Berlin Wall a permanent divider between East and West Berlin, and the potential for another Checkpoint Charlie incident lingered. At the same time, though, something fundamental had changed about the situation in Berlin because of the Wall. Once it was clear that the Western powers were not going to attempt to eliminate the Wall, people began adjusting to life in its shadow. This is not to say that it disappeared as an issue between, or within, East and West. No West German politician could publicly accept the Wall’s legitimacy, any more than they could accept East Germany’s. And attempts by East Germans to cross over into West Berlin continued, especially before the East Germans could completely encircle West Berlin in concrete and mines. But since the Wall had removed the most pressing areas of conflict between the two sides, there was a sense that they could each now accept the status quo, and conditions could return to the situation pre-1958.

Western preparations for a potential clash continued, however. While there was a sense that the urgency had been removed, there was also a recognition that the basic problems – the division of Berlin, Germany, and Europe, Allied access to West Berlin, and the status of East Germany – remained extant, and the two sides had made little progress to solve them in the more than three years since Berlin had burst to the forefront of the Cold War. Nor was there much hope among Western officials that they could, or even should, make any progress. Consequently, they had to remain on guard for further Soviet or East German provocations, which would most likely continue to come in the form of harassing or limiting Allied access to West Berlin.

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And in fact, the Soviets and East Germans continued to harass Allied convoys and airplanes. Although these harassments did not reach the level of earlier provocations, particularly the one that set off the Checkpoint Charlie standoff, they were a cause for worry among Western officials, and provided impetus to the various groups involved in setting Berlin policy. Set apart from each other, each incident was minor. But officials understood that should the Soviets begin a series of harassments, each seemingly minor but together possibly major, the West might soon find itself facing that dreaded scenario of having to choose between accepting a significant change in access rights or challenging the change and risking war. Thus they had to monitor each incident closely and carefully calibrate each response.

Still, it appears that Khrushchev had already decided by the end of 1961 that he had come as far as he could on Berlin, and was no longer willing to risk his political or international prestige on changing the status quo. In particular, he may have begun to realize that the West was increasingly seeing his use of the nuclear threat as an empty bluff, and as strategy it was reaching its limits.²⁸ The crisis he had generated had provoked divisions within NATO, but not to the degree that he had hoped or expected, and it was clear that NATO would directly confront any drastic moves. While debate continued over the expansion of nuclear weapons in NATO, there was little probability of West Germany gaining an independent nuclear capability, and the Kennedy administration’s talk about centralizing nuclear control indicated its reluctance to allow the nuclearization of West Germany. East Germany was more stable, and had even

²⁸ Zubok, A Failed Empire, 141.
gained some *de facto* recognition from the West, even if *de jure* recognition was still off the table. Moreover, the negative consequences of reopening the Berlin question, such as economic countermeasures against East Germany or the Soviet Union, were beginning to look more negative compared to the possible positive benefits such a move might have for the Soviets. Although he had not succeeded in eliminating the Western presence inside East Germany’s borders, Khrushchev had essentially removed Berlin as a thorn in his side. He could now live with the status quo.

Of course, Khrushchev would not abandon Berlin or the leverage it continued to provide him. Ulbricht and his allies – particularly the Chinese – insisted that the Soviet Union needed to resolve the Berlin question and evict the Western powers. And so the harassments continued, as did Khrushchev’s threats. He continued to press his demands for Berlin on Kennedy, both publicly and privately, although without reintroducing the deadline or ultimatum for signing the peace treaty with East Germany. In August, the Soviets made it appear that they were preparing to sign a treaty, remove their commandant, and abolish the office of the Soviet Commandant, which had been in place since 1945. To the Allies, this move appeared to be part of the Soviet plan to turn over control of Berlin entirely to the East Germans and thus unilaterally change the status of

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29 While the Western allies were still not willing to enter formal negotiations with the GDR, they were happy to let the Federal Republic negotiate with its eastern counterpart on issues such as trade, technical agreements, and other low-level issues. As well, the decision to recognize East German authorities as agents of the Soviets in Berlin and East German indicated a willingness to accept the reality of East Germany, even if not its legality. See Memorandum From Secretary of State Rusk to President Kennedy, 2 August 1962, FRUS 1961-1963, XV Berlin Crisis, 1962-1963 Berlin Crisis 1962-1963, 258.
30 Ibid.
the city. While the move caused consternation, especially in Berlin, most officials were willing to regard it as another attempt by Khrushchev to “cry wolf” over Berlin. They took very little action in response.

The most dangerous act of early 1962 was not a result of a planned Soviet action, but of a spontaneous incident. On the night of August 17, two young East Berliners, Helmut Kulbeik and Peter Fechter, attempted to cross over the Wall into West Berlin. The East German guards opened fire on them, missing Kulbeik but wounding Fechter, who fell back into the no-man’s-land between the Wall and a secondary barrier the East Germans were building, and bled to death within an hour. The shooting took place in full view of onlookers on both sides of the Wall, sparking demonstrations against the East Germans by West Berlin civilians. In the following days, West Berliners stoned buses carrying Soviet soldiers to the Soviet war memorial in West Berlin, and the Western authorities had difficulties containing such anger. Some of that anger was directed at the Americans, British, and French as well as the East Germans and Soviets, since the American authorities – next to whose sector Fechter had died – had done nothing to aid the dying man. However, since Fechter had fallen back on to the East German side of the Wall, the American commander did not have the authority to send even an ambulance to his aid, and any such move likely would have resulted in the East German guards opening fire.

__32 Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to the President's Special Counsel (Sorensen), 23 August 1962, FRUS 1961-1963, XV Berlin Crisis 1962-1963, 285. The duties of the Commandant related to relations with the Western powers were shifted to the higher command of the Group of Soviet Force in Germany. “Statement by the Soviet News Agency Tass...”, August 22, 1962, Documents on Germany, 823-24.
33 Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to the President's Special Counsel (Sorensen), 23 August 1962, FRUS 1961-1963, XV, Berlin Crisis 1962-1963, 285._
fire on the rescuers, expanding the incident into a potentially dangerous one. The most action the Allies could take was to protest the shooting and call on the Soviet Commandant to discuss with his Western counterparts ways to prevent further such incidents. Although the abolition of the Soviet Commandant’s office a few days later ruled out such a meeting, the killing remained in the city’s memory.

