

BLOCKADED VICTORS - DIVIDED BERLIN

ONLINE PUBLICATION ACCOMPANYING THE OPEN-AIR EXHIBITION

75 YEARS OF THE AIRLIFT



BLOCKADED VICTORS - DIVIDED BERLIN. 75 YEARS OF THE AIRLIFT

**ONLINE PUBLICATION ACCOMPANYING THE OPEN-AIR EXHIBITION
IN FRONT OF THE TEMPELHOF AIRPORT DEPARTURE CONCOURSE
(FROM 28 JUNE 2023 TO 12 MAY 2024)**

**MILITÄR
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MUSEUM**
Flugplatz Berlin-Gatow

MUSEUM МУЗЕЙ
BERLIN БЕРЛИН
KARLSHORST
КАРЛСХОРСТ



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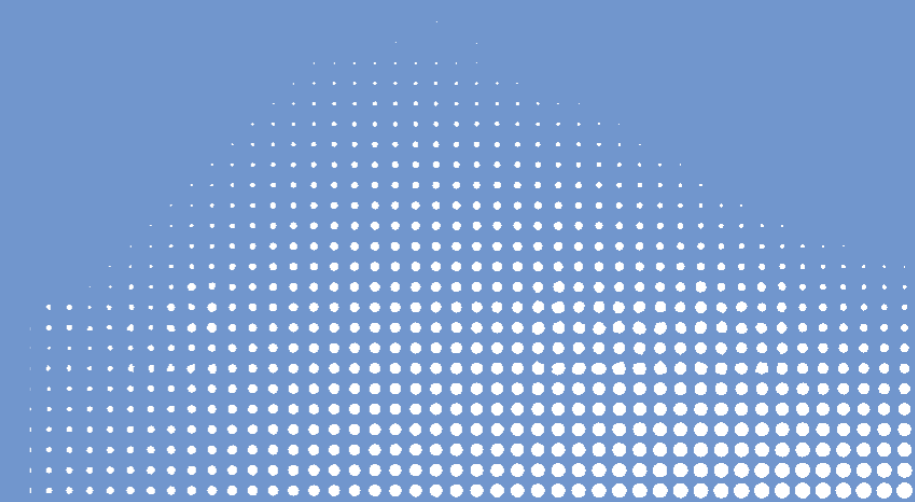
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INTRODUCTION

DORIS MÜLLER-TOOVEY

1948: For many months, aircraft supply a blockaded million-strong city threatened by hunger. With flights leaving every minute, they constantly break records delivering goods, as they rain chocolate and safeguard democracy and peace. In the end, enemies will have become friends. Though nothing is completely wrong about this, it is only part of the story. The narrative just described is well known. Less, however, is known about the complex background circumstances that led to the Soviet blockade of West Berlin and the Anglo-American Airlift. The same holds true for the way these events are connected with the victorious powers' policy on Berlin and Germany, as well as the development of the city. Seventy-five years after the Berlin Blockade and the Airlift, the Bundeswehr Museum of Military History Berlin-Gatow Airfield, the Allied Museum Berlin and the Museum Berlin-Karlshorst have set themselves to expanding the common core narrative of the Airlift's success and locating it within its historical-political context.

The exhibition entitled "Blockaded Victors – Divided Berlin. 75 Years of the Airlift" is an open-air exhibition, held in front of the departure concourse of Tempelhof Airport, free of charge for everyone from 28 June 2023 to 12 May 2024. The title says it all. It refers to the broadened perspective on the core topic and two levels of action and experience: that of the victorious powers and that of the people of Berlin. Blockade and Airlift marked a culmination point in a development that for several years had confronted the victorious powers of World War II – the United States, the United Kingdom, France and the Soviet Union – with fundamental questions about the future political order in Germany and Europe. The former allies in the fight against National Socialist Germany and its expansionist aspirations had turned into opponents in a geostrategic-ideological con-

flict that gained momentum in Europe following the end of World War II. This difficult power-political situation made it increasingly impossible to negotiate a joint policy on Germany and to find a solution for Berlin that satisfied all sides. The differing positions of the victorious powers were mutually incompatible; they "blocked" each other. In the end these conflicting positions saw Germany and Berlin divided into zones and sectors with different political and societal structures. The founding of the two German states in May and October 1949, respectively, cemented this situation.

The present exhibition devotes four large sections to these topics. The first section, "Blockaded Victors", deals with the interests of the four victorious powers, the treatment of the "German question" in the conferences of foreign ministers, the control and administrative bodies of the Allies, and the Soviet blockade of Berlin. The section "Divided Berlin" recapitulates the city's development: from the situation following the end of the war and the division into sectors, to the first elections and the split of the city administration, the currency reform and the supply situation during the Blockade and, finally, to the way this division manifested itself in the founding of the two German states in 1949. The section headed "Airlift" starts off with a look into the disruptions that occurred on the transit routes into Berlin as early as spring 1948 and goes on to discuss the decision of the United States and the United Kingdom to institute an airlift and the colossal logistic enterprise associated with it, the involvement of German civilian workers, as well as the crisis diplomacy that took place in the background. The section of the exhibition headed "Myth and Commemoration" concludes this exhibition and offers a look at those instances and times when the Airlift regained prominence in the culture of remembrance.

It also makes clear that both sides exploited the Airlift for propaganda purposes right from the start.

