The Defense of Berlin
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The Wall

In the early morning of August 13, 1961, the long awaited Communist move to halt the flow of refugees into West Berlin finally began. At several minutes past midnight the East German News Agency (ADN) published a communique from the countries of the Warsaw Pact officially requesting the government of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) to take the necessary action to “establish order” along the border to West Berlin. The communique, together with the requested action, both had been arranged at the meeting of the Warsaw Pact leaders ten days before in Moscow.

The communique itself was a long one. It left little doubt why the measures were being taken and what would be their intended effect. “The present situation regarding the traffic on the borders of West Berlin,” the communique began, was being used by the NATO powers for “undermining the GDR’s economy.” Unstable elements in East Germany were being made to leave their homeland through deceit, bribery, and blackmail. “This subversive activity inflicts damage not only on the German Democratic Republic but also affects the interests of other countries of the Socialist camp.”
"In the face of the aggressive aspirations of the reactionary forces of the FRG [Federal Republic of Germany] and its NATO allies, the Warsaw Treaty member states cannot but take necessary measures for insuring their security, and primarily the security of the German Democratic Republic. . . ."

Accordingly, "the Governments of the Warsaw Treaty member states address the People’s Chamber and the Government of the GDR . . . with a proposal to establish such an order on the borders of West Berlin which would securely block the way for the subversive activity against the Socialist camp. . . ."

Great pains were taken by the Communists to show that West Berlin itself was not being affected. The impending action was made to appear as though only the trouble in East Germany was being isolated. The rights of the Western Allies—or better, those rights for which the West had said they would fight—were carefully excepted. The right of Western access explicitly was not to be interfered with: "It goes without saying, that these measures must not affect the existing order of traffic and control on the ways of communication between West Berlin and West Germany."

The announcement of the Warsaw Pact concluded by stating that the measures being invoked along the East Berlin border would disappear only when a peace settlement with Germany had been achieved. The "present abnormal situation" in West Berlin would then be settled on that basis.¹

Published alongside the Warsaw Pact communique was a decree of the East German government putting the control measures into effect. According to the East German announcement, "such control is to be introduced on the borders of the German Democratic Republic, including the border with the Western sectors of Greater Berlin, which is usually introduced along the borders of every sovereign state." Citizens of the GDR "may cross these borders only with special permission."

Like the Warsaw communique, the East German announcement went to great length to reassure the West that the right of access would not be interfered with. "This decree in no way revises former decisions on transit between West Berlin and West Germany via the German Democratic Republic." The rights of "citizens of other states" to visit the capital of the GDR would also not be affected. West
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Berliners would be permitted to cross the border at specified points upon presentation of a West Berlin identity card. The East German decree was accompanied by an order from the East Berlin city government barring all East Berliners from holding jobs in West Berlin.

The decrees were put into effect immediately. At thirty-five minutes after midnight (7:35 P.M. Saturday, Washington time), armored cars of the East German People's Army rolled into the Potsdamer Platz in the center of Berlin—the crossing point where the American, British, and Soviet sectors all joined together. Other military units appeared at the Brandenburg Gate, at Friedrichstrasse, and at each of the other 80 crossing points between East and West Berlin. By 2:30 A.M. the entire twenty-eight mile border separating the Soviet sector from the three Western sectors had been sealed. A force reliably estimated as one fully motorized division of the East German Army heavily supported by People's Police and Communist factory militia (Betriebskampfgruppen) was deployed along it in tactical formation. Double strands of barbed wire and other light obstacles were emplaced. Of the eighty crossing points into East Berlin, only thirteen remained.

The East German action in Berlin was supported throughout the Soviet zone with extensive troop movements. The Soviet Army in East Germany, now under Marshal Konev, moved out of their kasernen shortly after midnight and took up tactical positions throughout the countryside. East German and Soviet armor filled the roads and highways in a calculated show of force designed to cow any feeling of popular resistance. An estimated force of two Soviet divisions lined the border between the Western sectors of Berlin and East Germany proper. As one East German official subsequently commented, the lesson of June 17, 1953, had been learned. The appearance of armed might was much more effective in putting down a revolt before it began rather than afterwards.

The significance of the East German action in closing the sector border was not immediately apparent to American military headquarters in West Berlin. Indeed, Allied authorities had long expected Communist measures to shut off the stream of refugees. When the Communist moves were announced, it was therefore assumed that the border closure was a purely East German affair and that the strength of the Western position was not being affected. The East
German moves themselves had been cleverly cloaked in the language of the communique. Brigadier General Frederick O. Hartel, the Commanding General of the Berlin Command, advised a correspondent of the *New York Times* in the early hours following the border closure that “all responsibility for controlling traffic from East to West Berlin” belonged to the German police. He said that he did not anticipate taking any action and had not received any instructions to the contrary from Washington.\(^5\)

It was only later in the day, after much prodding from Mayor Brandt, that Allied headquarters fully realized the significance of the East German action. By that time, of course, the border closure had been in effect for almost eighteen hours.\(^6\)

General Hartel, it perhaps should be noted, had been in Berlin for less than six weeks when the East German action of August 13 occurred; his superior, Major General Albert Watson, II, the Commander of the American sector, for less than three months. Before coming to Berlin, Hartel had been stationed at the Pentagon in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. There, he had been closely connected with the Administration’s contingency planning and his assignment to Berlin was a direct result of this experience. Accordingly, when he said that the traffic from East to West Berlin was a responsibility of the German police and not his, he was undoubtedly repeating official Washington sentiment.

Western contingency plans, it should also be remembered,\(^{*}\)\(^{**}\) had in all probability encompassed the Communist closure of the East Berlin border. For several months reports of an imminent sealing of the frontier had been trickling out of East Germany. The recent statements of Western leaders, not to mention those of Ulbricht and the East German press, all pointed to this very possibility. The meeting of the Western Foreign Ministers held in Paris only a week before, held for the specific purpose of preparing plans for emergency action in Berlin, discussed the border closure in considerable detail. Thus, on the morning of August 13, when the American troop commander in

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* Interestingly, when RIAS (Radio in the American Sector) broadcast its first bulletin of the Communist border closure at 4 A.M. Sunday morning, an editor removed the recorded song that was to follow the news. The song was entitled “Let’s Do like the Swallows Do” and it was feared by the station’s USIA personnel that its playing might be taken as a signal by listeners in the East to fly from their homes. (*See New York Times, August 16, 1961.*)

** See previous chapter.
Berlin did not voice any alarm at the East German action, much less suggest any counter measures, it can only be assumed that he followed the prescribed Allied response. In other words, the Western powers were prepared to see the East Germans close the border in East Berlin without contesting the point. Had another course of action been provided for, certainly the Berlin Command would have taken it.

In Washington, the immediate news of the East German move to seal the frontier was received virtually without comment. It was only seven o’clock Saturday evening in Washington when the Warsaw communique was published, and well before ten o’clock when the border closure had been completed. The State Department on Saturday evening, however, declined all comment. It was not even reported whether Secretary Rusk or President Kennedy had been informed, something which certainly would have been announced had the situation been thought critical.

Ironically, the only person in Washington who was willing to comment Saturday night was Senator William Fulbright, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Smitten by the response which his earlier television remarks about the closing of the border had had, Fulbright made a remarkable turn about. “It has been my understanding,” the Arkansas Senator said, “that free transit between the two parts of Berlin was guaranteed under Four-Power Pact. If this agreement is being broken by unilateral action it could lead to serious consequences.”

With the exception of Senator Fulbright’s comment, official Washington remained silent for the first seventeen hours after the East Berlin border was sealed. Leaders in London and Paris likewise declined comment although the British Foreign Office did make a brief announcement that the Communist moves were “contrary to the four-power status of Berlin and are therefore illegal.” In the meantime, of course, the minions of Walter Ulbricht literally were leaving no stone unturned in their efforts to close whatever gaps might have remained in the newest extension of the Iron Curtain.

Shortly after twelve noon on Sunday, August 13, (5 P.M. Berlin time), Secretary of State Dean Rusk finally broke the silence which had enshrouded Washington. The Secretary issued a brief statement which did little more than call attention to the fact of which the entire

* See previous chapter.
world was now aware. The authorities in East Germany, Rusk said, had taken severe measures to deny their own people access to West Berlin. "These measures have doubtless been prompted by the increased flow of refugees in recent weeks." Rusk then added what has since become known as the American sigh of relief—Western rights had not been affected! "Available information," Rusk said, "indicates that measures taken thus far are aimed at residents of East Berlin and East Germany and not at the Allied position in West Berlin or access thereto."