The Peter Fechter incident demonstrated how easily tensions could still rise, even absent a Soviet ultimatum. Western contingency planning continued apace, on the assumption that the Berlin Powers would have to find ways to live with a Soviet-GDR peace treaty.\(^3^4\) This assumption meant that the Allies were now in a position to accept East Germans as agents of the Soviets for the purposes of handling access to Berlin, although the French and West Germans remained reluctant about granting the Soviets such a concession.\(^3^5\) Few officials expected such a concession to be enough should Berlin again flare to crisis, but with the crisis in abeyance, it was a safe move to consider.

Rather than issue another ultimatum for a peace treaty with East Germany, however, Khrushchev decided on a new move to increase the Soviet strategic position: he would secretly dispatch medium- and intermediate range nuclear missiles to his new ally Cuba, and put the continental United States directly under nuclear threat. Khrushchev was not thinking of reanimating the Berlin Crisis. He was well aware of the continuing Soviet strategic inferiority, and probably felt it in his inability to extract significant concessions on Berlin. Still, he could not simply surrender the issues behind the Berlin

\(^3^4\) Memorandum From Secretary of State Rusk to President Kennedy, 2 August 1962, FRUS 1961-1963, XV Berlin Crisis, 1962-1963, 262.
\(^3^5\) Ibid, 258.
Crisis, especially after he had spent almost four years focusing world attention on them. In Khrushchev’s mind, the deployment of missiles to Cuba would match the deployment of American missiles in Turkey. By balancing the two powers’ nuclear positions, Khrushchev could reopen Berlin with more leverage, and possibly back the Americans far enough off their position to remove the Berlin thorn from the Warsaw Pact’s side. This move was risky since it depended on getting the missiles operational before the United States detected them, and then on the United States accepting the presence of Soviet nuclear missiles in the Western Hemisphere. When the Americans did not accept their presence, the result was an expansion of the Cold War crisis to a grave level.

The Cuban Missile Crisis

Although most of the world’s attention in late October 1962 was focused on Cuba, the Cuban Missile Crisis had significant implications for Berlin. Kennedy understood the repercussions for Berlin if he elected to take action against Cuba; if the United States launched air strikes or an invasion against Cuba, the Soviet Union’s likely would retaliate by attacking Berlin. This possibility was an important factor in pushing Kennedy away from these types of actions against Cuba. The Cuban Missile Crisis once again brought home how tenuous the West’s position in Berlin was, and how enhancing deterrence was vital to ensuring that NATO did not find itself under unendurable pressure in the city.

Even before the United States became aware of the missiles in Cuba, American officials were concerned that the Soviets might be linking the island with Berlin. The

feeling was that if something happened in Berlin, whether started by the Soviets or by the West, the Soviets would expect the Americans to take action against Cuba, and so they were hurriedly building up Cuba’s defenses against any such action. In particular, American officials considered the possibility that the Soviets might be in a rush to prepare Cuban defenses so that they would be more secure in making a move against Berlin.\(^3^7\) There was recognition that Khrushchev had staked a lot personally and politically on Berlin, had come away with little, if anything, and might even be unsure of Soviet strength should the Berlin Crisis come to a conflict point. He may have then been looking for ways to gain ground without forcing a new crisis over Berlin, and Cuba was a possibility.\(^3^8\) Still, Kennedy and his advisors were willing to believe Khrushchev’s assurances that the weapons going into Cuba were entirely defensive in nature, although they monitored those weapons to ensure that Khrushchev was not lying.

Into September, Western leaders warily believed that the Soviets were not looking to introduce offensive weapons, especially nuclear missiles, into Cuba. By October, Soviet moves, including shipping medium-range bombers capable of carrying nuclear bombs, increased American doubts about Khrushchev’s assurances. Kennedy and Rusk pressed Gromyko about the Soviet arms buildup, and Gromyko insisted that the weapons were purely defensive. That changed on 14 October, when U-2 spy plane reconnaissance revealed the presence of Soviet MRBMs in Cuba. When told two days later, Kennedy,

\(^3^7\) Memorandum of Conversation, 7 September 1962, FRUS 1961-1963, XV Berlin Crisis, 1962-1963, 313.
shocked by the news, realized at once that it heralded a change not only in the Cuban situation, but also the one in Berlin.

Still, the information remained unclear, and Kennedy was not willing to jump into a crisis without more details. The day after he learned of the MRBMx, he met with West German foreign minister Gerhard Schroeder to discuss Berlin and other mutual matters. Even though Cuba clearly weighed heavily on Kennedy’s mind throughout the conversation, he gave no hint of it to Schroeder, and he clearly indicated to Schroeder that he was more concerned about the likelihood of a renewed Berlin crisis by the end of the year. Likewise, Kennedy deliberately gave no indication to Gromyko that he knew of the missiles when they met the next day, and once again the main issue of contention was Berlin, which Gromyko called the “rotten tooth which must be pulled out.”

Gromyko’s assurance did not allay American fears that Berlin was about to flare up again. In fact, it reinforced the earlier view that Soviet actions in Cuba were closely tied to their intentions in Berlin, and that Khrushchev was stationing nuclear missiles next door to the United States in order to prevent the West from responding strongly in Berlin.