Seventy-five years ago, the Soviet blockade of West Berlin and the Anglo-American Airlift marked the beginning of what we generally call the Cold War. This term denotes the decades of competition and threatening scenarios between the two superpowers, the United States and Soviet Union, with their different political, societal and economic systems that affected the whole world. In light of current geostrategic developments and the crisis situation in Europe caused by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, and given that it has repeatedly been labelled a new Cold War, it might appear logical to draw a connection between current events and those of 1948–49. Such an approach, however, would fall short of reality and ignore the glaring differences between then and now.

Unlike the Cold War, the current conflict is no global politico-ideological, economic, technological and cultural confrontation, and the global geostrategic situation is a great deal more complex than it was in 1948–49. In the years following World War II, the political and economic situation in Europe was highly volatile. Infrastructure of every kind was largely destroyed, and millions of people had been murdered, killed in war or forced to flee, or at least found themselves in an extremely precarious living situation. The United States was en route to becoming a global superpower, as was the Soviet Union, which moreover had suffered the greatest losses and destruction during the war of extermination waged by Nazi Germany. The leaders of both states considered an open military conflict in Europe, such a short time after World War II and involving a direct confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, too great a risk. Ultimately, the Soviet blockade of the land and water routes leading into West Berlin – as well as the Airlift in response to it – were measures deliberately designed to remain below the threshold of military conflict. Moreover, top-level diplomatic exchange continued in

the background throughout the entire blockade; mediators from both sides had negotiated at the United Nations Headquarters ever since December 1948.

"Blockaded Victors – Divided Berlin. 75 Years of the Airlift" addresses many aspects of the events of 1948–49. In the essays of the present publication, the curators offer more in-depth information on some of the topics addressed in the exhibition. This includes the security situation in Europe following World War II, the motives driving the four victorious powers' actions before, during and after the Berlin crisis, the actual supply situation in the city's Western sectors at that time, and another Airlift topic that keeps attracting controversial debate – the so-called "Backlift". The references listed at the end of each essay also offer an overview of the state of research on the Blockade and the Airlift.

I wish all readers an interesting read and an equally entertaining and enlightening time visiting the exhibition.

BERLIN BLOCKADE | AIRLIFT TO BERLIN (1948-49) - AN ASSESSMENT IN TERMS OF SECURITY POLICY

MARC HANSEN

Initial Situation and Security Interests of the Parties to the Conflict

With the end of World War II, the geopolitical coordinate system had also shifted. The liberal democracies were now engaged in a global confrontation with the community of Communist states led by the Soviet Union. In 1948, the international situation was one of permanent critical tension, even though the United States still firmly believed that – owing to its nuclear monopoly – it could win any future conflict by political means alone, that is, without having to use any direct military force. The blockade of West Berlin was the first real challenge to this point of view as the events around Berlin contained the real threat of direct military conflict between the competing systems, albeit below the nuclear threshold.

As a result of World War II, the Soviet Union had enlarged its territory and was now in a favourable geostrategic position in Central and Eastern Europe. There, the presence of the Soviet Army was an asset for the Soviet leaders, who sought to install governments in Poland, Hungary, Romania and Czechoslovakia that were headed by Communist parties, thus securing political control of this cordon sanitaire, which consisted of politically and economically dependent satellites.

The Berlin Blockade of 1948 was the Soviet Union's attempt to expel the Western Allies at low political cost from Berlin, a city located in the Soviet-controlled eastern part of Germany, and thus lay the foundation – if possible – for politically undermining the Western Allies' presence throughout Germany. This goal of expanding power and influence in Germany and Europe is

indicative of a security approach of the Soviet Union that focused on the preservation of vested interests and the wish for a confrontational interpretation of the "coexistence arrangement" with the Western Allies. The corresponding wish for clear and unambiguous "front lines" without shared reference points with the systemic rival is certainly one geostrategic factor explaining the actions of the Soviet leadership in the conflict over Berlin, quite apart from the obvious political symbolism.

In response to the Blockade, the United States of America and its allies started an unprecedented airlift, known as Operation VITTLES, to provide food, fuel and other vital goods to the city. For the Western Allies, however, VITTLES was not only an enormous logistic effort undertaken in order to mitigate the effects that the Soviet blockade would have on the population of West Berlin. The operation may also be regarded as a security policy signal demonstrating their readiness to defend Western Europe against possible military aggression by the Soviet Union.

After the end of World War II, the security policy of the United States in particular was characterised by the desire to achieve strategic stability in Europe while simultaneously minimising risks to its own global interests. As a geopolitical instrument of peacekeeping in this sense, the United States relied on strengthening a liberal economic system in Europe, combined with a free political and social order. However, when the Soviet Union became increasingly critical of this approach and actively countered it with its alternative communist agenda, the United States developed the concept of actively assuming the role of a "world ordering

power", which not only propagated the aforementioned systemic orientation but also enforced and defended it, politically and militarily. The action taken by the United States in the context of the Blockade and the Airlift is the first example of this.

The British and the French behaviour in that conflict in the post-war years was primarily characterised by their intention to prevent the Soviet Union from becoming the dominant political power in Central Europe. Due to a lack of military and economic resources, however, they believed themselves incapable of direct confrontation. Instead, they sought to push the US commitment in Europe and support the US course of action to the best of their ability with their own means, especially as regards the symbolically charged Berlin issue.

Security Decisions and Military Operations

The political decision-making process within the Soviet leadership to initiate the Berlin Blockade in 1948 was closely linked to the decision of the Western Allies to introduce a new currency in their occupation zones in Germany. The Soviet Union considered this a threat to its interests. The decision to impose the Blockade was made at the highest echelons of the Soviet government, most likely coming from Soviet head of state and general secretary of the party, Joseph V. Stalin himself. The Soviet leadership believed that a prolonged blockade was an adequate political means to force the Western powers to abandon West Berlin. This would, theoretically, enable the Soviet Union to bring East Germany, including all of Berlin, under its political control. Moreover, the Blockade was intended to signal to the Western powers that the Soviet Union would not tolerate any attempts to challenge its authority over its security sphere of interest in Eastern Europe. The Soviet Union undoubtedly had the resources to enforce and secure the blockade by military means.