Almost as an afterthought, Rusk added that the East German action was a violation of the four-power status of Berlin. This violation, he said, would be "the subject of vigorous protest through appropriate channels." 7

With that the statement concluded. There was no demand that the admittedly illegal East German measures be halted or that the right of free circulation within the city be restored. There was no threat of Western counteraction nor indeed, anything which might indicate that the United States planned to intervene. It was, in fact, almost as if the American government welcomed the East German move. The refugee flow finally had been shut off and deplorable though this may have been for those affected, a dangerous source of tension in Berlin had been removed. The formal protest to which Rusk referred, a State Department aide later announced, "would probably be made tomorrow." 8

Before making his statement, Rusk had discussed the Berlin situation by telephone with President Kennedy who was spending the weekend at Hyannis Port. The President approved Rusk's statement and agreed with the Secretary that the most serious aspect of the border closure was the possibility that an insurrection might be touched off in East Germany. 9 If the President and the Secretary considered the effect of the East German action on the morale of the people of West Berlin and thereby on the Western position in Berlin, they gave no sign of it. The President and his Secretary of State were in complete agreement that nothing should be done to aggravate the situation further. Mr. Kennedy remained at Hyannis Port, declining to make public comment, and Dean Rusk went to a baseball game at Griffith Stadium.

Indeed, had the East German regime been worried about the possibility of Western intervention, the events on the afternoon of August 13 in Washington must have consoled them. The response at each of
the Allied capitals, in fact, would hardly have given cause for alarm. In Paris, both President De Gaulle and Premier Debré were on vacation. In their absence, no official statement was forthcoming and certainly no counteraction could have been initiated. In London, Lord Home was away shooting grouse, and Prime Minister Macmillan was vacationing in Scotland. Only in Bonn was the head of the government on duty. Dr. Adenauer was informed during the night of the Communist action and afterwards called a hasty conference of his advisers at his Rhoendorf home. The Chancellor then issued a short official statement. “It is the law of the hour,” he said, “to meet the challenge from the East firmly but calmly and to do nothing that can worsen the situation.” Reports from Bonn indicate that Adenauer had definite countermeasures in mind. High on the list, it was felt, was the possibility of economic sanctions. In the absence of guidance from his NATO partners, however, the Chancellor dared not act on his own.

Meanwhile, at Allied headquarters in Berlin, the casual unconcern of the first few hours gradually yielded to a grim realization that more was involved than originally had been believed. Although the total effect of the Communist measures were still not yet understood, the presence of heavily armored East German Army units along the sector border, and especially the movement of two Soviet armored divisions to positions surrounding the city, were enough to cause the Allied command to think in terms of tactical readiness. There still was no thought of action to reopen the border; indeed, it was still felt that the East German move was not totally undesirable, but the sudden appearance of so much Communist military power now caused the American, British, and French Commands to be concerned over the security of the Western sectors. Accordingly, the three Allied garrisons were alerted and confined to their barracks in a full state of combat readiness.

Shortly after the alert was ordered, the three Western Commandants began a series of meetings which lasted throughout the day. Mayor Brandt attended several of these and in no uncertain terms advised the military authorities that the entire Western position in Berlin was at stake. The Communists, he said, had physically absorbed East Berlin into the GDR and had unilaterally destroyed the four-power status of the city. It was a blatant act of aggression against the West he insisted and if nothing was done to counteract it, his people would feel betrayed. The Mayor pleaded for energetic action which would force the
Communists to "cancel their unlawful measures." Among other things, he asked for an immediate show of force along the border.

Prodded by Brandt's forceful arguments the Commandants began to revise their earlier estimates of the situation. The Mayor's proposals were forwarded to each of the three Western capitals but no action was taken. Even had they wanted to, it probably would have been impossible for the Allied Commandants to have taken the prompt action which Mayor Brandt desired. Unlike General Clay in June of 1948, the Allied Commandants in Berlin in 1961 were very junior members of the Western military directorate. Whereas, General Clay was the American Military Governor for all of Germany, and reported directly to the Secretaries of State and of the Army in Washington, Major General Albert Watson, II, had a command line running first to Army headquarters in Heidelberg, from there to NATO in Paris, and then to Washington. Even when his messages arrived in Washington it is certain that, coming as they did from a relatively junior official who had been in Berlin less than three months, they would not have received the same deferential treatment that Clay's did in 1948. Accordingly, on August 13 Watson carried out the orders he had been given and did nothing. The alert he called was for the protection of the Western sectors. It was not for possible counteraction. After dispatching Brandt's request forward, he declined all further public comment. The situation, he said, had been fully reported to the three Allied capitals and any comment would have to come from there.\footnote{11}

Later Sunday afternoon, Mayor Brandt addressed a special session of the West Berlin Parliament. He appealed to the Berliners to remain calm and reasonable. At the same time he let it be known that he considered prompt and vigorous Allied countermeasures essential. The right of free movement within the city, he said, was inherent in the very nature of its four-power status. This right had never been interfered with before, not even during the blockade of 1948–49 when the Russians had tried to starve the city into submission. The Communist action of last night, the Mayor continued, was therefore all the more serious and should be speedily resisted. Allied reaction, he concluded, should not be confined to protests. "Today," Brandt said, "the real test for our people begins."\footnote{12}

The reaction of the Berliners was much like that of Mayor Brandt. Having lived in the eye of a storm for over fifteen years, they were
The shaded area in this map represents the Soviet-occupied Zone. Almost one-half of this area was captured by the Western Powers (the double line shows furthest point of jurisdiction), although U.S. troops actually penetrated much further before withdrawing. The withdrawal of the Western Powers coincided with their entry into West Berlin, indicating scrupulous Western adherence to pre-established 4-Power agreements on the occupation of Germany.
I. Main border-crossing points authorized by Communist authorities since August 23, 1961:

1. Friedrichstrasse/Zimmerstrasse
   - Only for members of Diplomatic Corps, Western Occupation Forces and non-German civilians.
   - "Checkpoint Charlie"

2. Prinzengraben/Heinrich-Heine-Strasse
   - Only for residents of Federal Republic of Germany.
   - West Berliners not admitted.
   - Also used for mail, interzonal goods and exchange of burial uses.

3. Bornholmerstrasse
   - Only for residents of Federal Republic of Germany.
   - West Berliners not admitted.

II. Minor border-crossing points (authorized by Communist authorities since August 23, 1961) for a small number of persons who are acceptable to the East Berlin authorities and who have special passes.

4. Chausseestrasse

5. Invalidenstrasse

6. Oberbaumbrücke

7. Sonnenallee

III. Additional checking points are located at Friedrichstrasse railroad station for those traveling on international trains and on the S-Bahn (elevated interurban).

West Berlin's area is as large as New York City's boroughs of Manhattan, Brooklyn and Bronx combined.

Since August 13, 1961 — the day the Communists built the 27 mile Wall that split Berlin in two — there have been only 8 points of intra-city crossing. Of the West Berlin enclaves shown, only Steinstücken (50 people) is inhabited.
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acute sensitive to its various shifts and stresses and they knew that
the Communist action was a threat to their existence. The closing of
the border within the city—the total incorporation of the eastern sector
of the city into the so-called German Democratic Republic—spelled
for them the end of Berlin's role as a vigorous island of freedom in the
midst of a Communist sea. West Berlin itself might remain, but only
as a withered monument to a past civilization; without the free access
to it by people in the East, its purpose would be ended. For Berlin was
more than a haven for refugees. It was a place where people from the
East could come for a visit, could see for themselves the good life in
the free West, and could return home with this lesson when their visit
was over. More than 150,000 such people came into West Berlin each
day. Except for a few, all returned to East Berlin and East Germany
in the evening. They returned, however, having experienced the free-
dom, the joy and the prosperity which West Berlin so cheerfully shared.
Then too, as long as they knew they could leave East Germany when-
ever they wished, Ulbricht's power was limited. With the lifeline to
Berlin open, communism could never consolidate its deadly grip on
East Germany. But with it closed, sixteen million people were exiled
into slavery.

Such were the feelings of the Berliners on the afternoon and evening
of August 13, as they waited for American intervention; for America,
since the days of the airlift, had come to symbolize for the Berliners
the determination of a free people to defend the cause of freedom with
whatever means were necessary. Not even their compatriots in West
Germany held the same mystical place in the hearts of the Berliners as
did the Americans. Considering the miracle of the airlift, this feeling
was not without reason.

By Sunday evening, therefore, the disappointment in Berlin was all
the keener when the Amis had failed to act. The appearance of even
one American soldier in battle dress at the border probably would have
soothed the Berliners. Clay would have recognized this; Brandt did
recognize it; Watson may have recognized it but in the absence of
orders from Washington he declined to act. Washington, of course,
was unaware of it, much as they had been unaware of the possibilities
of the airlift in 1948.

Along the sector border in West Berlin crowds of Berliners watched
the Communist preparations all day. At dawn, a dozen or so gathered
at the Brandenburg Gate. By noon, a thousand or more were on hand, each anxiously watching and waiting. Many West Berliners took advantage of the Communist decree which still allowed them to drive into East Berlin to see for themselves what was happening. What they saw was a shock. Between the Unter den Linden and the Potsdamer Platz they could count thirty-six Russian-made tanks with East German crews. In the Marx-Engels Platz stood twenty-seven military lorries, most of them loaded with uniformed People’s Army troops carrying submachine guns.* Other vehicle parks were located nearby, and although no Russian troops were in sight, hard core factory militia (Betriebskampfgruppen) mounted a guard to the rear of the barricades and kept everyone 500 meters from the frontier. The rest of East Berlin was also an armed camp. Field kitchens and bivouac areas were placed in the middle of the streets. Meals were constantly being served to soldiers “back from the front.” As one West Berliner reported it, it was as though the city was being occupied all over again.

