

Eisenhower and the Berlin Problem, 1953–1954

❖ David G. Coleman

The year 1953 was a pivotal one for the Soviet bloc, particularly in Eastern Europe. Events at that time laid the foundations for the Eastern bloc's Cold War policy for the remainder of the 1950s and into the 1960s. Of most profound impact was Josif Stalin's death in March 1953, an event that reshaped Soviet politics and touched off a prolonged transition in Soviet domestic and foreign affairs. Other significant developments also occurred that year: The outbreak of a widespread popular rebellion in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in June 1953 threatened the political, military, and ideological cohesion of the Soviet bloc. The resolution of that crisis, in turn, provoked important political changes in both Moscow and East Berlin. The settlement of the Korean War in July 1953 brought an end to a highly destructive and destabilizing Cold War conflict. Albeit only an armistice, the settlement raised hopes of continued improvements in East-West relations. Those hopes were dimmed, however, by the detonation of the Soviet Union's first hydrogen bomb (actually a "boosted" fission bomb) in August 1953, which gave a psychological lift to Soviet defense policy, exacerbated Western fears already aroused by the first Soviet nuclear bomb test four years earlier, and set the stage for the missile race that was to dominate nuclear strategy in subsequent decades.

Recent studies have shown that the combined impact of these events, especially the violent turmoil in the GDR, was much greater than previously thought. Some observers have even argued that the East German rebellion irrevocably undermined the legitimacy of the GDR's claim to statehood by dispelling once and for all any hopes the regime may have had of winning the confidence of the East German people. In that respect, the June 1953 crisis clearly contributed to the eventual downfall of the GDR.¹ Partly for this

1. Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis in Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 6, 15–16.

reason, Christian Ostermann has argued that the June 1953 rebellion should be regarded as “one of the most significant focal points in the history of the Cold War.”²

The formative influence of the period after Stalin’s death was bound to affect the West as well as the East, especially on the question of Germany. The role of the United States vis-à-vis Germany during this period therefore warrants closer scrutiny. The particular focus of this essay is the Eisenhower administration’s consideration of the Berlin problem, a problem that was to play a vital and continuing part in the Cold War. As Hope Harrison has demonstrated, the foundations of Soviet and East German policy during the Berlin crisis of 1958–1962 lay in the events of 1953. The East German rebellion set in motion a chain of developments culminating in Nikita Khrushchev’s Berlin ultimatum in November 1958 and the building of the Berlin Wall two-and-a-half years later.³ Yet what has been largely neglected in studies of Washington’s handling of the Berlin problem is that U.S. policy, too, had its foundations in 1953. The East German uprising influenced U.S. perceptions of the Berlin problem long after the resistance had been crushed. This point was stressed as far back as 1981 by Blanche Wiesen Cook, who speculated (even before most of the key documents were available) that Dwight Eisenhower’s response to Khrushchev’s 1958 ultimatum could be traced back

2. Christian F. Ostermann, “The United States, the East German Uprising of 1953, and the Limits of Rollback,” Working Paper No. 11, Cold War International History Project (hereafter CWIHP), Washington, DC, December 1994; and Valur Ingimundarson, “The Eisenhower Administration, the Adenauer Government, and the Political Uses of the East German Uprising in 1953,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Summer 1996), pp. 381–409. On the significance of the events in Eastern Europe during 1953 for Soviet bloc politics, see Mark Kramer’s three-part article, “The Early Post-Stalin Succession Struggle and Upheavals in East-Central Europe: Internal-External Linkages in Soviet Policy Making,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Winter 1999), pp. 3–55 (Part 1); Vol. 1, No. 2 (Spring 1999), pp. 3–38 (Part 2); Vol. 1, No. 3 (Fall 1999), pp. 3–66 (Part 3); Christian F. Ostermann, “‘Keeping the Pot Simmering’: The United States and the East German Uprising of 1953,” *German Studies Review*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (February 1996), pp. 61–89; Christian F. Ostermann, “New Documents on the East German Uprising of 1953,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, No. 5 (Spring 1995), p. 10ff; Mark Kramer, “The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland: Reassessments and New Findings,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (April 1998), p. 210; Vojtech Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity: The Stalin Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 178–190; Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 154–163; Hope M. Harrison, “The Bargaining Power of Weaker Allies in Bipolarity and Crisis: The Dynamics of Soviet-East German Relations, 1953–1961,” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1993), pp. 31–105; and James Richter, “Re-examining Soviet Policy toward Germany During the Beria Interregnum,” Working Paper No. 3, CWIHP, June 1992. For more dated, but still useful studies, see Arnulf Baring, *Uprising in East Germany: June 17, 1953* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1972); Rainer Hildebrandt, *The Explosion: The Uprising Behind the Iron Curtain* (New York: Little, Brown, 1955); and Willy Brandt (as told to Leo Lania), *My Road to Berlin*, (London: Peter Davies, 1960), pp. 227–239.

3. Harrison, “Bargaining Power,” pp. 31–105.

to the events of 1953 and 1954.⁴ Eisenhower himself had publicly said as much in 1961 when he wrote that the Berlin policy papers he approved in January 1954 on the whole “continued to be followed quite consistently during the ensuing years.”⁵ Now that a much larger number of crucial documents have finally been declassified, the significance of the 1953–1954 period for the evolution of U.S. policy on the Berlin problem is even more apparent.

Having inherited the Berlin problem upon taking office in January 1953, the Eisenhower administration quickly reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to West Berlin and actively exploited it as part of a broader program aimed at undermining Soviet power in Eastern Europe. This program was dealt a severe blow by the East German uprising of mid-1953, but the importance of West Berlin to U.S. Cold War strategy continued to grow, forcing the administration to consider how it could best protect U.S. interests if faced with a serious challenge to Western access to Berlin. The outcome of this review process was a policy paper that envisaged the rapid and decisive escalation of a crisis and rejected the option of another airlift, as in 1948. By the time Eisenhower signed the paper in January 1954, two fundamental decisions about the Berlin problem had already been made: The United States would stay in West Berlin even at the risk of general war, and it would use West Berlin as the “free world’s outpost” against the Soviet bloc. The stage was thus set for the Berlin crises of 1958–1962.

Inheriting the Problem

It is an obvious but underappreciated fact that officials in Washington did not simply “forget” about the Berlin problem in May 1949, when the year-long blockade was lifted, only to be reminded of it again when Khrushchev issued his first ultimatum in November 1958. U.S. policymakers’ expectations of another Berlin crisis in fact had not waned since the lifting of the blockade. From May 1949 to November 1958 they sought numerous ways to ameliorate the situation. Soon after Eisenhower took office, he was forced to confront the Berlin impasse and reevaluate the strategic and tactical implications of the U.S. commitment to the city. The new administration concerned itself with more than just logistical problems; it also undertook fundamental policy decisions.

4. Blanche Wiesen Cook, *The Declassified Eisenhower: A Divided Legacy* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), pp. 209–210. See also William Burr, “Avoiding the Slippery Slope: The Eisenhower Administration and the Berlin Crisis, November 1958–January 1959,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Spring 1994), pp. 181–182; and Marc Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 209–211.

5. Dwight D. Eisenhower, “My Views on Berlin,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 9 December 1961, p. 26.

The most basic of these was the question of whether to remain in West Berlin. Although the option of leaving was never seriously raised, Eisenhower recognized that the situation was potentially dangerous and “wholly illogical,” as he later described it. He had been saying as much since 1945.⁶ His election afforded opportunities to reassess the situation. The administration claimed a mandate for change and promised a fresh look at U.S. national security policy, a process that resulted in wide-ranging efforts such as Project Solarium.⁷ Moreover, with Stalin’s death in March 1953, there appeared to be a chance for a new approach to relations with the Soviet Union. Yet despite these apparent opportunities, the Eisenhower administration eschewed any direct challenge to the strategic logic of the Berlin problem. Truman had drawn the line in Berlin, and the new administration essentially decided that the line should stand and that any retreat from established positions would lead inexorably to a Soviet march through Western Europe. Although Eisenhower tentatively seized the opportunity to address the broader German question on 16 April 1953 when he called for “the end of the present unnatural division of Europe,” a workable solution remained elusive.⁸

The Berlin problem was a symptom of the broader German question, but it had developed a significance and problems of its own since the blockade of 1948–1949. Having inherited and accepted the strategic logic of the commitment to defend West Berlin, the Eisenhower administration had to face the difficult problem of squaring ends and means. The general circumstances remained unchanged: Although West Berlin was still militarily indefensible, the United States had promised to come to the city’s defense. Initially, the efforts made by Eisenhower and his secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, to deal with this paradox were not substantively different from the policies of Harry Truman. Despite the far flung rhetoric during the 1952 presidential campaign that highlighted the differences between the foreign policy platforms of the Republicans and Democrats, the new administration sensed that continuity during a presidential transition was the best way to dissuade the Soviet Union from provoking an immediate crisis in Berlin.⁹ It seemed entirely possible,

6. “Memorandum of Conversation,” John Foster Dulles and Eisenhower, 30 November 1958, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1958–1960, Vol. VIII, pp. 142–143; and “Memorandum of Conversation,” Eisenhower and Dulles, 18 November 1958, *FRUS*, 1958–1960, Vol. VIII, pp. 84–85.

7. Robert R. Bowie and Richard H. Immerman, *Waging Peace: How Eisenhower Shaped an Enduring Cold War Strategy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 123–138. For some of the documentary record generated by this review, see *FRUS*, 1952–1954, Vol. II, Part 1, esp. p. 360ff.

8. See particularly W.W. Rostow, *Europe after Stalin: Eisenhower’s Three Decisions of March 11, 1953* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), pp. 3–34; and Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change, 1953–1956* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1963), pp. 144–147.

9. Briefing book for President-elect Eisenhower, n.d., Dwight D. Eisenhower, General, Subject, President’s Secretary’s File, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Missouri.

even probable, that Moscow wanted to create such a crisis. Shortly after Charles Bohlen was appointed the new U.S. ambassador to the USSR, he expressed what many feared when he warned that the Soviet Union was likely to apply increasing pressure on Berlin: “It is a potentially volatile area and may become more so, since military action might start there at almost any time.”¹⁰ At a meeting of the National Security Council (NSC) on 25 February 1953, Director of Central Intelligence Allen Dulles reported that Soviet leaders were able to separate East Berlin from West Berlin and “to pull the plug and isolate Berlin completely when they felt that the time was propitious,” and warned that “the situation was something to watch very carefully.”¹¹

The incoming administration therefore went to considerable lengths to dispel the notion that Eisenhower’s position on the Berlin problem would be any different from Truman’s. During a visit to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) only a fortnight after the inauguration, Dulles reassured the Germans that “we, in the United States are, now as then [1948], vitally interested in the welfare and security of this city and we share the determination of the Berliners to maintain their liberties.”¹² Three days later, when assuming his new post as U.S. high commissioner, James B. Conant told a German journalist that Washington was as determined as ever to ensure that Berlin would remain “the free world’s outpost.”¹³ A week later he went into greater detail, pledging that “the new administration in Washington will not abandon Berlin. . . . We will continue to fulfill our duties and to maintain our rights.” He also affirmed that the United States was “determined to keep open the lines of communications with Berlin,” and he vowed that “I can assure you there will be no faltering in our determination.”¹⁴

Although Eisenhower and Dulles accepted the strategic rationale for the U.S. commitment to West Berlin, they soon began to move away from what they saw as Truman’s overly defensive approach. In particular, they wanted to follow up on two opportunities they believed Truman had failed to use effectively. The first was the role that the common threat played in maintaining what was at times an uneasy unity within the North Atlantic Treaty Orga-

10. *FRUS*, 1952–1954, Vol. VII, p. 99.

