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MAKING THE BEST OF A BAD JOB?

THE NIXON ADMINISTRATION AND THE 1971 FOUR POWER BERLIN AGREEMENT

ABSTRACT

In the period 1969-1971, the Nixon administration had significant misgivings regarding the Eastern Policy (*Ostpolitik*) of the new West German government led by Willy Brandt. These mainly stemmed from a fear that it could create divisions within NATO and instability within the Federal Republic. Of particular concern was that Brandt had made ratification of the renunciation of force treaty he signed with the Soviet Union in August 1970 contingent upon a Four Power Berlin Agreement. Nixon and his national security adviser, Henry Kissinger, did not view the talks with any enthusiasm, believing that it would be extremely difficult to achieve a satisfactory agreement. Moreover, they feared that the Three Western Powers would be negotiating from a position of weakness. Accordingly, in 1969 and 1970 the White House did not view the Berlin negotiations as a priority. At the beginning of 1971, however, Kissinger and Nixon appeared to perform a *volte-face* when they decided, using their secret backchannel with the Soviets, to actively work to bring the talks to a successful conclusion. It is argued that this change was partly prompted by their wider diplomatic strategy; in particular, Nixon's desire to obtain a summit meeting in Moscow with his Soviet counterpart. It is also suggested that political calculations, especially the pressing need for a foreign policy success before the 1972 presidential election, played a significant role. Nixon and Kissinger established a secret set of tripartite discussions in Bonn that ultimately resulted in the successful conclusion of a Four Power Berlin Agreement. In doing so, they effectively negotiated behind the backs of two of their chief allies in Western Europe, Britain and France, and officials in their own State Department.

Key-words: United States, West Germany, Soviet Union, *Ostpolitik*, Berlin, diplomacy, negotiations, Four Power Agreement

INTRODUCTION

On 3 September 1971, the American, British and French ambassadors to the Federal Republic of Germany, and the Soviet ambassador to the German Democratic Republic, signed the Quadripartite (Four Power) Agreement on Berlin. The signing of the agreement took place in West Berlin in the building that had once housed the Allied Control Council. The agreement largely conferred *de jure* recognition on the *status quo*: the Four Powers effectively recognized that the city was going to remain physically divided for the foreseeable future. While there is an extensive amount of literature on the Berlin crises in the period 1958-62,¹ the negotiations and signing of the Four Power Agreement in the period 1970-71 have been relatively overlooked. The talks that led to the signing of the Four Power Agreement offers an interesting case-study on the way in which the Nixon administration formulated foreign policy on a significant international issue, and with regard to how it managed its relations with its chief European allies. It will be argued that senior figures in the Nixon administration – especially Henry Kissinger, Nixon's national security adviser – viewed the negotiations with considerable scepticism. Although the decision to hold the talks stemmed from a presidential initiative – Nixon proposed the idea of negotiations during a visit to West Berlin in February 1969 – there was a general feeling within the U.S. government, and especially on the part of the White House, that it would be extremely difficult to obtain a satisfactory agreement. Moreover, senior figures within the White House viewed Chancellor Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* (Eastern policy) with mounting apprehension, believing that it could potentially destabilize the situation in Europe. At the end of 1970, however, Kissinger appears to have performed something of a *volte-face*. Using his secret backchannel to the Soviet ambassador in Washington, Anatoly Dobrynin, Kissinger played a crucial enabling role in bringing the Four Power talks to a successful conclusion. This article will argue that there are several possible reasons for explaining this apparent reversal. One interpretation that has been advanced is that Kissinger hoped to use the Berlin talks – and his secret diplomatic initiative towards the Chinese – as a means of forcing the Soviets to agree to the convening of summit meeting between Brezhnev and Nixon in Moscow. Another long-standing interpretation is that the Nixon administration's approach to the Berlin talks was motivated by pure opportunism: Nixon hoped to capi-

¹ See, for example: V. Zubok, 'Khrushchev and the Berlin Crisis, 1958-62', *Cold War International History Project*, Working Paper No. 6, 1993, at <<http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/ACFB7D.pdf>>, 4 June 2013; P. Lunák, 'Khrushchev and the Berlin Crisis: Soviet Brinkmanship Seen from Inside', *Cold War History*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2003), pp. 53-82, at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/713999988>>; I. Trauschweizer, 'Tanks at Checkpoint Charlie: Lucius Clay and the Berlin Crisis, 1961-62', *Cold War History*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2006), pp. 205-228, at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14682740600650227>>.

talize politically from Brandt's *Ostpolitik*. While both interpretations almost certainly contain some truth, this article will argue that domestic political concerns also exerted a significant influence on the way in which Nixon and Kissinger approached the Berlin talks. By the beginning of 1971 the White House was being subjected to mounting criticism regarding its foreign policy. An agreement over Berlin presented the Nixon administration with the possibility of concluding a major international agreement before 1972, which was a presidential election year. It is also likely that by the beginning of 1971 Kissinger had come to view the Berlin negotiations as the one area of foreign policy in which it would be possible to achieve a major breakthrough in the relatively near future.

THE NIXON ADMINISTRATION AND THE GERMAN QUESTION

In recent years, a considerable amount of scholarly literature has been produced analyzing various aspects of the "German Question" in the years after 1945. A recurring theme in much of the literature is the extent to which Washington's policy was to a large extent determined by the attitude of the West German government. Konrad Adenauer – West Germany's first chancellor, and in office between 1949 and 1963 – *gained a virtual veto over whatever negotiating positions his other NATO allies might put forward*.² Fulcher has also argued that both the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations mooted the possibility of some kind of German settlement, particularly the notion of a confederal Germany, only to abandon them in the face of Adenauer's implacable hostility.³ Another study has shown that British efforts in the 1950s and 1960s to create an international atmosphere that was conducive to *détente* were thwarted by Adenauer, who consistently maintained that no state – other than, after 1955, the Soviet Union – would be permitted to have relations with both West and East Germany (the so-called Hallstein Doctrine).⁴ Yet by the mid-1960s the futility of this policy was becoming increasingly evident, not only to the Americans and their chief allies within NATO, but also to the West Germans themselves. In two speeches, given in 1964 and 1966, President Johnson proposed intensifying the West's contacts – or "bridge building" – with the communist states in Eastern Europe. In his second address, Johnson stated explicitly that Europe's and Germany's division could not be ended until relations between East and West had dramatically improved.⁵ These speeches effectively advocated a pol-

² J.L. Gaddis, *We Now Know. Rethinking Cold War History*, Oxford 1997, p. 150.

³ K. Fulcher, 'A Sustainable Position? The United States, the Federal Republic, and the Ossification of Allied Policy on Germany, 1958-1962', *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (2002), pp. 283-307, at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1467-7709.00310>>.

⁴ R.G. Hughes, *Britain, Germany and the Cold War. The Search for European Détente, 1949-1967*, London 2007, (*Cass Series: Cold War History*, 17).

⁵ See: A. Wenger, 'Crisis and Opportunity: NATO's Transformation and the Multilateralization of Détente, 1966-1968', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2004), pp. 31-34 and 51-54, at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1162/152039704772741588>>.

icy of *détente*, and foreshadowed the West German *Ostpolitik* that the Social Democrat and Free Democrat coalition government pursued after 1969.⁶

The “German Question” was, therefore, very much to the fore when the Nixon administration came to office at the beginning of 1969. It should also be noted, though, that the new administration was faced with a whole raft of major foreign policy issues. Foremost among them was the need to bring the war in Vietnam to a satisfactory conclusion – or “peace with honour”. The president and his advisors were also anxious to stabilize U.S.-Soviet relations, particularly in the area of strategic arms negotiations. Instability in the Middle East, less than two years after the Six Day War, was another pressing foreign policy concern.⁷ In this context, Europe appeared relatively stable, and therefore was unlikely to attract a great deal of attention. It is notable, for example, that when Nixon listed his chief foreign priorities in 1970, at the top of his list was East-West relations; in contrast, American policy towards Western Europe appeared at number five. Even then, Nixon added the caveat that this policy was only really of interest *where NATO is affected and where major countries (Britain, Germany and France) are affected*.⁸ The fact that the Nixon administration did not view relations with their chief European partners as being particularly important has to some degree been reflected in the literature. It is notable, for example, that in one particularly detailed study of the Nixon-Kissinger partnership, there are relatively few references to Western European states or their leaders. Indeed, the Berlin talks and the Brandt government’s *Ostpolitik* are mentioned only in passing, and then only in the wider context of the Nixon administration’s relations with the Soviet Union.⁹

There were, however, several figures within the administration with strong European connections. The most obvious example, of course, was Henry Kissinger himself, who was first Nixon’s national security adviser and later became his secretary of state. A German Jewish émigré – his family had fled Nazi Germany in the 1930s – Kissinger, despite having lived in the United States for over three decades, continued to speak with a heavy German accent. His German roots and the fact that he had served as a U.S.

⁶ See: J. Von Dannenberg, *The Foundations of Ostpolitik. The Making of the Moscow Treaty between West Germany and the USSR*, Oxford 2008 (*Oxford Historical Monographs*), for a detailed analysis of the way West Germany’s relations with the Soviet Union evolved in the 1960s, culminating in the Moscow Treaty of August 1970. See also: T. Garton Ash, *In Europe’s Name. Germany and the Divided Continent*, London 1993, for a more general discussion of how West Germany’s relations with Eastern Europe, including the Soviet Union, evolved throughout the Cold War.

⁷ See: R. Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power*, New York 2007, pp. 104-05; and R. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation. American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*, Washington 1994, pp. 77-78, on the immediate foreign policy challenges that confronted the Nixon administration.