It was with this connection in mind that Kennedy and his advisors began their deliberations on the Cuban missiles in the Executive Committee of the National Security Council, or ExComm. In the first meeting on the morning of 16 October, Secretary of State Rusk expressed the fear of many in the room:

I think also that Berlin is very much involved in this. For the first time, I’m beginning really to wonder whether maybe Mr. Khrushchev is entirely rational about Berlin. [Acting U.N. secretary-general] U Thant

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39 Memorandum of Conversation, 17 October 1962, Ibid, 363
has talked about his obsession with it. And I think we have to keep our
eye on that element.
But they may be thinking that they can either bargain Berlin and Cuba
against each other, or that they could provoke us into a kind of action in
Cuba which would give an umbrella for them to take action with respect to
Berlin. In other words, like the Suez-Hungary combination [in 1956]. If
they could provoke us into taking the first overt action, then the world
would be confused and they would have what they would consider to be
justification for making a move somewhere else.\footnote{11:50 A.M.-1:00 P.M. Meeting on the Cuban Missile Crisis, 16 October 1962, Ernest R. May and Philip Zelikow, \textit{The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House During the Cuban Missile Crisis} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), Vol. 2, 411.}

In particular, ExComm officials struggled to understand Khrushchev’s motives
for putting missiles in Cuba, and Rusk’s comment about his rationality touched on the
fear that Khrushchev was so determined to push the West out of Berlin that he would risk
provoking the United States into nuclear war.

The other important question was how to react to the missiles. The initial reaction
most everyone, Kennedy included, considered was to launch a military attack – either air
strikes or an invasion – to destroy the missiles before they could become operational. But
such an attack would obviously have repercussions that leaders would have to discuss
and prepare for first. The most likely Soviet counter-response would be to cut off or even
attack Berlin. Although many in ExComm may have been willing to accept the loss of
Berlin in those circumstances, they recognized that the conflict likely would not stop
there.\footnote{6:30-8:00 P.M. Meeting on the Cuban Missile Crisis, Ibid, 437.} Once the Soviets attacked Western forces in Berlin, there would be very little
chance to contain the confrontation, short of general nuclear war. This sequence of events
would bypass the steps that the Allies had been working on in contingency planning, and
clearly would represent a threat to the Berlin Powers, NATO, and the world. Rusk again
made this reality clear by noting that no action that the United States took in Cuba was truly a unilateral action, because anything it did, even limited in size and geographic scope, affected all of its allies, especially those in NATO.\textsuperscript{43}

While the general belief in ExComm was that the Allies would go along with American decisions about Cuba, McGeorge Bundy argued that the NATO allies might point out that they already lived within range of similar MRBMs, and that it would be possible for the United States to.\textsuperscript{44} This concern cut to the heart of the deterrence question, although no one directly brought that up. Had the United States decided to live with the missiles in Cuba, Khrushchev would have seen it as a sign of weakness, and he also would likely have seen an opportunity to press his advantage by renewing pressure on Berlin. Although the West could have remained determined not to relinquish its position in Berlin, American leaders would have found it harder to resist those, like the British, who argued that Berlin was not worth the risk of nuclear war, since that war now more directly threatened the American homeland. At the same time, however, attacking the missiles and risking a Soviet retaliation in Berlin could possibly leave the United States open to criticism from the Germans that Cuba was not worth Berlin, weakening the Alliance from another direction. These types of issues weighed on Kennedy as he prepared to make a decision on attacking Cuba.

Before long, it was apparent to Kennedy that, while attacking Cuba carried significant risks that the Allies would probably object to, taking no action would carry its own risks. Allowing the Soviets to place missiles in Cuba would undermine the Allies’

\textsuperscript{43} 11:50 A.M.-1:00 P.M. Meeting on the Cuban Missile Crisis, 16 October 1962, Ibid, 404, 406.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid, 412.
confidence in the United States to help them elsewhere, which would probably cause the disintegration of NATO itself.\textsuperscript{45} The problem was not the Soviet missiles in Cuba, since the West would still have enjoyed a significant nuclear superiority, but it was the political and psychological effect of their deployment. Their presence so close to the United States would give the perception of a major shift in the strategic balance, even though the United States had just proved the missile gap false.\textsuperscript{46} The Joint Chiefs of Staff, now headed by Maxwell Taylor, followed this line of reasoning most strongly, arguing that failure to act in Cuba would dangerously weaken the credibility of the United States to act elsewhere, especially Berlin.\textsuperscript{47} To a degree, Kennedy concurred, since he believed that the Berlin problem would remain even if the United States took no action on Cuba, but if the missiles were operational when the Soviets brought Berlin back up – he thought likely within two months – then the West would “have this thing [Cuba] stuck right in our guts.”\textsuperscript{48} His goal was to find some action that would lessen the risk of nuclear war, while at the same time reassuring the Allies that the United States was determined to preserve its nuclear deterrent.\textsuperscript{49} By this time, Kennedy was increasingly convinced that a blockade of Cuba would most likely secure these goals.

A blockade carried its own risks, though. It was technically an act of war, which opened the United States to Soviet counter-moves, especially in Berlin. Should the Soviets counter in Berlin, they would have a strong bargaining chip; if the United States

\textsuperscript{45} 11:10 A.M.-1:15 P.M. Meeting on the Cuban Missile Crisis, 18 October 1962, Ibid, 535
\textsuperscript{46} ‘After Two Years: A conversation with the president’ Television and radio interview, 17 December 1962, \textit{Public papers of the Presidents}, 898.
\textsuperscript{47} 9:45-10:30 A.M. Meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the Cuban Missile Crisis, 19 October 1962, May and Zelikow, \textit{The Kennedy Tapes}, Vol. 2, 582.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{49} 11:10 A.M.-1:15 P.M. Meeting on the Cuban Missile Crisis, 18 October 1962, Ibid, Vol. 2, 541.
wanted the missiles out of Cuba, then it would have to trade the Western presence in Berlin. On the one hand, Kennedy was fatalistic about Berlin. Believing that the Soviets were about to renew their pressure on the city regardless of their actions in Cuba, he might have been willing to make such a trade. On the other hand, he knew he could not do so without the consent of the Allies, and it was unlikely that he would get such consent. Thus, Kennedy had to risk that Khrushchev would not seek to use Berlin as a bargaining chip in this way. A second risk was that although it may have been hard for the Soviets to take military action against Berlin in response to an American blockade of Cuba, a blockade of Berlin was something the West had feared the Soviets might impose throughout the Berlin Crisis. Once the Berlin blockade started, LIVE OAK came into play, opening the door to escalation not in Cuba, but in Berlin, where the stakes were much higher. But Kennedy and his supporters decided that the risk of a Cuban blockade was worth it. To minimize the chance at reprisal, they limited the blockade to offensive military material rather than all imports, and chose to call the action a quarantine, in the hopes that the Soviets would not equate Cuba and Berlin.