In light of the conventional military superiority of the Soviet Union, the Western Allies decided

in June 1948 not to react to the Berlin Blockade by deploying ground troops but instead they considered supplying the city by means of strategic air transport. At that time, US President Harry Truman was in the middle of his re-election campaign. His government had come under heavy criticism because, in the eyes of the opposition, it had responded too weakly to the steadily rising Soviet aggression in Europe after the end of World War II. Truman and his advisors therefore apparently considered the Berlin Blockade an opportunity for showing strength and resolution towards the Soviet Union. They also hoped that a successful airlift would bolster the image of the United States in Europe and across the world.

However, the decisive factors driving the political initiation of the Airlift were military-logistic assessments. The staff of General Lucius D. Clay, the military governor of the US occupation zone in Germany, held the opinion that the Berlin Blockade could principally be broken by an airlift. They also believed that an airlift would not only supply West Berlin with the required goods but that it would also be a strategic show of force against the Soviet Union. On 26 June 1948, Truman therefore authorised the initiation of the Airlift. The original plan provided for a three-month airlift, which could be extended if it became clear that the Soviet Union was unwilling to lift its blockade after that time.

The majority of US politicians involved in security affairs considered the establishment of an airlift a reasonable and adequate response designed both to demonstrate the resolution of the United States in light of the Soviet aggression and prevent a humanitarian crisis in West Berlin. Some members of the US military were, however, sceptical about the feasibility and effectiveness of an airlift. They also warned of potential risks. They feared that the Soviet Union would escalate the situation, thus causing a larger conflict. Also, they worried about the strain that an airlift would put on their military resources, especially on the personnel.

In the United Kingdom as well, politicians with sector expertise and higher staff officers generally supported the Airlift. Some in the UK also had reservations, however. The British Royal Air Force played a decisive role in the Airlift, as many sorties were flown by British pilots. In this context, some in the military were worried about the effects the Airlift would have on the country's military resources, which were still extremely limited following the end of World War II, and the associated potential risks of a possible military conflict with the Soviet Union.

The political leadership of the Soviet Union in turn considered the decision to implement the Airlift a provocation. It deplored the violation of Soviet sovereignty rights over East Germany and East Berlin and perceived the measure as a threat to its interests. Stalin accused the United States in particular of "rowdiness" and accused the Western Allies of seeking to provoke a war with the Soviet Union. The Soviet military leaders for their part responded to the Airlift with a show of force, and had Soviet Air Force bombers fly spoof raids on Berlin in September 1948. These and other threatening military gestures were intended to drive home to the Western Allies that the Soviet Union was perfectly willing to escalate the situation if necessary. On the part of the Soviet Union, the entire conflict was characterised by a combination of diplomatic pressure and aggressive military posture. The objective was to effectively disrupt Operation VITTLES and thereby undermine the political willingness to continue it.

The Western Allies' security staff devised a number of measures to resist the Soviet pressures. At a military operational level, they recognised that the Airlift's success depended on careful planning, coordination and execution and therefore strove to optimise the operation as thoroughly as possible. To this end, they established a joint air transport committee that was to monitor the Airlift and coordinate the efforts of the various countries involved. The committee met regularly in order to evalu-

ate the progress made, determine the requirements of West Berlin and, if necessary, adapt the operation. The military leaders also tried to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Airlift over time. They worked towards rationalising the loading and unloading of the cargo aircraft, using standardised procedures to speed up the process and make it more efficient. New technologies were developed, among them special freight containers to facilitate transport of specific sorts of goods. Also, specific training was introduced for pilots and ground crews so that they could meet the special challenges associated with the Airlift. Flight plans and weather forecasts were optimised, and detailed security protocols were established to minimise the risk of incidents. Still, the operation was not without risks, as the Airlift would see several serious accidents – some fatal.

At the political and diplomatic level, the success of the Airlift hinged on continued domestic political and public support in the Western Allied states and their international cooperation. For this purpose, political decision-makers in the United States, the United Kingdom and France strove to advertise the Airlift as a symbol of the resolution and solidarity of the West. To this end, they emphasised their technical and logistical capabilities and highlighted the humanitarian character of the operation to distinguish it from the allegedly ruthless policy of "interests" pursued by the Soviet Union. At the political level, the Airlift was thus described as a joint effort by the Western Allies to defend democracy and freedom against Soviet aggression.

At the same time, however, it was important to underpin this idealistic approach with practical political measures. This is where the United States' monopoly on nuclear weapons, which still existed at the time, came in. Intending to send a signal of strength and an unambiguous military warning to the Soviet Union, US President Truman decided on 28 June 1948 to deploy nuclear-capable B 29 bombers to the United Kingdom.

Several large cities of the Soviet Union would thus have been within their reach. Nothing was said, however, about whether these aircraft were actually equipped with operational nuclear bombs. Apparently, the security apparatuses of the United States and the Allies were aware of the necessity to permanently maintain a delicate equilibrium in their course of action to resolve the conflict. They were careful not to provoke the Soviet Union unduly or escalate the conflict militarily. Instead, they tried to let the Airlift's effectiveness speak for itself and strove to keep intact the channels of communication and diplomacy with the Soviet leadership.

