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The Erection of the Berlin Wall (1961), as Perceived by Dean Rusk and Anatoly Dobrynin, in their Memoirs

The Berlin Wall has become a symbol of Soviet power, arrogance, and militarism, while US policy at the time is often perceived as flexible and conciliatory. Nevertheless, neither portrayal is entirely accurate. Memoirs by Secretary Dean Rusk and Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin reveal that the Soviets were initially hesitant about the idea, which was primarily driven by East German communists pursuing their own agenda. In contrast, Washington's response seemed slow and indecisive. Consequently, the US approach to the 1961 Berlin Crisis was ineffective and counterproductive; the memoirs suggest that more could have been achieved had American leadership demonstrated greater resolve.

The article examines decision-making during the Berlin Crisis from the 1940s to 1961. An analysis of events and their interpretations by Rusk and Dobrynin reveals that a divided Germany and Berlin aligned with the interests of both the Soviet Union and the United States. Thus, the conventional view of the USSR as the key driver of the Cold War status quo and the US as its staunch opponent is misleading. Germany and Berlin were locked into the arrangements of the 1945 Yalta Conference, which remained unchanged until the fall of communism in 1989. The East German communists persuaded the Soviets to build the Wall, while the US had no intention of altering the Yalta agreement. The primary sources confirm this perspective unequivocally.

Keywords: Germany, Berlin, United States, Cold War, diplomacy, international crisis, Kennedy, Khrushchev

The erection of the Berlin Wall, an emblem of Soviet Cold War oppression, is well recognized and universally familiar. However, understanding why and how the crisis escalated is less common. Few realize the extent to which Berlin was underrated and overlooked in the Cold War politics of the antagonistic superpowers. In particular, a plethora of myths, simplifications, and clichéd comments arose concerning the confrontation. Thus, the memoirs of Dean Rusk and Anatoly Dobrynin offer valuable insights into Soviet and American decision-making processes and illustrate how Cold War policy was shaped during the 1960s.

The research questions posed in the article are as follows:

1. Why did the Soviet administration decide to act like it did in the case of the Berlin crisis of 1961?
2. Did the Washington administration make any political, strategic, and military mistakes in managing the crisis? If so, what were they?
3. What were Dean Rusk and Anatoly Dobrynin's roles in the events, and what were their evaluations of the crisis?
4. Are the politicians' crisis assessments concurrent with those of the official American and Soviet governments?
5. How reliable are the memoirs of D. Rusk and A. Dobrynin as primary sources in analyzing events?

The Crisis

Curiously, the status of Germany was not regulated during the Potsdam Conference of 1945. Despite having initiated the war, constituting the principal Axis power, and posing the greatest threat to the world, the decisions regarding the country's future were exceedingly vague, unregulated, and unclear. Apart from the four "Ds" (demilitarization, denazification, decentralization and democratization) that Germany was to undergo, no decisions were made concerning the reunification of the country or its future government.

The USSR and the US had their reasons for maintaining the status quo. The Soviets did not hold a dominant position in Germany; they did not occupy most of its territory, and therefore, the Soviets were not in complete

control of the situation there. Consequently, a potential loophole in the German administrative decisions was advantageous for Moscow, as it complicated the management of the Allied occupation zones.

The Allies did not gain control over Germany either; Berlin, the capital, was also situated in the Soviet zone. Like the USSR, the Allies regarded the division of Germany as a preferable solution to the country's reunification without Western oversight. Also, somewhat naively, the Allies hoped that Moscow would honor the agreements they had signed. It can be assumed that both parties — until one of the powers collapsed during the Cold War — believed that further concessions or modifications to the German *status quo* were either impossible or undesirable (Westad 68-71). In 1952, the East German authorities officially closed the inner German border.

Still, the Berlin crossing remained more accessible since four powers administered the city. From the perspective of the East German communists, the decision to cut off East Germany from the West was rational, since East Germans kept massively fleeing from their country. After 1952, Berlin became the main route for those wanting to leave Soviet-occupied Germany. The size of emigration was a genuine concern for the communist German authorities. By 1961, approximately 4.5 million people had left East Germany (20% of the country's population) ("Building the Wall in August 1961").

The composition of the emigrants was particularly distressing for the Communist authorities in East Germany; there were numerous physicians, technicians, engineers, scientists, artists, teachers, lawyers, and skilled laborers (*The Effects of Migration...*). Such a brain drain, if continued, could effectively undermine the economic existence and political integrity of the German Democratic Republic.

Strangely, East Germany and the USSR viewed the border issue differently. From 1945, the Soviets did not support the German communists' efforts to seal off the country, as that would have isolated the Soviets from the West and West German resources.¹ It meant losing insight and influence over the situation in the Western zones, to which the Soviets had, so far, had easy access (*Allied Occupation of Germany*).

¹ From the time V. Molotov had been drafting the Soviet post-war politics, the division of Germany was perceived as a potential — then absolute — failure of Soviet diplomacy. Cf.: V. Zubok, C. Pleshakov. *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 100-101. T. Judt, *Postwar: A history of Europe since 1945*. London: Penguin Books, 2005, p. 314.

Since the closure of the East-West border proved ineffective in halting emigration through Berlin, it became imperative for the German communists to close the remaining loophole. However, over the next six years, the East Germans and Soviets did not devise any practical means to stop the Berlin emigration exodus. In November 1958, the Soviets started testing the obsequiousness of the West. The Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev, issued an ultimatum to the Allies, demanding the withdrawal of their units and administration from Berlin within six months. He insisted that Berlin become a demilitarized and West-free city (Rusk 48).

Khrushchev argued that the USSR intended to pass control of the communication lines with West Berlin to the East Germans as a means of exerting pressure. The suggestion was that once the power fell into their hands, the East German authorities would be more energetic in limiting Western access to West Berlin. Still, the Western powers unanimously asserted their legal right to remain in the city and continue their presence there (Rusk 191).

Since it was evident that the West would not relent and the communists lacked the means to force the outcome they had demanded, Moscow welcomed the Western initiative to hold a series of meetings involving four foreign ministers. Thus, the Soviets preserved their credibility while feigning goodwill. Although the four-month negotiations were inconclusive (506. *Memorandum of Conversation*), a moderately positive outcome was still achieved. The substantial warming of the US-USSR relations led to Khrushchev's visit to the United States in 1959. Its conclusion was a joint statement by Khrushchev and US President Eisenhower that issues of sore points, like Berlin, "should be settled not by application of force, but by peaceful means through negotiations" (*Joint Soviet-United States Communique*).

