Following the decision of SHAEF to concentrate the major Allied thrust in the direction of Leipzig and Dresden rather than Berlin, Anglo-American military leaders turned to the problem of how to effect a peaceful meeting with the Soviet Armies.

On April 5, 1945, General Eisenhower informed the Combined Chiefs of Staff that it would be impractical to keep the American advance within the zonal boundaries previously decided upon. He suggested that both the Allied Expeditionary Force and the Russian Army continue to advance until contact was made. To minimize the danger of an inadvertent attack by one side upon the other, he recommended the line of the Elbe River beyond Leipzig as the best place to meet.* A natural barrier, such as a river line, would be easily recognizable on the ground by both sides and would make contact

* This line previously had been selected by General Eisenhower and General Bradley at their meeting in Rheims.
easier. Once the armies had met, Eisenhower said, then either the Red Army or SHAEF, on its own initiative, could request the other to withdraw. Based purely on operational necessity, the withdrawal would then take place.¹

Eisenhower's proposal eliminated entirely any advantage which the Western Allies might have gained as a result of their further military advance. As might be expected, British opposition to SHAEF's plan was immediate. To Prime Minister Churchill, Eisenhower's proposal not only was "premature" but "exceeded the immediate military needs" as well. In a note to General Lord Ismay, written on April 7, the Prime Minister summarized his disapproval:

When the forces arrive in contact and after the preliminary salutations have been exchanged, they should rest opposite each other in those positions.

Thus if we crossed the Elbe and advanced to Berlin, or on a line between Berlin and the Baltic, which is well within the Russian zone, we should not give this up as a military matter. It is a matter of State to be considered between the three governments. . . .

There cannot be such a hurry about our withdrawing from a place we have gained that the few days necessary for consulting the Governments in Washington and London cannot be found. I attach great importance to this, and could not agree to proposals of this kind [being decided] on a Staff level. They must be referred to the President and me.²

Four days later, on April 11, the formal reply of the British Chiefs of Staff to Eisenhower's proposal was forwarded to Washington. It repeated Churchill's objections and suggested that the Allied and Russian armies stand in place until ordered to withdraw by their respective governments. In short, the British stressed that the evacuation from the Soviet zone should be a political consideration to be decided by the heads of state and not by the military commanders.³

When the British reply was received in Washington, both the Department of State and the War Department vigorously objected. To them, the proposal of the British Chiefs of Staff was "Churchiavelian." It marked the injection of political considerations vis-a-vis the Russians that Washington preferred to avoid. "For governments to direct [this] movement of troops," according to officials of the European and Russian Affairs divisions of the Department of State, "defi-
nitetly indicated political actions.” Such movements, these officials advised the Joint Chiefs of Staff, should remain a military consideration. 4 [Italics in original.]

As Washington saw it, the position of the Allied armies in Germany when hostilities ended was not something to be used for political leverage. “Our State Department,” a later cable from the White House to London stated, “does not believe that the matter of retirement of our respective troops to our zonal frontiers should be used for bargaining purposes.” 5

Unlike the discussions over the direction of the Allied advance toward Berlin, this time the British government remained adamant. Mr. Churchill renewed his argument against what he considered a premature withdrawal of Allied forces directly to President Truman. In office little more than a week, Mr. Truman replied to the Prime Minister on April 23 that he preferred to withdraw the American forces from the Soviet zone on a purely tactical basis, and as soon as the military situation permitted. In his message to Churchill the President also enclosed a draft note to that effect which he proposed sending Marshal Stalin. Interestingly, both Mr. Truman’s reply and the draft text of the message to Stalin were prepared by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. 6

The Prime Minister however stood his ground. The withdrawal of Allied troops from the Soviet zone was a political issue and should await a decision by the heads of government. The following day he replied to the White House emphasizing once more the political advantages to be gained by the West from waiting until the end of hostilities before agreeing to such a move.

On April 23, while Washington and London negotiated, General Eisenhower cabled President Truman recommending that the withdrawal be handled along military lines. “I do not understand,” Eisenhower stated, “why the Prime Minister has been so determined to intermingle political and military considerations in attempting to establish a procedure for the conduct of our own and Russian troops when a meeting takes place. My original recommendation submitted to the CC/S [Combined Chiefs of Staff] was a simple one and I thought provided a very sensible arrangement.” 7

The tenaciousness of the Prime Minister temporarily won out, and Washington reluctantly agreed to await the end of hostilities before
beginning the withdrawal. On April 27, 1945, with President Truman’s hesitant approval, Churchill cabled Marshal Stalin that the troops of the Western Allies would withdraw to their respective zones, not as might be decided by SHAEF and the respective commanders of the Red Army opposite (which Eisenhower had proposed), but only upon the termination of hostilities. American and British troops were to remain in place following contact with the Russian Army, and major adjustments would be made only upon the approval of the Combined Chiefs of Staff.  

