

## MODERN HISTORY: *COLD WAR*

**To what extent was The Berlin Blockade a contributing factor to the Cold War in the period 1945 to 1953?**

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The Berlin Blockade was one of the major contributing factors to the eventuation of the Cold War in the period from 1945 to 1953. However, as Bastian asserts, Cold War was a product of “the breakdown of wartime alliances” where the emergence of the superpowers saw their interest in self-preservation dictate foreign policy and militaristic endeavours. The Blockade was a product of the escalating hostility between the superpowers in the aftermath of WW2 and a result of a series of provocative and retaliatory actions. Ultimately the dichotomy of East and West relations until 1948 established the grounds of Cold War, the blockade epitomising the antithetical ideologies of Soviet communism and US capitalism in the years to follow.

In 1948 Stalin ordered the Soviet forces in their zone of occupation to block all road, rail and canal links to the Western occupied zone of the capital, Berlin. Briggs claims that it was the Soviet’s intention to “starve the west out of Germany” so as to create a state which could then be unified and controlled by the Soviet Union, a perceived threat of the expansion of communism throughout the world. The western response to this provocative attack was to relieve Berlin by airlifting resources; food, medicine and other aid. The Soviet fear of the US atomic bomb saw that they did not prevent the airlift or shut off the access points. Simultaneously the US landed B-29s, atomic carrier jets in Britain, to, as according to Isaac and Downing “demonstrate that they meant business” a retaliatory action which underlines the threat that would permeate global hostilities; a nuclear attack. The blockade was a landmark event as it demonstrated the competing rivalry between Soviet communism in the USSR and US capitalism, and also that any perceived threat of communist aggression would be met with a hardline US response. Although the Blockade to a large extent was a significant event in solidifying the tensions of the world’s superpowers, the Cold War existed prior to the Blockade in 1948.

Rotman and Barberis assert that the tensions which led to the Blockade were founded as early as the 1943 Tehran conference. Stalin had emerged as victorious against the Nazis an alliance with the capitalist west based upon an “anti-fascist ticket”. They stress that an alliance based on a common enemy didn’t in the first place establish the basis for successful peace negotiations, due to their politically opposing ideologies Soviet Communism was “a threat to the US, capitalist way of life”. At Tehran the Soviet spheres of influence were highlighted, with the West’s Churchill, highly suspicious of “Soviet Expansionism”. This was further pressed in the Yalta conference of 1945, where the zones of German occupation were drafted and the agreement for “unfettered” democratic elections in the Eastern soviet occupied states were conducted. The West’s suspicion of Stalin grew as communist leaders were propped up in these Soviet satellite states, for example in Czechoslovakia. The fear of ‘Soviet Aggression’ was furthered at the following Potsdam conference in the same year where Stalin had redrawn the borders of Poland as a part of the Soviet Union at the Oder-Neisse lines. IN a world re-grouping from the extensive and destructive Second world war it can be asserted that the western allies were justified to have perceived this as Soviet expansionism; control through the spreading of communism, one of the perceived motives of the Soviet Union in creating the Berlin Blockade.

Conversely, it can also be viewed that Russia having been invaded three times in the past 27 years was merely retaliating to the threat of a future invasion, which had notably destroyed their economy, major cities and military, Smyser referring to their sense of “moat mentality” and the creation of a buffer-zone to thwart future attempts of invasion.

Cold war tension building also amounted in 1946 where it became more apparent that the fear of communist expansion by the west and the soviet fear of the atomic bomb saw rivalry further break the western alliance systems as Germany remained divided. Stalin’s speech to the Supreme Soviet addressed that capitalism never progressed in the course of peace smoothly, a typical Marxist-

Leninist statement. However, this was received as an intentional attack on the US, Churchill following this with his “Iron Curtain” speech in which he declared that “...an Iron Curtain has descended across the continent”. This further antagonised the Soviets and confirmed Stalin’s suspicion that the West were incredibly hostile towards the USSR. This subsequently led to the creation of the “two camps” and the Eastern Bloc. Such provocation and retaliations further fuelled the suspicion which was inculcating throughout the world and by 1947 Smyser asserts that the “lines of German division had begun to look more permanent”.