The Soviets declared their readiness to reach an agreement over Berlin at a summit planned for May 1960 in Paris. Unfortunately, the Soviet downing of an American spy plane, U-2, over the USSR and the capture of its pilot, Gary Powers, a Prisoner of War, undermined that perspective and complicated Moscow-Washington relations (Salmon 29-30). From a 21st-century perspective, however, the Soviet decision appears more as a pretext for withdrawing from the talks than as a response to hostile US operations.

Meanwhile, the pressure on Khrushchev from Walter Ulbricht and his East German comrades to close the Berlin border intensified. It was evident during the Khrushchev-Kennedy summit in Vienna on 4th June 1961. The Soviets reiterated their request to demilitarize Berlin (to be enforced

by 31st December 1961). At that time, leverage relied on the conclusion of a separatist Soviet-East German peace treaty, which would formally end the four-power agreement over Germany. It would mean the termination of the Soviet and East German occupation of West Berlin, respecting the then-current status of the city. It would also signify Moscow's official acknowledgement of a new European state. The Allies consequently asserted that no unilateral agreement would be binding for them, nor would it affect their presence in West Berlin (Salmon).

Nevertheless, in Vienna, President Kennedy claimed he was considering the permanent division of Berlin (Dobrynin 64). It was an unmistakable signal to Moscow. JFK announced in a CBS TV speech that the US was not in a fighting mode; he recognized "the Soviet Union's historical concerns about their security in central and eastern Europe." (*Radio and Television Report to the American People*). It sounded like a green light to the communists. Kennedy's belated declarations to spend an additional \$3.25 billion on the military and to triple the draft were not interpreted in Moscow as a sign of Washington's willingness to engage in a military clash over Berlin (Dobrynin 64-65). Thus, the fate of the open border in the city was sealed, and American credibility — sadly, not for the last time — was called into question.

* * *

The East Germans — with reluctant support from the Soviets — drafted a secret, radical plan: a wall was to be erected to physically separate East and West Berlin, and strictly controlled border passages were to be introduced (*Berlin Handbook* 160-162, 249). It was the Germans themselves who, deceitfully, yet still, revealed the purpose of collecting construction provisions. Walter Ulbricht, at an international press conference on 15 June 1961 (a mere 60 days before the Berlin Wall construction), announced: "*Niemand hat die Absicht, eine Mauer zu errichten!*" ("No one has the intention to erect a wall") (*Walter Ulbricht...*). It was the first time the term "wall" (German: *Mauer*) was used in the context of Berlin.

A decisive argument that convinced the communists they would remain unopposed came from Paris. From August 4 to 7, 1961, the foreign ministers of the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and West Germany held a confidential meeting to discuss their response to communist activities in Berlin (Rusk 193). The conclusion was a *uniform* unwillingness to resort to warfare over Berlin. Soon after, the KGB informed Khrushchev about the outcome of the talks (Zubok 26). Hence, the Soviets fully grasped

that the West would opt for economic sanctions against the GDR if Berlin were to be blocked. Theoretically, the US plans to accelerate the armament of European allies posed a threat; practically, however, the lack of political *willingness* to resort to military solutions, combined with the Allies' differences of opinion, guaranteed communist success and impunity.

Although East Germans wished to keep the wall a secret, the Americans in Berlin – contrary to the claims of various US agencies at that time – *were not* surprised by its erection. Washington had received advance intelligence leaks regarding the project. On August 6, 1961, a HUMINT source, a member of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*), informed Americans of the exact date the wall construction would commence (Maddrell). Additionally, on August 9, 1961, the Chief of the US Military Liaison Mission, based on SED communications intercepted that day, was aware of the intentions to block East-West Berlin foot traffic (Maddrell). Thus, hypothetically, the Americans had enough time (between seven and four days) to halt, block or counteract the wall construction in numerous ways.

On August 12, 1961, Walter Ulbricht signed an order to close the Berlin border and erect the wall (*Decree of the German Democratic Republic ...*). Engineering units and construction workers ripped up streets and roads and set up barbed wire fencing around the western sectors of Berlin (approx. 156 km). A similar barrier divided East Berlin from West Berlin (approx. 43 km).

The venture represented a significant logistical and economic achievement, involving over 30,000 engineering troops and regular soldiers. The East German Border Police were introduced in Berlin to manage traffic at special checkpoints. Additionally, to deter the Allies from taking any action, Soviet troops were stationed in the area where the Wall was being constructed (*Note from the Western Commandants in Berlin ...*).

Then, although American intelligence had information regarding the plans to erect the wall, it took Kennedy over a fortnight (*sic*) to react and order Guardsmen and Reservists to active duty ("Ulbricht blocks mass exodus..."). Still, that was occurring in America; meanwhile, in Germany, it took the same fortnight for the communists to construct a solid, concrete, barbed-wire barrier (*Statement by Chancellor Adenauer*). In other words, for fourteen days after August 12, 1961 (the start of construction), neither the US administration in Berlin nor the US military in the city and/or Germany took any action, passively watching the emerging barrier.

From late August 1961, numerous procedural issues, dangers, and conflicts arose concerning travel in the town. During the Potsdam Conference of 1945, the four powers agreed that Allied personnel could move

freely within any sector of the German capital.² However, with the Wall in place, the situation changed dramatically. The Allies were often denied entry into the Soviet zone, and the Soviets generally abstained from attempting to enter the Allied zones. Soon, the attitudes of the Allied troops grew hostile (Judt 317).

A high-profile scandal occurred on October 22, 1961, when the US Chief of Mission in West Berlin, E. Allan Lightner, was turned back on his trip to East Berlin ("Berlin crisis: the standoff at Checkpoint Charlie"). Then, General Lucius D. Clay, the US President's Special Advisor in West Berlin, then devised a plan to remove the wall and the barbed wire barricades using heavy bulldozers. The project was daring and could be highly effective, considering that the Soviets did not expect such a bold move whatsoever. Still, the brigade commander, General Frederick O. Hartel, dismissed the scheme. He claimed, "The communists had built these barriers feet inside of the East German Line, and any movement toward that end would place the Americans as the aggressors" (*Grouping Brigadier General Hartel*). For the Soviets, abandoning such a decisive action proved that the US was *not ready* for military solutions in the city. Needless to say, Clay's plan was *the first* US initiative to counter Communist conduct since August 12, 1961 (ten weeks after the beginning of the Berlin Wall construction).