Instructions were to come from the Combined Chiefs of Staff rather than the heads of government because of Washington’s insistence that the matter remain in military hands. Since a decision of the Combined Chiefs would require British concurrence, however, many in London took hope that the evacuation could await future political adjustments. They were soon disappointed. It is no secret that in April of 1945 Washington was not prepared to accept Mr. Churchill’s judgment about future Soviet intentions. To the American military, referral of the evacuation decision to the Combined Chiefs, rather than SHAEF, simply meant transferring it from one military level to another. As Washington saw it, the evacuation decision still was to be a military one and did not involve matters of state.

When Churchill’s message arrived in Moscow, Stalin did not answer. For almost a week the Soviet Premier waited, and when his reply did come, it was noncommittal. In contrast to his earlier message to Eisenhower, Stalin neither agreed nor disagreed with Churchill’s proposals. “I should inform you,” Stalin said, “that the Soviet High Command has issued instructions that when the Soviet and Allied forces meet the Soviet Command should immediately establish contact with the Command of the American or English forces.” That was all. There was no mention whatever of Allied troop locations in the Soviet zone nor indeed, anything that would indicate an acknowledgment of Churchill’s message.

On May 4, 1945, two days after the Russian reply was received, Prime Minister Churchill expressed his fears about the attitude of the Soviet Union in a letter to Anthony Eden:

I fear terrible things have happened during the Russian advance through Germany to the Elbë, [Churchill said]. The proposed withdrawal of the United States Army to the occupational lines
which were arranged . . . would mean the tide of Russian domination sweeping forward 120 miles on a front of 300 or 400 miles. This would be an event which, if it occurred, would be one of the most melancholy in history.

We have several powerful bargaining counters on our side, the use of which might make for a peaceful arrangement. First, the Allies ought not to retreat from their present positions to the occupation line until we are satisfied about Poland, and also about the temporary character of the Russian occupation of Germany. . . .

The death of President Roosevelt on April 12, 1945, already had seriously complicated the state of Anglo-American relations in dealing with Russia. The late President had been confident he understood the Russians and could handle them. He had recognized the signs of Soviet expansion and was troubled by them, but he hoped to temper these tendencies by the force of his own dynamic leadership and the personal relations which he had so laboriously cultivated with Marshal Stalin.

During the latter days of February and March, 1945, the President’s failing health had greatly affected his ability to give direction to American policy and it was at this time that the U.S. most needed firm guidance in response to the increasingly aggressive designs of the Soviet Union. Prime Minister Churchill has eloquently captured the tragic spirit of those fateful days:

As a war waged by a coalition draws to its end political aspects have a mounting importance. In Washington especially longer and wider views should have prevailed. . . . At this time the points at issue did not seem to the United States Chiefs of Staff to be of capital importance. They were of course unnoticed by and unknown to the public, and were all soon swamped, and for the time being effaced by the flowing tide of victory. Nevertheless, as will not now be disputed, they played a dominating part in the destiny of Europe, and may well have denied us all the lasting peace for which we had fought so long and hard. We can see now the deadly hiatus which existed between the fading of President Roosevelt’s strength and the growth of President Truman’s grip of the vast world problem. In this melancholy void one President could not act and the other could not know. Neither the military chiefs nor the State Department received the guidance they required. The former confined themselves to their professional sphere; the latter
did not comprehend the issues involved. The indispensable political direction was lacking at the moment when it was most needed. The United States stood on the scene of victory, master of world fortunes but without a true and coherent design. Britain, though still very powerful, could not act decisively alone.”

One of the great enigmas of the latter days of the war is what might have been the subsequent shape of Western policy had President Roosevelt lived and witnessed the blatant course of Communist aggression which Russia soon demonstrated she was pursuing. In a final cable, written in his own hand shortly before his death on April 12, Mr. Roosevelt had informed Churchill: “I would minimize the general Soviet problem as much as possible because these problems, in one form or another, seem to arise every day and most of them straighten out . . .” At this time, however, the President’s health had deteriorated to such an extent that most of his wartime responsibilities already had been delegated to the military authorities.