⁸ Quoted in: G. Lundestad, *The United States and Western Europe since 1945. From “Empire” by Invitation to Transatlantic Drift*, Oxford 2003, p. 176.

⁹ Robert Dallek’s detailed study of Nixon and Kissinger’s partnership contains only a few references to Germany and Berlin. See: R. Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger...*, pp. 214-16 on Nixon and Kissinger’s misgivings with regard to the Moscow Treaty, and Nixon’s jealousy of Brandt’s popularity in the U.S.; and pp. 287 and 301, which mention the Berlin negotiations, but only in the wider context of the Strategic Arms Limitation talks and Nixon’s desire for a summit meeting.

soldier in Germany in the immediate post-war period, naturally meant that he had a detailed knowledge of and interest in German affairs.¹⁰ Another particularly significant figure when it came to the formulation of the White House's policy towards Europe was Kissinger's deputy, Helmut Sonnenfeldt, who, *like Kissinger, was a German-born émigré with exceptional brain power*.¹¹ Within the confines of the White House, Sonnenfeldt would develop a close interest in the West German government's *Ostpolitik*, and would also become a significant critic of the manner in which the Four Power talks proceeded.

The Nixon administration's foreign policy had several distinct features. First, Nixon was determined to exercise a firm hold over foreign policy. When assembling his cabinet, Nixon selected William Rogers as his secretary of state, largely on the basis that Rogers had very little experience when it came to foreign affairs; he would, therefore, be less likely to challenge the president directly on significant foreign policy issues.¹² Kissinger – who swiftly emerged as a ruthless bureaucratic in-fighter – was also determined to extend his influence as far as possible when it came to the formulation of foreign policy. Kissinger and Rogers soon found themselves engaged in a protracted and bitter bureaucratic struggle over who was going to have the greatest say when it came to the making of foreign policy.¹³ Another important feature of the Nixon administration's foreign policy was its penchant for using "backchannels" and secret diplomacy when dealing with foreign powers, particularly the Soviets and the Chinese. Shortly after Nixon assumed office, a "backchannel" was established between Kissinger and the Soviet ambassador in Washington, Anatoly Dobrynin, which was designed to ensure that messages between the White House and the Soviets could be exchanged in secret, without the knowledge of senior State Department officials.¹⁴ The use of these secret contacts meant that the White House could exert a greater degree of control over foreign policy and minimize the role of the State Department, including the secretary of state. All these facets of Nixon and Kissinger's style of diplomacy – the use of "backchannels" and secret diplomacy from which the State Department was kept in ignorance – were evident in the way in which they approached the Four Power negotiations in Berlin.

Nixon's first real contacts as president of the United States with West Germany's political leadership occurred in during a week-long visit to Western Europe in February 1969, which included stop-offs in both Bonn and West Berlin.¹⁵ On 26 February

¹⁰ On Kissinger's early life, see: W. Isaacson, *Kissinger. A Biography*, New York 1992, pp. 17-128; and R. Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger...*, pp. 33-59.

¹¹ R. Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger...*, p. 101.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82; R. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation...*, p. 78.

¹³ See: R. Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger...*, pp. 116-17, and 248-52; and W. Isaacson, *Kissinger...*, pp. 195-98, on the Kissinger-Rogers rivalry.

¹⁴ See: A. Dobrynin, *In Confidence. Moscow's Ambassador to Six Cold War Presidents (1962-1986)*, New York 1995, p. 199; R. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation...*, pp. 80-81; R. Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger...*, p. 110; and W. Isaacson, *Kissinger...*, pp. 205-209.

¹⁵ See: R. Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger...*, pp. 112-116; and H. Kissinger, *The White House Years*, London 1979, pp. 73-111, for accounts of Nixon's visit to Europe.

Nixon and his foreign policy team met the West German political leadership in Bonn. The West German chancellor, Kurt Kiesinger – a Christian Democrat and former Nazi – in a private conversation with Nixon, was at pains to stress his country's continuing commitment to the United States and NATO.¹⁶ Nixon and Kiesinger again met one more time at the White House on 7 August 1969. This time the chancellor surprised the president by saying that West Germany and Poland had to come to a mutually acceptable agreement in relation to the Oder-Neisse frontier. This presumably was an indication that Kiesinger was seriously contemplating abandoning the Federal Republic's claim that Germany's true frontiers were those of December 1937. At the end of the conversation, Kiesinger referred to the forthcoming West German elections, saying that the most likely outcomes were either a continuation of the "Grand Coalition" between the Christian and Social Democrats, or a government led by the Christian Democrats in coalition with the Free Democrats.¹⁷

Kiesinger's expectations were not wholly unfounded, as the CDU emerged as the largest party in the Bundestag (the German Parliament). The leader of the SPD, Willy Brandt, however, managed to engineer a deal with the Free Democrats which would allow for a coalition with a slim majority in the Bundestag. Brandt – who had been a major figure in West German politics for well over a decade – had shot to international prominence as mayor of West Berlin in August 1961, when the East German authorities had constructed the Wall. It was Brandt – the most significant political figure on the ground – who had to deal with the political and humanitarian crisis that had ensued. The singular failure of either the governments of the United States or the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) to do anything more than protest against the building of the Wall had a major impact upon the mayor. Thereafter, Brandt, along with his closest advisers – particularly his press secretary Egon Bahr – became convinced that the FRG needed a new diplomatic strategy if his country's division was ever to be brought to an end. As foreign minister in the "Grand Coalition" Brandt had played a major role in intensifying the FRG's diplomatic contacts with several states in Eastern Europe.¹⁸

Senior figures within the Nixon administration were hardly enthused about the prospect of having to deal with a Social Democratic government in Bonn. While it

¹⁶ See: 'Draft memorandum of a private conversation between Chancellor Kiesinger and President Nixon, 26 February 1969' in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-76*, Vol. 60: D. Geyer (ed.), *Germany and Berlin, 1969-1972* (hereafter *FRUS*), Washington 2008, pp. 34-38 (*Department of State Publication*).

¹⁷ 'Memorandum of Conversation between Nixon and Kiesinger, 3 August 1969' in *FRUS*, pp. 66-75.

¹⁸ See: F. Taylor, *The Berlin Wall: 13 August 1961-9 November 1989*, London 2009, pp. 93-99, for a brief account of Brandt's early life; and B. Marshall, *Willy Brandt*, London 1990, pp. 26-72 (*Makers of the Twentieth Century*); on Brandt's political rise in Berlin after 1945, and his experiences in the 1966-1969 "Grand Coalition". See also: T. Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name...*, pp. 54-57, for a discussion of the impact that the building of the Wall had on Brandt's views on West Germany's policy towards the East; and also W. Brandt, *My Life in Politics*, Harmondsworth 1993, pp. 45-55, and 155-170, in which he describes how the building of the Wall influenced his political thinking, and his experience as foreign minister in the Grand Coalition.

was once thought that Nixon had a high regard for Brandt, whereas Kissinger from the outset harboured acute reservations about the West German government,¹⁹ the published documents show clearly that the president had an even greater antipathy towards the new government in Bonn than his national security adviser.²⁰ This mainly stemmed from an ideological distaste for the new West German government. In one memorandum written in July 1970 that analyzed the FRG's policy towards the East, Kissinger commented that, on balance, it was probably in the interests of the United States that the current government in Bonn should not collapse. The president – ever the Red Baiter – disagreed, scribbling on the memorandum: *Any non-socialist government would be better.*²¹ In contrast, Nixon often referred to the Christian Democrats as America's "friends" in West Germany.²² There was also a general lack of confidence about the abilities of Brandt and other senior figures within his government. Regarding Brandt in particular, Kissinger appears to have viewed the German chancellor as something of a light-weight.²³ Aside from the chancellor himself, there was concern about some of the senior officials in his vicinity. Egon Bahr – a close aide to Brandt, who was responsible for implementing the FRG's *Ostpolitik* – was a figure who attracted an unusual level of opprobrium from American officials.²⁴

At one level, the Nixon administration's concern regarding Brandt's emerging *Ostpolitik* seems relatively surprising. After all, the new West German government's decision to launch a major diplomatic initiative *vis-à-vis* the Soviet Union and other Eastern European states (including, eventually, East Germany) bore more than a passing similarity to the *détente* policies that Nixon and Kissinger were attempting to implement in this period. Yet despite the similarities in their respective diplomatic approaches, Nixon and Kissinger viewed Brandt's *Ostpolitik* with mounting apprehension. Klitzing has explained this apparent contradiction by arguing that the White House feared that *Ost-*

¹⁹ S. Hersh, *The Price of Power. Kissinger in the Nixon White House*, New York 1983, p. 416.

²⁰ Indeed, Nixon seems to have thought that Kissinger may, if anything, have been too soft in his attitude towards Brandt. In December 1972, in response to a memorandum that had been drafted by Kissinger outlining proposed steps towards recognition of East Germany, Nixon demanded that in future, all decisions on German matters had to be submitted to him personally. The president scribbled that the State Department was "pro-Brandt + pro-Socialist" and that he "totally" disagreed "with their approach." See: 'Memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, 20 December 1970' in *FRUS*, pp. 1099-1101, fn. 4.

²¹ See: 'Memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, 17 July 1970' in *FRUS*, pp. 278-282; for Nixon's comment see: p. 281, fn. 4.

²² See, for example, conversation between Nixon and Kissinger, 29 May 1971, in *FRUS*, pp. 720-724.