On October 25, 1961, General Clay demonstrated his determination to probe the border by sending a British diplomat, Albert Hemsing, to East Berlin. After the East German police returned Hemsing, US Commandant Gen. Albert Watson reported to the US Department of State that the USSR Commandant, Colonel Andrey I. Solovyev, had consented to the situation. As Solovyev claimed that the British official was incorrectly identified, Hemsing reappeared at Checkpoint Charlie, and the US military escorted him to the communist zone. The trip concluded shortly thereafter, and A. Hemsing returned to West Berlin safely (Amerson).

Colonel Solovyev asserted that the American conduct was an outright provocation and threatened retaliation. Simultaneously, and in a manner characteristic for the Soviets in similar circumstances, he stated that the Soviets were peaceful and unwilling to resort to violence (*Cf.: Note from the Soviet Commandant in Berlin ...*). To test Solovyev's credibility, A. Hemsing appeared at the checkpoint again on 27th October 1961. With no indication of how the Soviets would react, General Clay decided to station ten M48 tanks and an infantry battalion at Tempelhof Airfield, near

² Interestingly, the status of Berlin was not discussed at the Potsdam Conference. It is absent from the post-conference documentation.

Checkpoint Charlie. Fortunately, Hemsing completed his tour and safely returned to West Berlin (Amerson). Successful as such escapades may seem, they were rare and more a matter of propaganda than anything else, since they did not change or soften the Soviet or East German stance at all.

The tension escalated; in response to the Hemsing/Clay "raid," the Soviets deployed tanks to Friedrichstrasse, a central Berlin location. In retaliation, the American command sent ten tanks to confront the Soviets. From 17:00 on 27 October 1961 to 11:00 on 28 October 1961, both units faced each other, loaded with live missiles. The US Garrison in West Berlin, along with NATO and the US Strategic Air Command, was alerted (Hendrix).

According to Gen. Clay, the confrontation could have extinguished the crisis immediately had Washington permitted him to demolish parts of the Wall with bulldozers; he was confident that the Soviets would not counteract. Still, Secretary Dean Rusk communicated to Gen. Clay, "We had long since decided that Berlin *is not* a vital interest which would warrant determined recourse to force to protect and sustain" (Kempe). The signal to West Berlin decision-makers from Washington was unmistakable – the United States *was not* going to war over the city.

The reaction of Secretary Rusk is both surprising and disappointing.³ Just as Washington was reluctant to alter the arrangements of the Yalta and Potsdam Conferences, the Americans continually attempted to question the premises of the treaties worldwide. Hence, assuming that Gen. Clay was correct in his assessment of the Soviet reaction to the American bulldozers razing the Wall, Washington could only gain. If there had been no reaction from the Communists, the crisis would have been over. If Moscow intervened, the Americans could withdraw and return to the already unfavorable new *status quo* in Berlin and leave the Wall. Furthermore, still, the Soviets could not refer to any specific arrangements concerning post-war Germany, as such had not been made in Yalta or Potsdam.

However, as Moscow achieved its goals, the Communists concluded that the time for détente had arrived. To ease tensions, Khrushchev utilized a Soviet spy, Georgi Bolshakov, as an intermediary, which Kennedy accepted. Both politicians agreed to withdraw the tanks; additionally, communication channels were established among checkpoints, the Soviet Army High Command, Khrushchev, the US Military Mission in Berlin, and the White House (Rusk 196). Kennedy offhandedly commented, "It's not a very nice solution, but a wall is a hell of a lot better than a war" (*The*

³ Therefore, in his memoirs, Rusk presents the situation as largely beyond his control or one that had been decided upon before he came to his office.

Cold War 1958-1970 - Edexcel the USA's response...). It is genuinely difficult to find an instance of comparable American leniency towards the USSR throughout the entire history of the Cold War.

Regrettably, General Lucius D. Clay, who demonstrated resolute determination and decisiveness in the face of the crisis, was soon sent back to the United States (May 1962). He proved to be among the few US politicians and high-ranking military officers who comprehended the vulnerabilities of the Soviet leaders and saw through their Berlin bluffs, prepared to challenge the Yalta-Potsdam system in Europe.⁴

D. Rusk's assessment of the Berlin crisis

The Berlin Crisis of 1961 occurred at the beginning of the Kennedy administration, which was certainly not coincidental. As Nikita Khrushchev neither respected Kennedy nor treated him seriously, Moscow's approval of the East Germans' closure of the Berlin border was premeditated and well-timed (Judt 318-319). Given the new administration's lack of competence and inexperience in European affairs, the Soviets rightly hoped for confusion surrounding the power takeover in the US.⁵

Theoretically, in the context of the Berlin Crisis, Secretary of State Dean Rusk was the right man in the right place at the right time. No one in the Kennedy administration had comparable international experience; no one was as expert as Rusk in German matters.⁶ Unfortunately, no one wished to acknowledge that fact either.

In his memoirs, Dean Rusk devoted twenty-nine pages to the Berlin Crisis of 1961, which constitutes 5% of the total 550-page volume. Seemingly minor yet considering that Rusk was the second-longest-serving US

⁴ At General L. D. Clay's gravesite (West Point, US), the grateful West Berliners installed a memorial which reads: *Wir danken dem Bewahrer unserer Freiheit* ("We thank the defender of our freedom"). E. J. Ertle. "Lucius D. Clay — Berlin's defender of freedom." *Walled-in: A West Berlin Girl's Journey of Freedom*, 18 April 2016, <https://walled-in-berlin.com/j-elke-ertle/lucius-d-clay-berlins-defender-of-freedom/>. Accessed: September 25, 2024.

⁵ The memoirs of Dean Rusk prove that explicitly.

⁶ Before becoming the 54th United States Secretary of State, Rusk had served as the Director of the Office of Special Political Affairs (1947-1948), the 1st Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs (1949) and the 2nd Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (1950-1951) and a Rockefeller Foundation trustee and president (1951-1959).

Secretary of State, after Cordell Hull, with eight years in two consecutive presidencies during a genuinely eventful decade, the proportion proves significant indeed and illustrates the importance of the events for him.

The first and most striking remark Rusk makes about the crisis is that, contrary to President Kennedy and his other advisers, he did not view the Bay of Pigs landing or the Laos civil war as more important than the Berlin crisis. The Secretary asserts that the Allies should have secured a land corridor to Berlin through East Germany (Rusk 190-191). It demonstrates that he understood trouble with access to the city might arise in the then-growing tension between Moscow and Washington sooner rather than later (Cf. Judt 317). In that respect, he was correct, although, as is clear from his memoirs, he never promoted his view too vigorously in the cabinet.