11. “Memorandum of Conversation,” National Security Council (NSC) Meeting (25 February 1953), Box 4, NSC, Ann Whitman File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas. See also CIA, NIE-81, “Probable Soviet Courses of Action with Respect to Germany, through mid-1954,” 22 May 1953, Box 4, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Record Group (RG) 59, General Records of the Department of State, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

12. Dulles’s statement at Bonn, 6 February 1953, in Department of State, *Bulletin*, Vol. 28, No. 713, 23 February 1953, p. 302.

13. Conant radio interview, 9 February 1953, Department of State, *Bulletin*, Vol. 28, No. 713, 23 February 1953, p. 302.

14. Conant radio address broadcast on Radio in the American Sector (RIAS) Berlin, 18 February 1953, Department of State, *Bulletin*, Vol. 28, No. 714, 2 March 1953, p. 327.

nization (NATO). The Berlin blockade had been instrumental in pushing Western Europe toward collective security in 1949, and the Eisenhower administration looked for ways of using this common threat to its advantage once again. With the European Defense Community (EDC) treaty signed but not yet ratified, such leverage could be valuable in accelerating the process. To ensure that the United States would be ready to exploit the situation, the issue remained under constant interdepartmental review.¹⁵

The second opportunity that Eisenhower and Dulles identified, and the one with the most far-reaching ramifications, involved the symbolism of Berlin. Truman's overall approach to the Berlin issue had been defensive. Berlin was valuable as a demonstration of American resolve to contain the Soviet Union, but with the distraction of the Korean War and the constraints imposed by the demobilization following World War II, the Truman administration saw few viable ways of seizing the initiative in Europe. Eisenhower came to office arguing that Truman's brand of containment was dangerously defensive. He wanted his own government to make positive use of the American commitment to Berlin by maximizing the inherent propaganda benefits of the situation. As part of this process, Berlin became a focal point in the wider psychological war for Eastern Europe. Eisenhower intended to use the American commitment to West Berlin as a primary weapon in his efforts to wrest the initiative back from Moscow.

Eisenhower and Dulles constantly played up the symbolic role of Berlin. They declared the city a "showplace of freedom," a "beacon of hope," and a "window to the West"—using terms that became synonymous with West Berlin by the time John F. Kennedy came to office—and thereby provided the rhetorical framework for discussion of the Berlin problem that persisted throughout the Kennedy years. There was also a more tangible element to this strategy. By the end of 1953, the Eisenhower administration had assigned West Berlin the role of a constant and visible irritant to Soviet power in Europe.

The new approach had an immediate impact on how the United States portrayed its commitment to West Berlin. Eisenhower and Dulles sought to cultivate the issue as a key element of the wider effort to undermine Communist control in Eastern Europe. Taking many of the basic elements from the wartime application of psychological warfare, the administration devised an elaborate strategy for Europe, including an array of cultural, political, economic, and intelligence measures and covert operations. These comprised traditional programs of disinformation and military intelligence, radio broad-

15. "NSC Progress Report by the Secretary of State on the Implementation of NSC 132/1," 10 September 1953, Box 3, Policy Papers, NSC, Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, White House Office Files (WHO), Eisenhower Library.

casts, leaflet distribution, and other information activities, as well as more expansive programs such as the Atoms for Peace initiative. The most confrontational element directed toward Europe, long designated by U.S. administrations as the key region in the Cold War, was “liberation” or “rollback.” The theoretical objective was to encourage and help the peoples of Eastern Europe throw off the yoke of Communism and reduce Soviet power—in short, to use political instability as a weapon against Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe and thereby make Soviet power “a victim of its own dynamism,” as Paul Nitze had declared a few years earlier in NSC 68.¹⁶

Of course, the idea that Soviet power was vulnerable to political instability was not new, but Eisenhower, driven partly by campaign politics, made this objective a priority. It was imperative, Dulles emphasized during the campaign, that “we should be *dynamic*, we should use *ideas* as weapons; and these ideas should conform to *moral* principles.” He warned that Soviet leaders had long since recognized that they could “get further with ideas than with bombs” and were “using ideas as a principal missile.” He argued that military buildups of the kind pursued by the Truman administration in the early 1950s had no practical effect against this strategy.¹⁷ Eisenhower himself publicly embraced the policy, promising to implement “a dynamic program of penetration . . . to bring freedom to those who want it, and lasting peace to a troubled world.”¹⁸ As the policy developed during the campaign and into 1953, it remained vague on specifics but notionally directed toward seizing the moral and political offensive back from the Soviet Union.

Rollback and the East Berlin Riots

At the time of Eisenhower’s inauguration in January 1953, the rollback policy had wide popular appeal, but some observers already recognized a serious flaw in it that was never successfully remedied. Although the policy ap-

16. NSC 68, “U.S. Objectives and Programs for National Security,” 14 April 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, Vol. I, p. 248.

17. John Foster Dulles, “A Policy of Boldness,” *Life*, 19 May 1952, p. 146ff (all italics in the original); W.H. Lawrence, “Dulles Questions Stevenson Ability,” *The New York Times*, 9 August 1952, pp. 1, 5; W.H. Lawrence, “Eisenhower Binds Party to Program That Faces Facts,” *The New York Times*, 12 August 1952, pp. 1, 13; and Dulles’s address before the World Affairs Forum of the Foreign Policy Association of Pittsburgh, 15 May 1952, Box 63, John Foster Dulles Papers, Seeley G. Mudd Library, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey.

18. Eisenhower to C.D. Jackson, 8 May 1952, Box 65, C.D. Jackson Papers, Eisenhower Library. See also Bowie and Immerman, *Waging Peace*, pp. 41–80; Robert A. Divine, *Foreign Policy and U.S. Presidential Elections: 1952–1960* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1974), pp. 25–85; and John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 127–129.

peared ideologically sound, it was dangerously underdeveloped in its practical aspects. Charles Bohlen warned as much before the President's Committee on International Information Activities in February 1953. He cautioned that although everyone wanted Eastern Europe to be free, declaring this as an official policy would saddle the United States with a commitment that it would probably be incapable of fulfilling.¹⁹ The circumstances in East Germany seemed to offer an ideal setting for the policy; however, Conant warned Washington against inflated hopes. It was not safe to assume, he said, "that even if called upon to do so, the East Germans would be willing and capable of carrying out a revolution unless such a call coincided with a declaration of war and/or assurance of Western military support." Although the East German regime under Walter Ulbricht was battling severe economic problems and an outflow of refugees, there was nothing yet to suggest that the East German authorities could not control outbreaks of public dissent on their own.²⁰

Despite the warnings from Bohlen and Conant, the administration set about preparing to implement rollback. Truman had established a Psychological Strategy Board (PSB) in April 1951 to devise and implement psychological warfare programs, but the PSB had neither the resources nor the institutional weight to make a significant impact.²¹ Shortly after Eisenhower was inaugurated, he emphasized the seriousness with which his administration would wage political and psychological warfare. To this end, he announced the establishment of the President's Committee on International Information Activities. C.D. Jackson, a veteran of Eisenhower's North Africa campaign in World War II, was appointed special assistant to the president for Cold War planning, a post that gave him direct access to the president and a seat at nearly all top-level foreign policy discussions. In late July, the president announced that he was creating the United States Information Agency (USIA) to coordinate all foreign information programs. Two months later, the PSB was disbanded, and its responsibilities were essentially subsumed by a new NSC-directed body with a broader mandate and increased resources, the Operations Coordinating Board (OCB).²²

19. Bohlen's testimony before the President's Committee on International Information Activities, 24 February 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, Vol. VIII, p. 54.

20. Conant to Dulles, 3 February 1953; Conant to Dulles, 2 June 1953, both quoted in Ostermann, "Limits of Rollback," pp. 8-9.

21. With the creation of the PSB in April 1951, the hopes of psychological warriors had been high. But as Walter Hixson observed, "The PSB produced reams of studies, but failed to marshal the national security bureaucracy behind a coordinated effort." Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945-1961* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), p. 19.

22. On the enhanced role of the NSC and Operations Coordinating Board (OCB) in the Eisenhower administration's policy making and implementation, see Anna Kasten Nelson, "The

Senior officials hoped that Berlin would play a central part in rollback. To provide a full-time, centralized conduit for Washington-Berlin relations, the State Department created an informal “Berlin Desk” headed by Dulles’s sister, Eleanor Lansing Dulles, under whose direction the desk came to play an important role. Charged with exploiting the U.S. commitment to the city and directing Washington’s contribution to Berlin’s reconstruction, the Berlin Desk was instrumental in consolidating the Washington-Berlin relationship.²³

Like Truman, Eisenhower recognized the centrality of the U.S. commitment to West Berlin in reassuring the Germans of continuing U.S. support. The U.S. presence in the city was a formidable demonstration of American strength, and it also offered unparalleled opportunities to observe the dynamics of intra-bloc politics. Having already characterized West Berlin as the “window to the West,” the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) sought to make it also the “window to the East.”²⁴ Berlin became the hub of U.S. covert and overt anti-Soviet operations in Europe. In Germany such operations included: broadcasting into the East European satellites and the Soviet Union with Radio Free Europe (RFE) and Radio in the American Sector (RIAS); encouraging and funding pro-Western German youth groups, political parties, and social organizations; publishing newspapers and leaflets; providing CIA funding for front organizations such as the Congress for Cultural Freedom; engaging CIA support for a range of other propaganda activities; and initiating eavesdropping projects such as the Berlin Tunnel. Expectations were extraordinarily high. By not only maintaining an intelligence-gathering base in West Berlin, but also actively cultivating voices of dissent, the CIA hoped to destabilize Ulbricht’s regime while ensuring at all times that the trail of responsibility would not lead back to Washington.²⁵

“Top of Policy Hill”: President Eisenhower and the National Security Council,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Summer 1983), pp. 307–326; Robert Cutler, “The Development of the National Security Council,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (April 1956), pp. 441–458; I.M. Destler, “The Presidency and National Security Organization,” in Norman A. Graebner, ed., *The National Security: Its Theory and Practice, 1945–1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 226–242; Karl G. Harr, Jr., “Eisenhower’s Approach to National Security Decision Making,” in Kenneth W. Thompson, ed., *The Eisenhower Presidency* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America/Miller Center of Public Affairs, 1984), pp. 89–111; and Bowie and Immerman, *Waging Peace*, pp. 83–95.