By 10:30 Sunday evening a crowd of over five thousand West Berliners had gathered before the Brandenburg Gate. Their tempers were now on edge. All day long they had seen the barricades grow thicker. Reel after reel of barbed wire had been added to the first flimsy obstacles. All day long they had seen the East German army deployed in full battle array across the sector boundary. Shouts of “Hang Ulbricht,” and “Put down your guns,” began to be heard. Ten East German armored cars moved up to the other side of the gate. The West Berlin police succeeded in maintaining order but only with the greatest difficulty. When West Berlin went to bed that night, it went to bed angry and disappointed—angry that the Communists had acted, disappointed that the West had not.

Encouraged by the lack of Western response, the East German regime wasted little time in consolidating and extending their gains. At 4 A.M. Monday morning, August 14, 1961, all telephone and postal service with West Germany was severed. Although the trunk lines into West Berlin from West Germany were not affected, the East German action further isolated the people of the Soviet zone and now made it all but impossible for them to communicate with the outside world. A

* Testimony from defecting officers of the East German Army has subsequently revealed that Communist forces in East Berlin on August 13, were issued only blank ammunition and were under orders to give way should Allied troops intervene.
spokesman for the West German Postal Ministry in Bonn said that telegrams were the only communications still being accepted in East Germany from the West. No messages, he added, were coming out.

Later in the day, East zone authorities went one step further and closed the Brandenburg Gate. The number of crossing points into East Berlin was now reduced to twelve. Even at these twelve, steps were underway to restrict the flow of traffic further. At some, streets were torn up so that only one lane could proceed at a time; at others, movable barbed wire barricades were erected where previously only heavily armed soldiers had stood.

Karl Maron, the venomous East German Interior Minister, also announced on Monday that henceforth all West Berliners would be required to remain 100 meters from the barricades. East German forces, he said, would take appropriate action against all who did not. Western news photographers who violated the edict later in the afternoon on Monday were sprayed by Communist water trucks. Several other skirmishes were reported along the border and on three occasions Vopos hurled tear gas grenades into West Berlin.

Allied military headquarters in West Berlin still declined to intervene although Western troops were kept on a stand-by alert and only personnel living "off post" were allowed to leave the kasernen. The American Command also declined all public comment other than to say it was "watching the situation closely." 13

Monday afternoon at the Schöneberger Rathaus, West Berlin’s City Hall, five thousand West Berlin workers protested the lack of Western response. Carrying signs reading “We demand Counter-Measures,” and “Reunification Fast,” the workers listened sullenly as Mayor Brandt entreated them to remain calm. He had advised the Allies, Brandt said, of the need for urgent action. All they could do now was to wait. The workers departed slightly more comforted than when they had come. The Mayor, they knew, was on their side.

In the West, the critical position of West Berlin as a result of the border closure still was not recognized. President Kennedy returned from Hyannis Port late Monday morning and met with Secretary Rusk for more than an hour. The conference resulted only in the agreement that "there should be no move to provoke demonstrations against the Communist East German regime so long as Western access to isolated Berlin is unimpeded." 14 As before, the President and Rusk were still
looking at the East German move as something which might serve to lessen tensions with the Soviet Union. The possibility of countermeasures was of little interest.

At the State Department in Washington on Monday, the diplomatic representatives of Great Britain, France, and Germany met with Assistant Secretary of State Foy Kohler to draft the text of the official Western protest. Countermeasures were discussed but only in general terms. British and American representatives argued gravely against any “rash action” which might upset the delicate balance in Berlin. A dispatch in the well-informed *Washington Evening Star* that day reported governmental reaction in Washington to the border closure to be one of disapproval but little more: “While the West deeply disapproves shutting off communications between East and West Berlin, American officials said it would not be to the West’s advantage to do anything drastic about it.”

On Capitol Hill, reaction was much the same. Senate Democratic Leader Mike Mansfield advocated a policy of “let’s keep our shirts on” and see what this is all about. “Berlin,” he said, “is only one of the many difficulties that confront the President at this time.”

Senator Hubert Humphrey, the Democratic Whip, said that we “must look for Mr. Khrushchev to be very difficult” in the months ahead.

Senator Bourke Hickenlooper of Iowa called the border closure “another and not unexpected step in the cold war.” No voice was raised in the Senate of the United States on the day following the East German action, advocating anything other than a policy of watchful waiting.

Reaction was about the same in the other Allied capitals. In London, Foreign Office spokesmen let it be known that the British government was opposed to an economic embargo. In Paris, the hush of August vacations continued to prevail at the Quai d’Orsay. In West Germany, Chancellor Adenauer took to the campaign trail and in Regensburg delivered one of the harshest personal attacks on Mayor Brandt that the German electorate had ever heard. The Chancellor alluded directly to Brandt’s illegitimate birth and spoke of him as “Herr Brandt, alias Framm.” Adenauer again mentioned that economic sanctions were being considered by the West but he carefully avoided an open endorsement of them. The trade agreement with East Germany, he said, would have to be “looked at” in light of the latest move on Berlin.
Thus, forty-eight hours after the border closure had been effected, the Western powers had yet to take a positive step. Indeed, there was virtual agreement in each of the Allied capitals that a positive step should not be taken. Not even a formal protest over the Communist action had been transmitted to the authorities in East Berlin. It is not surprising therefore that the East Germans rapidly grew bolder, for the West seemed very much a paper tiger.

At one o'clock Tuesday morning, August 15, 1961, East German authorities announced that West Berlin vehicles would no longer be allowed in East Berlin without a special permit. The East German move was especially significant since it represented a clear-cut attack on Western rights. The original Communist measures to seal the border had carefully avoided any interference with Western traffic. One can only assume that the move was taken because of the total lack of Western response to the previous Communist measures. Several hours later, East German police fired on an escaping couple attempting to make their way to the West by swimming the Teltow Canal. The shots missed and the refugees made it safely across but it was an ominous sign for the future.

Later in the day, while the West Berliners continued to seethe at the lack of Western response, the formal Allied protest to the measures of August 13 was finally delivered to Soviet Military Headquarters in Karlshorst. The message was not only three days late, but unlike other protests, it was delivered not by one of the Western Commandants but simply by a messenger from the Allied Staff. Its contents were exceedingly mild and polite. Like Rusk's earlier statement in Washington, it merely recited the events which had taken place. There was no demand that the border be reopened or that the East German military forces be withdrawn. Indeed, only in the last paragraph of the 350-word note were the Communist measures actually protested.17

The Ulbricht regime acknowledged the protest in a manner that might be expected. Several hours after its delivery, the East German Government stole the march on the West and announced that any attempt to apply economic sanctions against the GDR would be met with a total blockade of all West German traffic to Berlin. Since the possibility of an East German blockade had been mentioned the day before by both Washington and London in their appeals for restraint, it again is likely that the East German regime was gauging its moves by Allied reaction.
If this was the case, they once more were not disappointed. In Bonn, where sentiment for economic sanctions had been strongest, the Free Democrats led by Erich Mende now opposed an embargo and said the Communists should not be given a pretext for blocking Western access. Mende’s comments were strongly seconded in London by unidentified high British Foreign Office officials who indicated in “off the record” statements that the Macmillan Government was “leery” of launching reprisals against the Soviet bloc for fear of provoking the Communists into further actions.18

In Paris, Foreign Minister Couve de Murville broke the official silence of the French government only to say that the East German action of August 13 was entirely against the four-power status of Berlin and must be taken very seriously. Significantly, de Murville added: “I would not say that it was entirely unexpected.”

From Washington, the New York Times reported that despite pressure from the Adenauer government for a more vigorous response, the Kennedy Administration had “decided to make a world wide show of reasonableness” in dealing with the Berlin issue. As was now the vogue in Washington, it was another case of the deliberate press leak being used to announce governmental policy. Said the Times:

The Kennedy Administration set out today to portray East Germany’s closing of the border between East and West Berlin as a dramatic confession of Communist failure.

The highest officials here indicated that this would be the extent, for the time being, of the Allied response to Communist moves in Berlin. As long as Western rights of access to the divided city are respected, the officials said, protest and vigorous propaganda will be the primary form of retaliation.19

News of the American position was received in Berlin with alarm. Neither the man on the street nor responsible city officials could believe their ears when they heard that the West had won a propaganda victory in the border closure. One astonished official of the West Berlin government remarked that if the West won many more victories like that there would be very little left to defend in Berlin.20

Indeed, as the days wore on after the border closure it became increasingly apparent that Washington was hopelessly out of touch with the situation in Berlin. Part of this no doubt was due to the fact that

* See previous chapter.
the senior U.S. representatives in Berlin were relatively minor cogs in the American government. Every action of the Berlin Command, in fact, was minutely dictated at this time from Washington, either by the State Department or the Pentagon. General Watson's reports were lightly received as coming from someone too closely involved to have a proper perspective. In the absence of a senior Administration official in Berlin, American policy in the crisis was reduced to bumbling along as best it could, based on the educated guesses of political authorities 3,500 miles from the scene of action. The result was a near fatal misjudgment of the issues involved.