Moreover, in his memoirs, Rusk straightforwardly refers to the American decision to withdraw troops from extensive areas of Germany that the US Army occupied in 1945 and to transfer the land to the Soviets. The Secretary openly acknowledges that the resolution was a mistake (Rusk 190-191). Still, the fact that he was right did not mean Rusk used it to bolster his position in convincing JFK to act according to Rusk's ideas. His proper assessment of various situations might suggest a politician who would exert adamant pressure on the Soviets and be willing to limit Soviet influence in Europe. However, his memoirs reveal that he took a back seat in the cabinet, reducing his activity to answering the President's questions and executing his orders; he certainly neither had the vision nor the drive of dynamic American diplomats, such as the already mentioned Cordell Hull.

From the early days of John F. Kennedy's administration, Dean Rusk expressed the view that Nikita Khrushchev intended to use Berlin as a test to evaluate the new American leader. The Allies appeared vulnerable in Berlin, lacking secure land access to the city. In such a situation – according to the Secretary – the Soviets were bound to push, and they did (Rusk 190-191). Nevertheless, he restricted his actions to merely mentioning his conclusions to JFK rather than attempting to counteract the US policy that seemed convenient for the Soviets.

Dean Rusk also concluded that Berlin did not seem to be a priority for JFK in 1961. He pointed out that such an attitude was – understandably – a significant concern for the West German government, which repeatedly brought the issue to the attention of the US Secretary of State. Therefore, he had to formally assure Germany's foreign minister, Lothar Bolz, of the United States' genuine commitment to Berlin (190-191). Additionally, given the Soviet demands to withdraw the Allied troops from Berlin

and their threat to conclude a separatist peace treaty with East Germany, Rusk realized it would entail months — if not years — of complications to negotiate the new terms of access to Berlin with German communists. The Secretary recognized it was perfectly convenient for the Soviets, as it would prolong the destabilization and the city's temporary status (190-191; cf. Judt 314-315). Nevertheless, as he adopted such a political stance within the US, decision-makers had been established and accepted over a decade earlier; Rusk did not feel competent to question them again.

The international situation deteriorated significantly between January and June 1961. American intelligence discredited itself during the Bay of Pigs landing in Cuba. Washington had little influence over the civil war in the Congo and proved ineffective in Laos. The country became a genuine ideological battleground; the Soviets sponsored, trained and inspired the *Pathet Lao* — a communist guerrilla group fighting the pro-American Laotian government. Conversely, Americans supported the anti-Pathet Lao Hmong guerrilla and the Royal Lao government, albeit with less success than the communists (Westad 180).

Still, according to Rusk, the most prominent decision-makers in US politics, namely, Kennedy's National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy and Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara, were preoccupied with those remote conflicts, attaching primary importance to their resolution, while simultaneously neglecting the issue of Germany and the status of Berlin (Westad 193). Interestingly, Rusk does not expand upon the reasons Bundy and McNamara had for their adamant stance in the Laos case. Predictably, in his memoirs, he actually omits mention of the American support for the Laotian guerrillas. He presents an image of the US government supporting the legitimized Laotian government against the Soviets sponsoring the partisan movements aiming at destabilization of the country and the spread of Communism in that corner of the world.

Furthermore, Rusk does not clarify why the two prominent US figures (Bundy and McNamara) failed to recognize the strategic, economic, historical, and political significance of Germany and Berlin during the 1960s. However, if Rusk held a differing perspective, he was not persuasive or assertive enough to sway his cabinet colleagues, which underscores the Secretary's relatively weak standing within the government. This also highlights the criteria by which the JFK cabinet members were chosen: the inner circle of acquaintances (including Bundy and McNamara) alongside the outsiders (Rusk 194).

The first indication that Bundy and McNamara were significantly mistaken in their assessment of priorities was the outcome of the Vienna

Summit in June 1961. Positive and cooperative as Khrushchev appeared in the context of Laos, he proved adamant and aggressive in his demands regarding Berlin, even resorting to the threat of war. Rusk took it seriously; he feared that impulsive Khrushchev might have meant it as he went public about the danger (Westad 194), especially since the Soviets set a deadline for the Allied withdrawal from Berlin (December 1961). What Rusk could not know — possibly due to the astonishingly ineffective intelligence and poor infiltration of the Soviet decision-making circles — was that Khrushchev was bluffing, as considerable aversion toward his policy was mounting among his *Politburo* comrades.⁷

Nonetheless, the Soviets' strong emphasis on Berlin and Germany during the Vienna talks should have remodeled the US foreign policy. The absence of such a case should be viewed as the gravest failure of US diplomacy during the Vienna Summit (V. Zubok, C. Pleshakov 247-249). Nonetheless, Rusk presents the summit in a much less pessimistic light. According to his memoirs, Vienna was not a triumph of US diplomacy, yet JFK demonstrated to Khrushchev his decisiveness and strong will (Rusk 192-193). Naturally, as one of the architects of the meeting, he must have been quite reluctant to see things otherwise. After the summit, Rusk remained passive once again and did not attempt to inspire JFK to act more in accordance with the Secretary's lines, which was indeed a pity.

The indolence and tentativeness of the US administration in response to the escalating Berlin crisis are further evidenced in Rusk's memoirs. He claims that, in July 1961, several attitudes regarding how to handle the crisis emerged. The stance presented by Dean Acheson (JFK's adviser) advocated for the energetic build-up of NATO and American forces (both conventional and nuclear) to demonstrate power. The strategy's weakness lay in the fact that the Americans were profoundly averse to and afraid of resorting to military solutions; if that were the case, investing in the armed forces to deter the Soviets was hardly convincing and could prove ineffective.⁸ Remarkably, that was also not very convincing or credible to the So-

⁷ Anatoly Dobrynin straightforwardly expresses that opinion in his memoirs; cf.: Anatoly Dobrynin, *op. cit.*, p. 46. Cf.: V. Zubok, C. Pleshakov, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

⁸ Dean Rusk, *op. cit.*, p. 194. Cf.: Carl Kaysen to General Maxwell Taylor, *Military Representative to the President*, "Strategic Air Planning and Berlin," 5 September 1961, Top Secret, excised copy, with cover memoranda to Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Lyman Lemnitzer, released to National Security Archive (appeal pending at Department of Defense). The National Security Archive, DoA: 01.10.2024, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB56/BerlinC1.pdf>.

viets, considering the thorough infiltration of US political circles by Soviet intelligence.

