

Lessons from Berlin: a review

Willy Brandt, *The Ordeal of Coexistence*

Hans Speier, *Divided Berlin: The Anatomy of Soviet Political Blackmail*

Jean Edward Smith, *The Defense of Berlin*

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Berlin is now and has been ever since the end of World War II the focal point in the Cold War with the Soviet Union. These three excellent books, approaching the problem from different angles, analyze and dissect its various aspects but all come to about the same conclusion—namely, that we should be very wary of Soviet offers of coexistence and that only military power has any effect on the Russians. These and other conclusions emerge from a review of Soviet–Allied relations over Berlin in the period since the end of the war.

The book by the mayor of Berlin, Willy Brandt, is based on his Pollak lectures at Harvard in October 1962, “augmented by a third section concerning the German problem in the perspective of coexistence. This section was edited after the Cuban crisis.”

Essentially, Mayor Brandt offers comments on many subjects in addition to coexistence, but his efforts at clarification of the term “coexistence” as used by the Soviets are not only perceptive but constitute the main thrust of this little book. “Coexistence,” he writes, “cannot be a synonym for maintenance of the status quo.” Nor can it be as defined by the Soviets. “Peaceful coexistence Soviet style means the militant pursuit of Soviet aims.” It does not imply

mutual toleration. “Soviet coexistence is thus not coexistence in its proper meaning—not really peaceful but, on the contrary, militant. . . .” “To this day Khrushchev and his followers still believe in total victory. It still determines their methods and is the major motivating force behind their policy.”

Brandt is critical of Western negotiations with the Russians. “It seems to me,” he writes, “that during the past years the political practice of the West has frequently suffered from an insufficient ability to conduct realistic negotiations.” Certainly the record as presented in the other two books under review bear out this comment.

Altogether, the mayor, full of experience with the Russians, presents much wisdom and good advice and, with reference to the German problem as a whole, hopefully concludes: “We in Germany have our contribution to make to a development in which, one day, the Soviet Union will recognize that it is better to have a treaty-made relationship to 70 million Germans than to have only a handful to trust, a handful who can only pretend to speak for 17 million Germans.”

Hans Speier, an old and experienced hand in German affairs, also demonstrating an excellent understanding of the Soviets, pre-

sents a meticulous and incisive review of the ins and outs of the Berlin problem—citing chapter and verse. Utilizing principally the Soviet ultimatum of 1958, the author gives an admirable exposé of Soviet propaganda and negotiating tactics. It is very helpful and stimulating to have the events surrounding and following this Soviet note rehearsed with such skill and penetration.

Concluding with a postscript which was written after the building of the Wall in Berlin, Professor Speier has some wise comments to make. "The question remains," he writes, "whether on balance it is Communism or the free West that benefited more from the events of August, 1961. The United States had reasserted, by action taken with the support of Great Britain and France, that it would not surrender the West's rights of presence in West Berlin and of access to the city. They put Communist respect for these rights to a test. The Western powers were successful, for the time being, in reaffirming the status quo in West Berlin. By contrast, the Communists had taken some probing action in the city that affected the position and policy of the Western allies adversely, at least in the short run, and they had succeeded in changing the status quo of divided Berlin by defying the West."

The third book, by Jean Edward Smith, is essentially a careful chronological review of the Berlin problem from the prewar days of negotiation to 1963. It contains an extensive bibliography, five useful appendixes, and an excellent index. A very revealing map of Germany showing President Roosevelt's ideas of dividing Germany is not without interest. The book will be a valuable reference source on Berlin for some time, because it contains the most complete and analytical review which we have had of the postwar developments in Berlin in their legal, diplomatic, and political settings.

Utilizing the voluminous documentation and commentaries, the personal accounts and scholarly studies which have appeared, the author in the most readable style puts Berlin in its proper perspective in world affairs.