Following the death of President Roosevelt, Mr. Truman at first also was unwilling to accept at face value Churchill’s warnings about the Soviet Union. To some extent, President Truman felt himself pledged to carry on with the policies that the Roosevelt Administration had begun. To a much larger extent he was completely unprepared to assume the burdens of the Presidency, which suddenly fell upon him. Unlike later incumbents of the Vice Presidency, Mr. Truman had not been made a part of the Executive branch of the government. He was unfamiliar with the belligerent turn which Soviet policy had taken and, like the general public, shared a hope that everything would be peacefully settled. He had not been informed in detail of the earlier agreements which had been negotiated regarding Germany and therefore, during his first weeks in office, was unwilling to act in these matters on his own responsibility.

Instead, he chose to rely upon his professional advisers and particularly, upon his professional military advisers. These unfortunately, as Mr. Churchill has suggested, were insufficiently aware of the larger political considerations then at stake. Those advisers of the political departments of State and Treasury whose business it was to know what was at stake, often feared that Britain and not Russia was the greater danger to world peace. Few of the top level officials of those departments were ready to renounce their past idealistic aspirations
for working together in cooperation with the Soviet Union. None were prepared to confront the Russian behemoth in a test of wills, or to maintain large American armies in Germany until the Soviet government, in Churchill's words, "satisfied our wishes and eased our anxieties."

As Dr. Herbert Feis has noted, these advisers judged the course which Churchill would have followed to be "inadvisable, ineffective, and impractical": inadvisable because it might provoke a harsh dispute with Soviet authorities; ineffective because the Soviet armies could close us out of Berlin; impractical because American opinion expected a rapid return of the soldiers from Europe.¹⁴

Alger Hiss and Harry Dexter White at this time were still high in the councils of the American government. Gerhart Eisler, later to become deputy propaganda chief of the puppet East German regime, was chief of the broadcasting station of the Office of War Information. Irving Kaplan, later identified as a Communist agent, served as Economic Adviser on Liberated Areas to the Department of the Treasury.¹⁵ With the possible exception of Harry Dexter White, it is reasonable to assume that these men had little effect on the formulation of American policy. Their contribution, if any, lay in seconding the voices of anti-British and pro-Russian sentiment then prevalent in Washington; prevalent, it should be added, among those whose basic loyalty to the United States is clearly beyond doubt.

Harry Hopkins, special confidant of President Roosevelt; Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr.; Secretary of Commerce Henry Wallace; former Ambassador to Moscow Joseph E. Davies, and Fleet Admiral Ernest King all were highly distrustful of British imperialistic ambitions and highly receptive to ideas of Russian good faith. Nor were they alone. General Marshall, Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, and Mobilization Director James F. Byrnes also shared the optimism of the late President regarding future Soviet intentions. All of these advisers had experienced the fruits of co-operation with Russia at first hand. For the past three years there had been almost no international issue that the Big Three had not settled. World government,

¹ Harry Dexter White, as Special Assistant to Secretary Morgenthau, was directly responsible for all foreign affairs as they affected the Treasury Department. Original drafter of the Morgenthau Plan, it was through White that a set of American plates for Allied occupation currency in Germany was made available to the Russians.
in effect, was already a reality and few wished to sacrifice it to the cold realism of postwar politics.*

The prevailing temper of the times was reflected by United States Justice Hugo Black of Alabama. Addressing an audience in the Hollywood Bowl, Justice Black compared Prime Minister Churchill’s fear of Russia to the anti-Bolshevik tirades of Hitler which had “kept nations divided within and suspicious of one another.” 16

The American military in the spring of 1945 were also far too concerned with closing off hostilities in Europe to be interested in questions of Soviet intent. General Marshall, the Army Chief of Staff and, upon President Roosevelt’s death, the virtual director of the American war effort, sought immediate Soviet assistance in the war which was still in progress against Japan and tried to avoid questions that might endanger that assistance. Admiral Leahy and the other members of the Joint Chiefs shared this desire.17 In Europe, General Eisenhower and his associates at SHAEF simply were politically out-distanced by Mr. Churchill in the appraisal of Communist aims.