The crisis really came to a provisional end diplomatically, when the Soviet Union in December 1948 had to realise that the Blockade was an ineffective means by which to enforce its interests. From Stalin's perspective, the political cost eventually exceeded the expected benefit. Thus the Soviet Union, in the "Four-Power Communiqué on Arrangements for Lifting the Berlin Blockade" (the Jessup-Malik Agreement) of 4 May 1949, finally declared to the Western powers that it would remove all restrictions imposed on Berlin.

The Effects of the Conflict on Security Policy

The repercussions of the Blockade and the Airlift within the context of the 1948–49 conflict over Berlin were manifold and long-lasting, in terms of both security policy and the military, well beyond the initial phases of the Cold War.

First of all, the Airlift marked an important milestone in the development of air traffic and logistics. It illustrated the potential of air transport for moving large quantities of supplies quickly and efficiently across large distances and led to substantial progress in aircraft construction, maintenance and operation.

In strategic-operational terms, the Airlift's success highlighted the relevance of logistical capabilities and technological superiority in modern warfare. It was not least the establishment and expansion of these capabilities that contribut-

ed decisively to the establishment of the United States' position as a global superpower. As a result, the Soviet Union, too, tried to develop new military technologies and relevant capabilities. The Airlift thus prompted – at least indirectly – the escalation of the arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union.

In the course of the conflict, the United States' role as unrivalled leading power of the "West" became obvious. At the same time, however, the value of political and military cooperation with like-minded partners in the face of possible threats became equally obvious in US security and political circles. This had a decisive influence on the future strategies of the United States and its Allies, for example within the context of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), founded shortly before the Berlin Blockade came to an end.

The conflict over Berlin broadened the rift between the East and West because the Soviet Union perceived the Airlift as a security policy failure on its part. Thus, the seeds were sown for future tensions. However, the potential of politics and diplomacy for resolving international disputes, managing humanitarian crises and preventing military escalation had become obvious all the same. Deserving of particular mention in this context was the increase in importance of international organisations such as the United Nations. These proved capable of offering opponents an internationally accepted forum for negotiations without "loss of face".

Ultimately, the legacy of the conflict over the Blockade and the Airlift is still evident in the international relations between the United States, Russia and Europe. The conflict made the United States a permanent – and vital – security policy actor in Europe. It thus laid the foundation for the development of international alliances as well as international hotspots that would shape global politics to this day.



Pic 1, left: Communist people's militia who was influenced by the Soviets marches over the Charles Bridge in Prague, 25.2.1948.

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Pic 2, left bottom: At the Conference of the Foreign Ministers in Paris from April to July 1946: Bidault for France (l.), Molotov for the Soviet Union (second from the right), Byrnes for the USA (third from the right), Bevin for Great Britain (second from the left), Paris, 27.4.1946.

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Pic 3, above: "Don't take anything from strangers". Mirko Szewczuk, British zone of occupation, 17.7.1947.

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Pic 4, next page: B-29 bombers of the US Air Force's Strategic Air Command during a training flight over Great Britain at the beginning of the Berlin Blockade, summer of 1948.

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“WE ARE STAYING. PERIOD.” THE POLITICAL DECISIONS OF THE WESTERN POWERS IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE BLOCKADE OF WEST BERLIN

BERND VON KOSTKA

The blockade of West Berlin was a political crisis that cast its shadow months ahead. It affected not only the political cooperation of the four occupying powers – the United States, the United Kingdom, France and the Soviet Union – in the highest governing bodies – the Allied Control Council for Germany and the Allied Kommandatura for Berlin – but also the access to Berlin. It had been clear for some time that Western and Soviet ideas of the future of Germany were drifting apart, but the explosive situation did not immediately erupt. This changed in March 1948.

The American Decision

In spring 1948, the US military leadership received a telegram from General Lucius D. Clay, the US military governor in Germany, that startled them. He wrote to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the most important advisory body to the President, and the Secretary of Defense, of his earlier belief that war was unlikely for at least ten years. Over the course of the past few weeks however, his observations and Soviet behavior had led him to worry, Clay continued, that the situation could change with dramatic suddenness. Clay could not support his claims with certain events or hard facts but was rather writing motivated by a “gut feeling”. Although he denied years later that he had intended his carefully worded telegram to be a war-warning, that was exactly how it was interpreted by the Pentagon in March 1948. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the US President were now also more acutely aware of the situation in Germany and Berlin.

April Crisis, Little Airlift and Gatow Air Disaster

The introduction of stricter controls on Western military rail traffic on the border to the Soviet occupation zone constituted the prelude to the

Berlin Blockade on 1 April 1948. The Americans and British strongly opposed the restrictions imposed by the Soviets. As a consequence, their trains were halted at the border and had to turn around. The following day, the Americans started to transport supplies to their military garrison in Berlin with C-47 transport aircraft. These flights took place primarily on Clay’s initiative. Meanwhile, the French and British waited for the situation to develop.

On 5 April, a British airliner collided with a Soviet fighter plane while approaching Gatow Airfield in Berlin. The Soviet pilot and everyone on board the airliner were killed in the crash. Clay now considered whether all American C-47 transport aircraft should receive fighter protection while flying in and out of Berlin through the air corridors. Such an escalation was avoided because the Soviets ended the train searches after a few days. The Americans stopped their supply flights to Berlin on 11 April.

The Americans and the British had to acknowledge, however, how extremely vulnerable the road, rail and canal access routes to Berlin were. In contrast to the agreement on air traffic dated December 1945, the Western powers had never entered into a binding agreement regarding their land-based rights of access to Berlin with the Soviets. The events of April 1948 drastically changed their view of this issue. The British prepared an emergency plan. In case of another blockade of land and water routes, aircraft were supposed to fly in goods for the British garrison in Berlin and fly out family members on their way back as part of “Operation Knicker”.