23. Eleanor Lansing Dulles, *Chances of a Lifetime* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1980), pp. 241–256.

24. Briefing book for U.S. High Commissioner Walter J. Donnelly, n.d., Box 1, miscellaneous files on Berlin, RG 466, Records of the U.S. High Commission for Germany (HICOG), National Archives.

25. See Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, pp. 57–86; Robert T. Holt, *Radio Free Europe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958); Christopher Simpson, *Science of Coercion: Communication Research and Psychological Warfare, 1945–1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Lawrence C. Soley, *Radio Warfare: OSS and CIA Subversive Propaganda* (New York: Praeger, 1989), pp. 221–224; and James G. Hershberg, *James B. Conant: Harvard to Hiroshima and the*

Soon after these programs were launched, a spontaneous and widespread rebellion in mid-1953 posed a singularly perplexing challenge. When East Berlin workers began a wave of protests on 16 June 1953 that spread to hundreds of cities and towns throughout the GDR by the following day, Washington was caught off guard.²⁶ Eisenhower was forced to decide whether to mobilize U.S. political and covert agencies to aid the uprising. The East German workers initially had been seeking only a reduction in their work quotas, but they soon began to demand fundamental political changes—the very issues rollback sought to exploit. This seemed to augur well for the policy, but ultimately Washington was unable to seize the opportunity.

By the time the NSC convened on 18 June for its regular Thursday meeting, the uprising had been effectively quashed. Even so, the assembled officials hoped that new waves of protest would follow not only in East Germany, but in other bloc countries. The NSC discussion turned to how the United States might participate. Dulles noted that the crisis “posed a very tough problem for the United States to know how to handle.” Jackson put it more colorfully: the “64-[thousand] dollar question,” he said, was how far the United States was willing to go “if this thing really gets cracking.”²⁷

The main problem for Eisenhower to decide was whether the United States could support violent uprisings without destabilizing the situation so much that it would provoke general war. The absence of planning for such an occasion necessarily constrained his options. Although the president

Making of the Nuclear Age (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 653. On the Berlin Tunnel, see David E. Murphy, Sergei A. Kondrashev, and George Bailey, *Battleground Berlin: CIA vs. KGB in the Cold War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 206–237. After returning from the Berlin conference of early 1954, Jackson made an ill-fated proposal to jumpstart the Atoms for Peace program by building a state-of-the-art nuclear power reactor in West Berlin. Despite the many logistical problems with the idea, Jackson insisted that the idea’s critics were missing the point, and told Nelson Rockefeller: “I know these damn reactors won’t produce enough electricity to light a town, but I assure you it doesn’t make any difference, if they will just light one electric light bulb, or turn one irrigation wheel.” Jackson to Rockefeller, 26 April 1955, Box 91, C.D. Jackson Papers, Eisenhower Library; OCB, “Study on Berlin Reactor Proposal,” 30 March 1954, Box 8, OCB Central File, NSC Staff, WHO, Eisenhower Library; Wallace Irwin, Jr. to Cecil B. Lyon, “Study for OCB on Berlin Reactor Proposal,” 25 March 1954, *ibid.*; “Excerpt of a Report by C.D. Jackson upon His Return from the Berlin Conference,” *ibid.*; C.D. Jackson, “Psychological Aspects of the Berlin Conference,” n.d., Box 33, Jackson Papers, Eisenhower Library; and OCB, “Progress Report on the Implementation of 5404/1,” 30 April 1954, Box 8, Policy Papers, NSC, Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, WHO, Eisenhower Library.

26. Just over a fortnight before the uprising, the CIA had reported that Soviet control over the Eastern satellites was secure and that “although the majority of the satellite population is and will remain discontented with the regimes, organized opposition has been virtually eradicated.” CIA, NIE-87, “Probable Developments within the European Satellites, through mid-1955,” 28 May 1953, Box 4, Record Set of NIEs SNIEs 1950–1954, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, RG 59, National Archives.

27. Memorandum of conversation, 150th NSC Meeting (18 June 1953), 19 June 1953. For a sanitized reprint, see *FRUS*, 1952–1954, Vol. VII, Part 2, p. 1587. For the full text, see Box 4, NSC, Ann Whitman File, Eisenhower Library.

wanted to cause the Soviet Union every possible difficulty, he told the NSC that openly endorsing the rebellion would be tantamount to sending the rioters to their deaths. Consequently, he was not prepared to provide arms to the East Berliners, despite several recommendations to do so. As Eleanor Dulles later observed, “We had no moral right to ask people to risk their lives for a cause which in all probability was doomed to complete failure.” Pitted against several hundred thousand heavily-armed Soviet troops, she argued, the rebels stood no chance. Supplying them with arms would only have led to their slaughter.²⁸ Eisenhower, however, was motivated by more than just the fear of having blood on his hands. It made no sense to take huge risks in what appeared to be a doomed venture. Eisenhower said at the NSC meeting that if the revolts became more serious and spread to the Soviet Union or to China, he might be willing to intervene. But as long as the disturbances remained confined to Eastern Europe, he judged that the Soviet Union would have few problems asserting its control and could retaliate quickly and easily against West Berlin. In such circumstances, American intervention faced a strong probability of backfiring and would result in a significant loss of prestige. It was not yet time, Eisenhower concluded, to “roll them out for keeps.”²⁹

Consequently, despite the appeals of West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and West Berlin Mayor Willy Brandt and a flood of news reports of West Berliners’ impassioned pleas for the United States to follow through on what it had promised, Eisenhower and Dulles refrained from supporting the rebellion, going only so far as to encourage passive resistance.³⁰ Their silence was based on the simple conclusion that the uprising had no realistic chance of success. Eisenhower and Dulles regarded the crisis as symptomatic of a temporary weakening of Moscow’s control over its satellite states, but not an event that in itself would topple the Soviet regime. The United States could fan the flames of discontent, but, as Jackson himself told the NSC, if they did so, heads would roll. In short, U.S. intervention would result in nothing more than a net loss. Although Jackson would have liked to seize the opportunity, he was unable to offer a plan that would meet with the president’s approval. Apart from providing arms to the rioters, Jackson had few other immediate

28. Eleanor Lansing Dulles recorded interview by John T. Mason, Jr., 27 September 1964, Oral History Project, Eisenhower Library.

29. “Memorandum of Conversation,” 150th NSC Meeting (18 June 1953), 19 June 1953; and “Memorandum of Conversation,” NSC Meeting (25 June 1953), 26 June 1953, Box 4, NSC, Whitman, Eisenhower Library.

30. Konrad Adenauer to Eisenhower, 21 June 1953, *FRUS*, 1952–1954, Vol. VII, Part 2, p. 1591; Eisenhower to Adenauer, 25 June 1953, *ibid.*, p. 1593; and Brandt, *My Road to Berlin*, pp. 235–239. See also Eisenhower’s press conference, 1 July 1953, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Dwight D. Eisenhower: 1953* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960), p. 463; Eisenhower to Adenauer, 25 July 1953, *Public Papers*, pp. 516–520.

suggestions. Even RIAS and RFE broadcasts were restrained and called for the rioters to submit to the Soviet authorities.³¹ The deployment of tens of thousands of Soviet troops and tanks, unchecked by U.S. intervention, ensured that the crisis passed quickly. The Soviet military enforced martial law and sealed the border between the Eastern and Western sectors of Berlin.³²

In the days following, the PSB hurriedly put together a plan to exploit the unrest in Eastern Europe, but the scope of its proposals was limited, and the Soviet Union had restored order in the GDR before any of the ideas could be implemented.³³ The only definite action taken by the administration was the announcement of token financial aid for West Berlin's industries.³⁴ By the time the NSC met again on 25 June, the crisis was long over and Washington had turned its attention to assessing what happened. Several senior officials expressed a sense of guilt that they had unrealistically built up the hopes of the East German workers for U.S. support. Although Dulles flatly denied it, many in the administration went so far as to attribute responsibility for the riots to the U.S.-sponsored broadcasts over RIAS and RFE. High-ranking intelligence officials believed that the problem was more fundamental: CIA Director Allen Dulles told the NSC that since Stalin's death, the Soviet Union had been waging a "peace offensive." According to Dulles, Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov, who U.S. intelligence analysts surmised was driving Soviet policy, had "softened" Moscow's hold over the satellite countries as a political maneuver to divide the Western allies. Intelligence analysts claimed that this strategy had backfired when the people of Czechoslovakia and East Germany spontaneously seized the opportunity to voice their discontent. In a prediction that at first appeared reasonable based on available evidence, but then turned out to be egregiously wrong, Dulles speculated that the upheaval had demonstrated such weakness on the part of Ulbricht's regime that it could lead to Ulbricht's removal under Soviet auspices and the appointment of someone more capable.³⁵

31. According to Harrison, East German and Soviet authorities also relied on RIAS broadcasts to keep abreast of developments. Harrison, "Bargaining Power," p. 71.

32. Baring, *Uprising in East Germany*; Hildebrandt, *The Explosion*.

33. "Memorandum of Conversation," 150th NSC Meeting (18 June 1953), 19 June 1953; and "Memorandum of Conversation," 151st NSC Meeting (25 June 1953), 26 June 1953, Box 4, NSC, Whitman, Eisenhower Library. Jackson, "Memorandum of Telephone Conversation with Dulles," 17 June 1953, Box 10; Telephone Calls, John Foster Dulles Papers, Eisenhower Library. The PSB submitted PSB D-45, "Interim U.S. Psychological Strategy Plan for Exploitation of Unrest in Satellite Europe," which was eventually adopted by the NSC as NSC 158. PSB D-45, 22 June 1953, and revised version 29 June 1953, Box 6, PSB Working Papers 1951-1953, RG 59, National Archives.

34. "Statement by the President Regarding a Grant of Additional Aid to West Berlin," 18 June 1953, *Public Papers: Eisenhower: 1953*, pp. 445-446.