Another piece of advice concerning crisis management, quoted by Rusk in his memoir, seems intriguing. It is not so because of its controversial nature but due to its author, Adlai Stevenson, the United States Ambassador to the United Nations. JFK had disfavored Stevenson, as the latter had not supported the President in the electoral run and, for some time, had been perceived as a potential Democratic Party alternative presidential candidate. Stevenson promoted strengthening the US military, as well as — as Rusk puts it in his memoirs — “progress on resolving other Berlin issues.” It is never again referred to what Stevenson meant by that statement, which may prove the Ambassador’s little orientation in the “Berlin issues” (Rusk 194). Such vague advice was — predictably — of little value to JFK.

The concept that attracted the most attention from the President was advocated by Rusk and his two influential supporters — Robert McNamara (who had JFK’s ear far more than the Secretary of State) and the independent White House consultant Henry Kissinger. They assumed the US *did have* its Berlin policy (in operation for fifteen years by 1961) and Washington wished to continue it. As the Soviets were the ones demanding changes, the case was to be negotiated *ad infinitum* to slow down or — ideally — block any alterations in the *status quo* that were favorable to Moscow (Rusk 194). That illustrates how convenient the Yalta-Potsdam world order was for Washington in the early 1960s, particularly in Europe (Judt 167-169). That also meant that the grounds of Cold War hostility and competition were sometimes much less ideological or political in nature, and in many cases were determined by economic factors.

Since the above approach cost nothing and did not require additional commitments, it was adopted as the official political strategy for the crisis, proving that the Americans did not desire the unification of Berlin or Germany. The *status quo* was as favorable for the Americans as it was for the Soviets. Hence, it is hardly surprising that the White House was apathetic when the construction of the Wall began. Secretary Rusk openly stated, “The Berlin problem could not be solved [...], but neither did I want it to deteriorate into war. I advocated passing the problem on to the United Nations.” (Rusk 193-194) Such a conviction suggests that nobody in JFK’s administration viewed Berlin and Germany as the focal point of the Cold War and the *main battlefield*, contrary to the Soviets (Judt 315). Rusk’s comment also explains why his activities during the Berlin Crisis were so little dynamic, vague, and lacking firmness.

The subsequent events noted by Rusk in his memoirs illustrate how unprofessional and light-hearted US officials were regarding the Berlin case. Shortly after the Vienna Summit, the Department of State drafted a response note to Khrushchev and sent it to the White House for approval. After several weeks, it was concluded that the note *was lost (sic)*. The Department of State sent the note again; this time, it became locked in the safe of a bureaucrat who left for a two-week vacation. Once released, White House officials deemed it as being too dry and lacking a sufficiently engaging tone.

Then, Theodore Sorensen, JFK's speech writer, "beautified" and edited the note so that it became unclear and inconclusive, at least in Rusk's opinion. Additional time was spent simplifying and rewording the note to ensure it conveyed its original message (Judt 315). It demonstrates that neither the Department of State nor the Department of Defence monitored communication between Moscow and Washington at the summit level, nor did the White House prioritize such correspondence between Khrushchev and Kennedy.

The series of mishaps and the apparent incompetence of various Washington officials can be considered a disturbing indication of either remarkable indolence or a more sinister infiltration of the White House by Soviet intelligence. It is difficult to believe that such events, particularly in such an urgent and politically decisive situation, could be accidental. This possibility raises fundamental questions about the security and integrity of the US government during the Cold War.

As JFK's cabinet saw no room for negotiation in the Berlin case, Rusk was dispatched to Paris for confidential talks with the foreign ministers of the United Kingdom, France, and West Germany. In his memoirs, the Secretary openly admits that he did not believe it feasible to persuade the ministers to adopt a joint stance and act in unison. Still, the primary issue was the swift and accurate flow of information to Soviet intelligence regarding the outcomes of the talks. That led Khrushchev to believe that the Allies were not prepared to resort to violence in response to Soviet aggressive conduct in Berlin, similar to the West's inaction during the communist political coups in Poland or Czechoslovakia in 1948 or the Budapest uprising in 1956.⁹

When JFK decided to bolster the Allied garrison in Berlin and call up the National Guard and Reserve, Rusk supported the move. However, he

⁹ It was after the Paris meeting that Khrushchev authorised Ulbricht to divide Germany and Berlin formally and literally, with a wall. Tony Judt, *op. cit.*, p. 316.

urged that it be done quietly and without declaring a national emergency. He claims the Americans reassured their NATO partners about the US's determination to defend Berlin and maintain a military presence there, but it was only a half-truth. What Rusk does not reveal is that the US policy-makers planned to *accept* the division of Germany and Berlin (199-200). The Secretary's statements in his memoirs starkly contrast with the plan, highlighting the considerable cluelessness regarding the situation, its severity, and the Soviet determination.

The above is fully evidenced by the statement in the memoirs that the erection of the fences and the construction of the Berlin Wall, which commenced on 13 August 1961, took the White House by surprise (Rusk 199-200). It demonstrates the inefficiency of US intelligence in Germany and a lack of understanding regarding the seriousness of the communists. US officials appeared oblivious to the potential damage that the division of the city would cause in the future. Additionally, given that the Americans had prior knowledge of the planned construction of the Wall, it appears a well-justified conclusion that Dean Rusk is not being entirely truthful in his memoirs.

Astonishingly, the Secretary saw positives in the erection of the Wall. "We soon determined that the East Germans aimed the Berlin Wall at their people, not the people of West Berlin. They were not trying to keep anyone out, but rather to keep their own people in" (Rusk 199-200). The quote illustrates how little the Secretary of a superpower at the time understood the complex nature of the city, the fact that numerous East Berliners had families in West Berlin and vice versa, and how tragic and definitive a split the Wall introduced into their lives.

Additionally, from the beginning of the construction of the Berlin Wall, the Kennedy administration was clear that they *would not* put the Berlin Wall case on the knife's edge.

We quickly decided that the Wall was not an issue of war and peace between East and West; there was no way we would destroy the human race over it. [...] What Eastern European regimes did to their own people was not an issue of war and peace between East and West. So, we did not seriously consider knocking the Wall down. (Rusk 195)

The above quote perfectly illustrates how mistaken the conviction was from a historical perspective. It was the Eastern European peoples' distrust, frustration, and dissatisfaction with communist oppression that led to the dismantling of the system in the Eastern bloc, not the active operations of the US. Unfortunately, the Kennedy administration did not comprehend

that the Allied efforts should be coordinated and applied in tandem with the grassroots initiatives of the oppressed Eastern bloc societies, which was likely to bring an end to the Cold War decidedly sooner than it eventually occurred.