²³ Klitzing has also argued that Kissinger had a fairly contemptuous view of senior figures in the West German government: *He did not consider the people conducting it, the nationalistic Bahr and the idealistic Brandt, the type of hard-nosed politicians required to deal with Moscow.* See: H. Klitzing, 'To Grin and Bear It: The Nixon Administration and *Ostpolitik*' in C. Fink, B. Schäfer (eds.) *Ostpolitik, 1969-1974. European and Global Responses*, Cambridge 2009, pp. 80-110, especially p. 85.

²⁴ On one occasion, Rogers used the word "reptilian" when describing Bahr. See: 'Minutes for National Security Council Meeting, 10 December 1969' in *FRUS*, p. 126. Similarly, Kissinger also called Bahr a "lizzard", see: transcript of telephone conversation between Kissinger and Rogers, 16 July 1970 in *FRUS*, p. 278.

politik would have a destabilizing impact upon the European scene, which would conflict with the Nixon administration's wider diplomatic strategy. Klitzing has observed that, from Kissinger's perspective, *the implicit goal of change was the most ominous aspect of Ostpolitik. The inherently defensive aspect of the Nixon Doctrine of July 1969 – to shore up the eroding position of American preponderance – was at odds with the assertive component of Ostpolitik. Strains between Bonn and Washington were almost inevitable, all the more so because Washington disliked the independence and confidence that Bonn displayed in pursuit of Ostpolitik.*²⁵

Nixon and Kissinger also believed that West Germany's *Ostpolitik* would in all likelihood have a pernicious impact upon the FRG's relations with America's West European allies, which would then weaken the cohesion of the Atlantic Alliance.²⁶ The Nixon administration, moreover, became increasingly worried that the West Germans were being less than wholly forthcoming when it came to keeping the United States abreast of developments in its Eastern diplomacy.²⁷ These concerns became especially pronounced when Brandt embarked upon negotiations with Moscow that would ultimately lead to the signing of the Moscow Treaty in August 1970. This was a renunciation of force treaty in which both parties agreed to settle their differences through peaceful means. In terms of Brandt's *Ostpolitik*, the most significant and controversial aspect of the Treaty was that the West German government formally accepted Germany's post-1945 eastern frontiers with Poland. The Treaty also contained a reference to the German Democratic Republic, which effectively took the West German government a step towards formal recognition of its eastern counterpart.²⁸ When the outlines of the treaty became clear in the summer of 1970, there was a general impression in Washington that the West Germans were willing to concede too much – particularly on the issue of Germany's eastern frontiers – in return for the intangible gains of "environment improvement".²⁹ Aside from these general reservations, the Treaty was especially problematic from the American perspective because Brandt had made it clear to the Soviets that West German ratification of the Treaty would be dependent upon a satisfactory conclusion to the Four Power talks over Berlin which had recently begun. This ensured that the success or failure of the West German government's *Ostpolitik* – and also to a large degree the political future of Brandt's government – had effectively been placed in the hands of the Three Allied Powers.³⁰

²⁵ H. Klitzing, 'To Grin and Bear It...', p. 83.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 85; G. Lundestad, *The United States...*, p. 172.

²⁷ See, for example, 'Memorandum from Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 12 March 1970' in *FRUS*, pp. 176-178.

²⁸ See: T. Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name...*, pp. 70-71, for an assessment of the treaty.

²⁹ See: 'Memorandum from Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 27 May 1970' in *FRUS*, pp. 234-238; see also: J. Von Dannenberg, *The Foundations of Ostpolitik...*, pp. 238-259, for an account of the Allied Powers' reaction to the Moscow Treaty.

³⁰ 'Telegram from Embassy in West Germany (Rush) to State Department, 29 June 1970' in *FRUS*, pp. 255-257.

THE INITIATION OF THE BERLIN TALKS

As soon as the Nixon administration had come to office in January 1969, it was immediately confronted with a tense diplomatic situation in relation to Berlin. Towards the end of 1968, the West German government announced that the Federal Assembly, the Bundesversammlung, would convene in West Berlin in order to elect a new president of the Federal Republic. The Soviet and East German authorities vehemently protested against the planned gathering, although it was not the first time that a Federal President had been elected in West Berlin. One of the last decisions of the departing secretary of state, Dean Rusk, had been not to intervene with the West German authorities.³¹ Kissinger saw no reason to overturn this policy. The situation in Berlin was closely monitored, and contingency plans were “dusted off” in case the Soviet or East German authorities attempted to interfere with Allied traffic entering the western sectors of the city or even launched a full-scale blockade. Senior decision-makers – Kissinger included – doubted, however, that the Soviets would allow the situation to escalate into a major superpower confrontation.³² When the Federal Assembly finally did meet on 5 March, it turned out to be something of an anti-climax. Soviet and East German obstructionism was confined to the closing of the three autobahn routes into the city for four hours. Beyond that, the gathering passed off peacefully.³³ The 1970 dispute over the sitting of the Federal Assembly was not as serious as previous Berlin crises, such as those in 1958 or 1961. It did, nonetheless, serve as a reminder that the city’s status and, in particular, the West German state’s formal relationship with the western half of the city, remained contested. While the Wall had served to contain superpower tensions, there was no formal agreement between the Four Allied Powers regarding the functioning of the city.³⁴

On February 23 – in the midst of the dispute over the sitting of the Federal Assembly – Nixon embarked upon his first visit to Western Europe as president of the United States. The trip was reminiscent of President John F. Kennedy’s famous tour of Western Europe in 1963, which had been designed to strengthen America’s ties with its Western European allies. Kennedy’s trip had culminated in a stirring speech in West Berlin, in which the president had declared that the United States would defend the besieged enclave’s freedom.³⁵ During the course of his Berlin visit, Nixon gave a speech at the Siemens Factory. The president naturally gave the obligatory assurance that the United States and its Allies would continue to defend the western

³¹ ‘Telegram from Department of State to Embassy in Germany, 10 January 1969’ in *FRUS*, pp. 7-8.

³² ‘Memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, 11 February 1969’ in *FRUS*, pp. 14-19.

³³ ‘Memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, 6 March 1969’ in *FRUS*, p. 50.

³⁴ See: R. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation...*, p. 136, for an account of the dispute over the sitting of the Federal Assembly in West Berlin.

³⁵ R. Dallek, *John F. Kennedy. An Unfinished Life 1917-1963*, London 2003, pp. 624-625.

half of the city's freedom. But the president went on to offer an olive branch – apparently at the request of Willy Brandt, the West German foreign minister. Nixon stated: *When we say that we reject any unilateral alteration of the status quo in Berlin, we do not mean that we consider the status quo to be satisfactory. Nobody benefits from a stalemate, least of all the people of Berlin. Let us set behind us the stereotype of Berlin as a "provocation." Let us, all of us, view the situation in Berlin as an invocation, a call to end the tension of the past age here and everywhere.*³⁶

In effect, the president's statement suggested that the U.S. government was amenable to the idea of negotiations in an effort to obtain concrete improvements in the existing situation in Berlin.

The initial Soviet response appeared to indicate that they were receptive to the notion of negotiations over Berlin. Shortly after the president returned to Washington, Dobrynin had lunch with Kissinger and stated that his government had a "positive" attitude towards the notion of negotiations over Berlin.³⁷ A few months later, the Soviet premier, Alexei Kosygin, in a reply to a letter from Nixon, stated the Soviets' willingness to embark upon exploratory talks, but contained no concrete proposals.³⁸ There the matter appeared to rest until Andrei Gromyko – the Soviet foreign minister – gave a wide ranging speech in July to the Supreme Soviet that discussed the issue of Europe's frontiers with particular reference to the two Germanys. Gromyko stated that his government was willing *to exchange opinions over how to prevent complications concerning Berlin now and in the future.*³⁹ The U.S. government responded to the speech by reiterating their willingness to begin exploratory talks. This resulted in several more exchanges, including two conversations between Rogers and Gromyko in September in New York and Washington, in which both the Soviets and the Americans expressed their willingness to discuss Berlin, but neither side appeared willing to present concrete proposals. It was only when a new West German government, under the leadership of Willy Brandt, came to power in September that the issue of talks over Berlin suddenly gained new momentum. Washington decided to pursue the proposed Four Power talks, if only to ensure that the new West German government did not raise the issue of Berlin directly with the Soviets themselves.⁴⁰ In December the Three Western Allied Powers delivered an aide-memoire to the Soviets, which proposed the initiating of Four Power talks. It was not until February 1970 that the Soviets finally accepted the Western Allies' proposition that the talks should take place in the building that had once housed the defunct Allied Control Council, which was located in West Berlin. For the Western Allies, the building was considered appropriate because it symbolized the notion that the whole of Berlin remained under Four Power control. The Soviets, on the other hand, were willing to allow the

³⁶ Quoted in an editorial note in *FRUS*, p. 48.

³⁷ 'Memorandum of a conversation between Kissinger and Dobrynin, 3 March 1969' in *FRUS*, p. 49.

³⁸ 'Kosygin to Nixon, 24 May 1969', excerpt contained in *FRUS*, p. 57.

³⁹ Extracts of Gromyko's speech to the Supreme Soviet of 10 July 1969 are contained in *FRUS*, p. 60.