The American Dilemma in 1948

Discussions in Washington over the orientation of American foreign policy also included the Berlin issue. On 25 June, one day after the beginning of the blockade, US President Harry S. Truman discussed the aggravation of the situation in Berlin with his cabinet. Views on the seriousness of the situation differed. On 26 June, Clay ordered – just like he had in April – the supply of the US garrison in Berlin by airlift. Truman knew the position of the military governor. Clay explicitly advocated a continued American presence in Berlin, justified by, among other things, the domino theory: if Berlin falls, Germany will be next and eventually half of the European continent would be at risk.

On 28 June, Truman met with his Secretary of Defense and other advisors. All advisors favoured withdrawing from Berlin because providing the city with sufficient supplies during a blockade seemed unrealistic. Truman ended the meeting by saying: “We are staying. Period.” The president had now made up his mind to stay in Berlin. The discussions continued nevertheless. “I have to listen to what I already know”, Truman wrote in his memoirs about the objections of the Department of State and many members of the military. Three months later, the presidential decision was confirmed yet again by the National Security Council.

On the part of the critics, almost no one believed in the success of the airlift. According to their reasoning, the operation would reach its limits by winter at the latest, at which point it would no longer be able to fulfil its purpose. Failure would leave the American position weaker than before. In addition, the airlift would tie up in Germany the entire global air transport capacities of the US Air Force. Truman’s decision in favour of staying in Berlin was probably also made against the background of the presidential elections in November 1948. Defying the Soviet Union in Berlin and keeping the occupying forces in place obviously did Truman no harm – he was re-elected.

Foreign Secretary Bevin as a Key Figure in the British Decision

After World War II, the British economy was on its knees, the Empire ruled from London was crumbling, and the food rationing imposed on the British people during the war had to remain in force until 1954. Compared to the situation before World War II, Great Britain was economically and politically rather in the position of a loser of the war. For its political re-orientation after 1945, Great Britain relied on close cooperation with the United States on the one hand and a strong Europe on the other. Germany was allocated an important role in this scenario.

In view of the Berlin blockade, the situation was all the more difficult. Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin immediately ended his vacation. At a crisis meeting convened by Prime Minister Clement Attlee on the evening of 24 June, Bevin contradicted all those calling for a withdrawal from Berlin. He wanted to extend the already established supply of the British garrison to the people of West Berlin. “The provision of supplies to the city by air,” Bevin said, “is not a matter of feasibility but a matter of will.” After this meeting, Bevin became the British crisis manager for the Berlin Blockade. He attributed an important strategic role to a West German state – and to Berlin – in the containment of communism in Europe. Staying in Berlin was hence in the long-term strategic interest of Great Britain. At the cabinet meeting on 25 June, Bevin stated his determination to hold on to Berlin – even though the United States had not yet made an official decision on the Berlin issue at that time. With regard to the danger of a possible military confrontation with the Soviet Union, Bevin took a clear stance: “They will not dare to use force against us.”

At the beginning of the Berlin crisis, Bevin made decisions that went far beyond his powers as foreign secretary. He enjoyed, however, the full support of the prime minister. There was great mutual trust between the two politicians, and Bevin often kept Attlee informed in bilateral talks.



Pic 1, left: The Wreck of the Crashed Vickers VC1 Viking, April 1948.
© AlliiertenMuseum / Slg. Provan

Pic 2, left bottom: British Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin (second from right) visits Tempelhof, the airlift airport, on 9 May 1949. US Military Governor Lucius D. Clay (centre) and General William H. Tunner (right) accompany him.
© AlliiertenMuseum / US Air Force

Pic 3, above: "Exotic" planes also took part in the airlift. Here, for example, is a French AAC.1 Toucan, a reproduction of the German Junkers, Ju 52.
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Pic 4, next page: An American Douglas C-54 takes off from Frankfurt/Main to Berlin.
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As part of a military operation, transport aircraft were deployed from Great Britain to Germany on 24 June. On 25 June, the first supplies reached the British garrison in Berlin by air. The official announcement that Great Britain would under no circumstances leave Berlin followed on 26 June. In addition to supplying its own garrison, it was now also the medium-term goal to provide goods for the people of Berlin by air. Bevin was not motivated by his liking of the people of Berlin; he was not a particular friend of the German people. Bevin's policy on Germany at the end of June 1948 was strongly guided by close cooperation with the Western allies, in particular the United States. He was well aware that Britain politically would achieve little without the two other Western powers.

The French Search for a Peaceful Solution

The tensions that arose in Berlin in 1948 also caught the attention of the French. Just like in the United States, there were different opinions about staying or possibly withdrawing from Berlin. Until the beginning of the Berlin Blockade, the French were toying with political ideas only. Unlike in Washington and London, there were some in Paris that considered the newly established democracy in Berlin and Germany definitely worth defending and saw it as an opportunity for Europe's future.

When the blockade began in late June, the French government was forced to take a position and act. The biggest influences on matters of foreign policy were the military governor in Germany, Pierre Koenig, his political advisor Jacques Tarbé de Saint-Hardouin and François Seydoux, the political advisor to the French in the Allied Control Council in Berlin. During the Berlin crisis, however, René Massigli, French ambassador to London, was also one of the influential French diplomats.