35. "Memorandum of Conversation," 150th NSC Meeting (18 June 1953), 19 June 1953. For a sanitized reprint of this memorandum, see *FRUS*, 1952-1954, Vol. VII, Part 2, pp. 1586-1590. For the

The Eisenhower administration was dismayed by the results of the crisis, not least because many policy makers sensed that U.S. inaction had undermined the credibility of rollback. To be sure, the very fact that the uprisings occurred, and particularly that the protesters quickly shifted from narrow economic complaints to wider political concerns—with pronounced anti-Soviet overtones—suggested that the central premise of rollback, namely that Soviet power in Eastern Europe was vulnerable to political attack, was essentially correct.³⁶ Nevertheless, the crisis demonstrated that instability in Eastern Europe could be just as dangerous to American interests as it was to Soviet security. Washington's unwillingness to become involved in East Germany highlighted serious deficiencies in rollback and the way it was implemented. It also created domestic political problems for the administration as critics accused the administration of hypocritically abandoning the very people whose hopes the United States had been deliberately building and exploiting. These critics, including Senator Joseph McCarthy, seized upon rumors of Communist infiltration of U.S. agencies in Germany to subject those agencies and foreign programs to withering scrutiny.³⁷

Despite these severe costs, Eisenhower and Dulles were convinced that the uprising had dealt a blow to the legitimacy of the Soviet position and exposed the fragility of the Communist regime. They quietly relished the irony that the workers of the GDR, who supposedly lived in a “workers’ paradise” according to Communist propaganda, were the ones who protested against their living conditions.³⁸ Eisenhower and Dulles were also pleased that the crisis made it more difficult for the Soviet Union to engage in Four-Power talks on Germany and the Berlin question, which the administration had been leery of pursuing. In effect, the East Berliners had “pulled the rug from under the Kremlin” and opened a window of opportunity for the West to seize the initiative.³⁹ For Eisenhower, who had been finding it increasingly

more complete text, see Box 4, NSC, Whitman, Eisenhower Library. See also “Memorandum of Conversation,” 151st NSC Meeting (25 June 1953), 26 June 1953, *FRUS*, 1952–1954, Vol. VIII, p. 66. In fact, the situation led to a strengthening of Ulbricht's regime. Kramer, “The Early Post-Stalin Succession Struggle (Part 1),” pp. 40–55; Harrison, “Bargaining Power,” pp. 96–105; and John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), pp. 130–131.

36. Initially, Soviet authorities seemed to have agreed. See Kramer, “The Early Post-Stalin Succession Struggle (Part 2).”

37. For McCarthy's attacks on the HICOG, see Hershberg, *James B. Conant*, pp. 656–657. See also “Memoranda of Telephone Conversations,” Dulles and John J. McCloy, 23 June 1953; Dulles and James Riddleberger, 9 July 1953; Dulles and Jackson, 9 July 1953; and Dulles and John Taber, 9 July 1953, all in Box 1, Telephone Calls, John Foster Dulles Papers, Eisenhower Library.

38. See for example Eisenhower's press conference, 1 July 1953, *Public Papers: Eisenhower: 1953*, p. 126.

39. “Memorandum of Conversation,” 150th NSC Meeting (18 June 1953), 19 June 1953; and Ingimundarson, “Political Uses of the East German Uprising in 1953,” p. 382.

difficult to resist the calls from his allies—particularly British Prime Minister Winston Churchill—for a summit meeting, the instability in East Germany provided a convenient and timely excuse.⁴⁰

Dulles, for his part, saw a need for careful long-term management of the crisis. It was imperative, he believed, to resist the widespread perception that the uprising had marked the first step in the disintegration of Moscow's East European satellites. Like his brother, he regarded the "softening" of Soviet control as a deliberate, if miscalculated, tactic in the Soviet peace campaign rather than a sign of fundamental weakness. Molotov was "undoubtedly the ablest and shrewdest diplomat since Machiavelli," Dulles told the NSC, and it would be unwise to exaggerate the significance of the revolt.⁴¹ Although the crisis strengthened American propaganda urging general elections for the whole of Germany, Dulles claimed that the riots presented the Soviet Union with a choice of taking either a more lenient or a tougher line. Either way, he argued, the West should anticipate imminent action. It was difficult to predict what that move might be—the range of options appeared to include a proposal to remove all foreign troops from Germany or renewed calls for the neutralization and unification of Germany—but recent Soviet actions, including moves toward an armistice in Korea and the recall of twenty top Soviet officials from East Germany, seemed to indicate that something was afoot.⁴²

Some officials, however, were less sanguine, fearing that Soviet military action could not be ruled out. Whereas Dulles suggested that the instability made it less likely that East German paramilitary forces would attack West Berlin, the U.S. High Commission in Germany (HICOG) suspected that the entire episode had been a carefully fabricated disturbance that would give the Soviet Union a pretext for permanently sealing off East Berlin and even for seizing the whole city, a scenario that had been considered by the CIA for some time.⁴³

40. Eisenhower declared that although he would not attend a Four-Power conference, Dulles would. He also resolved that the United States would not participate in such a Four-Power conference until the Soviet Union withdrew its forces from East Germany, at which time the United States would withdraw its forces from West Germany. For Eisenhower's refusal to attend a summit, see Eisenhower to Churchill, 5 May 1953, in Louis Galambos and Daun Van Ee, eds., *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), Vol. 14, pp. 206–208.

41. Dulles to U.S. Embassy in Czechoslovakia, 6 July 1953, *FRUS*, 1952–1954, Vol. VIII, p. 69.

42. "Memorandum of Conversation," NSC Meeting (2 July 1953), 3 July 1953, Box 4, NSC, Whitman, Eisenhower Library; and "NSC Progress Report by the Secretary of State on the Implementation of NSC 132/1," 10 September 1953, Box 3, Policy Papers, NSC, Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, WHO, Eisenhower Library.

43. HICOG, "Alternative Courses of Developments Arising out of June 16 Uprisings in East Germany," 25 June 1953, *FRUS*, 1952–1954, Vol. VII, Part 2, pp. 1595–1596. For CIA concerns, see CIA, NIE-81, "Probable Soviet Courses of Action with Respect to Germany, through mid-1954," Box 4, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Record Set of NIEs SNIEs 1950–1954, RG 59, National Archives.

This view was shared by a few outside HICOG, but most U.S. officials agreed that the inability of Ulbricht's regime to quell the uprisings without Soviet tanks probably convinced Moscow that Soviet control over East Germany would be endangered by war. Such an assessment, the administration concluded, indicated that a Soviet withdrawal from East Germany was now highly unlikely. From the administration's standpoint, this was no bad thing. Earlier on, U.S. officials had been concerned that the Soviet Union would withdraw its troops from the GDR and put pressure on the West to reciprocate. This would leave intact the dense web of Soviet political ties with the governing East German Communist party, a scenario that the Eisenhower administration wanted to avoid. U.S. policy makers were relieved that the June 1953 uprising had apparently convinced Soviet leaders that it would be too risky to pull Soviet troops out of East Germany.⁴⁴

As Soviet control over East Germany tightened, U.S. officials continued to watch the Eastern satellites closely for any signs of significant unrest. At the same time, the administration engaged in a vigorous debate about the place of rollback in U.S. strategy.⁴⁵ Eisenhower and Dulles found that they had to fend off accusations of having shown depraved indifference. As Jackson put it to Eisenhower: "The very thing that was so gratifying, i.e. that these German developments were spontaneous and not engineered from the outside, is now about to boomerang because we have not moved in."⁴⁶ To counter this perception, the administration sought means short of military intervention to display its support for the people of Berlin and East Germany. In early July, at Adenauer's suggestion, the United States joined West Germany in launching a highly successful food program that provided a major propaganda coup and heightened popular defiance of the East German regime. The pressure that the Soviet and East German authorities felt from the program became obvious when they were forced to impose restrictions on travel into West Berlin and to mete out punishment against East Berliners who were caught participating. The program was judged an overwhelming success by U.S. officials at the scene.⁴⁷ Other limited yet provocative projects were designed to keep the East German regime on the defensive. These included "information activities"

44. NSC 160/1, "The U.S. Position with Respect to Germany," 17 August 1953, Box 6, Policy Papers, NSC, Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, WHO, Eisenhower Library. See also Allen Dulles's comments to the NSC as recorded in "Memorandum of Conversation," 151st NSC Meeting (9 July 1953), 9 July 1953, Box 4, NSC, Whitman, Eisenhower Library.

45. The Solarium Project was particularly central to this reevaluation of rollback. Bowie and Immerman, *Waging Peace*, pp. 128–139, 158–177.

46. Jackson to Eisenhower, "East Germany," 3 July 1953, *FRUS*, 1952–1954, Vol. VII, Part 2, p. 1608.

47. Lyon to Conant, 12 September 1953, *FRUS*, 1952–1954, Vol. VII, Part 2, p. 1647; Conant to State, 30 September 1953, in *ibid.*, pp. 1655–1658; and Conant to Eisenhower, in *ibid.*, pp. 1660–1663.

such as free exhibits, including a spectacularly popular exhibit on Atoms for Peace, scholarship funds for East German students to attend Berlin's Free University, and active encouragement of commemoration of the June riots.⁴⁸

In the short term, then, the experience of the June riots taught U.S. policy makers the high risks of rollback, risks that were again demonstrated in Hungary in 1956.⁴⁹ Bohlen's earlier warnings of the danger of publicly announcing "liberation" as an objective of U.S. foreign policy appeared to be vindicated and were vigorously supported by some in Washington. Perhaps the most telling criticism came from several American ambassadors in Western Europe, especially Conant, who took the opportunity of a meeting in September 1953 to voice strong disapproval of what they believed was the disproportionate and damaging influence that Washington's psychological warriors were having on U.S. policy toward Europe.⁵⁰

In contrast to those who feared that rollback had lost credibility, some officials (especially at the planning level) gradually saw reason for hope.⁵¹ As John Ausland of the State Department's Bureau of German Affairs remarked, "the uprising had a lasting influence on our thinking." In fact, he said, "much of our planning was directed toward preparing for a repetition of those events."⁵² Despite the failure of the rebellion and its potentially dangerous implications, the crisis appeared to show that organized underground movements existed and that they could be effective in the GDR and other parts of Eastern Europe.⁵³ Some officials even speculated that the riots revealed a window of opportunity for the more ambitious aspects of Washington's Ger-

48. See Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, pp. 72–73; Ingimundarson, "Political Uses of the East German Uprising in 1953," pp. 394–407. The popularity of the program exceeded all expectations. Original estimates had been to supply one million food parcels per month to residents of the Soviet zone. In the first two days of the program, however, over 200,000 Soviet zone residents collected parcels from West Berlin. Debate ensued among the Western allies regarding the appropriate level of publicity to give the program without provoking the Kremlin. See "Memoranda of Conversations," Informal PSB Meetings, 8 July 1953 and 15 July 1953, Box 7, PSB Working Papers 1951–1953, RG 59, National Archives; Merchant to Under Secretary, "Proposal to Extend Food Supplies to Eastern European Satellites," 14 July 1953, Box 8, *ibid.*; Phillips to Under Secretary, 15 July 1953, *ibid.*; and *FRUS*, 1952–1954, Vol. VII, Part 2, p. 1611ff.

49. For a specific discussion of the relationship between RFE broadcasts in the Hungarian uprising of 1956 and the experiences of June 1953, see "Radio Free Europe," Box 7, Alpha, Subject, Staff Secretary, WHO, Eisenhower Library.

50. "Concept and Ideas for Psychological Warfare in Europe Developed by the Chief of Mission Meeting at Luxembourg on September 18–19, 1953," *FRUS*, 1952–1954, Vol. VI, pp. 678–681. See also Dulles to Eisenhower, 1 October 1953, *ibid.*, pp. 683–684; Eisenhower to Dulles, 1 October 1953, *ibid.*, p. 684; Livingston T. Merchant to Walter B. Smith, 6 November 1953, *ibid.*, p. 685; and Hershberg, *James B. Conant*, pp. 662–663.