Throughout the Cuban Missile Crisis, consultation with the Allies was an important factor within ExComm’s decision-making. Rusk emphasized that any action would require Allied backing, and that backing would only come if the Americans

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50 Ibid, 535.
51 Ibid, 539.
52 Ibid, 534.
consulted them from the start. Although he worried that the Allies would try to pressure the United States not to act, Kennedy immediately agreed that consultation was desirable, especially early on. Keeping them in the loop, he hoped, would bring the Allies on board with the blockade idea and provide crucial political support for American actions. Before speaking publicly about the missiles on the evening of 22 October, Kennedy sent special envoys to the major European capitals to brief the Allied leadership and gain their support, and kept in close contact with Harold Macmillan over the telephone, consulting him closely about the crisis and what steps the United States should take. Kennedy also created a sub-committee to ExComm, chaired by Paul Nitze, to manage Berlin issues and coordinate with the Ambassadorial Group. This coordination was especially important, because if the Soviets retaliated in Berlin, the response would have had to be tri- or quadripartite, and thus would likely run through the Ambassadorial Group and LIVE OAK.

In general, the Allies were on board with the American response to the missiles, despite their own misgivings about the risks. De Gaulle famously told Acheson that he did not need to see the U-2 photos to believe the Americans, and that he did not have any objections to the American reaction “since it is legal for a country to defend itself when it

55 9:45-10:30 A.M. Meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the Cuban Missile Crisis, 19 October 1962, Ibid, 585.
56 In addition to the personal envoys Kennedy sent to Macmillan, de Gaulle, Adenauer, and Canadian Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, he also sent personal notes to other NATO members, and Dean Acheson briefed the NAC after his briefing for de Gaulle.
finds itself in danger.”  

Macmillan pressed Kennedy to act decisively enough to ensure that the crisis would not drag on and open up Western weaknesses. The NAC and other NATO members also gave public and private statements of support, especially in the United Nations during the tense discussions in the Security Council. This support helped Kennedy keep the quarantine policy on track, and contributed to the political pressure on Khrushchev not to escalate the crisis either in the Caribbean or in Berlin.

Throughout the crisis, Kennedy and others kept the focus on Berlin, which he called the “main site” of the conflict, as well as on Cuba. This focus meant that not only did Kennedy have to ensure that his allies saw the connections between Cuba and Berlin, but that the public, especially in Europe, understood the threat to themselves from the missiles in Cuba. In his discussions with Macmillan, Kennedy continually came back to the question of how to get the missiles out of Cuba without prompting a response from the Soviets in Berlin. The quarantine was all well and good for stopping present and future shipments, but there were both MRBMs and IRBMs in Cuba, and they could become operational before the United States and the Soviet Union found a political solution for Berlin. At that point, Kennedy knew, the Soviets would be in a better position to threaten Berlin. He had to consider the need to launch attacks against the missiles before they became operational, but knew that such action would have an effect

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58 Telegram from the Embassy in France to the Department of State, 22 October 1962, FRUS 1961-1963, XI Cuban Missile Crisis and Aftermath, 166.
60 Ibid, 70.
61 May and Zelikow, The Kennedy Tapes, 205-06.
on the Berlin situation. Neither Macmillan nor Kennedy came up with an answer for this dilemma.

Fortunately for them, they did not have to. Instead, Kennedy decided to make a deal with Khrushchev. In exchange for an American pledge not to invade the island, and eventually remove American MRBMs from Turkey, Khrushchev would remove all the missiles from Cuba. This solution presented its own problems, however. While the missiles in Turkey were American, they were deployed there as part of NATO, and so the decision to remove them would require some form of Alliance agreement. And as the Turks looked to the missiles as a guarantee of their security, getting such agreement would be difficult. Kennedy and his closest advisors therefore decided that that aspect of the deal would have to remain secret, so that it did not appear as a quid pro quo with the Soviets. Instead, they would remove the missiles from Turkey at a later date, and thus be able to assure the Turks and the other allies that the move did not weaken the deterrent. The fact that the Jupiter missiles in Turkey were obsolete and due for removal soon anyway helped Kennedy’s subterfuge.

By 28 October the Missile Crisis was over, but the status of Berlin remained the same. The successful outcome in Cuba, though, gave American officials confidence that Khrushchev would not seek to reopen Berlin in the near future. They believed that Khrushchev’s actions in Cuba were so tied to Berlin that not having the missiles in Cuba would prevent the Soviets from putting new pressure on Berlin, as the Americans had

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originally expected. Instead, Khrushchev found himself back in the position he occupied at the start of 1962 – or even at the start of the Berlin Crisis in 1958 – now with even less leverage after his failure to maintain the missiles in Cuba.

In fact, Western officials saw the conclusion of the Cuban Missile Crisis as an opportunity for gaining ground on Berlin. Though some may have harbored hopes of strengthening the Western position and removing the Wall, the general consensus was to resume pressure on the Soviets to negotiate a *modus vivendi* on the status quo in the city. Policymakers expected that the Soviets would recognize the value of stability in Western Europe, possibly even over the middle- or longer-term, and would agree to the formalization of the access routines in order to prevent a resumption of tensions over the city. Paul Nitze in particular pushed for a bold diplomatic move that would force the Soviets to negotiate a *modus vivendi*, or even a long-term solution to Berlin and Germany. The West could again emphasize an all-German solution based on free elections across both East and West Germany. Confident in the demographic and political advantages West Germany had over the East, officials knew that such an election would almost certainly result in a reunified Germany at least leaning towards the West, a significant loss for the Soviet Union. Ambassador Thompson put forward a similar

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64 Memorandum From David Klein and Colonel Lawrence J. Legere to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy), Subject: Meeting of the Nitze Subcommittee (October 29), 29 October 1962, Ibid, 406-07.
65 Memorandum From the Chairman of the Berlin-NATO Subcommittee (Nitze) to President Kennedy, I-26257/62, undated, FRUS 1961-1963, Ibid, 411.
66 Ibid, 416.
proposal, although one allowing some concessions to the Soviets on Berlin and Germany in order to achieve an agreement.\textsuperscript{67}

With the West seemingly in a strong position, the possibility arose of a new U.S.-Soviet summit, or even a Four-Power summit. While this summit meeting might ostensibly have finalized the new situation in Cuba, Berlin would certainly be a major topic of discussion, and the West likely would have put a new Berlin proposal forward.\textsuperscript{68} American officials cautiously considered broaching such a possibility to the Soviets, hoping that they could replicate the example of both sides making concessions in Central Europe.\textsuperscript{69} Beyond exchanges dealing with the last issues from Cuba, however, little came from these approaches, and there was no summit meeting.