Secondly, Dean Rusk expresses fear that the Soviets could resort to nuclear weapons over Berlin, leading to a worldwide catastrophe. It again demonstrates how little understanding the Americans had of the complexities of Soviet decision-making, the level of stress and anxiety about the situation among Politburo members, and how quickly opposition to Khrushchev's hard line was emerging. Again, it also speaks volumes about how ineffective, clueless, and amateurish the US intelligence was during the peak time of the Cold War (Cf.: Dean Rusk 193-199).

The erection of the Wall immediately created tremendous anxiety, frustration, fear and a feeling of abandonment among West Berliners (Cf.: *Statement by Chancellor Adenauer ...*). However, Rusk refers to the situation as a need to separate "the psychological reaction to the building of the Wall from the safety and security of West Berlin" (Rusk 196). The Secretary did not understand the crucial role social moods play in policymaking. Over time, that lack of comprehension would lead to several wasted opportunities to conclude the Vietnam War.

In the meantime, no coordinated response from the Allies regarding the Wall was possible as the French and Germans refused to negotiate with the Soviets. Rusk claims that German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer was vehemently opposed to any deals with Moscow concerning West Germany or Berlin (Rusk 196; cf.: Zubok, Pleshakov 195). Regarding German and Berlin matters, Adenauer was the most realistic Western politician of his time, clearly aware of American cluelessness and reluctance to change the *status quo*. Dean Rusk, however, saw him differently: "He [Adenauer – M.B.] [...] lived in the shadows and needed constant reassurance about the loyalty of the Americans to NATO and Germany" (Rusk 196-197). In other words, Secretary Rusk and, consequently, the entire US government, disregarded his opinions.

Ultimately, the Americans opted to issue a firm protest and complaint regarding the situation to the Soviets. In contrast to the French and Germans, Washington engaged in rather peculiar negotiations with the Soviets. Curiously, Dean Rusk and his British counterpart, the UK foreign minister Alec Douglas-Home, agreed to "talk just as long and just as repetitively as Andrei Gromyko [the USSR foreign minister – M.B.]" (Rusk 197). That proves the Americans had *little* to convey or negotiate, and the talks served merely as a smokescreen to avoid losing face and

admitting the then-current situation was as favorable for the US as it was for the USSR.

However, D. Rusk describes his reaction to A. Gromyko's threats as entirely out of tune with the American stance:

Gromyko started off with the same language — “there will be war” — that Khrushchev used at Vienna. [...] I told him: ‘Now, Mr. Gromyko, if you want war, you can have it in five minutes. All you have to do is start it. But if you don’t want war, then we’d better talk about this further.’ (Rusk 197)

Bold and uncompromising though the statement may seem, the Soviets knew the Americans might have been *ready* for war in the military sense; still, they were politically and mentally *unwilling*. The Soviets also realized that a compromise would eventually be reached as the situation in Germany was acceptable to both Moscow and Washington.

The crisis ended on 17th October 1961, when Khrushchev withdrew his deadline concerning Allied troops in West Berlin. As Dean Rusk saw it, “The Berlin Crisis was over, but the Berlin problem remained” (197). He repeatedly mentions Soviet harassment of Western access to Berlin throughout 1962 and 1963. Simultaneously, he notices “[...], but the Soviets still evidenced a desire to talk” (197). All attempts to conclude the situation in a more “Western-favorable way” proved futile.

Once again, the Americans succumbed to the traditional Soviet rhetoric of goodwill and collaboration, engaging in talks and negotiations while Moscow planned to do absolutely nothing. Surprisingly, the Soviets had successfully utilized this pattern prior to the Berlin Crisis; it had been effective then and would continue to be effective in subsequent clashes within the Cold War and beyond, without the Americans seeing through the smokescreen.

A. Dobrynin's evaluation of the Berlin crisis

Anatoly Dobrynin, like Dean Rusk, had the requisite credentials to form opinions and influence his country's foreign policy. Present in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 1946, by the time the Wall was erected, he had accumulated fifteen years of diplomatic experience. From 1957 to 1960, Dobrynin served as Deputy Secretary-General at the United Nations (*Anatoly Fyodorovich Dobrynin: Soviet diplomat*). Subsequently, from 1960 to 1962, he led the foreign ministry department responsible for relations with the United States and Canada. As in Rusk's case, nobody in the Soviet

Politburo at that time was more competent in US foreign policy than Anatoly Dobrynin.

Dobrynin devotes twenty-five pages of his 639-page memoir to this topic, accounting for approximately 4% of the total. Considering that the author collaborated with six US Cold War presidents and had numerous issues to address, the presence of the crisis in his narration appears as prominent as in the memoirs of Dean Rusk.

From his memoirs, it is evident that a significant difference of opinion arose between Nikita Khrushchev and his Deputy Prime Minister, Anastas Mikoyan, during the *Politburo* preparatory meetings prior to the Vienna Summit (Dobrynin 44). Although Mikoyan, intimidated at the time, could not muster any significant support for his option, a crack in the Soviet unanimity towards the US was evident. Furthermore, in a private conversation between Dobrynin and Andrei Gromyko, the Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, the latter expressed an opinion similar to Mikoyan's; Dobrynin suggests that his view on the matter at the time was more akin to Mikoyan's than to Khrushchev's (44).

Dobrynin claims that the status of Germany and Berlin was vital for the Soviet delegation in Vienna. Khrushchev wanted a divided Germany and pushed for it with Kennedy. Sadly, the Soviet leader did not realize that JFK wanted *the same*. Dobrynin states the President appealed to Khrushchev "not to change the existing balance of forces" (Dobrynin 45), suggesting there was an opportunity to regulate the matters. Interestingly, contrary to Dean Rusk's memoirs, Dobrynin claims that Kennedy was concerned about Germany's status, expressing this concern in an interview with James Reston, an American political journalist. Reston published an article after the Vienna Summit, claiming JFK was convinced a prolonged crisis over Berlin was inevitable. Rusk's claims that Washington was surprised by the erection of the Berlin Wall.

According to Dobrynin, much of Khrushchev's aggressive conduct in Vienna stemmed from his intention to demonstrate the critical importance of the Berlin issue to the Soviet Union (Dobrynin 44). Simultaneously, Khrushchev's behavior was mere empty rhetoric from the outset, as – in the opinion of A. Dobrynin – no one in the *Politburo* had discussed or thoughtfully considered military solutions to Berlin during the preparations for the summit.