By Tuesday night, August 15, with Allied action confined so far to the rather feeble protest made that morning, and with a propaganda victory now claimed by Washington, the mood in West Berlin became one of despair. The city's 13,000 riot police were put on a full state of alert to guard against any possible violence by the citizens themselves, and Mayor Brandt called a mass meeting for the following day in front of the City Hall. East German military forces along the border were reinforced and 47 more Russian-built T-34 tanks were moved into tactical positions. At several points the flimsy wire barricades were replaced by prefabricated concrete slabs taken from nearby housing projects.

Wednesday morning, August 16, 1961, saw further inroads made in the Allied position. East German border guards installed raisable traffic barriers—the kind seen at many grade-level railroad crossings—at each of the remaining twelve crossing points. East zone functionaries began to boast publicly of their victory and one East Berlin official even remarked that it had been impossible to work with "open borders." Colonel Andrei Solovyev, the Soviet Commandant in East Berlin, also chose Wednesday morning to reply to the Western protest of August 3 regarding the earlier East German measures against the so-called "border crossers." With heavy irony, Colonel Solovyev stated that the Allied protest was now "completely out of place." Solovyev charged that it simply was another attempt by the West to interfere in the domestic affairs of the German Democratic Republic. "If you intend by your letter to extend the outmoded occupation regime to the capital of the German Democratic Republic," he said, "then such demands cannot be taken seriously."

A breakfast meeting between President Kennedy and Secretary Rusk
in Washington on Wednesday morning resulted only in more leaks to the press that the United States intended to take no vigorous action.

In West Berlin on Wednesday, the cries for countermeasures became more furious. By early afternoon over a quarter of a million people had gathered in front of the West Berlin City Hall in response to Mayor Brandt’s plea of the day before. By now, however, their mood was one of anger and bitterness. Almost all thought they had been betrayed by the West. Dozens of posters appeared protesting the West’s inaction. One said “Munich—1938—Berlin—1961.” Another, “Paper Protests Don’t Stop Tanks.” With equal vigor the crowd booed references to the East German border closure and to the perfunctory Allied protest which followed it.

Mayor Brandt, looking tired and worn, attempted to keep the crowd in check and carefully avoided any incendiary remarks. He informed the crowd that he had sent a personal message to President Kennedy advising him of the situation and stating that the city expected “not merely words but political action.” “What happened here in the last three days,” Brandt said, “is a new version of the occupation of the Rhineland by Hitler. The man today is called Ulbricht.” The Mayor’s words expressed the feelings of the people precisely. They listened attentively and went home. Many were already convinced that their cry for support had gone unheeded.

The measures which Brandt suggested that the Allies should take are worthy of notice. In subsequent days some were adopted and some were not. All, however, had been suggested by the Mayor in his earliest conferences with Allied officials in Berlin after the border closure had gone into effect. It is natural therefore that Brandt’s greatest criticism that Wednesday afternoon was directed against the slowness with which the West was responding. Brandt’s suggestions included:

1. The immediate reinforcement of the Allied garrison.
2. The immediate movement of Allied troops along the autobahn between Berlin and West Germany to emphasize the continued right of Allied access.
3. The indictment of the East German regime before the United Nations for the suppression of human rights.
4. A selective ban by the West German government on vital economic goods imported by East Germany.
5. The immediate arrival in West Berlin of a prominent American personality preferably a Cabinet Minister.

6. The appointment of General Lucius Clay as American Commandant.

7. The taking over of the West Berlin portion of the city's elevated railroad system which was still under the control of the East. (This suggestion previously had been denied by the Allied Commandants.)

8. Closing of the offices of the German Communist Party (SED) in West Berlin. (This also had been turned down.)

9. Allied refusal to issue travel documents to East German officials wishing to travel to the West. (This ban had been rescinded earlier in the year.)

10. The stationing of token Allied forces along the sector border. (This had been strongly urged by Brandt Sunday morning but had been refused.)

11. Immediate protest to the Russians at the continued presence of East German armed forces in East Berlin.

12. An immediate session of the West German Bundestag. (This also had been refused, this time by Bonn.)

The above list represented a carefully thought out program prepared by the West Berlin city government under Brandt's direction. It seems neither inflammatory nor provocative, and it certainly warranted immediate consideration. In Washington, however, the embattled Mayor's call for "political action" was greeted with a storm of political abuse. The State Department and the White House were incensed that Mayor Brandt had announced the letter before the President had received it. Almost immediately the propaganda organs of the Administration began decrying Brandt's letter as a cheap political trick designed to rally support in the forthcoming West German elections. Sophisticated Washington columnists commented that Kennedy himself had just been through a bitter election and well understood the "temptation a crisis offers politicians." 23 Virtually all segments of the American press took up the cry. The Scripps-Howard chain commented editorially that Brandt's statement was "rude and presumptuous." "West German campaign oratory," it said, "is an irresponsible complication of the crisis in

William S. White, the traditionalist political commentator of The Evening Star, referred to Mayor Brandt as a “mere mayor” trying to “take over the foreign policy, not only of his own country but of all the West by addressing personal notes to the President of the United States.” White accused the Mayor of “shamelessly using the world crisis” to promote his own campaign. “It is easy for demagogues to whip up excited crowds, as Mr. Brandt is doing, to pour scorn on the West for inaction.”

And so it went on the fourth day after the border closure. The Berlin crisis continued to drift, with the West still refusing to concede that an emergency existed. The New York Times reported that the Kennedy Administration felt the “long advertised crisis” in Berlin had not yet occurred. Other capitals were reported “in essential agreement” with Washington that “no rash sanctions or countermeasures should be applied at this time.”

The following day, Thursday, August 17, 1961, Mr. Kennedy’s press secretary, Pierre Salinger, announced that Mayor Brandt’s letter had arrived. Salinger made a point of saying, however, that it had not yet been decided whether the letter would be answered. But in Western Europe by this time, doubts were beginning to arise over the wisdom of the “propaganda victory” approach advocated by the United States. Paris announced that President De Gaulle was cutting his vacation short and returning to the city because of the Berlin crisis. In Bonn, Konrad Adenauer and other CDU officials began to feel the pressure for more effective action and stepped up their pleas to Washington. A group of university students in Bonn sent President Kennedy a black umbrella reminiscent of Neville Chamberlain whose policy of appeasement in 1938 paved the way for Hitler’s dismemberment of Czechoslovakia.

*From Berlin, Edward R. Murrow, the new head of the United States Information Agency who was visiting the beleaguered

* Attached to the umbrella was the following message:

We are sorry to say, Mr. President, that because of your reserved reaction to the happenings in Berlin you have at the moment become the most worthy possessor of this symbol of a fateful policy.

Because your doubtlessly very determined words in this present crisis were not followed by equally determined actions, there arises a comfortless memory of an era of European history from which the world is still suffering.
city, sent back dire warnings of the total failure of the Administration’s policy.

By Thursday afternoon, certain rumblings of regret could be heard even in Washington. Doris Fleeson, the syndicated columnist of *The Evening Star*, in what perhaps could be termed a press leak from the bottom, defended Brandt’s “precedent-shattering letter” as coming from a man “standing on the barricades with a restless populace behind him.” The very same approach she said had long been argued by the German experts of the State Department. “Up until now,” Miss Fleeson continued, “the reply has come back from the top that they were not convinced.” She went on to say that the fact that Brandt’s letter was sent at all reflected an increasingly deteriorating situation; a situation that the news dispatches from Berlin were describing with increasing bluntness. Although she did not disclose her source, it was obvious that Miss Fleeson had been talking to people in Foggy Bottom other than Dean Rusk.

In Berlin, meanwhile, the East Germans continued their efforts to complete the separation of East and West. Although “the Wall” itself had not yet made its appearance, East German workmen began tearing up rails along the S-Bahn system which had previously run into West Berlin. People living in houses along the border were evacuated and doors and windows facing West Berlin were sealed.

The continued lack of Allied response to the Communist moves was driving responsible officials in West Berlin to despair. Little secret was made of the breach which had developed between Berlin and Washington. In Moscow, the Kremlin, which was profiting immensely from the situation, broke its long silence on the border closure and announced that the East German measures would remain in effect until a peace treaty had been signed. Previously, Soviet officials had remained conspicuously noncommittal about the East German action, apparently content with allowing the Ulbricht regime and the Warsaw Pact to shoulder full responsibility. By Thursday, it was obvious that the West planned no violent reaction and so Moscow hastened to join its ally already in the field. Lest there be any doubt of Soviet intentions, however, Andrei Smirnov, the Russian Ambassador in Bonn, called on Chancellor Adenauer the day before and advised him that Russia

*Khrushchev, interestingly, had been on vacation at his Black Sea villa in Sochi since August 12.*
would do nothing to aggravate the crisis until after the September West German elections.