General Eisenhower’s personal opinion of the Soviet Union at this time was recorded by his Naval Aide, Captain Harry Butcher, USNR, in a diary entry dated “Paris, Friday, May 25, 1945.” According to Butcher:

"Last night, the General and I had an old fashioned bull session that lasted until too late this morning. We talked about Russia. Ike said he felt that the American and British relationship with Russia was about at the same stage of arms-length dealing that

* Ambassador to Moscow Averell Harriman and Secretary of the Navy James V. Forrestal were notable exceptions. Forrestal reports a White House meeting on April 23, 1945, during which President Truman asked those present for their views on Soviet policy toward Poland. According to Mr. Forrestal, “The Secretary of War [Stimson] said that it was such a newly posed question . . . he found great difficulty in making positive recommendations but he did feel that we had to remember that the Russian conception of freedom . . . was quite different from ours or the British and that he hoped we would go slowly and avoid any open break. He said that the Russians had carried out their military engagements quite faithfully and was sorry to see this one incident project a breach between the two countries.

“I gave it as my view,” Forrestal said, “that this was not an isolated incident but was one of a pattern of unilateral action on the part of Russia . . . and I thought we might as well meet the issue now as later on.

“ Ambassador Harriman expressed somewhat the same views. Admiral Leahy took the view, on the other hand, more or less the same as that of the Secretary of War . . .” The Forrestal Diaries, Walter Millis, ed. (New York: Viking Press, 1951), pp. 48–50.
marked the early contacts between Americans and the British when we first got into the war. As we dealt with each other, we learned the British ways and they learned ours. A common understanding developed and eventually we became Allies in spirit as well as on paper. Now the Russians, who have had relatively little contact, even during the war, with the Americans and British, do not understand us, nor do we them. The more contact we have with the Russians, the more they will understand us and the greater will be the cooperation. The Russians are blunt and forthright in their dealings, and any evasiveness arouses their suspicions. It should be possible to work with Russia if we follow the same pattern of friendly cooperation that has resulted in the great record of Allied unity demonstrated first by AFHQ [Air Force Headquarters] and subsequently by SHAEF.18

When seen in this context of official and unofficial sentiment it is not surprising that President Truman at first avoided the firm policy toward Russia that Churchill proposed.9

With the beginning of May, hostilities in Germany rapidly drew to a close. The Nazi hierarchy did not attempt a last stand in the Bavarian Redoubt and with Hitler's death the will to resist quickly ebbed. The successor government of Admiral Doenitz at Flensburg made plans to capitulate. Following a brief period of negotiations, the formal Instrument of Surrender was signed in General Eisenhower's headquarters at Rheims at 0241 hours on May 7, 1945. Colonel General Alfred Jodl, Chief of Operations of the German High Command, and Grand Admiral Hans von Friedeburg, Commander-in-Chief of the German Navy, represented the tottering Doenitz government. General Walter Bedell Smith signed for the Allies. Witnessing his signature were General Ivan Susloparov of the Soviet Union and General Francois Sevez of France.

The following day a second surrender ceremony demanded by the

9 By the following month Harry Truman was firmly in the driver's seat. When Secretary Morgenthau, the sponsor of the ill-fated plan for the pastoralization of Germany, wanted to go to Potsdam to take part in the discussions on Germany, the President informed him that the place for the Secretary of the Treasury was in Washington, not Potsdam. According to the President:

"He [Morgenthau] replied that it was necessary for him to go and that if he could not he would have to quit.

"'Alright,' I replied, 'I'll accept your resignation right now.' And I did.

Soviet Union was held in Berlin. This time Field Marshal Keitel represented Germany; Marshal Zhukov and Air Marshal Tedder signed for the two Allied Commands; General de Lattre de Tassigny and General Spaatz signed as witnesses for France and the United States. At the time, little significance was attached to the Soviet Union’s insistence on a separate ceremony.

On May 12, with the hostilities ended, Prime Minister Churchill renewed once more his request that the American and British forces not be withdrawn from the Soviet zone until suitable political agreements regarding the future of Germany had been concluded. In a telegram to President Truman, Mr. Churchill referred for the first time to the “Iron Curtain” which he said had descended along the Russian front. Churchill requested that he and Truman meet at once with Stalin to discuss a general European settlement. Until such time as the meeting was held, the Prime Minister urged that Western troops remain in place.6

“I am profoundly concerned about the European situation,” Mr. Churchill wrote:

I learn that half the American Air Force in Europe has already begun to move to the Pacific theatre. The newspapers are full of the great movements of the American armies out of Europe. Our armies also are, under previous arrangements, likely to undergo a marked reduction. The Canadian Army will certainly leave. Anyone can see that in a very short space of time our armed power on the Continent will have vanished, except for moderate forces to hold down Germany.