After 1962, when Dobrynin was appointed as the USSR ambassador to the US, he claimed that he and Rusk reached a complete deadlock over the German and Berlin issues, both in official meetings and private conversations (Dobrynin 49), which illustrates how little the Americans understood

or cared about the strategic importance of Germany for the development of the Cold War.

What A. Dobrynin regrets most about the Berlin Crisis is that – in April 1961 – JFK was ready to accept the then-current order of things in Germany and Berlin. Thus, neither was the erection of the wall necessary, nor were the tensions connected with restricting access to the city or military clashes on the verge of conflict:

Moscow [...] overlooked [...] President Kennedy's readiness to reach an understanding on the *status quo* in Europe. Had that happened, it would have been one of the highest achievements of Soviet diplomacy [...] and an introduction to *détente* (Dobrynin 64).

Still, according to Dobrynin, Khrushchev believed the Berlin case presented an opportunity to gain an advantage over the West; however, it is unclear what the Soviet leader meant by that (64). It may be assumed that Khrushchev staged a performance of firmness and decisiveness in front of his *Politburo* comrades, as he felt the opposition against him was solidifying.

In Dobrynin's memoirs, Khrushchev is portrayed as a highly impulsive, arrogant, and short-sighted politician, consistent with the observations of other politicians and diplomats. In June 1961, Robert Kennedy, United States Attorney General, used the intermediary of Georgi Bolshakov, a KGB agent, to contact Moscow. R. Kennedy signaled that the US was unwilling to have a showdown with the USSR. Concurrently, he claimed a group of Pentagon officials supported the hard line. Nevertheless, as he stated, they did not influence the White House decisions (64). If so, Khrushchev had *full knowledge* and understanding of how open and flexible the Americans were in the context of normalizing Germany and Berlin's status. From this perspective, his aggressive and largely unconstructive conduct appears utterly *irrational* and *excessive*.

Additionally, pushing things too far proved enormously risky for the Soviets, and Khrushchev should have realized that. On 17th June 1961, in a confidential talk with Dobrynin at the White House, JFK told him:

If [...] the United States agree to leave West Berlin, [...] no one is to trust Washington's word anymore, and all our obligations towards other countries will turn into a worthless piece of paper. If we are forced out of Berlin [...], all our guarantees to Western Europe will lose any sense. [...] This affects our basic interests, for the alliance with Western nations is the keystone of American foreign policy (Dobrynin 64)

Indeed, the US foreign policy doctrine could not have been articulated more clearly and explicitly, particularly as Kennedy's administration avoided provoking any Soviet suspicion of duplicity or a hidden agenda regarding Berlin. Kennedy continued to send conciliatory signals, which Khrushchev chose to ignore. Once again, JFK openly told Dobrynin: "I were able to get rid of Castro's Cuba under our nose (*sic*), but I have to put up with its existence as both sides have to put up with the existence of other things they don't like" (67).

To make the American stance even more transparent, Kennedy informed Dobrynin that, although the President was deeply concerned about the situation in Germany, he did not believe it would escalate into a significant conflict (Dobrynin 67). Once again, Khrushchev's warlike approach proved pointless, especially since:

[...] no further serious situations arose out of the dispute over [...] Berlin. The construction of the Berlin Wall [...] had, in its own perverse way, given Kennedy confirmation of the *status quo* that he sought in the area, although it could never be publicly acknowledged (Dobrynin 93).

The fact that Nikita Khrushchev acted counterproductively and ineffectively against Soviet interests illustrates the Soviet decision-making model. Traditionally, a powerful and influential individual became a leader whom no one could oppose. From that moment on, Soviet leaders relied on their own judgments, rarely following the advice of any consultants. To some extent, this was rational, as seeking advice was viewed as a sign of weakness; moreover, being aware of what a leader does not know could be a potential advantage for his rivals, who were always present and ready to seize control. Thus, Khrushchev became a victim of the Soviet system to which he belonged. This, coupled with his shortcomings — namely, limited formal education, narrow horizons, insufficient comprehension of international politics' complexities, impulsiveness, and crudeness — created a formula for catastrophic decision-making.

Interestingly, Dobrynin notes that the Americans were flexible and willing to compromise over Berlin and Germany along the Soviet line; yet, they were clear about how far that could go. JFK straightforwardly informed Dobrynin that the United States was prepared for a military showdown if the worst came to pass (Dobrynin 99). Although the President did not elaborate on what he meant, the Soviets received a clear signal that American leniency had its limits.

A skillful politician should have been able to successfully balance on that border, never attempting to exceed it. Still, Anatoly Dobrynin does not

portray Khrushchev in this manner, frequently emphasizing his moodiness, impertinence, and impetuosity (Dobrynin 31, 41, 52, 65-66, 79, 95-97, 112-13, 130-131, 522).

Dobrynin's summary of the Berlin Crisis is quite balanced and realistic:

Kennedy waged his fiercest struggles over the status of Germany [...] and over yielding anything in West Berlin, which would have upset the intricate balance throughout Europe — as indeed proved to be the case thirty years later when the Berlin Wall came down, the balance shifted, and Germany was reunited. It was, first of all, Berlin and Germany that Kennedy always had in mind when speaking with Khrushchev [...] about maintaining the *status quo*. But the *status quo* at that time no longer suited [...] the Moscow leaders who aimed to create two German states (Dobrynin 113).

Intriguingly, A. Dobrynin remains ambiguous in his memoirs about what precisely he means by the assertion that the status quo did not suit the Soviet leaders. Throughout his references to the crisis, he maintains that the Soviets desired two separate German states and a divided Berlin. If that is the case, the states (including the split Berlin) would require clearly defined borders and control over the movement of people entering and leaving. As highlighted by Secretary Dean Rusk, such a solution would have been most favorable and convenient for the Americans.

Therefore, the above quotation may be interpreted as the Soviet leaders' realization — as early as the 1960s — that Europe, in general, and Germany and Berlin, in particular, would be the primary arena for power confrontation during the Cold War. Washington viewed it differently, seeking decisive grounds for rivalry elsewhere (e.g., in the Southeast, Latin America, Asia, or the Near East). The fact that the communist system ultimately collapsed in Berlin, Germany, seems to indicate that the Americans were mistaken in that respect and the Soviets were correct.

Conclusions

In the early 1960s, the United States had a murky vision of its foreign policy towards Germany and Berlin; Secretary Dean Rusk's memoirs confirm this. What is subtly suggested between the lines, the Soviets quickly realized and exploited fully. Paradoxically, it became a double-edged sword, as the Communists effectively isolated themselves from the West, triggering a series of Cold War decisions and actions that, by the end of

the 1980s, brought the Soviet Union to the brink of financial, economic, and military collapse, as well as social disaster.