Later in the day on Thursday, the formal Allied protests of the East Berlin border closure were delivered in Moscow. It was reported by the New York Times, however, that the notes were being delivered largely to assuage West German feelings of disappointment. Like the earlier note sent to the Soviet Commandant in East Berlin, the tone of the protest was restrained. In what must rank as one of the great understatements of diplomatic communication, the East German sealing of the frontier was said to have "the effect of limiting, to a degree approaching complete prohibition, passage from the Soviet sector to the Western sectors of the city." The protest, of course, had been drafted in Washington by the Western representatives meeting with Foy Kohler at the State Department, and clearly reflected the Kennedy Administration's hesitation to increase the area of conflict.

Thursday evening Dean Rusk met with President Kennedy at the White House to review the situation. They stressed that Berlin was only one of the issues discussed, but it was no secret that the continuing reports from Berlin had had their effect. Mr. Kennedy clearly was unhappy at the way the situation was developing, and accordingly now gave Mayor Brandt's proposals close attention. Secretary Rusk, in fact, seized on the suggestion of sending a high ranking official to Berlin and reportedly recommended Vice President Lyndon Johnson.

Friday saw additional signs of activity in Washington. President Kennedy conferred with Vice President Johnson at 11 A.M. and shortly afterwards announced that Mr. Johnson had agreed to go to Berlin as his personal representative. General Lucius Clay was contacted in New York and soon appeared at the White House. The President asked Clay, then chairman of the board of the Continental Can Corporation, to join the Vice President's mission. Clay instantly accepted. The President also announced that his own departure for Hyannis Port this weekend would be postponed.

At six P.M. Friday evening, just prior to Vice President Johnson's departure, the President convened another special policy meeting on Berlin at the White House. This time Lyndon Johnson and General Clay joined the conferees. With them, in addition to the President and Secretary Rusk, were Presidential military adviser General Maxwell Taylor; Special Assistants McGeorge Bundy and Walt Rostow; and
Charles Bohlen, former U.S. Ambassador to Moscow who, as Special Assistant to the Secretary of State, was to accompany the Vice President's mission. Once more Mayor Brandt's proposals were considered, and Generals Clay and Taylor urged that the American garrison be reinforced. An overland movement of troops from West Germany, the Generals said, would have the added advantage of demonstrating the continued right of Allied access. According to General Clay, most of the other participants were strongly opposed. Basic Western rights in the divided city, they claimed, had not been affected. But the counsel of the generals prevailed. At 7:40 P.M. Pierre Salinger called in reporters for an official announcement. The garrison would be reinforced. "In view of recent developments, including the movement of East German military forces into East Berlin," Salinger stated, "the President has directed an appropriate increase of the U.S. garrison in Berlin. A battle group of approximately 1,500 men will proceed by way of the Helmstedt-Berlin Autobahn, arriving there on Sunday."

At 9:14 P.M. Friday evening Vice President Johnson and General Clay departed from Andrews Air Base for Bonn. In a brief departure statement, Mr. Johnson said he was going to Berlin to assure the West Berliners of America's "firm determination to use whatever means may be necessary to fulfil our pledge to preserve their freedom and their ties with the free world." General Clay made no statement.

In Germany, announcement of Johnson's mission had an immediate and heartening effect. Chancellor Adenauer applauded the move and said that the West German government warmly welcomed the Vice President's visit. Mayor Brandt expressed his "unlimited pleasure" at the announcement. "The people of Berlin," he said, "will show President Kennedy's representative how welcome he is in Berlin, and the Soviet Union will correctly understand this trip."

Earlier in the day, both the Chancellor and Mayor Brandt spoke before a belatedly called special session of the Bundestag. Neither brought up the subject of economic reprisals, although Brandt repeated once more his appeal for "convincing, non-military countermeasures." He said he was not reproaching the Allies but that the situation demanded "visible signs of Allied presence and Allied rights and above all, political initiatives." The Mayor also repeated his request that the garrison in Berlin be reinforced.

For the Communists, Friday was also a busy day. Shortly after
midnight East German workmen began construction of a six-foot high concrete wall in the Potsdamer Platz. During the day other stretches of the wall went up replacing the improvised barbed wire entanglements strung earlier in the week. Thousands of workmen were reported at work on the project. Defecting East German policemen said that orders had been issued to complete construction of the wall along the entire 28-mile sector border by Monday. Allied officials watched the wall's progress without comment. In contrast to the afternoon of August 13, at no time did responsible officials in Berlin recommend to the various capitals that action be taken to interfere with the wall's construction.*

On Friday, Colonel Andrei Solovyev also rejected the protest of the Allied Commandants regarding the sealing of the East sector border. The protest, Solovyev said, was “completely unfounded.”

At the same time Solovyev was acting, Moscow likewise was rejecting the Western notes of the day before. These notes, said Moscow, were “without foundation” and were “categorically rejected by the Soviet Government.” The length of the Soviet reply, almost 3,000 words, indicates that it had been prepared sometime previously and had been kept on hand for the use at the proper time. For the most part it was another attempt to justify the Soviet stand on Berlin, and catalogued

* At his Press Conference on January 15, 1962, President Kennedy was asked specifically about the wall's construction and whether intervention had been recommended. The question, and Mr. Kennedy's answer, were as follows:

Q.—Mr. President, criticism that we did not tear down the Berlin wall seems to be increasing rather than decreasing. . . . I don't recall that you have ever publicly discussed this particular phase of the question. Do you think it would be helpful for you to do so now?

A.—Well, I haven't discussed it but I stated that no one at that time in any position of responsibility—and I would use that term—either in the West Berlin American contingent, in West Berlin, France, or Great Britain, suggested that the United States or other countries go in and tear down the wall.

The Soviet Union had had a de facto control for many years, stretching back to the late 40s in East Berlin. It has been turned over as a capital for East Germany a long time ago. And the United States has a very limited force surrounded by a great many divisions, and we are going to find ourselves severely challenged to maintain what we have considered to be our basic rights—which is our presence in West Berlin and the right of access to West Berlin, and the freedom of the people of West Berlin.

But in my judgment, I think that you could have had a very violent reaction which might have taken us down a very rocky road. And I think it was for that reason and because it was recognized by those people in positions of responsibility that no recommendation was made along the lines you have suggested at that time. Hindsight is . . .
in detail alleged Western violations to the city’s four-power status. The responsibility for the East German sealing of the border between East and West Berlin was laid directly on the Western powers. Their subversive activities, Moscow said, had made the “protective measures on the border of the German Democratic Republic” necessary. The measures, it was announced once more, would remain in effect until the conclusion of a German peace treaty and “the normalization of the situation in West Berlin” on that basis.

Shortly after the delivery of the Russian notes, Walter Ulbricht delivered a victory address to the East German people. Ulbricht’s tone was one of elation. The border closure he said had “cleansed the atmosphere.” “We have succeeded in getting the war center of West Berlin under control.” Ulbricht spoke for more than an hour. He made repeated attacks on the West, and especially on Mayor Brandt. In conclusion, Ulbricht stated that “our measures have shown even to those who did not believe it before the true balance of power in the world.”

Fortunately, announcement of the visit of Vice President Johnson and General Clay took some of the sting out of Ulbricht’s words. Western inaction at this point very definitely would have caused a major panic in Berlin. West Berlin officials already were reporting temporary shortages of certain staples in various retail stores because of anxious buying by excited housewives. While the city itself had supplies enough to last over nine months, popular morale would have sustained it for only a fraction of that time.

At six o’clock Saturday morning the battle group President Kennedy had ordered to Berlin began to roll. Shortly after six A.M. public information officers at USAREUR Headquarters in Heidelberg disclosed that the unit involved was the 1st Battle Group, 18th Infantry, from nearby Mannheim. The route of march would take the battle group along the West German autobahn from Mannheim to Frankfurt and Kassel, and then along the Harz mountains to Braunschweig (Brunswick). It would bivouac in Braunschweig for the night, enter East Germany at Helmstedt early Sunday morning and be in Berlin shortly

* The 18th Infantry was the closest American battle group to Berlin. The northern portion of the U.S. defense area in Germany is held largely by armored units and while these could have been moved, it was no doubt felt easier to transport infantry troops in trucks than it would have been to place the tanks and personnel carriers of an armored battalion on the road. (A battle group, it should be noted, is a unit of organization peculiar to the American infantry. Armored units are grouped into battalions and combat commands.)
after noon. Although no difficulty was expected on the move through East Germany, United States Army Commander in Europe, General Bruce C. Clarke, moved with a small command group to the Helmstedt area Saturday afternoon. Military and West German police took over the problem of traffic control along the entire route from Mannheim to Helmstedt and energetically kept the column moving. Nineteen hours after leaving Mannheim the last vehicle of the 18th Infantry closed in Braunschweig.