Meanwhile what is to happen about Russia? I have always worked for friendship with Russia, but, like you, I feel deep anxiety because of their misinterpretation of the Yalta decisions. their attitude towards Poland, their overwhelming influence in the Balkans, excepting Greece, the difficulties they make about Vienna, the combination of Russian power and the territories under their control or occupied, coupled with the Communist technique in so many other countries, and above all their power to maintain very large armies in the field for a long time. What will be the position in a year or two, when the British and American armies have melted and the French has not yet been formed on any major scale, when we have a handful of divisions mostly French, and

6 “Of all the public documents I have written on this issue,” Churchill later stated, “I would rather be judged by this.” Winston Churchill, Triumph and Tragedy, p. 572.
when the Russians may choose to keep two or three hundred on active service?

An iron curtain is drawn down upon their front, and we do not know what is going on behind. There seems to be little doubt that the whole of the regions east of the line Lübeck, Trieste, Corfu will soon be completely in their hands. To this must be added the further enormous area conquered by the American armies between Eisenach and the Elbe, which will, I suppose, in a few weeks be occupied, when the Americans retreat, by the Russian power. . . . And then the curtain will descend again to a very large extent, if not entirely.

Meanwhile the attention of our people will be occupied in inflicting severities upon Germany, which is ruined and prostrate. . . . Surely it is vital now to come to an understanding with Russia, or see where we are with her, before we weaken our armies mortally or retire to the zones of occupation.

The Prime Minister then went on to request an immediate meeting with Stalin to discuss these problems.19

President Truman, however, felt a meeting with Marshal Stalin was premature. By Washington's direction, American forces would withdraw from the Soviet zone when the military situation made it advisable. With hostilities now ended, it was time for the withdrawal to take place. Two day later, on May 14, Mr. Truman formally declined Churchill's request. It was better to discover the true aim of Soviet policy, Truman said, before risking a final rupture. For this purpose, he told Churchill, Harry Hopkins was going to Moscow to discuss recent differences with Marshal Stalin. The policy of the Roosevelt Administration temporarily would be continued.20

In declining Churchill's proposal to meet with Stalin prior to the withdrawal of Allied troops, President Truman was yielding both to the counsel of his advisers and to the attitude of the American people. The United States still was not willing to use its military position for political purposes.

The net result of the exchange of cables between the Prime Minister and President Truman was that SHAEF would arrange the Allied withdrawal before any Big Three conference could be held. The advance position of Western forces, the hold by the United States Army on that great area of central Germany between Eisenach and the Elbe, would be yielded to the Red Army as a military consideration. Included in this region were the provinces of Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia,
containing the great industrial cities of Leipzig (1939 population 701,606), Dresden (625,174), and Magdeburg (334,358); an area with the second greatest concentration of German industry outside the Ruhr. It was an area of over 20,000 square miles, a region as large as the combined land areas of Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Jersey with a prewar population exceeding 12.5 million people. Today it comprises almost half of the total land area of the East German satellite state and nearly two-thirds of its present population.

Clearly, the decision of the United States to proceed with the evacuation of American troops from the Soviet zone was one of the major decisions of the early postwar period. The subsequent communization of Central Europe could not have taken place had the Allied forces remained where they were. The fall of the democratic government in Czechoslovakia three years later can be directly attributed to the power vacuum created by the withdrawal of Western military power.

Similarly, the decision to withdraw American forces from the Soviet zone prior to a meeting with Stalin is indicative of what might have happened had the Western Allies continued on to Berlin while the war was still in progress. Berlin, had it been captured, likewise would have been yielded to Soviet authority.

In retrospect, considering the temper of the times, the attitude of the American people and the policy of the American government, it is indeed possible that General Eisenhower was correct in halting the Allied advance on the Elbe. The advantages which might have accrued to the Western powers from the capture of Berlin certainly would not have been realized. General Bradley estimated that to take Berlin might have cost one hundred thousand casualties. Bradley may have exaggerated the figure but the fact remains that the cost could have been high. Given the drift which official American policy assumed in 1945, it is extremely doubtful if this prize would have been used to later advantage. The roots of the present Berlin crisis in the wartime and the immediate postwar periods, are found not in decisions made by military men on the field of battle, but in decisions not made in Washington.

