

## MODERN HISTORY

### Assess the significance of Berlin in the development of the Cold War by 1961.

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Following the end of the Second World War the Allies agreed to divide Germany's capital, Berlin, between themselves. However, as the Cold War developed, Berlin became a symbol of the United States and USSR's political tension. With such symbolic importance both super powers protected their influence in Berlin fiercely and it became a key factor in the escalation of Cold War tensions. Throughout the Cold War the two superpowers, the USA and USSR, tried to prove that their ideology Capitalism and Communism were the best. In a war without direct conflict popular opinion and world influence were of great importance and thus Berlin became greatly symbolic of the clash of the two ideologies.

Although the zones of occupation were discussed at Yalta they were officially decided upon at the Potsdam conferences. Berlin itself was a long way inside the Soviet zone of occupation but was divided between the French, British, Americans and USSR. The former allies also had very different views of what should happen with Germany, the USSR wanted to keep Germany weak, but the US wanted to restore Germany economically to prevent them from turning Communist, or returning to Fascism. This made Berlin especially problematic as it was not only a direct contrast between Capitalism and Communism, but also a contrast between the two superpowers' vision for Germany.

The 1947 Truman Doctrine established the policy of containment, one which had a large impact on the significance of Berlin. The economic recovery program, The Marshall Plan was designed to help implement containment; to Truman they were "halves of the same walnut." The Marshall Plan was designed to help the European economies recover from the war and prevent people from becoming desperate and possibly turning to communism. The USA did offer the USSR and its allies Marshall Aid but the Soviet Union was suspicious of America's motives and thus refused the Marshall aid and prevented its satellite states from accessing it. The plan was very successful, at \$13.2 billion dollars it was the largest peace time aid programme to date and it emphasised the economic differences between East and West, particularly in Berlin. As West Berlin and Germany recovered, the communist countries did not and massive numbers of East Germans fled to West Germany through Berlin.

The Berlin blockade and airlift crisis was a direct result of this economic division and population drain. Stalin was worried by the introduction of the stronger currency, the Deutschmark into British and American occupied Western Germany in December 1946 and even more so when it was introduced into the French zone in February 1948. Stalin feared a strong and united Germany, as Russia had been invaded by Germany twice in the twentieth century, and thus when the Deutschmark was introduced into West Berlin Stalin reacted aggressively, he cut off all land access to Berlin. Berlin and its three and a half million citizens were isolated in the middle of the Soviet zone, Stalin hoped to force the west out of Berlin and maintain a weakened Germany. However, due to the US policy of containment and the highly symbolic importance of Berlin, the Western allies were not willing to give up Berlin.

The western allies responded to the Blockade by using their air corridors to airlift all of Berlin's supplies for almost a year. This was a very expensive exercise, costing \$200 million but it was a symbolic way of proving that the Western allies would not be pushed out of Berlin, once again Berlin came to represent the increasing tensions between the powers. It was the first test to the policy of containment and the policy's first great victory. The airlift was also important to the Western allies in terms of propaganda. They were able to use Berlin as a symbol of democracy and the airlift as a victory for capitalism, images of Santa Claus delivering Christmas presents from American airplanes and stories of American pilots dropping candy to the children of Berlin filled newspapers and therefore, the airlift was immeasurably important to the allies in terms of propaganda.

The blockade and airlift also meant Germany was officially divided, in 1949 the three Western zones formed the Federal republic of Germany and the Soviet zones formed the German Democratic Republic. Berlin was a symbol of division but the city itself had now caused even further division.

The biggest impact the airlift had was the formation of the military alliances NATO and the Warsaw Pact. NATO was signed in April 1949 and each member agreed that if one was attacked, the others would join to defend it. It also established permanent military bases in Western Europe. NATO demonstrated that the US was willing to stand up to Soviet aggression, such as the airlift.

NATO allowed West Germany to rearm and join NATO in 1955 to increase the alliance's military strength. This greatly alarmed the USSR, who feared a united Germany, they retaliated by forming the Warsaw Pact in Poland May 1st, 1955. The pact was made up of all Eastern Europe's communist states except Yugoslavia but it was dominated by the USSR, all Warsaw forces followed Soviet orders and used Soviet weapons. Both NATO and Warsaw were nuclear capable alliances; the USSR exploded their first nuclear bomb in August of 1949. This meant Germany was divided more than ever, especially in Berlin which had now become the frontline between two heavily armed powers. The alliances marked the beginning of the arms race, one of the most dangerous developments of the Cold war and it was sparked by the Berlin blockade and airlift crisis.

The second Berlin crisis that was of major significance was the building of the Berlin wall in 1961. There were no border controls between East and West Berlin and between 1949 and 1961 2.6 million out of a population of 17 million East Germans fled to the economically stronger West through Berlin. In 1960 Eisenhower refused to apologise to the USSR over the U2 Spy plane incident, greatly increasing tensions between the two superpowers, in this tense period of brinkmanship the Kremlin once again looked to oust the West from Berlin. When Kennedy became President Khrushchev saw him as young and inexperienced and felt he could bully him out of Berlin. After the humiliating defeat of US backed rebels in the Bay of Pigs conflict in Cuba, Khrushchev saw his opportunity to force Kennedy out of Berlin. On August 13<sup>th</sup> 1961 the East German government closed the border to Berlin and on August 15<sup>th</sup> the government began constructing a wall separating West Berlin from Eastern Germany.

Understandably this overnight construction of a wall cause major friction between the USA and USSR. Western troops were put on alert and on October 16<sup>th</sup> 1961 US tanks were sent to Checkpoint Charlie to meet Soviet tanks, at one point they were muzzle to muzzle across the border. Tensions increased to such an extent that the world prepared for a war. However, due to the nuclear policy of Mutually Assured Destruction a world war would mean the destruction of both powers, with no real gain. The crisis was only averted when President Kennedy sent a secret message to Premier Khrushchev, only then did US and Soviet troops pull back. Although tensions eased the arms race intensified and Kennedy increased US military spending. Once again, Berlin became greatly important in the propaganda aspect of the Cold War; to the West the wall became a symbol of Soviet repression, the West used the contrast between the designer shops on the Kurfurstendamm and the grey buildings in the East to promote Capitalism. However to the East the wall became a protection from Fascism, something the Soviets linked with the new strong Capitalist West Germany.

In the Cold War, both superpowers sought to prove to the world that their ideology was better than the other. Berlin became instrumental in this propaganda competition; its symbolic importance meant that it was a hot bed of tension and a highly guarded territory. Furthermore, it was the front line in the division between East and West – it was the physical representation of their differences.