⁴⁰ 'Memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, 17 November 1970' in *FRUS*, pp. 118-19.

negotiations to take place in this location because it was in West Berlin, which would allow them to maintain their position that the talks pertained only to the western half of the city.⁴¹

During these desultory exchanges between the Three Powers and the Soviets over when and whether the Four Power talks over Berlin should take place, senior figures within the Nixon administration had time to consider their own attitude towards the prospect of negotiations. A division emerged between the State Department and the White House on this issue.⁴² The view of the State Department was that the U.S. would have little to lose from participating in the talks, as it would be the West Germans who would be required to make the biggest concession, which would be to reduce radically their political presence in the Western sectors of the city.⁴³ Kissinger and Sonnenfeldt, however, were unconvinced. Kissinger felt that the Three Powers would be negotiating from a position of weakness, warning the president that *the other side holds all the cards*.⁴⁴ Kissinger elaborated this point in a later memorandum, in which he argued that there was *an inherent asymmetry in the Berlin power structure* in that the Soviets had *the capacity to mount immediate harassment on the slightest pretext*, while the Three Powers had to *consult and react*. Kissinger also noted that the West German government had introduced a *new and somewhat novel factor*, in that they had *proposed the Three Powers seek Soviet agreement to respect the ties that have developed between the FRG and West Berlin*. This was seemingly at odds with the Soviets' desire to negotiate a substantive reduction of the federal presence in West Berlin. Kissinger, therefore, felt that the chances of securing an agreement were minimal.⁴⁵ Sonnenfeldt, in another memorandum, was particularly critical of the State Department, arguing that they had not evaluated the consequences were the negotiations to collapse; nor had they outlined a clear set of objectives for the negotiations themselves. Sonnenfeldt urged Kissinger – who probably needed little in the way of encouragement – to assert a greater degree of control over government policy by placing the issue within the framework of the National Security Council.⁴⁶ Despite mounting concern among the NSC staff that their colleagues at the State Department might proceed with the negotiations before a clear “game plan” had been formulated, they also recognized that, in Sonnenfeldt's words, there was “no alternative” to talks over Berlin.⁴⁷ This was,

⁴¹ D. Mahncke, 'The Berlin Agreement: Balance and Prospects', *The World Today*, Vol. 27, No. 12 (1971), pp. 514-515.

⁴² See: H. Kissinger, *The White House Years...*, pp. 99-100, who has noted the division between the White House and the State Department regarding West Germany's *Ostpolitik*.

⁴³ 'Memorandum from Richardson to Nixon, 13 February 1970', extracts contained in an editorial note in *FRUS*, p. 147.

⁴⁴ 'Memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, 26 September 1969', extracts of the memorandum contained in the editorial note in *FRUS*, p. 79.

⁴⁵ 'Memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, 12 March 1970' in *FRUS*, pp. 176-178.

⁴⁶ 'Memorandum from Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 17 February 1970' in *FRUS*, pp. 147-148.

⁴⁷ 'Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 17 February 1970', extracts of the memorandum contained in the editorial note in *FRUS*, pp. 148-149.

presumably, because the West Germans, the French, and the British were keen for the negotiations to commence as quickly as possible.⁴⁸

Another difficulty, from the American perspective, was that the U.S. ambassador would be negotiating alongside the British and the French representatives, and that the West Germans would also play an influential role in the formation of Three Powers' negotiating objectives and tactics. Each of these parties was represented in what was known as the "Bonn Group". This was a committee composed of officials of the Three Powers and was used to consult with officials of the West German government. Therefore, the Americans could not decide upon their approach to the negotiations unilaterally, but would have to be sensitive to the views of the other parties. The new West German government was particularly anxious that the Berlin talks begin before Brandt's visit to East Germany in order to meet with his opposite number, Willi Stoph. The West Germans wanted to emphasize to the Soviets and East Germans alike that Berlin was still under Four Power control before Brandt embarked upon the next stage of his *Ostpolitik*. Kissinger balked at this truncated timetable, fearing that there would not be enough time for the Bonn Group to formulate an agreed set of objectives. Nixon, writing to Brandt, proposed a compromise in which a date for the first session of the Berlin talks would be arranged for the end of the month, and that it would be announced before the chancellor travelled to East Germany. If by that time the Allies had still not reached an agreed position, then the first meeting would be devoted to purely procedural matters.⁴⁹ In the event, Brandt visited the East German city of Erfurt on 19 March and – much to his hosts' discomfort – received a rapturous reception from the city's citizens.⁵⁰

The first session of the Four Power negotiations was convened in West Berlin on 26 March. Thereafter, sessions were arranged regularly every few weeks. The chief negotiators of the Three Powers were their respective ambassadors to West Germany: Kenneth Rush represented the United States; Sir Roger Jackling, Britain; and Jean Sauvagnargues, France. The chief Soviet negotiator was their ambassador to East Germany, Pyotr Abrasimov. In his memoirs, Anatoly Dobrynin described 1970 as the "year of drift and doubt" with regard to superpower diplomacy.⁵¹ In terms of the Four Power Berlin negotiations at least, it would be hard to dispute this assertion. The talks swiftly reached an impasse over the issues of an agreed formula on the Three Powers' civilian transit rights to West Berlin through the territory of the GDR; and the reduction of the FRG's political presence in West Berlin. The Three Powers wanted the Soviets – as opposed to the East Germans, which they did not yet recognize – to give an explicit guarantee with regard to Three Power civilian access to West Berlin. This was problematic for the Soviets in that they claimed that the GDR was a sovereign state, and that it had jurisdic-

⁴⁸ See: M.-P. Rey, 'Chancellor Brandt's *Ostpolitik*, France and the Soviet Union' in C. Fink, B. Schäfer (eds.), *Ostpolitik, 1969-74...*, pp. 111-125, who argues that France, under President Pompidou, shared many of Nixon and Kissinger's reservations regarding *Ostpolitik*, but continued to give Brandt grudging support because they wanted to maintain the Franco-German reconciliation.

⁴⁹ 'Memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, 10 March 1970' in *FRUS*, pp. 169-172.

⁵⁰ See: T. Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name...*, p. 128, for a brief description of Brandt's meeting with Stoph.

⁵¹ A. Dobrynin, *In Confidence...*, pp. 206-208.

tion over its own territory. Both the Americans and the Soviets claimed that they each had to be sensitive to the concerns of their own German ally. The Americans argued that a clear declaration on Three Power access rights would ensure the West Germans would be more accommodating when it came to curtailing their political presence in West Berlin. The Soviets countered this by saying that agreement on a major reduction of the federal presence in West Berlin would make a clear formula on Three Power access more palatable to the East Germans.⁵²

As the talks failed to make much headway, relations between Washington and Bonn became increasingly strained. This was partly a consequence of the fact that the success of Brandt's *Ostpolitik* had become directly tied to the Four Power negotiations. The West German government had made ratification of the Moscow Treaty with the Soviet Union contingent upon the successful conclusion of the Four Power talks. Furthermore, Brandt's own political fortunes had become inextricably linked to the success of his *Ostpolitik*. Were the Berlin talks to collapse, then it was quite possible that this would deliver a deathblow to his high-profile eastern initiatives, which, in turn, would create a major political crisis for his government.⁵³ In contrast, U.S. policy-makers – many of whom had a rather more ambivalent view of the talks – felt no great sense of urgency. These contrasting views were reflected in at least two rather testy encounters between Rush and Bahr in the course of 1970. On the first occasion, in July 1970, the American ambassador pressed for inclusion in the Moscow Treaty a clear statement regarding Four Power responsibility for Berlin. Bahr responded by accusing the Americans of demanding that the FRG gain a provision that the Americans themselves could not attain in their own negotiations with the Soviets. Bahr then accused the Americans of not keeping the West German government fully informed on the progress of the talks. Unsurprisingly, Rush was unmoved by this assertion, pointing out that the FRG had participated fully in the Bonn Working Group.⁵⁴ A few months later, in another exchange, Bahr also accused the Americans of being too vigorous in their protests to the Soviets against some infringements of Allied vehicles entering into West Berlin. Rush again staunchly defended his government's approach, arguing that the U.S. could hardly allow these incidents to occur without comment.⁵⁵ These exchanges reveal the contrast in the respective attitudes of American and West German officials: Bahr was anxious to ensure that nothing should be said or done that could conceivably derail the FRG's *Ostpolitik*; in contrast, the Americans were anxious that Western Allied interests in Berlin should be vigorously defended.

Given that senior figures in Washington also harboured significant misgivings with regard to West Germany's *Ostpolitik*, consideration was even given to using the Berlin

⁵² 'Memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, 17 July 1970' in *FRUS*, pp. 282-284.

⁵³ H. Klitzing, 'Grin and Bear It...', pp. 93-95; H. Kissinger, *The White House Years...*, pp. 800-801; and 'Memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, 17 July 1970' in *FRUS*, pp. 282-284.

⁵⁴ 'Telegram from Embassy in West Germany (Rush) to State Department, 29 June 1970' in *FRUS*, pp. 274-276.