While the 18th Infantry was on the road, Vice President Johnson and General Clay landed in Bonn. They conferred with Chancellor Adenauer for over two hours. After lunch Johnson and Clay departed for Berlin. The Chancellor, who himself had not yet been to Berlin since August 13, requested to accompany the mission but Vice President Johnson politely declined. The German election campaign was hot enough, Johnson felt, without making it appear that the United States was taking sides. The flight, he told Adenauer, had been intended as a purely American affair.

Vice President Johnson landed at Tempelhof airport in Berlin shortly after two p.m. As soon as the wheels of his plane touched down a massive demonstration of solidarity began. Mayor Brandt was on hand to meet him. Together they reviewed an honor guard of American troops and West Berlin police. The Vice President spoke briefly; his words were moving and to the point, and already the morale of the city was recovering. The United States, Johnson said, would stand with Berlin in the defense of freedom. "We remember your ordeals, we honor your fortitude, and we are with you in the determination to defend your liberty and the high and holy cause of human freedom."

The Vice President and Mayor Brandt then led a motorcade from Tempelhof to City Hall. In spite of a steady rain which had kept up all morning, more than 400,000 people lined the route, many openly weeping. When the motorcade had gone less than a mile, Johnson and Brandt stepped from their car and began to walk. They moved slowly through the huge crowd shaking hands as they went. It was a moment of intense emotion in a city long accustomed to great emotions.

The party moved on to the newly built wall in the Potsdamer Platz; Johnson studied it closely for over ten minutes and the cavalcade resumed. At City Hall waited 300,000 people in a mood even more charged than that of those who had lined the route. The Vice Presi-
dent himself was now close to tears. His presence had had an electric effect.

Mayor Brandt spoke first. "On Wednesday we stood here and called out to the world for our brothers in the East. The dispatch of American troops and this visit are the answer." The crowd raised a tremendous cheer.

Lyndon Johnson then spoke. The fact that he said nothing new nor promised any strikingly bold action did not bother the Berliners. They were happy that he was there and that their link to the free world had been demonstrated. Six days before, of course, would have been better but the important thing now was that America had acted.

To the crowd, and later that evening before a special session of the West Berlin Parliament, Vice President Johnson renewed America's pledge to stand by the city. His words were not the words of diplomatic nicety but of a man who now felt the importance of the events about him. Doubtless, they were also words which the Communists would understand. Quoting the American Declaration of Independence, Johnson said—"To the survival and to the creative future of this city we Americans have pledged, in effect, what our ancestors pledged in forming the United States: 'our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.'"

After Vice President Johnson had spoken Mayor Brandt introduced General Clay. Although the Vice President was the star of the day, the Berliners had a special, and perhaps, a much deeper affection for their old friend. Their ovation was tumultuous. "Here stands the man," Brandt said, "who helped to save our lives then, together with the unforgotten Ernst Reuter." According to nearby witnesses the General was also close to tears. Blushing at the personal demonstration for himself, Clay told the crowd:

I want to say how wonderful it is to see proud and still free looks on the faces of the people of West Berlin. Thanks to your courage, with the support of my own countrymen and the support of all freedom-loving people, what we started together twelve years ago we will finish together and Berlin will still be free.

When the speeches were over, the German police band broke into the Star Spangled Banner followed by the Deutschland Lied and Berliner Luft. From the tower of the Schöneberger Rathaus waved four flags: two American, one German and one from Berlin. From inside
the tower, the Freedom Bell, installed after the blockade, rang out loudly. For the Berliners, and indeed, for the entire free world, it had been a great day. If possible, Sunday was even greater. Shortly before one P.M. the first elements of the 18th Infantry rolled into Berlin. Vice President Johnson and thousands of enthusiastic Berliners were on hand to greet them. People once more lined the streets and pelted the trucks with bouquets of flowers as the column quickly made its way from the American checkpoint at Drei Linden to McNair Barracks. From a reviewing stand on the parade ground at McNair Barracks—the same reviewing stand from which General Omar Bradley had welcomed the Second Armored Division into Berlin sixteen years before—Vice President Johnson told the arriving troops that they were there as a symbol of America’s promise to remain in Berlin “no matter what course things run.”

After a short rest, the soldiers remounted their vehicles for a parade through the city. Up Clay Allee, down the Kurfürstendamm, into the Tauentzienstrasse the column moved, everywhere accompanied by ringing ovations from a grateful populace. Colonel Grover S. Johns, the veteran commander of the battle group, said it was “the most exciting and impressive reception I’ve ever seen with the possible exception of the liberation of France.”

Sunday evening, as the emotion packed day drew to a close, Vice President Johnson remarked that “we all feel better now.” In addition to welcoming the reinforcements from the 18th Infantry, Johnson had kept up an almost round-the-clock tour of the city. He also managed a seventy-five minute private talk with Mayor Brandt from which both emerged beaming. “There are absolutely no differences between us,” the Vice President told waiting newsmen. Johnson had advised Mayor Brandt that the United States planned no additional measures at this time in Berlin and also handed him President Kennedy’s reply to the Mayor’s earlier letter. Although its contents were never made public, little secret has been made that the President’s message contained some rather sharp language. It had been drafted at Mr. Rusk’s special direction in Washington and to a large extent reflected the views which had dictated the earlier policy of the Administration. Lyndon Johnson by this time had formed perhaps a better judgment of the situation and advised the Mayor not to be too upset about the letter.

At four A.M. Monday morning Vice President Johnson’s party de-
parted for home. The two and a half days had been well spent, and the morale of the Berliners—"our first line of defense"—had been restored. More important perhaps, a responsible member of the Administration had seen for himself the situation in Berlin and could add his voice to the President's councils. General Clay, of course, was no stranger to the problems of dealing with the Russians over the divided city and no doubt contributed his own advice that we should take a firm stand.

Official American thinking regarding the situation in Berlin at this time actually was divided into two schools. The first, and the dominant school within the Administration, nominally headed by Mr. Rusk, included Adlai Stevenson, "Chip" Bohlen, Senators Fulbright and Mansfield, most of the political appointees in the State Department at the level of Assistant Secretary and above, and Ted Sorensen, Walt Rostow and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., on the President's personal staff. Generally speaking, they believed that the Allied position in Berlin was based on three things: first, the right of free access; second, the right to keep troops there; and third, the continued economic and political viability of the Western sectors. In Mr. Rusk's terminology, these items were the "heart of the matter" in Berlin and therefore what the West should defend. The border closure, it was felt, did not affect these basic points. Indeed, now that the refugee problem had finally been settled, the Rusk-Stevenson-Bohlen school believed that it might be possible to conclude a mutually acceptable arrangement over West Berlin with the Russians on a long term basis. These negotiations would naturally involve some give and take but this was thought to be justified if a lasting settlement could be achieved. Among those items that might be conceded—and these limits varied—were a reduction in the size of the garrison (the recent increase would make this even easier); the liquidation of RIAS and other related "irritants"; the total separation of West Berlin from the Federal Republic; and perhaps, reconsideration of the Rapacki Plan for a neutralized zone in Central Europe.

Seen in the larger framework of foreign policy in general, the advocates of the "soft-line" urgently sought to improve diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and felt that this could be achieved through "meaningful" negotiations. Indeed, to these advisers the absolute horror of nuclear war made any other course unthinkable. Thus, since there was no "rational" alternative to negotiations, the mere fact that discussions were going on was considered a virtue; as having an intrinsic
value of its own regardless of the subject discussed. It was this sacra-
mental view of negotiations that characterized the Rusk-Stevenson-
Bohlen school within the Administration, and all of its members were
ranged somewhere along this continuum. The Soviet Union was looked
on as a tough but nevertheless reasonable adversary with whom one
could carry on a meaningful dialogue—just as Disraeli or Palmerston
could have done with the Czars. This view was supported by the nu-
merous Kremlinologists who professed to see in the post-Stalinist de-
velopment of Russia a significant liberalization of communism, as well
as by the serious internal rifts within the Sino-Soviet bloc which were
everyday becoming more evident. Khrushchev’s pleas for “peaceful
coexistence” thus tended to be accepted at face value. In Secretary
Rusk’s phrase, the United States should “always be willing to go the
last mile” to make negotiations possible.

Also, many of the members of this “soft-line” school were occupying
high executive positions for the first time. An overwhelming pre-
ponderance of them hailed directly from university campuses, or were
writers and men of letters—all honorable professions, but professions
(in the words of one contemporary critic) “preoccupied with words,
prone to regard verbalizing as completed action.” The propensity to
debate was thus an inborn characteristic of many on the New Frontier,
and even President Kennedy traced his governmental experience to
the United States Senate, a body long distinguished for its rhetorical
tradition, where responsibility rarely transcends the oral level. It was
perhaps only natural then that during the first year of their stewardship
many in the Administration should look at the cold war simply as an-
other dispute amenable to discursive solution. According to the Rusk-
Stevenson-Bohlen school, “brinkmanship” in any form was to be
avoided; detachment and objectivity to be encouraged. But the de-
tached and disinterested approach was particularly subject to error
when it came to dealing with Berlin. The questions of sector bounda-
ries, free access, troop levels, etc., were charged with a significance
penetrating to the very roots of the Western Alliance, and could not be
looked at “with the calm detachment . . . of a city planner talking
about the defects of the municipal franchise of Montclair, New
Jersey.”