The Kennan ‘Long Telegram’ declaring that the communist totalitarian regime was a direct threat to the “American way of life” and that the Soviets had “an instinctive fear of the outside world”. It can be viewed however that Russia’s inclination to keep Germany divided also contributed to the Cold War hostility as by keeping Germany divided they could reap it for reparations to rebuild its own infrastructure and prevent Germany from future aggression. The West viewed this as an “unofficial declaration of war”. The continued division of Germany reflects the deteriorating relationship between the Soviet Union and the US. The potential for Cold War lay in the struggle of each superpower to assert its own national safety after the war left society fractured. The Berlin Blockade was a product of the melting-pot of hostilities that intensified the ideological debate as each sought influence in Europe.

Traditionalists such as Smyser believe that the Blockade was a product of the Soviet expansionist aspirations against the US’s determination for Germany to become a unified, sovereign, western nation free of the ills of communism, supporting Briggs’ assertion of Russia’s motive. However the conflict wasn’t without its provocations. In the period of 1947 to 1948 the Soviet Union was challenged by the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Aid, the introduction of the Deutschmark and the creation of an American/ British German bizon.

The Truman doctrine outlined the US’s policy of containment that it’d be their responsibility to fight against “communist aggression”. It was a product of the growing success of the Greek and Turkish communist parties in gaining control after WW2, declaring that communism was “the will of a minority force upon a majority”. This clearly divided the world into two camps the US had ‘laid the gauntlet’. Paterson asserts that the doctrine was not based on known facts, the US feared that power of the Soviet Union but in reality, the USSR had been almost decimated by their efforts against Germany in WW2- they could neither wanted or could afford a war. The subsequent Marshall Plan to thwart communism by injecting \$400 million into Mediterranean nations was designed to starve off the need for communism following the belief that poverty-stricken nations looked to communism at desperate times. Deutscher also asserts that the Doctrine and Marshall Plan were “highly provocative” and that they left the USSR with little choice than to respond militaristically and politically to the ‘Manichaeon’ view that Truman had put forth, hence the blockade’s role in the Cold War was as the first crises to an intense ideological conflict that had existed as early as 1945.

Furthermore conduit to the belief that the Soviets were gaining too much control in Eastern Europe, the allies created the Bizone in breach of the Potsdam protocols and advocated the introduction of the Deutschmark in the new FDR of Western Germany. This led to the Soviet’s feeling of encirclement an attempt of the allies to weaken the Soviets controls in Eastern Germany that may have led to the creation of a hostile nation set against the Soviet Union should they lose control of their zone of occupation. This multitude of anti-communist threats escalated the clear distinction of east and west, the USSR was now the enemy of the US. The Berlin Blockade to this extent was a product of the building Cold War tension, the atmosphere of suspicion and mutual detest.

The Blockade was the first conflict of the Cold War and would have a reverberating impact. However there were other contributing factors and it clear that the war existed prior to the 1948 crises and that it was merely a demonstration of the hostility existing between the USSR and the US. The Blockade led ultimately to the US’s formation of NSC68 which declared the post WW2 alliances were broken, “realignment was permanent”. NSC68 wasn’t a product of the blockade but the ideological differences between the US and the USSR. The true cause of the war was the threat

that each posed to one another which eventuated into the Korean War, and the series of proxy conflicts which followed China's establishment of a communist state in 1949.

The Cold War existed in the emergence of the rivalry between the competing hostilities of communism and capitalism as each sought national security and the prevailing of their own ideologies. The Blockade to an extent was one of many factors but not solely responsible for the development of the Cold War to the period in 1953.