⁵⁵ 'Memorandum of conversation between Bahr, Van Well, Dean and Rush, 9 December 1970' in *FRUS*, pp. 409-412.

talks as a means of putting pressure on the West German government. A few senior officials even questioned whether Brandt's *Ostpolitik* and the conclusion of a Berlin agreement were even in the best interests of the United States. One detailed memorandum drawn up by the U.S. permanent representative of the North Atlantic Council, Robert Ellsworth, which analyzed Brandt's *Ostpolitik*, outlined several possible ways in which the United States officials could obstruct the course of the Berlin negotiations. Any one of these would serve as a "gentle hint" to Brandt that the U.S. was less than happy with the current state of the West German government's *Ostpolitik*.⁵⁶ Yet policy-makers were also mindful of the dangers that resided in a policy of obstructionism. They feared that were the negotiations to fail, the West German government would simply blame the United States for the collapse of its *Ostpolitik*. U.S. officials were also aware that the issue of *Ostpolitik* was highly charged in West German domestic politics. There was a distinct danger that the United States would be perceived as siding with the Christian Democrats – and therefore effectively intervening in West German internal affairs – if they were perceived to be deliberately undermining the Brandt government's approach towards the East. Therefore, for the most part, senior U.S. officials decided to swallow their doubts and continue to support publicly the West German government's *Ostpolitik*.⁵⁷ There was, however, in the summer of 1970 some debate within the administration over the type of Berlin settlement that they wanted to see negotiated. In one Senior Review Group meeting, held at Nixon's summer residence in San Clemente in California, Kissinger posited that the U.S. government faced a choice between negotiating an interim agreement that might lead to some minor improvements in the situation of West Berlin, or a more comprehensive settlement. At that time, Kissinger appeared to believe that a comprehensive Berlin settlement would be almost impossible to achieve, simply because West German and Soviet objectives seemed to be fundamentally incompatible.⁵⁸

There was, therefore, little evidence by the autumn of 1970 that a breakthrough in the Berlin negotiations was close at hand. Neither the Soviets nor the U.S. and its allies had given any real indication that they were willing to modify significantly their stance on several of the most critical issues. Moreover, there was little evidence that senior figures within the White House viewed the negotiations as a major foreign policy priority. Nixon and Kissinger had other foreign policy concerns, notably ending the Vietnam War on terms that they considered to be acceptable. Until senior White House officials – particularly Kissinger – were willing to put their weight behind their negotiations, and actively work to overcome the obstacles that stood in the way of an agreement, it was unlikely that a breakthrough would be achieved.

⁵⁶ 'Memorandum from Ellsworth to Kissinger', undated, but probably given to Kissinger in July 1970, in *FRUS*, pp. 270-273.

⁵⁷ See: 'Memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, 14 October 1970' in *FRUS*, pp. 355-360, which provides a detailed overview of the administration's thinking about the FRG's *Ostpolitik* in general and Berlin in particular, including the pros and cons of obstructing the Berlin negotiations.

⁵⁸ 'Minutes of the Senior Review Group Meeting, 31 August 1970' in *FRUS*, pp. 308-316 (quotation taken from p. 315).

THE BACKCHANNEL AND SECRET DIPLOMACY

Towards the end of 1970 the American position seems to have performed something of a *volte-face*. Kissinger, in particular, who had long been distinctly cool about the desirability and prospects of the Berlin talks, suddenly became more involved, to the extent that he played an enabling role that went a long way towards ensuring the negotiations' ultimate success. Kissinger made full use of his secret "backchannel" contacts with the Soviets, and also established a secret parallel set of talks, in order to engineer a diplomatic breakthrough. Geyer has explained Kissinger's change in attitude in terms of the administration's wider diplomatic agenda. He argues that in 1969 Nixon and Kissinger attempted, through their "backchannel" contacts, to persuade the Soviets to assist them in finding an honourable settlement to the war in Vietnam. In return, they promised that they would do something "dramatic" in order to improve U.S.–Soviet relations. Moscow, however, remained unreceptive. In 1970, Nixon and Kissinger's strategy shifted. Secret contacts with the Chinese indicated that it might be possible to facilitate a dramatic rapprochement with Beijing. The West Germans, moreover, were pressing for an intensification of the Four Power talks over Berlin. Geyer argues: *In an impressive display of geopolitical geometry, Kissinger began to use triangular diplomacy with Beijing and the quadripartite negotiations on Berlin to force an improvement of bilateral relations with Moscow. This time, the primary objective was not a settlement in Vietnam but a summit in the Soviet Union.*⁵⁹

According to this interpretation, Kissinger – with atypical diplomatic dexterity – skilfully exploited these opportunities in an effort to extract the major concession of a high-level summit meeting between Nixon and the Soviet leader, Leonid Brezhnev.

It is certainly true that Nixon dearly wanted a summit meeting with his Soviet counterpart. In his memoirs, the Soviet ambassador, Dobrynin, describes his first meeting with the president on 17 February 1969, about four weeks after Nixon's inauguration. On being told by the ambassador that the Soviets favoured "peaceful co-operation", Nixon apparently indicated that he hoped that a summit would be arranged in the future, though he cautioned that it would need *thorough preparation and time for him to gain a more complete idea of world affairs and the details of specific issues*.⁶⁰ It is also clear from the documents that have been published that the desire to obtain an agreement on the summit meeting had a significant impact upon the final stages of the Berlin negotiations.⁶¹

It is also true that the Nixon administration's wider diplomatic strategy had a strong influence on the course of the negotiations. It is known, for example, that from

⁵⁹ D.C. Geyer, 'The Missing Link: Henry Kissinger and the Back-Channel Negotiations on Berlin' in idem, B. Schäfer (eds.), *American Détente and German Ostpolitik, 1969-1972*, Washington 2004, p. 81 (*Bulletin of the German Historical Institute*, Supplement, 1).

⁶⁰ A. Dobrynin, *In Confidence...*, p. 198.

⁶¹ See, for example, 'Conversation between Nixon and Kissinger, 29 May 1971' in *FRUS*, pp. 720-723.

the outset Nixon and Kissinger had linked the Berlin negotiations to progress in the Strategic Arms Limitation talks.⁶² American tactics in the final stages of the negotiations were also heavily influenced by their secret contacts with the Chinese. In May, the Soviets attempted to implement their own form of linkage when Dobrynin made it clear to Kissinger that they would only agree to a summit meeting when a satisfactory agreement on Berlin had been reached. Nixon and Kissinger bridled at this Soviet form of linkage, and ultimately, from the Soviets point of view, it backfired.⁶³ Much to the Soviets' surprise and consternation, the U.S. government announced in June 1971 that Nixon would visit China the following year. The "China factor" significantly impinged upon the final stages of the Berlin negotiations. In May and June Kissinger instructed Rush to slow down deliberately the pace of the negotiations, partly as a reaction against the Soviets' decision to make a Berlin agreement a precondition for a summit meeting, and partly to ensure that nothing was finalized before the news of Kissinger's secret visit to China had broken. Nixon and Kissinger clearly hoped that the prospect of a major realignment of Sino-American relations would lead to a more flexible approach on the part of the Soviets in the Berlin negotiations. Above all, Kissinger hoped to use the China announcement as a way of forcing the Soviets to commit themselves to a summit meeting the following year before the Berlin talks had been concluded. This strategy worked, in that shortly after the announcement of Nixon's future visit to China, the Soviets agreed that there would be a summit meeting in Moscow in 1972.⁶⁴

Yet the notion that Nixon and Kissinger were simply implementing a clear strategy on the diplomatic chess board is, to say the least, open to question. It is likely that other factors, based on narrower political calculations, also played a role. Hersh, for example, has suggested that Kissinger and Nixon's shift in support of the Berlin negotiations was rooted chiefly in opportunism, in that they *perceived by early 1971 that Brandt's Ostpolitik was going to pay off with a negotiating success. The White House wanted in and the backchannel gave them an entrée.*⁶⁵ Moreover, while Geyer argues that the Berlin talks were an instrument used by the Nixon administration for a greater end – to engineer a transformation in U.S.-Soviet relations⁶⁶ – the evidence suggests that certainly by the latter stages of the talks, the president and his national security adviser had come to see a successful outcome to the talks as an important objective in itself. For example, in May, Nixon – never one to understate his administration's diplomatic accomplishments – described a Berlin agreement as being historic. It would be, he opined, an even bigger achievement than a settlement to the War in Vietnam or the crisis in the Middle East. Berlin was of greater significance because it was the one point in the world

⁶² R. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation...*, pp. 107-108.

⁶³ Dobrynin has asserted that it was the idea of the Soviet foreign minister, Gromyko, to make a Berlin agreement a precondition for a summit meeting. See: A. Dobrynin, *In Confidence...*, pp. 218-220.

⁶⁴ R. Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger...*, pp. 288-300; and R. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation...*, p. 263, on Kissinger's secret trip to China in July 1971.

⁶⁵ S. Hersh, *The Price of Power...*, p. 418.

⁶⁶ D.C. Geyer, 'The Missing Link...', pp. 80-82.

in which the United States and the Soviet Union could go to war.⁶⁷ Given the limited nature of the agreement that was being negotiated, which essentially did little more than recognize the *status quo*, it is hard not to dismiss this as simply being presidential hyperbole.

One further factor that certainly needs to be considered is the motives of Kissinger, who on the American side was the single most important decision-maker in the process. We know, for example, that despite his best efforts to cast himself as a cool, dispassionate realist, Kissinger was in fact extremely emotional, and that this could often have a pronounced influence on his decision-making.⁶⁸ Nixon's national security adviser was also decidedly ambitious. He was determined to ensure that he was at the centre of the decision-making process; and using the president's authority he embarked upon a concerted campaign to minimize the influence of the State Department. It is not unreasonable to suppose that Kissinger, by the beginning of 1971, had concluded that, out of all the foreign policy issues with which the administration was grappling, the Berlin talks was the one area in which they were most likely to achieve a major breakthrough. Dobrynin, in his memoirs, has also noted that Kissinger had a tendency to seize control of those foreign policy areas in which he felt that there was a strong possibility of achieving a successful outcome, while leaving more intractable issues within the purview of the State Department.⁶⁹

Nixon's role in the negotiations also needs to be considered. The president, while being kept fully briefed on the progress of the talks, did not play a significant role when it came to finessing the details of the proposed agreement. Citing the specific example of the Berlin negotiations, Dobrynin has noted that Nixon tended to give direction on the broad outlines of his administration's foreign policy, but remained relatively aloof when it came to the minutiae of what was actually being discussed in the various diplomatic contexts. This ensured that Kissinger was given a largely free hand when implementing the president's foreign policy directives.⁷⁰ Robert Dallek has also noted that Nixon had an overwhelming desire to be viewed as a statesman. During his 1968 election campaign he had promised that he would end the war in Vietnam, and in his inaugural address had called for an "era of negotiations". Yet the Nixon administration had conspicuously failed in its first two years to produce a major foreign policy breakthrough. Both Nixon and Kissinger were, therefore, under considerable pressure to achieve a significant foreign policy success. The disappointing results of the November 1970 Congressional elections served only to compound this situation.⁷¹ Under mount-

⁶⁷ 'Conversation between Nixon and Kissinger, 28 May 1971' in *FRUS*, pp. 714-717.