The Americans and British first of all ensured that the French would not withdraw from Berlin. This would have weakened the city's four-power status and significantly worsened the Anglo-Amer-

ican position. The American offer to also provide the French garrison with supplies by airlift was thus crucial. The French decided to stay in Berlin and thus emphasized the position already taken by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in May 1948 stating that leaving Berlin would be an admission of weakness. At the same time however, Paris refused to participate in a military operation concerning Berlin. A note from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs sums the French position up well: "It is important for us to stay in Berlin as long as this is peacefully possible."

The establishment of the Anglo-American Airlift gave the French the opportunity to wait for the situation to develop further. Paris indeed believed supplying the city by air to be quite feasible to a certain extent. As a gesture of goodwill, and despite their limited resources, a handful of French aircraft participated in the Airlift. The French also regarded themselves as a potential mediator between the conflict parties and hoped to achieve individual relief measures – such as the transport of coal by rail to Berlin – through negotiations with the Soviets. These hopes were not fulfilled and French policy finally focused on the cooperation with the United States and Great Britain – especially on the ground in Berlin, where the third, urgently needed Tegel airport was built in the French sector. By deciding to stay in Berlin, France was a silent beneficiary of the success of the Airlift – without a significant financial contribution and without suffering any casualties.

Conclusion

When reacting to the Berlin Blockade, the three Western powers focused on national interests in their decision-making. Staying in Berlin and supplying the city by air had the advantage of not having to choose a more extreme option, which would have been either a local military confrontation with the danger of international expansion or withdrawing from the city and losing a large amount of political credibility in doing so. In retrospect, all three countries made the right decision, given the unforeseeable success of the Airlift.

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THE SOVIET PERSPECTIVE DURING THE BERLIN CRISIS OF 1948/49

JÖRG MORRÉ

So far, historical research has been unable to fully explain the calculations of the Soviet leadership regarding the Berlin question, and what specific aims they had pursued with the Blockade of Berlin. The archives in Moscow, which would likely provide answers, will remain inaccessible for the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, it is possible to draw some conclusions about the Soviet perspective during the Berlin Crisis of 1948/49 from the sources known today. This article will present a summary of those.

It is a fact that after the end of the war, the Soviet Union felt that they had a prior claim to Berlin. After all, from April to May 1945, the Red Army had single-handedly conquered the capital of the *Reich* and successfully managed it for two months before the three victorious Western powers took over their sectors in Berlin. The more obvious the efforts of the Western powers to merge their zones in order to form a West German federal state, the more strongly Stalin pressed for the integration of Berlin as a whole into the Soviet Occupation Zone (SBZ), which completely surrounded the city. For that to happen, the Soviet leadership wanted to take advantage of the fact that the access of the Western powers to their sectors in Berlin through the SBZ had never been clearly regulated by any treaty. For safety reasons, clearly defined air corridors had been established only for air traffic in 1946. Since the turn of 1947/48, Soviet politicians had deliberately exploited the unclear situation on the ground by conducting harassing border controls to demonstrate to the Western powers how much their position in Berlin depended on the goodwill of the Soviet partner.

On 15 March 1948, Moscow decided to further tighten this border policy. First, the Soviet representative was to protest in the Allied Control

Council against the exclusion of the Soviet Union from the ongoing talks on a future West German state in London. Since 1945, the Berlin-based Control Council had been the supreme occupation authority where all four victorious powers coordinated their policies and enacted laws that were equally effective in all occupation zones. From the perspective of the Soviet Union, the talks in London were a breach of the arrangements made by all four allied powers at the Potsdam Conference in 1945. In his statement at the Control Council on 20 March 1948, the head of the Soviet Military Administration in Germany (SMAD), Vasily Sokolovsky, voiced the Soviet protest before leaving the room. The already difficult cooperation in the Allied Control Council thus came to an end. It is highly probable that the Soviet side had not intended Sokolovsky's statement or withdrawal to terminate its participation in the Control Council. Rather, the protest was meant to force the Western powers to return to the format of four-power control over Germany. In order to increase the pressure in this matter, a few days after the break-up of the meeting of the Control Council the SMAD ordered the closure of ground routes between the Western zones and Berlin as of 1 April. However, the Soviet protests and restrictions at the border failed to achieve the desired effect, and the Allied Control Council did not convene again.

The response of the Western powers to the closure thwarted Soviet expectations. The US Air Force organised the so-called "Little Airlift" almost on the spot, which allowed the continued supply of the Western powers' garrisons in Berlin. After just under two weeks, the SMAD lifted the blockage of Berlin traffic on the ground, although high bureaucratic obstacles to the transportation of goods remained.





Pic 1, prev. page: Closure of access routes to and from Berlin during the blockade.

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Pic 2, above: A special unit of the Brandenburg Police, established in April 1948, monitored traffic to the surrounding areas of Berlin. Graph of the Deutsche Grenzpolizei, 1956.

© 10 Jahre Deutsche Grenzpolizei, edited by Hauptverwaltung Deutsche Grenzpolizei, Berlin (Ost), 1956.

Pic 3, right page, above:

As of 24 June 1948, access to and from Berlin was denied to the Western powers. Potsdam-Dreilinden, summer of 1948.

© Allied Museum / Spt Provan

Pic 4, right page, bottom: During the night of 12 May 1949, all blockages were lifted.

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Moscow maintained the border controls as a matter of principle. Even as late as mid-June, the SMAD reported with satisfaction that the Western powers' room for mobility was restricted "as planned". In response to the currency reform in West Berlin, the movement of goods to the sectors of the Western powers was completely blocked from 24 June. When the US-British Airlift began on 28 June 1948, Soviet observers – who counted every flight, carefully registered any complications and calculated the food requirements for the Western sectors – believed that supply by air could not be kept up for long. According to their (mis-)calculation, the Airlift would collapse in winter at the latest. Therefore, Stalin continued to negotiate from a position of presumed strength even after the beginning of the Airlift.