In the heady atmosphere of May, 1945, with peace in Europe so recently secured, few in the West were prepared to recognize the situation in Germany for what it was. The menace of Communist aggression as yet was little understood, and the political advantage of military strength—the role of the military as a guarantor of peace—as yet was
little appreciated. America did not understand the nature of the world that it had suddenly been called upon to lead. In 1945 we still assumed that Western concessions would be taken by the Russians as signs of friendship. Few were willing to believe that to the Soviet Union Western concessions appeared as signs of weakness, encouraging communism to drive an even harder bargain. Prime Minister Churchill's cable requesting an immediate meeting with Stalin arrived in Washington less than one week after the final Instrument of Surrender in Germany had been concluded. In the prevailing atmosphere of joy and celebration it is not surprising that so few took it seriously.

For the most part, the American people were still thinking of our wartime good fellowship, and like Mr. Truman, they were little prepared for the difficulties that were then developing. War as a means of policy was morally wrong, and the United States had been at war only because she had been attacked. Now, with victory assured, America was not going to become involved in what many considered the petty, imperialistic quarrels of Europe. As one distinguished critic of this era has written, the American people "were quite unready to face the necessity of engaging in a prolongation of the struggle to protect the freedom of European peoples, and to preserve a safe strategic position and balance of power against the Allied nation to whose survival they had contributed so much." 21

In Berlin, the fighting had stopped on May 2, 1945. On that date, General der Artillerie Erich Weidling, German Military Commander of Berlin, representing the remnant of the German Army which had resisted the Russian onslaught for over two weeks, signed the formal capitulation of the city at Tempelhof. Two days before, on April 30, Adolph Hitler had committed suicide. Simultaneous with Hitler's death, Walter Ulbricht, puppet czar of the present East German regime arrived in the baggage of the Red Army. One tyranny was over but another was about to begin.

The Berlin which surrendered to the Russian Army on May 2, 1945, seemed unlikely ever to recover from the war's destruction. The Inner City, a broad expanse of ancient buildings, parks, and governmental structures stretching from the Alexander Platz to the Tiergarten was a smoking ruin. Only twisted shambles remained of the international
quarter, the Hansa Viertel, and the downtown shopping area. Scarcely a home had been left untouched. Of the 1,500,000 dwellings which formerly existed in Berlin, seventy-six percent were no longer inhabitable; twelve percent had been totally destroyed. Entire blocks had been leveled to the ground. Whole streets, passageways and courtyards had vanished.22

Of the 150 bridges which had once connected the various parts of Berlin, 128 were destroyed. Gas, water and electricity had ceased to function, and telephone service was virtually unknown. Untreated sewage created a further problem. Buses and street cars were no longer in operation, and transportation from one part of the city to another was impossible.

In May of 1945, the population of Berlin, formerly 4.3 million, numbered little more than two million. Less than ten percent of these were under thirty years of age. Death from causes other than war had increased from a level of 13.3 per thousand persons in 1939 to 76.2 per thousand in 1945. Cases of typhus and tuberculosis increased threefold. Hospital and medical facilities were seriously over-taxed. Stores and businesses, closed when the fighting began, remained shuttered with their proprietors usually in hiding.

For the better part of a week the Red Army ran loose in a reign of terror. Only gradually was order restored; then the looting became systematic. Reparations succeeded rape as the Communist Order of the Day. Ninety percent of Berlin’s steel industry, 75 percent of its printing industry, 85 percent of the machinery of the electrical and optical industries were loaded onto flatcars for shipment to the Soviet Union.

Ten weeks later when President Truman arrived in Berlin for the Potsdam Conference he was staggered by the destruction he found. “I never saw such desolation,” he wrote. “Our drive . . . took us past the Tiergarten, the ruins of the Reichstag, the German Foreign Office, the Sports Palace, and dozens of other sites which had been world famous before the war. Now they were nothing more than piles of rubble. A more depressing sight than that of ruined buildings,” he continued, “was the long, never-ending procession of old men, women, and children wandering aimlessly along the autobahn . . . carrying, pushing, or pulling what was left of their belongings. In that two-hour drive I saw evidence of a great world tragedy, and I was thankful that the
United States had been spared the unbelievable devastation of this war."  