The Soviets’ unwillingness to open the door to the types of concessions the West might push for, such as all-German elections, limited the potential for a summit. Similarly, reluctance on the part of some of the Allies to open the door to new talks on Germany prevented movement. Adenauer, in particular, adamantly opposed providing Khrushchev with an opportunity to recoup something from his Cuban debacle. In the German Chancellor’s mind, the Soviets were at a significant disadvantage after Cuba, and allowing them back to the table would benefit Khrushchev instead of the Allies. He believed that Khrushchev would look at a summit as a chance to “let bygones be bygones,” and in negotiations would do anything in his power to wipe out the disgrace of

\textsuperscript{67} Memorandum From the Chairman of the Advance Planning Subcommittee (Rostow) to the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy), 9 November 1962, FRUS 1961-1963, Ibid, 423-24.

\textsuperscript{68} Memorandum From the Chairman of the Berlin-NATO Subcommittee (Nitze) to President Kennedy, I-26257/62, undated, Ibid, 412-13.

\textsuperscript{69} Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in the Soviet Union, 28 November 1962, FRUS 1961-1963, Ibid, 447.
Cuba. Instead the West should press its determination to make clear to the Soviets that they would not allow any more challenges to the status quo. What neither Adenauer nor the rest of the Allies knew, was that Kennedy had traded the missiles in Turkey for the missiles in Cuba. Kennedy surely realized that if the Allies knew that he had agreed to remove the NATO missiles from Turkey in return for the Soviet missiles in Cuba, he would have lost even more support. Without full Allied backing, the United States had little incentive to press the Soviets on a summit.

It is unclear whether the Soviets would have agreed to a summit, or whether such a summit would have achieved anything more than previous ones. The apparent lack of Soviet interest in a summit suggests that the Soviets would not have seen a summit as an opportunity to recover some of what they had lost in Cuba. But that does not mean that they would have felt themselves at any sort of disadvantage in the negotiations, and almost certainly would have continued to insist on treating East Germany as a sovereign state in any discussions on reunification, nullifying the Western goal of all-German elections. Furthermore, as part of this insistence Khrushchev would have fallen back on Berlin’s status and the need to fully integrate it into East Germany, meaning the elimination of the Western presence there. Although the Soviet leader would have been unlikely to reignite the crisis after October 1962, Berlin would have been a strong chip for him to play in summit negotiations.

Much of the Allies’ focus for 1962 was on the growing divide between the United States and the rest over the question of nuclear strategy. Early in the year, the Kennedy

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administration began moving faster on its shift to Flexible Response, requiring a stronger diplomatic push with its allies in order to get them on board with the changes. This push culminated in McNamara’s private Athens and public Michigan speeches that called for a more focused and flexible nuclear strategy under American control. The Allied reaction to this proposal was mostly negative, as the other nuclear powers saw it as a criticism of their independent deterrents, while the smaller powers saw it as an impractical demand on their conventional contributions and a step toward American decoupling from European security.

At the same time, however, NATO was discussing Berlin contingency plans that added the kind of flexibility that the Americans were pushing for. Unlike the 1957 Strategic Concept, the NATO planning in 1962 envisioned the possibility of a conventional deterrent and defense, even if the nuclear was still the preference. Norstad therefore put together NATO’s BERCON plans from a basis that was much closer to Flexible Response than Massive Retaliation, and the range of plans under the BERCON rubric reflected that change. Thus, even though the Allies were wary of Kennedy’s plans, they had already essentially accepted the need for flexibility and the changes to NATO strategy such flexibility demanded.

The atmosphere of mid-1962 may have contributed to the acceptance of the BERCON ideas. Following the scare at Checkpoint Charlie in October, the crisis waned, and it even seemed as though the shadow the West had been operating under since November 1958 was dissipating. Kennedy, like others, did fear that Khrushchev was planning another initiative on Berlin, most likely for the fall, possibly after mid-term
American elections. Soviet moves like the withdrawal of their military commandant in Berlin in the summer reinforced this fear, making it appear that they were taking steps in preparation for a separate peace treaty. But once again Khrushchev surprised his Western counterparts, and took his initiative to the Caribbean and the new ally in Cuba.

The Western officials who predicted that Khrushchev would spring his latest move after the November elections were right, but his focus was on Cuba. Khrushchev planned to have his nuclear missiles in place by then, making it virtually impossible for the United States to remove them. But he took this action not only to protect Cuba, but also to provide the Soviet Union with a shortcut to nuclear parity with the United States. Once he had the United States within his nuclear reach, he could reopen the Berlin question with more leverage, and possibly gain the peace treaty with East Germany that would secure that regime and solidify the Soviet position in Central Europe.

When they discovered the missiles in Cuba, Kennedy and his advisors read the situation in essentially those terms. The missiles were not as much of a threat to their Cuban policy as they were to their German policy, and allowing the missiles to remain would undermine American credibility and weaken the West’s security in Europe. Thus, for the members of ExComm, Berlin was connected to Cuba not just because it was the likely target for Soviet retaliation to an American attack on the Cuban missiles sites, but also because they saw Berlin as the real target of the Cuban missiles. Khrushchev himself actually downplayed the connections between Cuba and Berlin, and rejected any thoughts of retaliating for Cuba in Berlin.⁷¹ But the Kennedy administration did not know that at

the time of the crisis, and certainly saw the removal of the missiles from Cuba as a victory in Berlin.