* Dean Acheson to the Legislators of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization,
November 18, 1959.
At the time of the border closure in East Berlin, however, it was the Stevenson-Bohlen view that prevailed in Washington. Its proponents considered the continued stream of refugees as perhaps the major source of tension in Berlin, and therefore the major stumbling block to reopening negotiations. If this exodus could somehow be shut off, then the way would be open for fruitful discussions. Since every sign pointed to an eventual East German border closure anyway, it was tacitly agreed between Washington and the other Allied capitals that no Western opposition should be offered when the move was finally made. This agreement was ratified at the meeting of the Foreign Ministers in Paris, and dictated the initial Allied response on August 13 and the days immediately following. Great Britain and the Adenauer government were in complete accord with the Administration position although for political reasons the West Germans were considerably more circumspect in saying so. France, though opposed to opening negotiations, was not opposed to shutting off the flow of refugees for its own sake. First, General De Gaulle agreed that tensions might be reduced. Second, and here one must appreciate De Gaulle's overriding sense of history, the movement of German peoples out of Central Germany, he felt, must be checked so that a vacuum for Slavic expansion would not be created. In the long run, according to De Gaulle, a halting of the westward migration of the East German refugees might be important in securing the German frontier on the Oder—a scheme he had long advocated.

Thus, when the East Germans did strike, the West stood by and did nothing. The formal protest sent three days later was strictly for appearances. No concerted effort to reopen the border was ever considered and the idea of countermeasures caused only alarm. Not until the situation in West Berlin became truly critical was this policy seriously questioned. Then, it was questioned not by the school that had developed it but by the opposing group which had reluctantly acquiesced to its adoption. For Stevenson and Schlesinger, Willy Brandt was still a wild man shouting fire in a crowded theater. The best indication that a shift had occurred, however, was the return of General De Gaulle to Paris on Wednesday. By this time it was obvious that all was not well.

Opposed to the Rusk-Stevenson-Bohlen group on Berlin was the so-called “hard-line school.” This school centered on the various “cold war” planning staffs in Washington, and for the most part represented
a continuation of the policies of the two previous Administrations. Un-
disputed leader of the hard-line school was former Secretary of State
Dean Acheson. Other prominent members included Paul Nitze, Gen-
eral Taylor, the uniformed service chiefs, many of the civilian leaders
in the Pentagon, and the pick and shovel men on the German desk in
the State Department.

The influence of the hard-line school on American policy was prob-
ably greatest during the early days of the Kennedy Administration.
Certain of the hard-line advocates, the Joint Chiefs of Staff in particu-
lar, later became seriously discredited in the eyes of the White House
as a result of the Cuban episode. Their views on Berlin were therefore
discounted accordingly. Former Secretary Acheson, who up until
Vienna had been the President's personal adviser on Berlin, became the
victim of a palace vendetta and fell from grace shortly after the Presi-
dent's return. President Kennedy himself had been severely shaken by
his meeting with Khrushchev in Vienna and afterwards desperately
sought to reduce whatever tensions might exist in U.S.-Soviet relations.
As a result, by the middle of July the influence of the hard-line school
had become minimal. The Stevenson-Bohlen policy leading toward
negotiations was adopted, and the possibility of an East German border
closure was accepted as a contribution to that end.

The position of the hard-line advisers was about the same as that of
General De Gaulle and Mayor Brandt. Negotiations with Russia over
Berlin were not considered desirable since the West could go no way
but down. The status quo in Berlin represented a major victory for the
West. As long as the status quo remained, Ulbricht could not consoli-
date his hold on East Germany, and without East Germany, Khru-
shchev could not consolidate his hold on Eastern Europe. Berlin, in
short, was an offensive weapon—an asset rather than a liability. It was
therefore in our interests to do everything possible to maintain the
present situation and to keep the bone in Khrushchev's throat where it
belonged. Admittedly, to do this involved a willingness to "go to the
brink" if necessary. The continuing pressure on Khrushchev that Berlin
represented, however, made this risk worth while.

This reasoning was based on the belief that the Western position in

* While General De Gaulle may have favored ending the flow of refugees for its
own sake, he strongly opposed negotiations over Berlin and was firmly against
Western concessions. It is in this latter, and indeed, more fundamental connection,
that his position was similar to the hard-line school in Washington.
Berlin included a great deal more than the so-called “heart of the matter” items listed by Secretary Rusk. In fact, every element of the existing four-power status in Berlin was considered essential. As soon as the first dent was made, it was felt, a never ending process of attrition would begin and Berlin’s value would be nullified. It goes without saying that the right of free movement within the city, the right which insured the continued access to West Berlin by the peoples of the East, was one of the major points to be preserved. The complete adoption of the Stevenson-Bohlen policy following Vienna therefore represented a major defeat for the hard-line advocates. The West’s position in Berlin came to be looked on by the Kennedy Administration as a burden rather than an advantage. Accordingly, American policy became directed toward unloading that burden.

But none of this should be considered as ameliorating the role of President Kennedy as the final arbiter of American foreign policy. No President in history has been so vocal in his determination to be “his own Secretary of State,” and never before have deskmen at the State Department had their work so well supervised “all the way to the top.” * Indeed, it would be a disservice both to the President and to his advisers (both “hard-line” and “soft-line”) if anything in this discussion should be taken to indicate that U.S. policy on the New Frontier is anything other than that desired by the President himself.

As has been indicated, immediate Western action—or rather, immediate Western inaction—following the border closure was a direct result of this policy. With the flow of refugees halted, the way to negotiations with Khrushchev was felt to be open. As Chalmers Roberts of The Washington Post wrote of the border closure on August 18:

No one is saying so out loud but there is a considerable belief here that the Communist move in effect removes one of the issues in dispute at any future East-West negotiations. Nikita Khrushchev has been demanding that the West end the use of Berlin as an escape route for East Germans. Now he has done it himself.

The delayed pro-forma Western protest, the long period of official silence, the belated attempt to portray the Communist action as a “sign of weakness” were all natural adjuncts of this policy. Kennedy’s sting-

ing reply to Mayor Brandt likewise resulted from assuming that the closing of the border had been to the West's advantage. The reports from West Berlin speaking of the need for action and of the deteriorating popular morale were at first dismissed as momentary phenomena. Only when these reports persisted, and indeed, grew ever more urgent, was anything other than tacit acknowledgment of the East German action ever considered. The proposals of the West Berlin government were then scrutinized with care. Vice President Johnson was dispatched to Berlin and, over the reported objections of the Stevenson-Bohlen school, the 18th Infantry moved to the city's reinforcement.

On his arrival in Berlin, Vice President Johnson shared the feeling that the border closure could be made to work to the West's advantage. His purpose, as he expressed it, was to reassure the Berliners and to have a look for himself. He did both, and as a result, when he reported to President Kennedy in Washington, Johnson was in a position to advise the President of the extreme precariousness of the West's new position. The West Berliners, he emphasized, were disenchanted, and the whole episode had been woefully misjudged from Washington. It would be some time, perhaps even years, he indicated, before the West Berliners would recover from the shocks of the past week. Indeed, whether West Berlin would ever recover from the shock of Western inaction was at best, problematical. If Communist pressure should suddenly tighten again, a full blown panic would likely ensue.37

Clearly, Lyndon Johnson had been deeply moved by his visit to Berlin. He returned, as he said, "with a feeling of unlimited gratitude to the people of West Berlin and West Germany and with a feeling of unlimited compassion for the suffering now being endured by the people of East Berlin and East Germany. . . ." His arrival statement at Andrews Air Base eloquently expressed this feeling; it stands in marked contrast both to the announcement of Mr. Rusk eight days before, and to the policy which Washington had pursued up until his visit. Said Johnson:

It is impossible to give an adequate picture, in these few words, of the courage and the dedication to freedom which sustain the people of West Berlin in these difficult days. They are being tested and harassed by Communist power; but their heroic conduct in this emergency has become one of the major assets of the free world. . . .
No one who has seen and talked with the refugees from East Germany, as I have done, can fail to realize what a profound human tragedy is involved.

That realization must heighten the urgency with which we consider our own responsibilities, and the responsibilities of our Allies, in dealing with the issues raised by the Berlin crisis.  

Following Vice President Johnson's first-hand report, the Western attitude stiffened considerably. President Kennedy announced from the White House that the next weeks and months would be difficult "in maintaining the freedom of West Berlin, but maintain it we will." This remark represented a decided departure from the earlier idea that the border closure had represented a net gain for the West, and indeed, was the first public statement made by the President since the border closure went into effect nine days before.

Although the pressure for negotiations continued, a number of new actions were now taken to buttress the Allied position in West Berlin. On August 21, when a battalion of the East German Army suddenly appeared across the border, the British military command in Berlin dispatched a company of combat infantry and four fifty-ton Centurion tanks to the West Berlin sector boundary. The British action represented the first appearance of Allied military forces along the West Berlin border since the East German operations of August 13 had begun. The company remained in place overnight and was joined the following day by the entire British garrison. As a spokesman at British Headquarters in Berlin was quoted as saying, "we decided to show the flag."