To Fleet Admiral William D. Leahy, war-hardened Chief of Staff to the President, the scene was equally appalling. "As we toured the ruins of Berlin," Leahy reported, "every building we saw was badly damaged or completely destroyed. This one-time great and beautiful metropolis, capital of a proud nation which many times I had desired to visit, was wrecked beyond repair. . . . I had never seen anything like it in my long naval career."

And just as President Truman had noted, Leahy also found that:

. . . much more distressing than the view of devastated Berlin was a long procession of old men, women and children, presumably evacuated from their homes by their Russian conquerors. They were marching in great numbers along the country roads, carrying their pitifully small belongings and their infants, probably to an unknown destination and probably without hope. There were no young men among them. Any men we saw were all beyond military age or crippled and lame. These helpless people seemed to be prodded by some urge to get some place where they could find food or shelter—anything, apparently, to get out of the Soviet occupied territory.

It was noticeable to me, as the President's own personal party at dinner that evening discussed scenes we had witnessed, [Leahy continued,] that there was no mood of vindictiveness or revenge, but rather a realization . . . of the horrible destructiveness of modern conflict.  

Gradually Berlin awakened. Beneath the rubble and destruction, under the ruin and chaos, much had remained intact. The war had taken its toll and the first few days of the Russian occupation even more, but the foundations of the city had survived. What was underground was usually only flooded; what was severed could be joined; what was broken could be mended. Most important, however, was that through it all the citizen of Berlin somehow had managed to survive. In him the heart of the city remained intact.

Slowly, life in Berlin was restored. Restaurants and cabarets, soon to become places of entertainment for the troops, had been ordered reopened by Russian authorities on May 2, and the distribution of rations was organized shortly afterward. On May 4, Radio Berlin resumed broadcasting under Soviet control. Public transportation was resumed
on May 13, and the first U-Bahns (subways) began to operate the following day. On May 22, the first Russian film was shown in postwar Berlin. The Berlin Philharmonic gave its first concert on the twenty-sixth, and the following day the Renaissance Theatre reopened. For the most part, however, the theatres and the cabarets were only for the soldiers of the Red Army. Life for the Berliners was bleak beyond description.25

The governmental apparatus of Berlin also was quickly reorganized by the Soviets and set to work. No mention was made to the Berliners that the Americans, British and French would be coming later to join in the occupation of the city. For the present, all of Berlin belonged to the Communists.

District mayors were appointed by the Russians in each of the city’s twenty boroughs. New department heads in each borough were appointed—usually from a previously selected cross-section of middle class doctors, lawyers and trade unionists known by the Soviets to be sympathetic with the “proletariat.” Of those who were so selected, most were advanced in age and without previous political experience. The key positions in each borough were retained by the Communist Party. Personnel directors in eighteen out of the twenty boroughs were Communists. Education and police always remained in Communist hands.

The central city government likewise was reorganized. As Lord Mayor, an inconspicuous Arthur Werner, sixty-seven-year-old retired architect with no previous governmental experience was chosen. The deputy mayor however and six out of thirteen executive department heads of the central city government were Communists. Paul Markgraf, a former German Army officer who had been captured at Stalingrad and indoctrinated in the Soviet Union, became Police President. Trade unions and political parties were revived at this time and likewise came under the closest Communist supervision.

Soviet controlled newspapers quickly began publication. The Tägliche Rundschau, a German-language daily of the Red Army, was the first to appear. The Berliner Zeitung, the official organ of the city government, followed shortly afterwards. In all, there were five local newspapers, each under strict Soviet supervision, when the Western Allies arrived.

The Soviets also used the distribution of food as a device to further
Communist aims. For ration purposes, the Berliners were divided into five categories. Those in the highest category, politicians, Party officials, most teachers, and those who were performing hard labor, received 2,485 calories a day. Those in the lowest category—those who were unemployed, overage, or who had incurred Communist displeasure—were allowed only 1,248 calories. Those in the lower two ration categories, a total of almost one million people, lived on the borderline of starvation.

Significantly, the Berliners resisted Communist pressure even then. Perhaps they had endured too much in one lifetime to trade-in one form of totalitarianism for another. As a result of the actions of the Red Army, the people of Berlin were permanently estranged from the Soviet Union. Even before the Western powers arrived, Russia already had lost her chance of capturing Berlin. Although she had captured it militarily, the first few weeks of looting and raping prevented forever her capturing it ideologically. The aims of international communism had been subverted by the soldiers of the Russian Army. Longingly, Berlin waited for the Western Allies.