⁶⁸ B. Keys, 'Henry Kissinger: The Emotional Statesman', *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (2011), pp. 587-609, at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.2011.00968.x>>.

⁶⁹ Dobrynin cites the situation in the Middle East in the first year of the Nixon administration. Dobrynin avers that Kissinger *evidently did not consider the time ripe for progress and consequently avoided personal involvement. He tacitly yielded that honor from the start of the administration to Secretary of State Rogers*. See: A. Dobrynin, *In Confidence...*, p. 204.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 229-230.

⁷¹ On this point, see R. Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger...*, pp. 243-244, 248-249.

ing political pressure, the possibility of successfully negotiating a comprehensive Four Power Agreement over Berlin must have seemed increasingly attractive. Certainly, by the final stages of the negotiations, Nixon appeared to be anxious that his name should be directly linked to the Berlin agreement. The fact that these were not simply bilateral negotiations between the Americans and the Soviets meant that the credit for the agreement would, to some degree at least, have to be shared with the other two western Allied Powers and West Germany. This did not prevent the president, in two revealing conversations with Kissinger on 28 and 29 May, from conniving to ensure that he received the bulk of the credit. Nixon instructed Kissinger that Egon Bahr should leak to the press Nixon's direct interest in the negotiations. The general notion that Nixon wished to promote was that *the President personally intervened in the damn thing*.⁷² The following day, when Kissinger alluded to the Berlin talks, Nixon opined that he *ought to get in on that*. Nixon, in other words, wanted his name to be directly linked to the agreement in order to *Get a little credit*.⁷³

Each of these factors – the desire to use the Berlin negotiations as part of the wider diplomatic strategy towards the Soviet Union and China, as well as more parochial political impulses – combined to ensure that the administration, towards the end of 1970, suddenly viewed the Berlin negotiations as something approaching a priority. Kissinger, whose attitude during the previous year and a half had been less than enthusiastic, suddenly began to exert significant effort to bring the negotiations to a successful conclusion. This might also have been at least partly a response to West German pressure. In December Willy Brandt wrote directly to Nixon, arguing that the recent round of talks had led to a *number of points of departure*, and proposed that in the coming year that the talks have a *conference-like character*.⁷⁴ A few days later, a delegation of senior West German officials led by Horst Emkhe also visited Washington, and restated the case for intensifying the Four Power talks. Emkhe emphasized that the West Germans did not want to accelerate the negotiations themselves, but only make the meetings less “sporadic”. After probing the West Germans on the possible pros and cons of following this course of action, Kissinger declared that the Americans and West Germans should actively look into the possibility of intensifying the Berlin negotiations.⁷⁵ Kissinger, the following day, then had an extended conversation with the Soviet ambassador, Dobrynin, which touched upon a number of foreign policy issues, including the Berlin talks. The ambassador expressed his frustration at what the Soviets perceived as American obstructionism. The meeting ended with Kissinger promising to review the American position on a number of foreign policy issues, including the negotiations over Berlin. Two days later the two men had a follow-up phone conversation, in which Kissinger, referring to

⁷² ‘Conversation between Nixon and Kissinger, 28 May 1971’ in *FRUS*, pp. 714-717, quotation taken from p. 715.

⁷³ ‘Conversation between Nixon and Kissinger, 29 May 1971’ in *FRUS*, pp. 720-723, quotations taken from p. 722.

⁷⁴ ‘Brandt to Nixon, 15 December 1970’ in *FRUS*, pp. 426-427.

⁷⁵ ‘Memorandum of a conversation between, Ehmke, Pauls, Kissinger and Hillenbrand, 21 December 1970’ in *FRUS*, pp. 449-455.

Berlin, obliquely assured the Soviet ambassador that he *was doing on this* [sic].⁷⁶ This was almost certainly an allusion to the fact that Kissinger was already considering, through the use of the secret backchannel, a major initiative in relation to Berlin.

It has been well documented that Nixon and Kissinger exploited their backchannel to the full during the Strategic Arms Limitation talks, which aimed to establish limits on the number of strategic nuclear missiles the United States and the Soviet Union would be allowed to possess.⁷⁷ Kissinger, in his memoirs, also acknowledged the importance of the backchannel in the negotiations over Berlin.⁷⁸ In a conversation with Dobrynin in January, Kissinger suggested that perhaps he and Dobrynin could finesse the most intractable issues between themselves.⁷⁹ Dobrynin – a veteran Washington observer – was more than aware of why Kissinger was anxious to use the backchannel, and was also cognisant of its limitations. Reporting to the Kremlin, Dobrynin observed that Kissinger encouraged the use of the backchannel because it allowed him, *rather than Secretary of State Rogers (with whom he is engaged in an unspoken rivalry), to play the principal role in these talks*. The ambassador went on to note: *However, now that the White House has cornered the market on all the negotiations with us on key issues, it is, in fact, having difficulties conducting those negotiations in any great detail without the assistance of professional experts, whom it has thus far avoided calling in. This is especially apparent from our most recent meetings on West Berlin. My counterpart is noticeably apprehensive about getting into a discussion of the details, much less devising language on them (with regard to transit issues, for example), lest he be “caught flat-footed” without professional expertise on these matters.*⁸⁰

In terms of managing their negotiations, Kissinger suggested to Dobrynin that he would secretly obtain the views of the West German government and the U.S. ambassador in Bonn on how the most difficult matters might be resolved. He would then use this information to attempt to reach agreements on these issues with the Soviet ambassador. Once the two sides had worked out mutually acceptable formulas for dealing with these problems, they would then be fed into the official Four Power talks in Berlin. Having obtained a positive response from the Soviets, to this suggestion, Kissinger then discretely summoned both Bahr and Rush to Washington, neither of whom was told what the Americans and Soviets had in mind. Both Bahr and Rush willingly agreed to Kissinger's proposed approach to the negotiations.⁸¹

⁷⁶ ‘Telephone of phone conversation between Kissinger and Dobrynin, 24 December 1970’, cited in the editorial note in *FRUS*, pp. 456-457.

⁷⁷ See, for example, R. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation...*, pp. 152-216; R. Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger...*, pp. 139-141.

⁷⁸ See: H. Kissinger, *The White House Years...*, pp. 823-833, in which Kissinger gives a reasonably detailed and frank account of the course of the negotiations in Berlin.

⁷⁹ ‘Memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, 25 January’ in *FRUS*, pp. 478-479.

⁸⁰ ‘Telegram from Dobrynin to Soviet Foreign Ministry, February 14, 1971’, National Security Archive, at <<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB233/2-14-71.pdf>>, 7 June 2011.

⁸¹ See: H. Kissinger, *The White House Years...*, pp. 806-807, which recounts his contacts with Bahr and Rush; and ‘Memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, 4 February 1971’ in *FRUS*, pp. 511-514, in which summarizes his conversation with Bahr.

In late February and early March 1971, however, the Kissinger and Dobrynin exchanges ran into similar problems that had bedevilled the parallel, official negotiations in Berlin. The most intractable issues continued to be the terms of the Three Powers' access to West Berlin, and the Soviet demand for a drastic curtailment of the FRG's presence within the western sectors of the city.⁸² A partial breakthrough in the negotiations finally occurred on 17 March when Dobrynin presented Kissinger with a Soviet draft version of the agreement.⁸³ While this was far from being wholly satisfactory, it did represent, in the eyes of Kissinger and other senior White House officials, a distinct improvement on previous Soviet efforts. Indeed, speaking to Nixon, Kissinger stated that *on first reading* the Soviet version *was acceptable*.⁸⁴ A few days later, having received the views of Rush, Kissinger sent back a copy of the Soviet draft containing his handwritten comments, which detailed particular objections. These included a demand for recognition of FRG-West Berlin ties, an acknowledgment of the supreme authority of the Three Powers in the Western sectors, and an assertion that it was the responsibility of the Three Powers to determine how West Berlin was to be represented abroad.⁸⁵ Given these American concerns, Kissinger and Dobrynin decided that best course of action would be for a private meeting to be arranged between Rush and Abrasimov. The two ambassadors would then attempt to reconcile the Soviet draft agreement with the American demands. However, arranging a private bilateral meeting which did not arouse the suspicions of the other interested parties – including the State Department – was no easy matter. In the event, two attempts were made for Rush and Abrasimov to meet at the close of the Four Power talks sessions in late March and early April, but on both occasions, for reasons that are not entirely clear, the arrangements fell through.⁸⁶ Rush reported the difficulties that he was experiencing in arranging a private meeting with Abrasimov, and pointed out that it would be extremely difficult to keep such contacts secret, as it would either involve him travelling to East Berlin, or Abrasimov crossing into the Western half of the city. Either sojourn was likely to attract the attention of the numerous security and intelligence agencies located within the city.⁸⁷ Given these problems, Kissinger suggested that they should await the arrival of Valentin Falin as the Soviet Union's new ambassador to West Germany. Rush immediately recognized that there would be a number of advantages of working directly with Falin. One of these was that he spoke passable English, so there would be no need to have interpreters present. Falin would also be based in Bonn; it would, therefore, be significantly easier to arrange discrete meetings. Furthermore, in contrast to the abrasive Abrasimov, Falin was

⁸² See: 'Message from Kissinger to Rush, 3 March 1971' in *FRUS*, p. 567, which recounts a conversation with Dobrynin on the 28 February. See also: 'Conversation between Kissinger and Dobrynin, 12 March 1971' in *FRUS*, p. 578.