Diplomatic negotiations for lifting the Blockade began in Moscow on 2 August 1948. The Western powers sent their ambassadors to Stalin to negotiate a solution to the crisis. In the conflict regarding the two German currencies, the Western representatives were quite willing to compromise. Behind the scenes, even the Control Council unofficially resumed its activities as the financial experts of the four powers jointly sought practicable solutions to the currency dispute in August and September. However, the Soviet side did not expect the Western powers to admit the Ostmark in their sectors. In order to achieve a result, they offered to find a way of dealing with two currencies in Berlin or even to accept the Ostmark as the sole currency for Berlin, if there was a joint financial control by all four occupying powers. Despite their willingness to compromise, the diplomatic effort in Moscow ultimately ended without success. Stalin believed that he would be able to hold on to his demands and objectives without having to compromise. He also ignored the fact that the Soviet Union was subjected to harsh international criticism because of its Blockade measures. The Soviet leadership insisted on its position that the Western powers had departed from the "Potsdam decisions". Even in late summer of 1948, they considered forcing the Western powers in Berlin to surrender a realistic option.

In misreading the overall situation, Moscow missed the chance to find an early solution to the Berlin Crisis.

The German communists' support continued to be a factor in Soviet policy on Germany, even in the Berlin Crisis. In 1945, leaders of the KPD (Communist Party of Germany) had returned from Soviet exile in the wake of the Red Army, and together with the social democrats of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), they had established their leading role in the political life of the Soviet Occupation Zone with strong support of the SMAD. In December 1948, Stalin called the SED leadership to Moscow to commit them to his course of intransigence. On 12 November 1948, it had been decided in Moscow to cancel the upcoming regular elections to the City Council in the Eastern sector of Berlin. This cemented the political division, since the western sectors of Berlin would now elect a western city government whereas in the Eastern sector the old city administration (called Magistrat) was to be continued; the Magistrat comprised only the SED and the mass organisations under their control. Within Berlin, double structures were created for all spheres of life; they were shared between the two halves of the city, providing each political camp with its own sphere. The SED leaders did not dream of challenging the rigid attitude of the Soviet leadership regarding the Berlin Crisis. Due to this "thinking in stereotypes" the Soviet leadership, with their focus on the Western powers, were oblivious to the change in the mentality of the inhabitants of the western sectors of Berlin. The more the Airlift grew into an impressively large relief operation with promises of freedom, the greater the emotional attachment to the Western occupiers as "protective powers". This was a circumstance the Soviet Union had carelessly underestimated in its blockade thinking.

By the end of 1948, both sides had become entrenched in their positions. While the Soviet Union adhered to its blockade policy, the Western powers pushed the Airlift toward ever-increasing transport performances.

From then on, the United Nations (UN) in New York seemed to be the only way to achieve a solution to the Berlin Crisis. In June 1948, the Berlin City Council (with the SED abstaining) had already appealed to the United Nations without result. Ernst Reuter took the issue up again in September invoking "People of this world look upon this city". In October 1948, a mediation proposal in the UN Security Council was thwarted by a Soviet veto. In November the UN General Assembly finally called on the four victorious powers to resolve the crisis. But now it was the Western powers who refused to negotiate under the pressure of the Blockade. After all, the Airlift had meanwhile become a successful relief operation and was perceived as a symbol of the US policy of "freedom and democracy" all over the world.

New possibilities to end the impasse arose when Stalin, during an interview, gave up the Soviet position that the Ostmark should be the only currency in Berlin. Shortly afterwards, the Soviet and American representatives to the UN Security Council – Jakov Malik and Philip Jessup – got into conversation with each other. In a total of eight

meetings between 15 February and 3 May 1949 a solution to the Berlin Crisis was found. Since these were de facto Soviet-American negotiations, the victorious powers of Great Britain and France had to be included afterwards. On 5 May, all four governments simultaneously announced the results of the negotiations: the Blockade of Berlin was lifted in the night of 12 May 1949; in addition, the four victorious powers convened another conference of their foreign ministers, to be held in Paris on 23 May to discuss the issue of Germany. This was a face-saving solution for the Soviet Union but it did not allow them to reverse the developments that had taken place. Although the four-power control over Germany did not cease until 1990, it was no longer effective as an interaction of the victorious powers. At the same time, as another meeting of the foreign ministers was convened, the Federal Republic of Germany was proclaimed as a West German federated state on 23 May 1949. On 7 October 1949, the German Democratic Republic was constituted. All victorious powers remained in Berlin, which was now a divided city, although still without the wall.

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STARVING FOR FREEDOM? SUPPLY STRATEGIES IN EVERYDAY LIFE IN BLOCKADED WEST BERLIN

RICARDO NEUNER

The Airlift continues to be a central point of remembrance in the history of Berlin. There is a persistent narrative that West Berlin was forced to starve and that it was only due to the supplies delivered by air by the British and American occupying forces that the city was capable of prevailing against the Soviet threat.

The Soviet Blockade did indeed pose a serious challenge to the Western occupying forces (United States, United Kingdom and France). The shortage of the resources required for industrial production and construction was the greatest worry. As regards the supply of private households, the Western Allies relied on the people of Berlin being prepared to endure an indefinite period of hardship for the promise of freedom held out by the West. Beyond minimum supply services, the population had to find their own way to weather the blockade situation. The Western Allies in return had to make good on their claim to be a protective power by finding a diplomatic solution to the crisis.