Khrushchev certainly took a gamble by risking the Cuban deployment, but had he succeeded, that gamble would have likely paid great dividends. It is not possible to say for certain why Khrushchev made the fateful decision, but Berlin surely played a large role, even if he was not prepared to use the city to deter Kennedy from acting against Cuba. The missiles in Cuba strengthened his hand against Kennedy in Berlin, and Khrushchev would have been hoping that their presence would be the final straw to break the back of the Western determination to hold Berlin. It is quite possible that he would have been correct had the United States not preempted their deployment.

The Cuban Missile Crisis was the closest the world came to nuclear war during the Cold War. Yet it was only a smaller part of the larger confrontation that had been going on since 1958. Ultimately, the close of the Cuban Missile Crisis also marked the end of the Berlin Crisis. West Berlin remained under American, British, and French control, the Berlin Wall remained in place, and Germany remained divided. But these issues no longer had the same urgency they had possessed in the opening years of the Cold War. Europe settled into a wary stability, fairly sure that war was not likely so long as neither side sought major changes to the status quo. And with stability in Central Europe, the attention of the Cold War turned elsewhere. In this way, too, Cuba provided an ending to the Berlin Crisis, because it was an example of the new global aspect of the Cold War.
Conclusion

Epilogue: Berlin in 1963

In the months after the events in Cuba, life progressed as normal in Berlin. The Soviets and East Germans continued to harass Allied access routes, but after the scare the world had gone through, these actions did not seem as threatening. Most officials doubted that Khrushchev would reopen Berlin issues, and expected maintenance of the status quo. This situation did not mean that NATO could rest on its laurels, however, and feel confident that there would be no conflict in Berlin or in Europe. Thus LIVE OAK and the re-evaluation of Western strategy that the Berlin Crisis spurred would continue, and until the end of the Cold War. Finally, Kennedy himself would put a capstone on the Berlin Crisis by going to the Wall and publicly and explicitly reaffirming the American commitment to the city, to West Germany, and to Western Europe. His speech in June 1963 was the last moment of confrontation, rhetorical or otherwise, in the Berlin Crisis.

For NATO, the period after the Cuban Missile Crisis was a time of reflection and adaptation. While Kennedy had taken care to inform the Allies of American action against Cuba, there was a sense in many NATO capitals that the consultation had been after the fact, and that NATO members had had very little input into Kennedy’s decisions, even though they had brought all of them to the brink of war. While the
Americans could partly brush off these complaints by arguing that Cuba was outside of the NATO area, the connections between the two crises revealed that some of the consultation mechanism had broken down. There was, however, little indication that the United States – or Britain or France – would be any more willing to include the NAC in full consultation, given their worries about the security of information and the difficulties of consensus.

Meanwhile, attitudes about strategy were beginning to change. While the Americans remained intent on building up the conventional capacities of the Alliance, practical realities – continued European reluctance to bear the financial and manpower burdens, difficulties in the American balance of payments largely due to the increased armed forces in Europe, and domestic questions about those relative costs – led to the decision to begin withdrawing many of the forces that had been sent as part of Kennedy’s 1961 Berlin build-up. The United States also turned more attention to expanding NATO’s nuclear capacities. NATO’s nuclear forces in the form of MRBM in Britain, Italy, and Turkey were obsolete (and in the case of Turkey, due to be withdrawn), but they still represented a large part of the American commitment to Europe. To replace them, the United States proposed the creation of a Multilateral Force of naval ships equipped with American Polaris IRBMs manned by Allied crews. Although the MLF was doomed to failure, for the time being it provided the Europeans the assurance that the nuclear umbrella still existed.

The problems of NATO’s nuclear strategy persisted. The Allies would never feel completely comfortable with the American nuclear umbrella, even after the creation of
the Nuclear Planning Group within the Alliance to plan nuclear strategy jointly. At the same time, however, the Allies would never feel completely comfortable with the absence of the nuclear umbrella, and the prospect of Flexible Response would continue to appear to the Europeans as the possibility of losing American nuclear protection. Thus, while the protection remained, always just sufficient to assure the Europeans, it was never stable enough in European minds. Still, the Allies remained committed to the ends of NATO strategy, even as they debated the means.

For Berliners, assurance came in another form. On 26 June 1963, Kennedy visited Berlin as part of a trip to Germany to meet with Adenauer. Kennedy was uncertain about adding Berlin to the itinerary, but he had thought about visiting the city since the start of the crisis two years before, and with tensions decreasing, the risks involved seemed minor. His brother had visited the previous winter with no negative repercussions and a visit promised to provide the President with the opportunity to lay out the American position directly to the people of West Berlin. Finally, a visit would show his own appreciation to the city, and its leaders like Willy Brandt, for remaining loyal to the West during the years of danger.

Kennedy gave two major speeches in Berlin, but the more dramatic one took place at West Berlin’s city hall, overlooking the Wall. Initially, his speech was to be a standard reassurance of the West’s determination to remain in Berlin and not abandon its people to the Soviets and East Germans. The enthusiastic reception Kennedy received from the West Berliners, however, convinced him that he had a unique moment to rally

not only the city, but the whole Western world. Changing the speech quickly in his notes, he also decided to add some phrases in German, which he prepared, but set aside due to his difficulty in pronunciation. Speaking to the people of West Berlin, and some in East Berlin as well, Kennedy highlighted the stark difference between the capitalist world and the communist world so evident in the divided city, and invited those who doubted those differences – on both sides of the Iron Curtain – to visit Berlin to see them for themselves. He then put a new stamp on the importance of Berlin to the West, declaring that not only was West Berlin a part of that alliance, but that, “Ich bin ein Berliner” (I am a Berliner).