51. Bowie and Immerman, *Waging Peace*, esp. pp. 164–165.

52. John C. Ausland, *Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Berlin-Cuba Crisis, 1961–1964* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1996), p. 109.

53. "Memorandum of Conversation," 151st NSC Meeting (9 July 1953), 9 July 1953, Box 4, NSC, Whitman, Eisenhower Library.

man policy. It had demonstrated that Moscow's control over its occupation zone was more precarious than at any point since 1948. Cecil Lyon, the director of the Berlin Element of HICOG, reported that even though Soviet troops quickly reasserted control without sacrificing Ulbricht's government, the June uprisings caused ordinary East Germans to "take a new lease on life and encouraged them to believe liberation from Communist rule might be achieved."⁵⁴ Many in Washington agreed with Ausland's October 1953 assessment that the uprisings and the effectiveness of efforts such as the food program demonstrated that "the right program at the right time can redound to our benefit. In other words, the Soviet position in Germany is by no means impregnable, and western actions can take advantage of its weaknesses."⁵⁵

Even those who shared this optimism, however, were aware that if roll-back was to remain a part of U.S. Cold War strategy, the management of the policy had to be vastly improved. Over the following years, the lessons that Washington took away from the riots were incorporated into official policy. In an amendment to the official paper on U.S. objectives in Germany, the NSC resolved to encourage the East German people to resist Ulbricht's regime passively, but to avoid incidents that would lead to violence or action that might result in a net loss to U.S. interests. As Conant succinctly put it (with a touch of frustration), the intention was "to keep the pot simmering but not bring it to a boil."⁵⁶ The administration made clear that it would support passive resistance, but it would go to considerable lengths to dispel the impression that the United States was offering blanket support for anti-Soviet demonstrations.

A New Approach to the Berlin Problem

The effect of these events was to make the Berlin problem even more important to U.S. Cold War strategy. Eisenhower sought to bring the tactical aspects of the problem—notably contingency planning—into line with the issue's increased salience. The contingency policy that the Eisenhower administration inherited was NSC 132/1, "U.S. Policy and Courses of Action to Counter Soviet or Satellite Action Against Berlin." At the core of this policy was an airlift. Truman had, albeit reluctantly, based his planning for a future challenge in Berlin on the assumption that a long-term airlift was the only viable way to resist anything less than a direct military attack on the city.⁵⁷ Consequently,

54. Lyon to Conant, 18 November 1953, *FRUS*, 1952–1954, Vol. VII, Part 2, p. 1669.

55. Ausland to Brewster H. Morris, 27 October 1953, *FRUS*, 1952–1954, Vol. VII, Part 2, p. 1665.

56. Conant quoted in Hershberg, *James B. Conant*, p. 660.

57. For some of Truman's frustration at having to rely on an airlift in the event of another block-

NSC 132/1 provided for a gradual four-phase process of escalation in the event of the most likely scenario—Soviet interference with Allied access to West Berlin. Initially, diplomatic protests would be sent and an airlift initiated. The Western powers would then resubmit the Berlin problem to the United Nations and seek to create a groundswell of international support. Only when the position in West Berlin was about to become untenable would the Western powers issue an overt ultimatum to the Soviet Union. Not unless all these options had been exhausted—and by implication, a considerable period of time had elapsed—would the use of limited military force be considered.⁵⁸

Although drafted only about a year earlier, NSC 132/1 rested on assumptions not shared by Eisenhower. The most important assumption concerned the desirability of a military response to a new Soviet challenge. The policy paper specified that “the Western powers should avoid the use of force unless and until necessity dictates.”⁵⁹ Technically, Eisenhower still subscribed to this basic principle, but he saw a much lower threshold of what constituted “necessity.” On the basis of this fundamental principle, he supervised the formulation of a new approach to protecting the U.S. commitment to West Berlin.

On 1 October 1953, as part of a general review process, Dulles presented the NSC with a progress report on the implementation of NSC 132/1.⁶⁰ Much of what he reported was encouraging. He claimed that substantial progress had been made in decreasing West Berlin’s vulnerability to a blockade, mainly through the stockpiling of basic supplies and preparations to make essential services run independently of facilities in the Eastern sector. Military authorities in Germany had developed plans ranging from token to full-scale airlifts. Efforts were under way to simplify the command structure by placing all Western forces in Berlin under a single chain of command in the event of an emergency. These American, British, and French forces could be supplemented by a solid contingent of West Berlin police now consisting of 15,000 men. Although numerically far inferior to the East German *Bereitschaften*, these West Berlin police officers, who were trained in the use

ade, see James Webb’s memoranda of his conversations with Truman on 31 May 1949 and 7 June 1949, *FRUS*, 1949, Vol. III, pp. 819–820, 830.

58. For a sanitized reprint of NSC 132/1, see *FRUS*, 1952–1954, Vol. VII, Part 2, pp. 1261–1269. For the full text, see NSC 132/1, “U.S. Policy and Courses of Action to Counter Possible Soviet or Satellite Action Against Berlin,” 12 June 1952, Box 18, Policy Papers, RG 273, Records of the NSC, National Archives.

59. *Ibid.*

60. “Memorandum of Conversation,” 164th NSC Meeting (1 October 1953), 1 October 1953. For a heavily sanitized reprint, see *FRUS*, 1952–1954, Vol. VII, Part 2, pp. 1364–1365. For the full text, see Box 4, NSC, Whitman, Eisenhower Library. For the text of the report, see “NSC Progress Report by the Secretary of State on the Implementation of NSC 132/1,” 10 September 1953, Box 18, Policy Papers, RG 273, National Archives.

of mortars, bazookas, and tear gas, were expected to make a valuable and timely contribution in the event of an East German attack on the city.⁶¹

On the less positive side, Dulles reported that there were still considerable vulnerabilities. Despite the impressive economic revitalization of the Federal Republic, economic conditions in West Berlin, although improving, remained difficult—a situation that the Soviet Union appeared intent on aggravating by exploiting the isolation of the city.⁶² One-quarter of West Berlin's labor force was unemployed, and the city's exports covered only two-thirds of the value of its imports, forcing the West Berliners to depend on external economic aid. A constant stream of refugees from East Germany, peaking at 30,000 a month, added to the ranks of West Berlin's unemployed and homeless and placed further strains on the resources of the Western sectors.⁶³ For Washington, these hardships had more than economic implications. They again raised the problem of maintaining morale in Berlin, an essential element if the U.S. commitment to the city were to be maintained. To complicate matters further, the administration was seeking to rationalize and reduce its financial outlay for Germany, making it urgent to reassure West Berlin's population of the continued interest of the United States in the security and welfare of the city and to emphasize the relatively generous support that Berlin received. Coordination of political and military planning with the British, French, and West Germans was also running into difficulties, par-

61. Jones (HICOG Berlin) to HICOG Frankfurt, 8 June 1950, Box 5, General (Subject) 1949–1952, U.S. Secretariat, Allied High Command, RG 466, National Archives.

62. Gaugain to Secretary General of the Allied General Secretariat, "General Situation in West Berlin," 23 March 1953, Box 1, Miscellaneous Files on Berlin, Executive Secretariat, RG 466, National Archives.

63. P. Gaugain to Secretary General of the Allied General Secretariat, "The Berlin Refugee Problem," 23 March 1953, Box 1, Miscellaneous Files on Berlin, Executive Secretariat, RG 466, National Archives; E.B. Maguire to HICOG, "Refugee Figures for West Berlin," 28 April 1953, Box 7, *ibid.*; and Lyon to Conant, 23 March 1953, *ibid.* For an earlier influential discussion of the refugee problem, see Eugene C. McAuliffe, "The Refugee Problem in Berlin," July 1950, *ibid.* The problems of dealing with East German refugees remained an issue until August 1961 when the boundary between East and West Berlin was sealed. Most of these refugees were evacuated to the Federal Republic, but many thousands remained in West Berlin as "nonrecognized" refugees. The problem was not so much one of finance as it was of space and Berlin morale. Washington was aware that existing policies were not adequate and that a suitable, long-term solution had to be found. Several attempts at financing construction of accommodation were partially successful but did not provide long-term relief, and risked souring the hopes of satellite peoples. Generally, the exodus of people from the Soviet zone was seen in the West as positive, but some feared for the destabilizing effect it could have on Eastern Europe, and others preferred that pro-Western agitators stayed in East Germany to carry on their resistance. Robert M. Macy to Cutler, 19 May 1953, Box 6, NSC, Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, WHO, Eisenhower Library; "Memorandum of Conversation," Hoover, Kaiser, Conant, *et al.*, 5 February 1956, *FRUS*, 1955–1957, Vol. XXVI, p. 413. See also *FRUS*, 1952–1954, Vol. VII, Part 2, pp. 1307–1309, 1316–1317; James G. Hershberg, "Explosion in the Offing": German Rearmament and American Diplomacy, 1953–1955," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Fall 1992), p. 520; and Konrad Adenauer, *Memoirs, 1945–53*, trans. by Beate Ruhm von Oppen (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965), pp. 446–447.

ticularly because of the reluctance of the British and French to commit in advance to countermeasures or specific reprisals.⁶⁴

In response to Dulles's report, Eisenhower outlined his own views on how the United States should go about honoring its commitment to West Berlin and countering the potential Soviet threat to interfere with Western access. It was clear, he said, that existing planning did not go far enough; if the Soviet Union blockaded West Berlin again, this would be tantamount to a declaration of war. The prospect of general war had to be plainly faced without going through all the time-consuming preliminary steps prescribed by NSC 132/1. He warned that if the Western allies allowed themselves to be drawn into a long-term airlift—which the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) advised was no longer even possible—they would appear belligerent once the situation became untenable and they were forced to take more drastic measures. In light of what he perceived to be a general decline in U.S. prestige abroad, this was a serious problem. To emphasize the stakes involved, he told his advisers that if the United States acquiesced in a new blockade, it would effectively sacrifice its leadership of the Free World.⁶⁵

Eisenhower was thus left with the same problem that Truman had faced: If an airlift was not a viable option, what were the alternatives? The notes from the 1 October 1953 NSC meeting do not record whether Eisenhower offered his own solution to this problem. His remarks, however, clearly implied that military force would be used. For the moment this went unsaid—at least by the president. But the new chairman of the JCS, Admiral Arthur Radford, was more forthcoming. Seizing upon the opportunity created by the president's remarks, he put forward his own view of the problem. Prior to his appointment to the JCS, Radford had attended only one NSC meeting, a session in 1948 at which General Lucius Clay had reported on the first Soviet blockade. At that meeting, Clay had recommended breaking the blockade with military force. That proposal was the subject of vigorous debate during the summer and fall of 1948, but Secretary of State George Marshall and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Omar Bradley, were both vehemently opposed to the use of force against the blockade. They quickly persuaded Truman to reject Clay's advice. Radford now revealed, quite bluntly, that he believed Clay's course had been the right one in 1948 and remained the right one in 1953.⁶⁶

64. "Memorandum of Conversation," 164th NSC Meeting (1 October 1953); and "NSC Progress Report by the Secretary of State on the Implementation of NSC 132/1," 10 September 1953.