The most saddening and concerning aspect is that — in 1961 — American policymakers, following the Soviet coups in Poland and Czechoslovakia (1948) and the Hungarian Uprising in Budapest (1956), still — naively — believed that anything could be resolved with Moscow other than through settlements by force.¹⁰

The Americans did not want or need to take any specific action regarding Germany and Berlin. The status that the country and city received throughout the 1940s and 1950s was satisfactory and convenient for the White House; hence, there was no pressure to alter it during the administrations of Truman, Eisenhower, or Kennedy. According to Rusk, the only difference between JFK and his predecessors was that Kennedy sought to recognize the status of Germany and Berlin officially. Thus, he initiated the Vienna Summit and signaled to the USSR his openness to “get the thing done.” The Soviets, however, misinterpreted his initiative entirely and viewed it as a challenge to their European position, a perception confirmed by A. Dobrynin’s memoirs.

Contrary to the Soviets, however, the Americans perceived the situation in Berlin in 1961 much more realistically. Politically, economically, or militarily, they were not concerned about the erection of the Wall; the 1948 Berlin Airlift demonstrated that the city’s supplies and survival were secure. This, in turn, shows that East German communists indeed erected the Wall against their people to prevent them from fleeing the oppressive communist GDR. Given such experiences, the Soviets should have realized that their actions — paradoxically — strengthened the American position in Germany and Berlin, as the Soviet harassment and setbacks made West Germany and Berlin even more dependent on American supplies and political support.

From a 21st-century perspective, even if American policymakers had their reasons to act as they did in 1961, the misjudgement of the significance of various theaters in the Cold War confrontation extended its duration and rendered the conflict unreasonably violent; it also caused prolonged suffering for the nations under Soviet oppression.

¹⁰ In his memoirs, Dean Rusk proves it even more evidently in the case of the *Prague Spring* of 1968. The American reaction was identical to those in 1948, 1956 and 1961, i.e. talks, protests and inconclusive meetings. Washington stuck inflexibly to the Yalta and Potsdam settlements, although the Soviets did not feel obliged to conform.

The confrontation of the memoirs of D. Rusk and A. Dobrynin also evidences the excellent intelligence preparation and effectiveness of the Soviet espionage agencies, while conversely revealing the discreditable inexperience and lack of professionalism, highlighting a complete ignorance of Soviet realities on the part of the American intelligence. Simultaneously, it appears standard in Soviet and Russian practice to have the best, most reliable firsthand information. At the same time, Soviet/Russian leaders commonly – and fortunately for the rest of the world – tend to discredit, distrust, or dismiss such information, thereby largely wasting the efforts of their secret agents.

The interpretations of the crisis by D. Rusk and A. Dobrynin differ, albeit only slightly. Both asserted that the status quo was acceptable (for various, sometimes unclear reasons), and both were hesitant towards the official Soviet pressure to challenge it. Neither found any point in negotiating matters concerning Berlin in 1961. Furthermore, both contend that to deal effectively with the Soviets, a diplomat must be assertive, decisive, persuasive, and prepared to resort to force while exercising power efficiently. Dean Rusk, however, was certainly not such a politician, and both memoirs demonstrate that beyond question.¹¹

Secretary Rusk was one of the key architects of U.S. policy towards the Soviets in 1961. Nevertheless, paradoxically, his position in JFK's cabinet was weak, and he had little influence over Kennedy. However, due to his competence and skill in winning supporters, Rusk's stance eventually prevailed during the Berlin crisis. Similarly, Anatoly Dobrynin was, nominally, the most competent and experienced member of the Soviet elite involved in decision-making. However, due to a particular and autocratic decision-making model in the USSR at that time, his influence on the actual course of events was insignificant. Still, as he was at the center of these events, his insights seem invaluable in comprehending how difficult it was to persuade the Soviet leaders of something they had not conceived.

The memoirs differ in how they present the crisis to the outside world. In this context, the Soviets proved, customarily, much less hypocritical. They did not concern themselves with what the world's public opinion might think about their aggression. A. Dobrynin does not mention any consultations, meetings, or conferences with Moscow's allies, as neither

¹¹ In this respect, it is a pity the Americans underused the figure of General Lucius D. Clay, the architect of the 1948 Berlin Airlift and the planner and executioner of the anti-Soviet demonstration of power in Berlin in 1961. Such a figure would undoubtedly be treated respectfully and constructively by the Soviets.

existed; the USSR only had subordinate slave states on its side, coerced into unwilling cooperation.

It must be borne in mind that memoirs are a peculiar primary source. They offer valuable insights, as well as a wealth of off-stage data and background decision-making. Simultaneously, they are written in hindsight, from a considerably long-term perspective, which may cloud the facts and judgments of their authors. Additionally, they are created with the post-factum understanding of the outcomes of the described events. Hence, it cannot be authoritatively established whether the opinions and conclusions presented by D. Rusk and A. Dobrynin in their memoirs fully correspond with their convictions and views at that time. Furthermore, D. Rusk is remembered as a war hawk and a politician blamed for numerous wrong decisions (e.g. his handling of the Vietnam War); A. Dobrynin represented the "Evil Empire" at its peak; thus, a certain degree of self-censorship, belittling one's own contribution, and self-justification cannot be overruled. All of this makes the memoirs essential and valuable, yet not entirely reliable sources.

The Americans, conversely, consulted, conferred, and deliberated with the British, French, and Germans. Still, those debates were inconclusive, as Washington dominated the narrative, and the American politicians were well aware of it. Their allies, treated in a strikingly different manner than Soviet satellites by Moscow, developed a mistaken conviction that they genuinely contributed to, or influenced, global decisions. This obscured the broader context on one hand but enabled the US to promote itself as a freedom fighter, liberator, and loyal ally to the German people and the city of Berlin on the other. For over four decades, the United States endorsed the division of Germany and its pre-war capital into two zones. In this regard, the Americans displayed equally little interest in the tragic fates of ordinary individuals, divided families, and communist oppression in Germany as the Soviets did.

Surprisingly, there are numerous analogies in the political conduct of the USSR and contemporary Russia; the mechanisms, methods, and distorted perspectives appear fascinatingly similar. Ominously, the West's treatment of 21st-century Russian initiatives and aggression is just as lenient, ineffective, and naïve as it was during the Cold War. If only modern politicians could draw realistic conclusions from the Cold War era, Moscow would potentially act more reasonably in its own interest, and Washington would contain Russian projects more effectively, to the advantage and security of both parties.

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