The crowd of more than a half million West Berliners greeted this speech with rapturous acclaim. Though they had recognized the connections between the West – especially the United States – and their city going back to the 1948-49 airlift, there had been fears of abandonment over the past five years, particularly when the West failed to respond forcefully to the raising of the Wall. Now, however, they could feel more secure in their bond. The West had resisted Khrushchev’s threats since 1958, Kennedy had resolutely stood up to the Soviets over Cuba, and now he had come to Berlin to bring that resolution to their city. Although the Western powers and the Soviets would not formally resolve the status of Berlin for another eight years, the possibility of the connections between Berlin and the West being cut had essentially disappeared, and West Berliners and many others knew it.

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3 Smyser, *Kennedy and the Berlin Wall*, 221.
Kennedy’s visit to Berlin also displayed how the issue had changed within the Western alliance. While Kennedy aimed his speech at the people of West Berlin, and included a message for the Soviets, the speech also had the purpose of assuring the Western Europeans, especially the West Germans, that the American commitment was intact, despite the planned changes to NATO doctrine. Increasingly, de Gaulle was looking for room to maneuver inside or outside of the Alliance structure, and American officials worried that he might weaken NATO’s overall cohesion. Already the French President had rejected Britain’s proposal to join the European Economic Community, accusing the British and Americans of seeking to dominate Europe and leave France sidelined. De Gaulle had then negotiated a new bilateral cooperation treaty, the Elysée Treaty, with Konrad Adenauer that tied France and West Germany together outside the NATO structure. Although the German parliament would weaken the treaty by inserting a preamble expressing West Germany’s security ties to the United States, it was clear that Kennedy would need actively to prevent France from building a new axis with West Germany that could undermine NATO itself.5 Thus, while some officials worried that Kennedy’s strong words at the West Berlin city hall might provoke Khrushchev, there was a general agreement that they would also meet de Gaulle’s challenge to the Atlantic community, and provide needed reassurance to West Germans and Western Europeans.

For the next several years, that new internal NATO challenge would be the main occupier of the Alliance’s energies. Planning for Berlin contingencies would continue, but the new problem would be how to reconcile new ideas for strategy and policy within

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the Western embrace. Under Kennedy and his successor Lyndon Johnson, American officials would continue to press for a more flexible allied strategy that moved away from quick and total use of nuclear weapons. Eventually, they would bring most of the Allies around sufficiently to craft a compromise strategy that continued to guarantee American involvement in European security while allowing for a revised deterrent capability that suited American goals. The one exception to this consensus was France, which decided in 1966 that it could no longer remain tied to an integrated military structure that did not rely on a fully nuclear deterrent. But while de Gaulle pulled French forces out of NATO’s formations and evicted NATO offices from French territory, he did not abrogate the North Atlantic Treaty, nor did he cut France’s security ties with the West. And perhaps most notably from Berlin’s standpoint, he did not withdraw French forces from the city, end collaboration with British and American forces, or seek a separate arrangement with the Soviets.

When Kennedy stood by the Wall in June 1963, Berlin was at the center of the Cold War. The Wall, thereafter, stayed at the center of the public imagination of the Cold War, but the conflict moved elsewhere. Attention focused on places like Vietnam, Angola, Nicaragua, and Afghanistan. Berlin, Germany, and Europe remained vital to the relationship between the Soviets and the West, and would return to prominence as the conflict wound down in the 1980s. NATO played a role leading up to those events, just as it had when the Wall first went up. NATO and Berlin were tied closely together, and until the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of the city in 1989, West Berlin continued to represent the West’s unity in the Cold War.
Conclusion

The Berlin Crisis was a test that NATO passed, although not with flying colors. Allied unity held, but not without strains. West Berlin remained out of Soviet and East German hands, but became surrounded by a barrier that would become increasingly formidable with each passing year. The West had avoided nuclear war, but the Cold War remained in place, and the two armies continued to face off against each other across the Iron Curtain. Yet for all the setbacks, NATO had once again proved its worth to Western security, and the relationships that the Alliance enabled between its members made it invaluable to their interests. Looking at the Berlin Crisis during its tensest years helps to show how NATO maintained this importance.

When Khrushchev launched the Berlin crisis in November 1958, no one expected that it would last nearly five years, and that in the end, Berlin would be even more divided than when it started. Yet through all the tension and fear that accompanied those years, the outcome of the crisis validated the West’s early decision to stand firm on its interpretation of its rights in Berlin. While the Wall and the division of the city had their drawbacks from the Western perspective, the bottom line was that the United States, Britain, and France continued to station troops in West Berlin, retained full transit rights along the land, air, and water routes into the city, and maintained West Berlin’s freedom and connections to West Germany and the Atlantic world. Despite the internal tensions that the Berlin crisis brought to NATO, the Alliance held together, remained a vital part of the deterrent to Soviet aggression, and adapted that deterrent to ensure its credibility into the future.
There is no way of knowing for certain whether Khrushchev would have been able to achieve his gains in Berlin if NATO had not existed in 1958. Britain, France, and the United States would surely not have had any more reason to accede to his demands and abandon Berlin. At the same time, however, they likely would not have had the same confidence that if they had to fight for the city, they could do so without risking the security of Western Europe. That confidence would have been even weaker if they had only the American nuclear deterrent to fall back on, especially as the credibility of that deterrent grew weaker by the 1960s. Even as it struggled to define and assert a conventional deterrence capability, then, NATO’s presence was a vital part of the success of the West’s policy to hold on to Berlin.

From early on, the West negotiated over Berlin and Germany with clear objectives that every NATO member supported. Although NATO on Berlin restated its existing policy in December 1958, it provided an important bulwark to the Berlin Powers’ negotiating position at the Geneva foreign ministers meeting and the abortive Paris Summit. The negotiators knew that they had some latitude for concessions, since most NATO members favored negotiations over confrontation, but also that they had support for the basics of the West’s Berlin policy, namely the continued presence of Western forces, the maintenance of their access, and the reunification of Germany through free elections. The failure of these meetings to achieve a breakthrough on German reunification (and the Berlin question alongside it) did not undermine NATO’s position, since most members could live with the status quo.
The experience of LIVE OAK also helps demonstrate NATO’s vital role. Although LIVE OAK was a tripartite (later quadripartite) operation, its participants always recognized the importance of its connections to NATO. The British leaned most heavily on those connections, largely as a way to delay action that might lead to war but also as a necessary instrument to ensure Western strength as a deterrent to war. Similarly, American leaders like Lauris Norstad understood that while the tripartite powers could launch the probes against Soviet blockades alone, they could not hope for the success of those actions without NATO’s support. NATO started in the background of the LIVE OAK exercise, but by 1962 it was integral to the framing of the contingency planning, as evident with the BERCON papers.