65. *Ibid.*

66. "Memorandum of Conversation," 164th NSC Meeting (1 October 1953). For the Memorandum of Conversation of the 1948 meeting, see "Memorandum of Conversation," 16th NSC Meeting (23 July 1948), 23 July 1948, Box 220, NSC, Subject, President's Secretary's File, Truman Library.

In view of the president's dissatisfaction with existing planning, the NSC's Planning Board was charged with reviewing NSC 132/1, but the board lacked any direct instructions on how to proceed. Two months later, after a review process dominated by the State Department, Dulles submitted the revised document to the NSC on 10 December 1953 under the designation NSC 173, "U.S. Policy and Courses of Action to Counter Possible Soviet or Satellite Courses of Action Against Berlin." Aside from some minor updates reflecting the changed situation since NSC 132/1 had been drafted, NSC 173 was almost identical in both wording and sentiment to the policy paper it was designed to supersede. The document still envisaged a four-stage reaction to a Soviet challenge. Military force was not to be employed until the fourth stage, and even then only if the airlift had failed, the Western position in Berlin had become untenable, and all other diplomatic and political options had been exhausted.⁶⁷

Predictably, the president, with the vocal concurrence of the Joint Chiefs, immediately rejected NSC 173. Eisenhower then proceeded to give an even more detailed exposition of his views. He revealed that he too believed that Clay had been right in 1948 to call for armed convoys to test the blockade and reestablish ground access.⁶⁸ Eisenhower said that he had no intention of being drawn into a long-term airlift, and that it was imperative to call Moscow's hand as soon as possible. A failure to do so would only embolden Moscow and perhaps lead to miscalculation and general war. The only way to avoid this and make the issues clear, he said, was to challenge any restrictions that the Soviet Union imposed. Accordingly, he ordered the NSC to rewrite the policy paper, basing it on the assumption that a Berlin crisis had to be resolved within three months.⁶⁹

The Joint Chiefs also took this opportunity to assert their influence. They argued that if the four-stage program outlined in NSC 173 were followed, it

67. NSC 173, "Report to the NSC by the NSC Planning Board on U.S. Policy and Courses of Action to Counter Possible Soviet or Satellite Courses of Action Against Berlin," 1 December 1953, Box 26, Policy Papers, RG 273, National Archives.

68. There is no record that Eisenhower expressed this view at the time, and, interestingly, Clay himself had apparently changed his own views. He told General Alfred Gruenther in May 1949—perhaps reveling in the success of the airlift—that "while at one time I believed movement by surface routes under armed guard would be feasible . . . to my mind there is no advantage in making such an attempt." Clay to Gruenther, 25 May 1949, Box 178, Central Decimal 1948–1950, RG 218, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), National Archives. By 1958, Clay seems to have embraced the strategy again and was critical of the airlift option. See McCloy to Merchant, 10 December 1958, *FRUS*, 1958–1960, Vol. VIII, pp. 166–167; and Lucius D. Clay recorded interview by Jean Edward Smith, February 1971, Part 22, OHP, Eisenhower Library. For a later expression of Eisenhower's views, see "Memorandum of Conversation," Eisenhower, Brandt, *et al.*, 11 February 1958, *FRUS*, 1958–1960, Vol. VIII, p. 19.

69. "Memorandum of Conversation," NSC Meeting (10 December 1953), 11 December 1953, *FRUS*, 1952–1954, Vol. VIII, pp. 175–176.

would place the military into an impossible position that could result only in embarrassment. The JCS were confident that the full-scale rearmament undertaken since 1950 would allow the United States to challenge a blockade with greater assurance than had been the case in 1948–1949. In 1948, they said, the military posture of the Western allies had been too weak to assert their rights, but this weakness had now been rectified.⁷⁰ There was no doubt, the Joint Chiefs asserted, that the Western powers were in a much stronger military position relative to the Soviet bloc than in 1949. Although the airlift of 1948–1949 was widely regarded as a political and psychological victory for the West, the Joint Chiefs warned that if the West appeared to acquiesce in a new blockade, the consequences would be dire:

The acceptance by the Allies of such a situation now would not only constitute a political setback of considerable proportions but would undoubtedly be widely interpreted as a sign of weakness vis-à-vis the Soviet Bloc, with consequent injurious effects upon United States prestige and leadership worldwide, and upon the determination of free peoples everywhere to resist Soviet domination.⁷¹

They also warned that advances in Soviet technology and contingency planning would neutralize the effect of an airlift. Radford urged the NSC not to repeat the airlift of 1948. He recommended that limited military force, rather than being the fourth and *last* stage of response, should now become the *first* reaction, even before diplomatic options had been fully explored. Eisenhower agreed.⁷²

Interestingly, on this fundamental issue of when to resort to military force—a question that clearly had profound diplomatic and political ramifications—Dulles had remarkably little to say. A memorandum from the NSC meeting on 10 December 1953 records several exchanges between Dulles and the NSC's executive secretary, Robert Cutler, who attempted to explain the difference between the two views on employing limited military force: NSC 173 and NSC 132/1 had recommended it only as a last resort, whereas the president and the Joint Chiefs were now suggesting that it be the first re-

70. On this transformation, which had been effected by the end of the Truman administration, see Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy*, pp. 100–152, 209–210.

71. Radford to Charles E. Wilson, "NSC 173," 9 December 1953, Box 8, Policy Papers, NSC, Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, WHO, Eisenhower Library. Although signed by Radford and issued as the views of the JCS, the Joint Chiefs themselves had not penned or discussed this memorandum since they were "too busy with other things." The memorandum did accurately represent a partial and mild version of their views that was further explained in succeeding weeks. Radford to Wilson, 19 January 1954, Box 8, Policy Papers, Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, WHO, Eisenhower Library.

72. "Memorandum of Conversation," NSC Meeting (10 December 1953).

sponse, even before any significant diplomatic efforts had been tried. According to S. Everett Gleason's memorandum of the discussion, Dulles failed to see any difference between the two plans.⁷³ This probably had more to do with Dulles's assessment of the importance of the discussion than with a genuine failure to comprehend the difference, as Gleason's memorandum implies. There were more pressing matters pertaining to European defense and the German question on the State Department's agenda, and Dulles also had legitimate questions about the relevance of contingency planning to the Berlin problem. When the drafting process was under way, he argued that the military provisions of NSC 5404/1 would never be needed. The United States, he said, had already made it abundantly clear—and continued to do so—that it would not tolerate a serious infringement of its rights of access to West Berlin. In light of these statements and the buildup of U.S. military power, Dulles believed it was highly unlikely that the Soviet Union would physically attempt to prevent U.S. forces from entering or leaving the city. As he advised his successor, Christian Herter, in March 1959, if the United States maintained the credibility of its resolve, "there is not one chance in 1000 the Soviets will push it to the point of war."⁷⁴ If they did so, he contended, this would mean there had been a serious lapse in the deterrent, and he had no intention of allowing that to happen. Dulles's apparent indifference to the intricacies of the NSC's discussion left an opening for the Joint Chiefs to take the lead. They incorporated the president's views into a draft policy paper for the NSC.

The result was NSC 5404/1, "U.S. Policy on Berlin,"⁷⁵ a document that laid the foundation for the administration's policy on the Berlin problem for the next several years. Submitted to the NSC in late January 1954, it contained strong and repeated recommendations that the United States react "vigorously," "quickly," "forcefully," and "promptly" to any new Berlin crisis. NSC 5404/1 stated that if the Soviet Union continued to challenge U.S. interests once Washington's intentions had been made clear, the United States would be compelled "to take immediate and forceful action to counter the Soviet challenge, even though such countermeasures might lead to general war." The paper identified several factors that allowed for a more confrontational stand: the military readiness of NATO had

73. *Ibid.*

74. Christian Herter, "Memorandum of Telephone Conversation with Secy Dulles," 6 March 1959, quoted in William Burr, "U.S. Policy and the Berlin Crisis: An Overview," introduction to *The Berlin Crisis, 1958–1962* (Alexandria, VA: Chadwyck-Healey, 1991), p. 34. See also "Memorandum of Conversation," NSC Meeting (10 December 1953); "Memorandum of Conversation," 164th NSC Meeting (1 October 1953).

75. At the time that the relevant *FRUS* volumes were compiled, the bulk of NSC 5404/1 remained classified and only the financial appendix was available. See *FRUS, 1952–1954*, Vol. VII, Part 2, pp. 1390–1394. For the full text of the document, see Box 5, NSC, Whitman, Eisenhower Library.

been improved; the Soviet Union had been put on notice that any action against Berlin would be forcefully resisted; a stockpile of supplies had been built up in West Berlin; Soviet leaders had instituted measures to undermine the effect of a counter-blockade; and Soviet technology had advanced considerably, particularly in radio-jamming and interference with navigation instruments. The new policy said it was necessary to force the issue inasmuch as “the period between initiation of aggressive actions and the ‘show down’ is likely to be short,” requiring diplomatic, military, and mobilization actions to be rapid and decisive.

Important though these provisions were, NSC 5404/1 was not just a military document. It also contained measures to enhance West Berlin’s symbolism, reduce the city’s vulnerability to blockade, and combat a growing feeling of despair detected among Berliners.⁷⁶ It recommended an intensified program to improve relationships with local political authorities, a review of stockpile procedures to place less dependence on an airlift, economic and relief projects to bolster the Berliners’ morale and reduce unemployment, and the development of unilateral and multilateral contingency plans. In addition to these essentially defensive measures, the NSC sought to exploit “unrivalled propaganda advantages” over the Soviet Union by allocating funds for special projects designed to influence the people of the Soviet zone and sector, by intensifying intelligence activities, and by consolidating British and French support.⁷⁷

By far the most contentious item in the policy paper was the recommendation for the use of “limited military force” to test the seriousness of Soviet interference with Western access. “Limited military force” was later defined by the Defense Department as “sufficient to determine definitely Soviet intentions by drawing Soviet fire or by otherwise compelling the Soviets to choose between permitting or resisting with force the passage of the U.S. forces along the Autobahn.”⁷⁸ The object of such an exercise was not to wage conventional warfare. After all, Eisenhower had never considered a ground war in Europe to be a feasible option after 1945, especially if it were limited to conventional weapons. Rather, the point was to wrest the political-military initiative from Moscow and to define the issue in the starkest terms, relying on the credibility of massive retaliation.⁷⁹ Although Eisenhower was confident that the existing preponderance of U.S. strategic power would be decisive in influencing

76. OCB, “Progress Report on NSC 5404/1,” 29 December 1954, Box 27, Policy Papers, RG 273, National Archives.

77. NSC 5404/1.

78. The specific force required to achieve this objective was assessed as one motorized rifle platoon to accompany motor convoys and one reinforced rifle platoon on each train. R.B. Anderson to Dulles, 25 May 1955, *FRUS*, 1955–1957, Vol. XXVI, pp. 384–385.

79. Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, pp. 147–163; and Saki Dockrill, *Eisenhower’s New-Look National Security Policy, 1953–61* (London: Macmillan, 1996).

Soviet leaders,⁸⁰ he recognized that the value of massive retaliation was potentially limited even in circumstances in which it could be most effective. The documentary record on the Berlin issue from 1953 and 1954 clearly shows that Eisenhower had already identified the key difficulties in applying massive retaliation to the Berlin problem long before the administration's critics raised the issue later in the decade. Those later criticisms focused on a point that Eisenhower himself had recognized in general terms in 1952: Without a direct and unambiguous threat, the credibility of massive retaliation was difficult to sustain.⁸¹ This was particularly pertinent to the Berlin problem. It had long been recognized that the challenge was likely to come in the form of incremental political encroachments on Western rights and interests, or what were otherwise known as "salami tactics." It was unlikely that the Soviet Union would be foolish enough to provide the West with a clear *casus belli*, especially since the Western powers had declared that they would treat a military attack on West Berlin as equivalent to an attack on London, Paris, or Washington.⁸² The problem, as Eisenhower saw it, was that there were limits to the asymmetry of response. It was important, he said, to define some overt Soviet act as constituting a blockade: "Otherwise the situation would be so fuzzed up that we would never arrive at a precise point where we could call the Russian hand."⁸³ His solution, therefore, was to force the Soviet Union to decide at the outset whether to pursue war or peace. If Soviet leaders retreated—as he expected they would—this could stabilize the situation; but if they pressed ahead with their attack, deterrence would have failed and the real possibility of general war would have to be faced.

Accordingly, NSC 5404/1 spelled out a clear process of escalation: If the Soviet Union blocked access to Berlin, the United States would issue an ultimatum threatening the use of force and would send an armed probe along the Autobahn to assess Soviet intentions. Simultaneously, Washington would initiate general mobilization for the dual purpose of persuading Moscow of the dire nature of the situation and preparing, if necessary, for all-out war. U.S. leaders recognized that if war did occur, Berlin itself was militarily indefensible. Hence, rather than be sending any more troops to the region, they would immediately invoke general war plans.⁸⁴

Having developed this new policy unilaterally, the Eisenhower adminis-

80. Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy*, pp. 100–152.

81. Eisenhower quoted in Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, p. 128.

82. See particularly Ernest R. May, "America's Berlin: Heart of the Cold War," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 77, No. 4 (July/August 1998), pp. 148–160.

83. "Memorandum of Conversation," 174th NSC Meeting (10 December 1953), 11 December 1953, Box 5, NSC, Whitman, Eisenhower Library.

84. NSC 5404/1.

tration knew that it would be extremely difficult to sell it to the British and French. Since 1948 it had been an article of faith that Western action could be undertaken only with British and French support.⁸⁵ In the immediate postwar years, the British and French strongly supported U.S. intervention in Europe, but they had demonstrated that they could be difficult and reluctant partners, particularly in moments of crisis. This created a vulnerability that the Soviet Union could conceivably exploit.⁸⁶ The administration was concerned that, as Walter Bedell Smith put it during the height of the Berlin blockade, the West's "combined plans present the lowest common denominator of fears of all participants."⁸⁷ U.S. officials anticipated that the option of employing limited military force before diplomatic avenues were exhaustively pursued would encounter resistance and skepticism. They did not expect that the British and French would view the situation with the same urgency that the NSC now did. The distraction posed by France's embroilment in Indochina further complicated matters. The NSC resolved that it would seek to persuade Britain and France to accept U.S. policy, but that "the United States must be prepared to act alone if this will serve its best interests."⁸⁸

This emphasis on unilateralism made it extremely difficult to implement some sections of NSC 5404/1. The activities that could be undertaken without controversy, such as the stockpiling and propaganda programs, proceeded well. But other important provisions, specifically those requiring allied participation, were more troublesome. In January 1954, while the NSC was still formulating the new policy, the foreign ministers of the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain, and France met in Berlin to discuss the German question. Once again, they made little progress. The Soviet leadership, having recently decided to consolidate Ulbricht's regime in a separate East German state, was in no position to compromise.⁸⁹ The Western powers, for

85. NSC 132/1 had said: "In considering possible courses of action, we must recognize that they can be pursued effectively only with the support of our major allies. It is reasonable to assume that divergencies of view are liable to develop as to the desirability and effectiveness of specific courses of action, and the United States must take these into account at every stage of planning and execution of plans." NSC 132/1.

86. See particularly Avi Shlaim, "Britain, the Berlin Blockade and the Cold War," *International History* (London), Vol. 60, No. 1 (Winter 1983/84), pp. 1–14; John W. Young, *France, the Cold War and the Western Alliance, 1944–49* (New York: St. Martin's, 1990), pp. 199–204; and William I. Hitchcock, *France Restored: Cold War Diplomacy and the Quest for Leadership in Europe, 1944–1954* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), esp. pp. 104–105.

87. "Memorandum of Conversation," 16th NSC Meeting (23 July 1948). See also George C. Marshall to Clay and Robert D. Murphy, 20 July 1948, Box 1, Top Secret Cables to and from the Secretary of State 1946–1949, Political Adviser Frankfurt, RG 84, Foreign Service Posts, National Archives; and Caffery to Marshall, 25 June 1948, 740.00119 Control (Germany), RG 59, National Archives.

88. NSC 5404/1.

89. On Soviet policy toward the German question during this period, particularly the ousting of

their part, had little by way of substantive proposals to offer. The only real result of the meeting was to confirm Washington's qualms about its allies.⁹⁰

If U.S. leaders had any doubts about the unwillingness of their European allies to embrace the new policy, events in 1953–1954 dispelled them. Because U.S. officials knew that proposals to use force would raise havoc with the allies, they were reluctant to initiate discussions on the subject, for fear of jeopardizing other, more immediately important negotiations. The British had repeatedly made clear that they regarded an airlift as the only proper response if the Soviet Union reimposed a blockade. Discussions with the British and French indicated that London's disinclination "to die for Berlin" was getting stronger, while the French were increasingly determined to maintain their independence of action and were therefore strongly opposed to ironclad contingency plans.⁹¹ The OCB's executive officer, Elmer Staats, acknowledged that these differences created an almost insurmountable "problem of timing."⁹² To avoid controversy that might put at risk other negotiations, the changes to American policy remained a closely guarded secret.⁹³

Yet, by May 1954, pressure was mounting to broach the changes with the British and French. Airlift planning and stockpile programs were nearing completion, and the modifications proposed under NSC 5404/1 needed to be made almost immediately if they were to be effective. However, it appeared doubtful that these modifications could be carried out without arousing suspicions or revealing that U.S. policy on Berlin had changed. If that were to happen, it would be impossible to explain the modifications to the British and French without disclosing the new policy.

More pressing matters intervened, the most important of which was the collapse of the EDC. In August 1954, two years after the EDC treaty had been signed, the French legislature finally rejected it. Having staked a great deal on the ratification of the treaty, Eisenhower found that his plans for mean-

Lavrentii Beria, see Kramer, "The Early Post-Stalin Succession Struggle and Upheavals in East-Central Europe," Parts 1–3; Richter, "Reexamining Soviet Policy"; Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity*, pp. 178–190; Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, pp. 154–163; and Harrison, "Bargaining Power," pp. 31–105.

90. On the Berlin conference, see Dulles's national address, 24 February 1954, Department of State, *Bulletin*, 8 March 1954, pp. 343–347; Jacob Beam to Bowie, "D-Briefing on Berlin Meeting," 24 February 1954, Box 83, Policy Planning Staff (PPS) 1954, RG 59; Philip H. Watts to Bowie, "Report on Berlin Meeting," 26 February 1954, *ibid.*; and *FRUS*, 1952–1954, Vol. VII, Part 1, pp. 804–1174.

91. Burr, "Avoiding the Slippery Slope," p. 182.

92. Elmer B. Staats to James S. Lay, Jr., 6 January 1955, Box 8, Policy Papers, NSC, Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, WHO, Eisenhower Library.

93. OCB, "Progress Report on NSC 5404/1," 30 April 1954; and OCB, "Progress Report on NSC 5404/1," 14 September 1955, Box 8, Policy Papers, NSC, Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, WHO, Eisenhower Library.

ingful reductions in the U.S. military and financial commitment to Western Europe had suffered a severe setback. The United States would now be forced to rely on policies that, although in place, were supposed to have become redundant with the implementation of the EDC.⁹⁴ The collapse of the EDC also had a direct impact on U.S. planning for Berlin. Radford and Allen Dulles warned that in the wake of the EDC fiasco, the Soviet Union would undoubtedly exploit those differences. Because the Berlin question hinged on Allied cooperation, it was bound to be a prime target for a Soviet diplomatic offensive. More important, a number of senior officials succumbed to their frustration with the allies by using the EDC's failure as a justification for the United States to shed any lingering dependence on British and French cooperation in protecting U.S. national interests, particularly West Berlin. They would have to wait until Washington's program of "educational work" would convince the British and French of the importance of West Berlin.⁹⁵ These tensions were heightened by the perception of an imminent threat to the city brought about by the growing harassment of Western traffic and the continued turmoil in East Germany. Radford warned that if the British and French remained unwilling to accept the policy adopted by Washington, the NSC should revise the policy to eliminate all dependence on British and French participation.⁹⁶

Although Eisenhower and Dulles regarded this idea as extreme, the administration did its best in 1954 and 1955 to develop ways of implementing the new policy secretly without arousing the suspicions of the British or the French. In the meantime, the administration continued to prepare for a unilateral defense of U.S. interests. In late December 1954, the Joint Chiefs reported that they had completed the military preparations and stood ready to implement NSC 5404/1 unilaterally if necessary.⁹⁷ Although many officials

94. See particularly Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945–1963* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 125–200; Brian R. Duchin, "The 'Agonizing Reappraisal': Eisenhower, Dulles, and the European Defense Community," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Spring 1992), pp. 201–222; and William I. Hitchcock, *France Restored: Cold War Diplomacy and the Quest for Leadership in Europe, 1944–1954* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), pp. 169–202.

95. "Memorandum of Conversation," 186th NSC Meeting (26 February 1954), 26 February 1953, *FRUS*, 1952–1954, Vol. VII, Part 1, p. 1224; "German Policy Paper," 4 August 1953, attached to Lay to NSC, 10 August 1953, Box 6, Policy Papers, NSC, Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, WHO, Eisenhower Library; NSC 5433/1, "Immediate U.S. Policy toward Europe," 16 September 1954, Box 13, *ibid.*; Radford to Secretary of Defense, 8 May 1956, Box 8, *ibid.*; and OCB, "Progress Report on NSC 5404/1," 14 September 1955.

96. "Memorandum of Conversation," NSC Meeting (10 November 1955), *FRUS*, 1955–1957, Vol. XXVI, pp. 399–400.