⁸³ 'Letter from Dobrynin to Kissinger, 18 March 1971' in *FRUS*, pp. 592-599.

⁸⁴ 'Conversation between Kissinger and Nixon, 18 March 1971' in *FRUS*, p. 590.

⁸⁵ 'Telephone conversation between Kissinger and Dobrynin, 21 March 1971' in *FRUS*, p. 615.

⁸⁶ 'Message from Rush to Kissinger, 28 March 1971' in *FRUS*, pp. 631-634; and 'Message from Rush to Kissinger, 19 April 1971' in *FRUS*, pp. 662-664.

⁸⁷ 'Message from Rush to Kissinger, 30 March 1971' in *FRUS*, pp. 636-637.

a relatively suave diplomat who was likely to keep his emotions under tight control.⁸⁸ In the event, Falin would not take up his new posting until May. Once he was ensconced in Bonn, a series of secret tripartite discussions, involving Rush, Falin and Bahr, swiftly commenced, in which the three officials attempted to resolve the most intractable issues. The first began on 10 May, and these meetings continued into July, apart from two brief hiatuses as a result of Kissinger's wider diplomatic strategy regarding the proposed summit and the China initiative. Throughout the talks, Rush continually sent secret reports of their progress via a secret naval communications system that was based in Frankfurt. From the outset, Rush was optimistic that they would be able to make rapid progress.⁸⁹

The single biggest obstacle to reaching a satisfactory agreement remained the conflicting legal interpretations between the Western Allies on the one hand, and the Soviets on the other. For the West, the whole city (including East Berlin) remained under Four Power occupation, a position that in their eyes had to be reflected in the terminology that was contained in the agreement. For the Soviets, East Berlin was the capital of the GDR (a state that, as yet, the West refused to recognize); therefore, any Berlin agreement could only apply to the Western sectors of the city. Until these radically different interpretations could in some way be reconciled, then reaching an agreement would be extremely difficult. Egon Bahr, on a visit to Washington in April, suggested a way of circumventing this impasse. In a discussion with Kissinger and other senior officials, Bahr commented that in their draft, the Soviets had conceded to most of the West's demands, but had done so in a way that was utterly unacceptable to the FRG and the Three Powers. Bahr went on to propose the idea that a Four Power Agreement, rather than delineating legal justifications, should instead confine itself to describing the practical rights and responsibilities for each of the Powers.⁹⁰ Kissinger appears to have been immediately attracted to this proposition, and Rush also endorsed this approach to the negotiations.⁹¹ On this basis, Kissinger and Rush, in consultation with Bahr, began to draw up a new draft agreement. The draft eventually formed the basis of the lengthy and intense tripartite discussions involving Rush, Bahr and Falin that took place in May and June. These sessions were devoted to finding formulas that were considered satisfactory by each of the parties. Once agreement was reached, these were then fed into the formal Four Power negotiations.⁹²

Once the secret tripartite meetings had commenced, the White House had to decide what concessions they would be willing to make in order to achieve a Four Power Berlin Agreement. Two National Security Decision Memorandums had previously been issued which had clearly delineated what the government was and was not prepared to concede. The broad parameters of the agreement had been clear for some

⁸⁸ 'Message from Rush to Kissinger, 1 April 1971' in *FRUS*, pp. 646-647.

⁸⁹ 'Message from Rush to Kissinger, 11 May 1971' in *FRUS*, pp. 699-704.

⁹⁰ 'Memorandum of a conversation between Bahr, Pauls, Kissinger, Sonnenfeldt and Sutterlin, 22 April 1971' in *FRUS*, pp. 669-672.

⁹¹ 'Rush to Kissinger, 25 April 1970' in *FRUS*, pp. 678-679.

⁹² See, for example, 'Message from Rush to Kissinger, 28 May 1971' in *FRUS*, pp. 718-720, which details Rush's recent meetings with Bahr and Falin.

time: the Three Powers wanted the Soviets to guarantee their transit rights to East Berlin and to acknowledge that the whole city (as opposed to simply the western sectors) remained under Four Power control; in return, the Western powers would concede a dramatic reduction in the political presence of the FRG. There were, nonetheless, two outstanding issues that needed to be dealt with. The Soviets had made it clear that they wanted to increase their official presence in West Berlin, ideally in the form of Consulate General. The West Germans were also demanding that they should have the right to represent West Berlin abroad, and that West Berliners should be allowed to use FRG passports when travelling to and from the Eastern bloc. National Security Decision Memorandum (NSDM) 106 issued on 22 April 1971 had authorized the concession of an expansion of the Soviet presence in West Berlin if it involved no more than a few offices, and that they did not have the status of official Soviet representation.⁹³ By the latter stages of the negotiations, Rush had concluded that the concession of a Soviet Consulate General would be necessary in order to obtain an agreement. The notion of granting the Soviets a diplomatic presence in West Berlin was anathema to several senior figures within the government, especially those in the defence and intelligence agencies. There was a strong suspicion that the primary purpose of the Consulate would be to conduct intelligence activities in West Berlin. Sonnenfeldt also noted, in one memorandum, that the Soviets already had a presence in West Berlin, in the form of the Soviet War Memorial, which had a permanent ceremonial guard, and that the Red Army also performed garrison duty at Spandau Prison, which housed the Nazi war criminal, Rudolf Hess. Sonnenfeldt argued that a significant increase in the Soviet's presence could have a demoralizing effect upon West Berlin's population.⁹⁴ In the event, a decision on whether to make the concession of a Soviet Consulate General had to be delayed when Kissinger made his secret and historic visit to China. After his return and shortly before the final "wrap-up" round of negotiations that began on 10 August, Kissinger, using his influence, convened a Senior Review Group meeting in which he managed to win the grudging consent of officials from State, Defense and the CIA to allowing a Consulate General to be established, if they could win other significant concessions from the Soviets (some of which, unknown to them, had already been agreed in secret), and the concession of a Consulate General was considered absolutely necessary in order to secure an agreement.⁹⁵ Accordingly, NSDM 125 was issued, which allowed for the concession of a Consulate General, provided satisfactory arrangements could be obtained on the issues of transit and the federal presence. Strict limits, however, were to be placed on the Consulate; these included a restriction on its size (no more than twenty diplomats) and that it could undertake only consular (as opposed to diplomatic and political) functions.⁹⁶

⁹³ 'National Security Decision Memorandum 106, 22 April 1971' in *FRUS*, pp. 672-675.

⁹⁴ 'Memorandum from Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 16 June 1971' in *FRUS*, pp. 752-753.

⁹⁵ 'Minutes of a Senior Review Group Meeting (chaired by Kissinger), 6 August 1971' in *FRUS*, pp. 805-812.

⁹⁶ 'National Security Decision Memorandum 125, 11 August 1971' in *FRUS*, pp. 823-825.

Washington's decision to make the concession of allowing the establishment of a Consulate General effectively cleared the way for the rapid completion of the final round of the negotiations. These were conducted in a series of intense ambassadorial meetings at the old Allied Control Council building in West Berlin from 10 to 18 August (there were no negotiations on the 13th, a day that was deemed to be inauspicious since it was the tenth anniversary of the building of the Wall). For Rush, the final round of negotiations proved to an extremely taxing task. It was his job to ensure that what had been agreed to during the secret trilateral talks would then be fed into the formal Four Power negotiations without arousing the suspicions of the British and the French. In the event, on several occasions Rush found that this process was hampered when his two colleagues, especially the British ambassador, attempted to insert their own preferred formulas. Rush also had to contend with a flow of instructions emanating from the secretary of state, Rogers, in Washington, who wanted to ensure that the final agreement was satisfactory in his eyes. Back in Washington, on 17 August, Dobrynin complained to Kissinger that the negotiations were moving away from those positions that had already been agreed to in secret. Kissinger explained that because the State Department, the British and the French were not privy to these secret arrangements, the U.S. had to use the procedure of negotiations, and occasionally formulations might need to be altered. But he assured Dobrynin that, in the event of a deadlock, the U.S. would favour the agreed position *unless overwhelming conditions arose*.⁹⁷ In the event, this momentary crisis passed, and the following day both Rush and Bahr sent messages to Kissinger reporting that a satisfactory formula on the issue of access had been arrived at in the Four Power negotiations. In the final session, both Rush and Abrasimov scrambled to finalize the agreement. Rush finally announced that the Three Powers were prepared to allow the establishment of the Consulate General in West Berlin if, as a *quid pro quo*, the Soviets would agree that West Berliners could travel to the Eastern bloc using FRG passports. Abrasimov accepted this proposal, and it was agreed that the passports would be stamped *in accordance with the Quadripartite Agreement*.⁹⁸

The fast pace of the final stages of the negotiations appeared to have alarmed the U.S. secretary of state, Rogers, who, at the eleventh hour, demanded a recess, and requested that Rogers travel back to Washington.⁹⁹ Rush, however, effectively ignored these instructions, and signed the Agreement *ad referendum*; in other words, the text was settled subject to the agreement of the various participating governments. It would, however, be rather difficult for any of the governments to introduce anything other than minor amendments to the agreed text. Rogers was distinctly unhappy with the draft text, and complained to Kissinger that Rush had exceeded his instructions.¹⁰⁰ Unsurprisingly, in

⁹⁷ 'Conversation between Kissinger and Dobrynin, 17 August 1971' in the editorial note in *FRUS*, pp. 840-841.