In Washington on August 21, the State Department also announced that a previously negotiated commercial air pact with the Soviet Union would not be signed "in the light of the over-all world situation." The following day, West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer flew to Berlin to inspect the Wall and discuss the situation with West Berlin officials. The Chancellor was met at Tempelhof by Mayor Brandt, but the atmosphere between the two was reported as distinctly "cool." At several stops along the sector boundary the Chancellor was greeted by an East German loudspeaker car hurling abuse. At other points, however, where Communist police were fewer, he was greeted by crowds of several hundred East Berliners who had gathered to wave handker-
chiefs across the border. According to Flora Lewis, the indefatigable correspondent of the Washington Post Foreign Service, many could be seen openly weeping.\textsuperscript{42}

As the West was moving to counteract the effects of the border closure, the East Germans stepped-up their measures to complete the separation of the city. Many of these measures were clearly designed to probe the willingness of the West to respond. On August 21, all residents of East Berlin whose houses fronted on the sector border were dispossessed and relocated. Two days later the East German Interior Ministry announced that the number of crossing points into East Berlin was being reduced from twelve to seven. Of the seven, four would be for West Berliners, two for West Germans, and one for “foreigners” and Allied personnel. The East German decree was accompanied by a new order banning all persons in the West from approaching the Wall closer than a distance of 100 meters. This ban, the announcement said, would be rigidly enforced by East German police with whatever means were necessary.

This time, Western reaction was immediate, and within hours after the 100-meter ban was announced, the three Allied Commandants had met, ordered a full alert of Western forces and dispatched 1,000 troops supported by tanks to defend the integrity of the sector boundaries up to the very wall itself. By one p.m., Wednesday afternoon, a vigorous protest note had been drafted and delivered to Soviet Headquarters in Karlshorst. The protest concluded with the statement that the East German ban was illegal and that “the Commandants are taking the necessary action to insure the security and integrity of the sector borders.”

The decision of the Commandants to take immediate action over the 100-meter ban had not been referred to their governments for approval.\textsuperscript{43} The question of the reduction of crossing points, however, was another matter. In Washington, despite Vice President Johnson’s urgent report of Monday, the Administration had decided to accept this latest East German affront as merely an extension of the earlier restrictions. While Paris and London were both reported adamant for firm countermeasures, the New York Times said that Washington had decided vital Western rights still had not been affected. After describing the so-called “heart of the matter” views of the Administration, the Times said:
In the view of the highest policy makers here, the new limitations on the movements of West Germans, West Berliners and Allied diplomats and soldiers who wish to enter East Berlin do not compromise any of these vital interests.

On the contrary, the policymakers tended at first to regard the new restrictions as merely an extension of the erection of Communist barricades between the two parts of Berlin.44

On Thursday, August 24, the probing action of the East German regime continued. Three American Army buses were held up for over an hour at the Friedrichstrasse checkpoint—the only checkpoint still open to Allied personnel—when East German police demanded to inspect the identity papers of the soldiers aboard. Later in the day, two American soldiers on duty at the border were sprayed with water from a Communist water truck. The stream of water subsided only when a nearby American officer reached for a tear gas grenade strapped to his uniform. That evening, East German border guards fired on and killed a refugee trying to make his escape to the British sector across a canal near the Reichstag. Although shots had been fired before, it was the first time a refugee had been killed since the border was closed eleven days before.

The following day, August 25, 1961, East German police fired warning shots over the heads of a crowd in the French sector when they did not respond to an order to move back from the wall. West Berlin police then stepped in and moved the crowd “for their own safety.” In two other incidents, East German police threw tear gas grenades into crowds of West Berliners along the border who were jeering at a speech of Walter Ulbricht being broadcast over East German loudspeakers. Ulbricht had returned to his old game of announcing that following a peace treaty, all access to Berlin would be placed in the hands of the East German regime.

In Washington meanwhile, pressure for negotiations was mounting. Following the movement of Allied troops to the sector boundary, Secretary Rusk became worried that a major conflict would be touched off in Berlin by “some PFC on the border.” Senator Mansfield once more advocated that the West begin negotiations on Berlin immediately,45 and at the White House, Administration spokesman Pierre Salinger, reflecting the Rusk position which had been adopted by the U.S., denied a report that General Clay was being considered for reassignment to Berlin.46
But in Berlin the renewed Communist offensive was taking its toll. Morale, which had been given so great a boost by Vice President Johnson's visit, was beginning to sag dangerously. And the persistence with which Washington pressed for negotiations in the face of continuing Communist encroachments was again being equated in Berlin with a willingness to surrender vital Western rights. The lack of more positive Western countermeasures to the latest East German assaults, and particularly, the acceptance of the reduction of crossing points from 12 to 7, was once more giving the West Berliners a feeling of alarm.

On August 26, the West attempted to calm these fears. The three Western Ambassadors in Bonn delivered identical personal notes to the Soviet Ambassador in East Berlin protesting the latest East German moves and announcing that any attempt to enforce the 100-meter ban “could only have the most serious consequences.” Heartening though the protests were, the Berliners could not help noticing that they were made in the form of personal letters from the Ambassadors and not as official communications from their respective capitals. Instead of raising the city's spirits, the protests thus served to lower West Berlin morale all the more.

Two days later Secretary Rusk announced from New York that negotiations with Russia over Berlin were definite. Mr. Rusk's announcement came following a two-hour meeting with Adlai Stevenson in the latter's Waldorf-Astoria apartment. The time and place of the negotiations, Rusk said, had not been worked out but they would probably take place when the UN General Assembly session convened on September 19. Since President De Gaulle was still adamantly against negotiations, it was assumed that the conversations would be begun by the United States alone.47

Rusk's announcement indicated once more that the basic policy of the Administration had not changed. Negotiations were still being considered by Washington as the surest way of reaching a settlement in Berlin. Whatever may have been the results of Vice President Johnson's visit, it did not dissuade the President from this basic tenet.

The following day, on August 29, in what may have been a severe

* The fact that the protests were delivered to the Soviet Ambassador in East Berlin rather than the Soviet Ambassador in Bonn was also considered dangerously close to a diplomatic recognition of the East German regime.
shock to the Administration, Chancellor Adenauer wrote to President Kennedy advising him that the continuation of Western reverses in Berlin was leading to a dangerous revival in neutralist sentiment throughout West Germany. According to Adenauer, and certainly De Gaulle and Brandt would have agreed, the present Western policy in Berlin was endangering the entire Western alliance. The dangers, as Adenauer was reported to have listed them, were that the Communists would continue to nibble away at West Berlin, or that the Allied position there would "be seriously weakened through negotiations with the Soviet Union." If the Communists were allowed to get away with any new attacks on the city after their success in sealing the border, the Chancellor said that a panic flight of West Berliners would probably result. The impact of such an event in West Germany he said was of great concern.  

Already, according to Adenauer, the failure of the West to react to the border closing had been followed in West Germany by the sprouting of neutralist sentiment. Some people he said were once more beginning to question whether Germany should have joined the North Atlantic Community. Indeed, although he did not say so directly, the Chancellor himself was being vigorously attacked in West Germany for the weak Allied stand and was again being referred to in the scornful phrase of the late Kurt Schumacher as the "Chancellor of the Allies." Adenauer concluded his message by saying that unless the West showed a noticeable ability to defend its position in West Berlin, a desire for some kind of an accommodation with Russia, perhaps even a neutral role between East and West, would become a serious factor in West German politics. Immediate countermeasures, he suggested, were essential.  

With the West German election less than three weeks off, Adenauer's letter had a profound impact in Washington. Within twenty-four hours President Kennedy announced that Lucius Clay was returning to Berlin. At a news conference attended by a record 437 newsmen, the President said that he was appointing General Clay as his personal representative in Berlin "to add to our resources of judgment and action." The appointment would become effective immediately following the West German election.  

In Berlin and West Germany the news of Clay's appointment was greeted with universal acclaim. To every West German and West
Berliner General Lucius D. Clay was a personal hero. If General Eisenhower could be said to be their conqueror, General Clay was their savior. In West Berlin, Mayor Brandt said that the city would welcome him “like a home-coming son.” The appointment said Brandt, “makes unmistakably clear the determination of the United States to defend the freedom of Berlin.”

With the appointment of General Clay the defense of Berlin had come full circle. The man who had saved the city for the West once before was again being called into service. This time, however, he would find his role more difficult. No longer the American proconsul of a conquered country, General Clay was to go to Berlin as a largely unofficial Presidential Ambassador. His appointment, it was stressed, would not offset the existing Command structure in Berlin. Unlike the crisis of 1948, Lucius Clay would now find himself at the operating end of a chain-of-command stretching through a myriad of bureaucratic labyrinths. His every action would be minutely controlled from a seat of government more than three thousand miles away. From a seat of government, it perhaps should be added, that no longer saw the Berlin crisis in the same manner as did he.