97. The designation for these actions was JCS 1907/112. See B.L. Austin to Radford, 31 July 1957, Box 9, Radford, Chairman's File, RG 218, National Archives.

believed that the British and French should be apprised of the new policy, Eisenhower and Dulles refused to do so because there always seemed to be other talks that could be jeopardized. The administration, while waiting for “a more suitable time” to raise the issue, never seemed to find one.⁹⁸

The Foundations of the Berlin Crises of 1958–1962

Between 1954 and 1958, formal Berlin policy remained essentially unchanged. In February 1958, Eisenhower reaffirmed NSC 5404/1 when he signed a new document, NSC 5803, the “Statement of U.S. Policy Toward Germany,” which included NSC 5404/1 almost verbatim.⁹⁹ NSC 5404/1 remained permanently on the OCB’s agenda, with periodic updates submitted for the NSC’s approval.¹⁰⁰

Although a Berlin crisis was a hypothetical situation in 1953 and 1954, there appeared to be a real chance that it might come to pass. If it did, Eisenhower had no intention of being caught off-guard as Truman was in mid-1948. Yet despite Eisenhower’s active involvement in the revision of U.S. policy on Berlin, he never intended to create an inflexible blueprint for action. He knew there were far too many variables for him to trust automatic responses. Rather, NSC 5404/1 was designed as a point of departure for his administration to deal with the Berlin problem and manage a potential crisis. The contingency planning was intended as a fallback option, not as a rigid guide to action. Even so, the document underscored Eisenhower’s belief that the United States must play an active role in Berlin and must not wait for a crisis before facing important decisions.

Eisenhower and Dulles both knew that the circumstances of the Berlin situation were fluid, and that there was no way to foresee the precise circumstances of the problem at any given time. Developments after 1953 certainly confirmed this. Political relations among the Western allies became a delicate balancing act, as reinvigorated West European states sought to reassert their own influence and interests. The growth of national military forces and even

98. OCB, “Progress Report on NSC 5404/1,” 31 July 1955, *FRUS*, 1955–1957, Vol. XXVI, p. 394; Dulles to State, 12 November 1955, *ibid.*, p. 401; and OCB, “Progress Report on NSC 5404/1,” 29 December 1954, Box 8, Policy Papers, NSC, Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, WHO, Eisenhower Library.

99. For the general provisions of NSC 5803, “Statement of U.S. Policy toward Germany,” see *FRUS*, 1958–1960, Vol. IX, pp. 631–644. For Supplement I concerning Berlin, see Box 23, Policy Papers, NSC, Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, WHO, Eisenhower Library. See also Supplement I to NSC 5727, 13 December 1957, *FRUS*, 1955–1957, Vol. XXVI, pp. 521–525.

100. For the regular status reports issued by the OCB, see Box 6, State Department Participation in OCB and NSC 1947–1963, RG 59, National Archives.

national nuclear deterrents, in Britain and (later) France, made issues of European defense exceedingly complicated.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, the Suez crisis of 1956 greatly impressed upon Eisenhower and Dulles the centrality of Allied relations in resolving crises. Changes in strategic circumstances also played a role. Between 1953 and 1958, thermonuclear weapons entered the arsenals of East and West in increasing numbers, and the means of their delivery—specifically, long-range ballistic missiles and high-speed bombers—created new risks associated with miscalculation and uncontrolled escalation. These risks magnified concerns that what started as “limited military force” could quickly escalate to a nuclear confrontation.¹⁰²

Other developments during the intervening period also had a direct impact on the evolution of the Berlin problem throughout the 1950s. In 1954, the Soviet Union announced that it regarded the GDR as a sovereign state, prompting the West to respond in two important ways. First, the United States placed West Berlin under NATO’s nuclear umbrella, a commitment that was reaffirmed in subsequent years. The United States thus gave a visible guarantee of its commitment to West Berlin, reinforcing the continued direct promises from NATO as a whole.¹⁰³ The second response seemed less significant at the time, but was actually at the heart of the later crisis. Faced with the prospect that the Soviet Union might relinquish some of its administrative duties to the East Germans, the decision was made at the ambassadorial level to accept GDR officials as representatives of the Soviet Union, albeit under protest. Not until Ulbricht announced in late 1955 that East Berlin was the GDR’s capital and proposed to restrict traffic between East and West Berlin did Western officials begin to show serious concerns about the implications of such a cutoff.¹⁰⁴ It is likely—though not definite—that Soviet intelligence sources in Berlin knew of the 1954 operational decision and passed news of it on to Moscow. When Eisenhower himself learned of the

101. For this process, see particularly Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, pp. 146–247.

102. The literature on the growing risks inherent with the development of thermonuclear and missile technologies is extensive. For a small selection, see David Alan Rosenberg, “The Origins of Overkill: Nuclear Weapons and American Strategy, 1945–1960,” *International Security*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Spring 1983), pp. 3–71; Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, pp. 95–200; Dockrill, *Eisenhower’s New-Look*, esp. pp. 116–148, 168–234; and Andrew P.N. Erdmann, “War No Longer Has Any Logic Whatever: Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Thermonuclear Revolution,” in John Lewis Gaddis, et al., eds., *Cold War Statesmen Confront the Bomb: Nuclear Diplomacy Since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 87–119.

103. See especially Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy*, pp. 153–168.

104. “Memorandum of Conversation,” NSC Meeting (1 December 1955), 1 December 1955, Box 7, NSC, Whitman, Eisenhower Library. That the Soviets might pass all responsibility for Western access to West Berlin to the GDR had actually been recognized as early as mid-1950. See McCloy, General Thomas T. Handy, and Major General Maxwell T. Taylor, “A Review of the Berlin Situation,” 29 August 1950, submitted to the NSC as part of NSC 89 on 20 October 1950, *FRUS*, 1950,

decision in December 1958, he feared that it had set a dangerous precedent. He also surmised that Khrushchev might be basing his actions on it.¹⁰⁵

One auspicious development in the mid- to late 1950s was that the material situation in West Berlin improved. Although the city still lagged behind many other cities of Western Europe—most starkly those of the Federal Republic—the economy of West Berlin gradually revived, thanks largely to the vigorous efforts of Bonn and Washington.¹⁰⁶ Between 1954 and 1956, unemployment dropped by half, commercial confidence improved, and demand increased for West Berlin's manufactured products. The general rise in living standards, however, posed its own problems. Some U.S. officials feared that the remarkable improvement in West Berlin's economy might in fact be detrimental to U.S. interests if it "dulled somewhat the West Berliners' spirit of militancy and defiance characteristic of their attitude during periods of real crisis," as the OCB suggested. It was questionable whether the people of West Berlin, now in a relatively prosperous situation compared to the immediate postwar years, would be willing to tolerate the kind of sacrifices they had made in 1948–1949.¹⁰⁷

The administration, however, continued to treat Berlin as the front line of the Cold War. Although the June 1953 uprising had muted considerably the tone of the administration's political programs in Eastern Europe, it had by no means ended them. In the wake of rollback's failures, the president and the State Department publicly revised their views to prevent "explosive situations" that would be dangerous for both East and West. Less dramatic objectives were adopted, and the administration began to seek ways of influencing Moscow's behavior. "Making a bad situation look worse," the NSC sensibly concluded, "will not affect behavior (choices) unless the subject sees something it can do about it."¹⁰⁸ In this respect, the Berlin problem still provided significant opportunities. On the one hand, West Berlin could be used as evidence of the strength of Western support for the eventual reunification of Germany, thereby reassuring the German people. If the citi-

Vol. IV, pp. 867–887. For the original report, see Box 5, Miscellaneous Files on Berlin, Executive Secretariat, RG 466, National Archives.

105. *FRUS*, 1955–1957, Vol. XXVI, pp. 353–363, 367–368, 377. For Eisenhower's concerns, see Bruce to Dulles, 9 January 1958, *FRUS*, 1958–1960, Vol. VIII, p. 1; "Memorandum of Conversation," NSC Meeting (11 December 1958), *ibid.*; and Findley Burns, Jr., to Dulles, 12 November 1958, *ibid.*, p. 50.

106. Jean Edward Smith, *The Defense of Berlin* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 131–150; Dulles, *Chances of a Lifetime*, pp. 241–256; and Brandt, *My Road to Berlin*, pp. 247–263.

107. OCB, "Progress Report on NSC 5404/1," 17 May 1956, *FRUS*, 1955–1957, Vol. XXVI, pp. 423–430; OCB, "Progress Report on NSC 5404/1," 31 July 1955, *ibid.*, pp. 390–392; and "Current Policy on Berlin Access," 10 December 1958, Box 8, Briefing Notes, NSC, Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, WHO, Eisenhower Library. See also Adenauer to Dulles, 11 December 1958, *FRUS*, 1958–1960, Vol. VIII, p. 181.

108. The JCS took a notably stronger view. See Bowie and Immerman, *Waging Peace*, pp. 128–138, 158–165. See also NSC 5505/1, "Exploitation of Soviet and European Satellite Vulnerabilities,"

zens of East Germany continued to reject the Communist regime imposed on them, as was repeatedly claimed in policy papers and discussions, they might eventually follow the Berlin example and rise up against their oppressors. On the other hand, the U.S. commitment to West Berlin could be used as a source of irritation to Soviet power by hindering the consolidation of Ulbricht's regime. In these ways, West Berlin's role in U.S. Cold War strategy was to act simultaneously "as an example of Western accomplishments and an island of resistance."¹⁰⁹

By the end of 1954, then, the foundations were laid for the internal crisis that would erupt later in the decade. Having identified the U.S. commitment to West Berlin as an opportunity to promote rollback, the Eisenhower administration increased the prominence of the city in symbolic and rhetorical terms. The administration made the Berlin problem a priority through its own decisions and actions, and it was now forced to reexamine the means available to uphold the U.S. commitment. The result was detailed and escalatory contingency planning. Within a year of taking office, the administration had approved two fundamental decisions regarding the Berlin problem that were to have profound implications later in the decade: first, Eisenhower reaffirmed Truman's willingness to fulfill the U.S. security commitment to West Berlin, even at risk of general war; and second, the administration resolved to use West Berlin as a source of irritation to Soviet power in Eastern Europe. Khrushchev's ultimatum in November 1958 forced the Eisenhower administration to face the consequences of both of these decisions.

Note

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18 January 1955, Box 14, Policy Papers, NSC, Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, WHO, Eisenhower Library; and NSC 5608/1, "U.S. Policy toward the Soviet Satellites in Eastern Europe," 18 July 1956, Box 17, *ibid.* On the Solarium Project's conclusions on this issue, see Bowie and Immerman, *Waging Peace*, pp. 128–138. In May 1954, Jackson resigned his post to return to Time-Life, but was still called on by the president from time to time.

109. Supplement to NSC 160/1, "Statement of Policy on U.S. Policy toward East Germany," 7 August, 1956, Box 17, Policy Papers, NSC, Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, WHO, Eisenhower Library.