Because Berlin is focal, there is little treatment of the evolution of German self-government in the various zones, the experiment in international government of a defeated nation (the ACC), and of certain periods when Berlin was not a major issue, as for instance 1945 to 1948. But nothing essential is omitted in the whole sad record of Soviet-Western relations in Berlin, and best of all, the interpretations and value judgments are keen and perceptive.

The book ends in chapter 14 with a clear, unvarnished account of American negotiations about Berlin and Germany since the erection of the Wall. This period, since 1961, has not heretofore been so carefully analyzed and it gives one the shivers to recall in detail how dangerous a situation we were in during the early period of the Kennedy administration. If anything stands out in the book, and a great deal does, it is the title of the last chapter: "No Concessions without Counter-Concessions."

In the whole history of relations with the Russians over Berlin, the record, as accurately and completely presented in this well-written book, shows that we must always keep our guard up, that we must immediately respond to any overt move made by the Soviets, preferably within forty-eight hours, and see that our rights are always respected. At any sign of weakness, any little crack in our armor or our determination, the Russians will take immediate advantage.

In reading and reflecting about these three books, several clear conclusions emerge. First of all, Berlin provides perhaps the best case study one can have in

studying Soviet tactics and objectives. Secondly, the contrast between the constancy and firmness of Soviet policy and the ups and downs of American policy becomes crystal clear. To mention Acheson on one side and Rusk-Stevenson-Bohlen on the other is sufficient to establish the point. One cannot look at sector boundaries, free access, troop levels, etc., as Acheson put it, "with the calm detachment of a city planner talking about the defects of the municipal franchise of Montclair, New Jersey." Being firm in 1948 under Truman and Clay, and in 1958 under Eisenhower and Dulles, is balanced before and after the Wall with Kennedy and Rusk.

Again, as Smith emphasizes, to write about Berlin without centering the discussion around General Clay is to miss one of the central points. Many other books have only touched upon the crucial importance of General Clay's contributions at significant turning points in Berlin.

Finally, one cannot review the recent history of Berlin and its people without recognizing the courage and bravery and will to freedom of the people of West Berlin in standing firm in the face of repeated threats to their freedom. "No nation," as Secretary Dillon once put it, "could preserve its faith in collective security if we permitted the courageous people of West Berlin to be sold into slavery." It is also well to realize that without the courage and cooperation of the West Berliners, especially in 1948-49, 1958-59, and 1961-62, our efforts would have failed to stop the Russians.

Hopefully it will continue to be American policy to prevent these brave people from being swallowed up by the Soviet system. But as General Clay has always pointed out, it requires a show of Western determination in order to cause the Communists to back

down, and there is nothing in the record to make one think that the Soviets will be content with the status quo. Having now broken all the important prewar and postwar agreements, including especially those negotiated in Paris in 1949 and in Geneva in 1955, when they "agreed that the settlement of the German question and the reunification of Germany by means of free elections shall be carried out," the Soviets do not fill one with much optimism.

Who would have thought in 1948 of a blockade to starve two million free people into submission? Who would have imagined in 1963 the erection of a wall through the heart of Berlin? Or the continuation in the Soviet Zone, nineteen years after the war, of the same kind of police state that existed under Hitler? In the face of a steadily aggressive position taken by the Soviets, one cannot read the record of Soviet-Western relations over Berlin and Germany without realizing that the West has been exceedingly patient and generous and fair in its negotiations with the Soviets. The wonder is, considering the different positions taken by our Allies at different times, the changing administrations in this country, and the constant "salami" tactics of the Russians, that we still hold our position in West Berlin!

Perhaps Willy Brandt is right in thinking that some day the Soviets will see the error in their policy, and Germany and Berlin will be once more united in freedom and democracy. Meanwhile, it would be well to remember President Truman's terse comment at the time of the blockade in 1948: "We are in Berlin by terms of an agreement and the Russians have no right to get us out by either direct or indirect pressures." This in a few words is the lesson of these three books.

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