LIVE OAK also demonstrated how thinking about the West’s nuclear and conventional strategies changed over the course of the Berlin crisis. The initial expectation that the West would respond to Soviet provocation in Berlin with nuclear retaliation was clearly problematic, and part of the impetus for LIVE OAK was to find responses to Soviet actions that would be more practical from both a military and a political point of view. Norstad and his staff began developing plans that diverged from the accepted Massive Retaliation strategy, although Norstad’s main focus was to introduce a pause in the action before nuclear retaliation became necessary. It took some convincing to bring the other allies on board, but the movement was an important part of increasing the flexibility of the Western deterrent.

Thus, by the end of the Eisenhower administration, Western officials were already starting to reevaluate strategy to ensure that it remained credible for the next round of the
Berlin crisis that many anticipated. Such reevaluation was most prevalent in the United States, where it also had the greatest impact due to the importance of the American nuclear force to the Western deterrent. The Bowie report and Maxwell Taylor’s *The Uncertain Trumpet* showed that a stronger conventional deterrent was more necessary in a world headed toward nuclear parity, and could be an enhancement of the overall deterrent rather than a detraction from it. The Kennedy administration came into office in 1961 open to these ideas and willing to bring them into fruition. Kennedy hoped to have the support of his NATO allies in doing so, but was also willing to start the process unilaterally and then draw the rest of the allies along.

Kennedy expected that an enhanced deterrent would also allow him to reshape the Cold War away from a conflict dominated by the division of Germany and Europe, and toward a competition where the superpowers could cooperate, especially on issues like disarmament. He found, however, that Khrushchev was still intent on settling the Berlin and Germany issues, and after Vienna Kennedy had to fall back on ensuring the Western position in Berlin to protect the Western positions in Germany and Western Europe. Thus, even the negotiations that followed the Vienna Summit centered more on European issues than the possibility of détente.

Yet despite his talk of peaceful coexistence, détente was not really Khrushchev’s goal. The Soviet leader knew that his country was strategically inferior to the West, and that he had little actual leverage in negotiations over Germany or any other major Cold War issues. Berlin was one of his main points of leverage, and he was determined to use it as intensely as possible. It was a means to put the West off balance, to provide political
support to the East German regime, to increase Soviet prestige in the international scene, and to show his continued ideological determination in the face of potential internal and international communist criticism for his policies of de-Stalinization and peaceful coexistence. But it was not, for him, a means for starting a war with the West, and that was a fatal flaw in his plan. Unless he could push NATO to the point of a decision between concessions and war, he could not gain the concessions he needed, and he was not willing to go to war over Berlin.

While Western officials remained uncertain about Khrushchev’s willingness to start a war over the city, there was enough doubt to stiffen their resolve not to make concessions beyond token minimums. And as long as West Germany, with its French support, leaned more towards that doubt about Khrushchev’s will, it provided a pillar that prevented any possibility of moving away from those minimum positions. Consequently, there was little chance of arriving at a mutually satisfactory Berlin solution – or Germany solution – under the circumstances of the late 1950s and early 1960s. The uncertainties of the changing strategic situation, the relative weakness of the Soviets – the side seeking change – and the politics of the Western relationship all implied the continuation of the status quo in Berlin and Germany, which ultimately suited the West’s goals.

The construction of the Berlin Wall was an example of the continued importance of Berlin and Germany to the Cold War, but also part of the decline of that importance. The Wall put an end to some of the most pressing issues regarding the city and gave Khrushchev a way out of his continued pressure on the West without admitting that his policy of pressure was not working. Had the East Germans combined the Wall with
restrictions on Western access or rights in West Berlin, then the likelihood of war would have been even higher than it was during the Checkpoint Charlie incident. But because Khrushchev kept the Wall limited to the goal of cutting off the refugee flow, and thus separated it from the goal of unifying Berlin under East German control, the West could accept it as a *fait accompli*.

Unfortunately, another consequence of Khrushchev’s view of the Wall was that he had to find another way to exert pressure on the West, since the use of Berlin had failed. In seeking to use Cuba to exert that pressure, Khrushchev hoped to close the strategic gap with the West and to force the United States to recognize the Soviet Union as an equal power. With that leverage and position, he could then refocus on Berlin and Germany, with a greater expectation of success for his vision of reunification. The failure to complete the missile deployment to Cuba before the Americans discovered it destroyed his plan, and he had little to gain by continuing the buildup and risking an American attack against Cuba. Without the Cuban leverage, and with little hope of success if he reopened his attempt to use Berlin as leverage, Khrushchev had little choice but to accept the status quo of the division of Germany and Europe. From his perspective, he could do so because he had stabilized the East German regime. But his concession still came at a great cost to Soviet prestige and standing in the communist world.

At the same time, however, Khrushchev had the possibility of gaining more from the Berlin crisis. Although the basics of the Western position did not change very much over the course of the crisis, many Allies became more willing to make concessions to avoid war. In 1958-59, most Western leaders dismissed the idea of turning West Berlin
into a free city. By 1962-63, however, that idea was more conceivable, especially after the Berlin Wall made the division of the city more concrete. Western leaders struggled under the pressure of the crisis to justify such a strong stand for remaining in West Berlin, especially in the face of war scares like the Checkpoint Charlie incident. The possibility of making the Berlin problem go away, even without resolving the German problem, became tempting in some minds, although the general consensus remained in favor of the status quo. There is no way of knowing what Khrushchev might have gained from the West on Berlin had he shown more patience. His characteristic lack of patience helped the West prevail in Berlin.
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