⁹⁸ 'Telegram (1700) from Berlin Mission to State Department, 20 August 1971' in *FRUS*, pp. 846-847.

⁹⁹ 'Telegram from State Department to Berlin Mission, 18 August 1971' in *FRUS*, p. 847.

¹⁰⁰ 'Transcript of a telephone conversation between Rogers and Kissinger, 20 August 1971' in *FRUS*, pp. 868-870.

private, Kissinger was dismissive of the secretary of state's concerns, telling Nixon that Rogers simply didn't understand the Agreement!¹⁰¹ Speaking to Rush a few days later, Kissinger opined that the State Department had been effectively reduced to "nit-picking". He went on to say – with some hyperbole – that it was *the most brilliant negotiation* that he had *ever seen*.¹⁰² Kissinger then moved swiftly to neutralize any objections. Brandt, at Kissinger's behest, wrote a letter to Nixon that endorsed the Agreement.¹⁰³ Given that the FRG was satisfied with the outcome, including the provisions that dealt with the federal presence, it would be relatively difficult for officials in the State Department to propose seriously the re-opening of the negotiations. Rush – whose visit to Washington included, in the words of one participant, *a decidedly cool* meeting with Rogers¹⁰⁴ – was also invited at Kissinger's instigation to visit the president, who was vacationing in San Clemente, California. Nixon, eager for a photo opportunity and for his name to be linked with the Agreement, publicly congratulated Rush on the successful conclusion of the negotiations.¹⁰⁵ The fact that the Agreement had received a very public presidential endorsement ensured that the State Department was in no position to undo the ambassador's work. As one reviewer of the published documents has noted, they *highlight how thoroughly Kissinger had outmaneuvered Rogers by the end of 1971*.¹⁰⁶

The governments of the Four Allied Powers gave their assent to the signing of the Four Power Agreement in early September. There was a last minute hitch when the two German governments produced two different translations of the Agreement. The British and the Americans insisted, with the support of the West German government, that the two German translations had to be reconciled. The Soviets – with the support of the French – argued that this was not necessary as neither of the two German states were contracting parties. For a moment, the two sides seemed to be in a state of deadlock. In the intervening period, the American ambassador, Rush, became ill as a result of high blood pressure, which meant that the signing of the agreement had to be delayed. By the time Rush had recovered, the issue of the German translations had been resolved, and the agreement was signed by the ambassadors on 3 September.¹⁰⁷ The agreement only came into effect after the West Berlin Senate had reached an inner-Berlin agreement with the East German government, and West Germany concluded its own agreement

¹⁰¹ 'Transcript of a telephone conversation between Nixon and Kissinger, 20 August 1971' in *FRUS*, pp. 871-872.

¹⁰² 'Transcript of a telephone conversation between Kissinger and Rush, 25 August 1971' in *FRUS*, pp. 902-903.

¹⁰³ 'Telegram from Embassy in West Germany to State Department (includes Brandt's message), 21 August 1971' in *FRUS*, pp. 881-882.

¹⁰⁴ Sutterlin, who was also present, later published an account, an extract of which is contained in *FRUS*, p. 896.

¹⁰⁵ 'Memorandum for the President's file, 27 August 1971' in *FRUS*, pp. 908-909.

¹⁰⁶ W. Lippert, 'The Tail Wags the Dog: Nixon, Germany, and *Ostpolitik*', *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (2011), p. 161, at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.2010.00941.x>>.

¹⁰⁷ See: 'Message from Rush to Kissinger, 8 September 1971' in *FRUS*, pp. 918-921, which gives a detailed account of the final exchanges just before the signing of the Agreement.

with East Germany on civilian access to West Berlin. Once these agreements had been reached, the foreign ministers of the Four Powers signed the Final Quadripartite Protocol in June 1972, which formally brought the Four Power Agreement into effect.¹⁰⁸

The final Agreement was essentially a compromise whereby the Soviets guaranteed the Three Powers' access to West Berlin, recognized the economic and cultural linkages between western sectors of the city and the Federal Republic, and allowed the FRG to represent West Berlin abroad; in return, the Three Powers agreed to significantly curtail the FRG's political presence and allow the opening of a Soviet Consulate General in West Berlin. The end result, as one writer has noted, was to give *the Allies and the West Berliners stability at the price of de facto recognition of East Germany*.¹⁰⁹ Public reaction to the Agreement was reasonably positive, the general view being that this was an important step in the emerging *détente* between the two superpowers. One British newspaper, for instance, described the Four Power Agreement as being a *tolerable pudding*.¹¹⁰ There were, however, several critics within the U.S. government who were less than happy with the outcome. Senior figures in the State Department – aware that Kissinger and Rush had been negotiating behind their backs – believed that the Agreement contained several important weaknesses. The Agreement was, for instance, ambiguous about whether Berlin remained under Four Power control. The beginning of the Agreement referred to Berlin (West); thereafter, the Agreement used phrases such as the “relevant area”. Sonnenfeldt, in a memorandum to Kissinger, also expressed concern that the agreement carried *with it the seeds of a new status for West Berlin, a status which is closer to the Eastern position than the Western position*. He warned that this might have a demoralizing impact upon West Berliners, who might suspect that the Western Powers would pull back from the city in the future.¹¹¹ Despite these reservations, it should also be acknowledged that Nixon and Kissinger's diplomacy was successful, in that it did lead to the conclusion of a Four Power Agreement. Furthermore, after the conclusion of the agreement, Berlin did not cause any significant crises between the two superpowers until the Wall was finally dismantled in November 1989.¹¹²

CONCLUSION

The Nixon administration's approach to the Four Power Berlin negotiations offer an interesting window on how the U.S. managed its relations with its chief Western European allies. It also reveals a number of interesting aspects with regard to the way the

¹⁰⁸ See: *New York Times*, 4 June 1972, for a report of the signing of Protocol.

¹⁰⁹ F. Taylor, *The Berlin Wall...*, p. 368.

¹¹⁰ *The Economist*, 28 August 1971.

¹¹¹ ‘Memorandum from Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 20 August 1971’ in *FRUS*, pp. 873-880.

¹¹² See: R. Hunter, ‘Berlin: Forty Years On’, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 68, No. 3 (1989); and A. Ulam, *Dangerous Relations: The Soviet Union in World Politics 1970-1982*, Oxford 1984, pp. 63-64, for assessments on the Four Power Agreement and its contribution to Berlin's relative stability during the 1970s and 1980s.

Nixon administration approached diplomacy. It is notable, for example, that the most significant policy-maker on the American side was Henry Kissinger. In 1969, Nixon's newly appointed national security adviser was decidedly doubtful about the whole idea of Four Power negotiations over Berlin. In several memorandums that he sent to the president, Kissinger argued that it would be extremely difficult to obtain an agreement with the Soviets and, moreover, the Three Western Powers would be negotiating from a position of weakness. Accordingly, neither Nixon nor Kissinger did much to encourage the initiation of talks over Berlin in 1969. When the Four Power talks did begin, Kissinger's forebodings appeared to be justified when the talks swiftly ran aground on the issues of Three Power civilian access to West Berlin and the Soviets' demands for a drastic reduction in the Federal Republic's political presence in the Western sectors of the city. Significant progress was not made until Kissinger himself decided to take an active role in the negotiations.

Several reasons might be adduced in order to explain Nixon and Kissinger's *volte face* at the beginning of 1971. One interpretation that has been advanced is that Berlin became an important part of Kissinger's wider diplomatic objectives – notably his efforts to secure a summit meeting between Brezhnev and Nixon in Moscow. Similarly, Kissinger's secret diplomacy in relation to China also impinged heavily in his approach to the Berlin talks. While these diplomatic calculations undoubtedly had a strong influence on the way Nixon and Kissinger approached the Berlin talks, there is strong evidence to suggest that other, more parochial factors were also at work. By the end of 1970 Nixon's popularity was slipping. Having promised an "era of negotiations" and to end the war in Vietnam, the president was under pressure to achieve a major foreign policy accomplishment. Similarly, it is quite possible that Kissinger had concluded by the beginning of 1971 that the Berlin talks offered the most likely avenue towards a significant foreign policy success. While in the past Kissinger had linked the Berlin talks with progress on the negotiations over strategic arms, the evidence strongly suggests that by the spring of 1971 Nixon and Kissinger had come to view the Berlin negotiations as an important foreign policy end in themselves. Certainly, Kissinger – exploiting his backchannels with the Soviets and West Germans – worked assiduously to ensure the negotiations reached a successful conclusion. In doing so, he demonstrated a willingness to go behind the backs of two of America's chief Western European Allies, as well as his own government's State Department. After the Agreement had been concluded, there were criticisms that the Three Powers had conceded rather too much, particularly the Soviet Consulate General, in return for little more than a Soviet assurance to respect the Four Power rights that the Three Powers had claimed since the end of the war. Nonetheless, as one of Kissinger's biographers has noted, the *Berlin and SALT agreements* may not have been *perfect, but they were accomplishments that the State Department had not been able to achieve*.¹¹³ Moreover, whatever the limitations of the 1971 Four Power Agreement, Berlin became an area of relative stability until the Wall was finally torn down in November 1989.

¹¹³ W. Isaacson, *Kissinger...*, p. 327.

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