Today, however, historical researchers agree that the Blockade was by no means intended to starve the population of the Western sectors. Firstly, the Soviet Union offered people the option to officially receive their supplies in the East. Secondly, at no time was there a complete blockade of private transport. It was largely goods traffic that was blocked. West Berlin was not sealed off hermetically. Instead, in many places alternative supply routes remained open for the people. In order to understand how Berlin was supplied during the Blockade, it is necessary to look beyond the way it was supplied by air and to the small-scale practices used "on the ground". To get hold of essential goods, the people of West Berlin resorted to various, indeed creative strategies, some of

which they had already used in the precarious years immediately after the end of the war. Another factor in this context is the mutual support provided by the people of Berlin and the cooperation with the area surrounding the city – a community that only broke apart when the blockade entrenched the division of the city and the two German states were founded.

Supply Situation Following World War II

Scarcity of goods and supply shortages had already shaped life in the city of Berlin during World War II. The official basic supply of the city population was rationed and the National Socialist city administration had separated the population into groups of need. Queuing up for hours in front of shops and waiting at distribution points were parts of normal life. Eventually, the bombardments caused the destruction of housing space. Those who remained in the city witnessed the immediate dangers of the war in the Battle over Berlin.

It was only after the war that the tense supply situation became a serious emergency. Even before May 1945, the slogan "Enjoy the war, peace will be dreadful" circulated among Nazi officials and many Germans in fact experienced the time after 1945 as harder than war itself had been. There were arbitrary confiscations, lootings and violence, and often sexual violence, exercised by Red Army members in a "flush of victory". However, the Soviet Military Administration in Germany (SMAD) was also confronted with the complex task of ensuring the supply of a city of which nothing remained but an unimaginable expanse of rubble. Compared to the time before the first bombings in 1940, the housing space lost was estimated at 40 to 50 percent after the end of the fighting. The transport system had collapsed

completely, with a few bus lines and railway sections marking notable exceptions. After the war, up to 500,000 displaced people a month flocked into the increasingly overwhelmed city. A destroyed gas and power grid added to the inadequate food situation and the general housing shortage, and the building materials required for reconstruction were lacking.

In an attempt to facilitate the transition to civilian life, the Soviet occupiers guaranteed reconstruction workers a higher ranking within the rationing system adapted from the Nazi era. The motto was: "He who does not work shall not eat". Even rations of the highest rank still meant malnutrition, however. Little was changed by the arrival of the Western Allies in July 1945, who initially retained the administrative structures established by the Soviet Military Administration. In this existential situation, the people of Berlin depended on informal and at times illegal ways of ensuring access to the necessities of daily life.

Bartering in its various forms – be it on the semi-legal grey market or the illegal black market – offered the most important way to do just that. Bartering could be done between acquaintances or at more or less well-organised markets in private homes or in the open street. Supply trips ("hoarding trips") into the area surrounding Berlin and the divestment of valuables were other options.

The supply situation deteriorated again in the Hunger Winter of 1946–47, following poor harvests and several spells of cold weather, with temperatures ranging below minus 15 degrees Celsius. In Berlin alone, 390 people froze to death between November and April. But also after this period, supply trips and illicit trade remained essential means of escaping hunger in all sectors. As currency issues remained unresolved, barter or trade using alternative currencies such as cigarettes were the rule on the black market. Illegal business blossomed across all sectors. The ever more frequent raids and calls for denouncements changed little.

Supply During the Blockade

The beginning of the Blockade on 24 June 1948 not only closed off access roads into the Western sectors, it also cut off the power supply from the city's eastern part. Power production in the West soon reached its limits, making the supply situation in the city, difficult as it already was, even more precarious. The Americans, the British and the French had to realise in the first days of the Blockade that a collapse of industrial and power production threatened and that the population, too, would face heating and food scarcity in the medium term. Existing stockpiles were low, and the US leadership expected serious hunger issues and a shortage of heating materials. The Airlift, which at that point had not been organised down to the last detail, initially averted immediate shortages. In July, about 3,000 tons per day were airlifted into the city – well below the required 5,000 tons per day. The efficiency of the Airlift steadily increased in the following months. After January 1949, the daily tonnage of airlifted production materials and supplies always remained between 5,500 and 8,000 tons.

In order to cope with the shortages without having to register for official rations in East Berlin, the inhabitants of the Western sectors expanded supply strategies known from the post-war period. "Hoarding", i.e. stockpiling, thus regained importance. By train, they would go from West Berlin to the lines' terminal points in the Soviet occupation zone, such as Bernau, Oranienburg, Straußberg or Erkner. From there, some would go by bicycle to the surrounding villages of the hinterland. The potato centre at Wriezen thus became a popular "day-trip destination" for the people of West Berlin. These arduous supply trips always entailed the risk of being divested of the just-obtained foodstuff during checks. In the first weeks of October 1948 alone, the *Transportpolizei* – the East German transport police – counted a total of 420,000 hoarding trips, during which 7,000 tons of foodstuff were seized.



Pic 1, left page: Berlin lies in ruins after the war, Frankfurter Allee 1945.
© Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-1986-1230-507/ Fotograf: Peter Cürlis

Pic 2, above: Black market scene at Potsdamer Platz, 1 May 1949.
© AlliiertenMuseum/Slg. Provan

Pic 3, bottom: Cutting trees in the Hufeisensiedlung in Britz,
Berlin 16 November 1948. © Illus/Süddeutsche Zeitung Photo

Pic 4, next page: Way home from a hoarding trip in the surrounding
Brandenburg area, near Fürstenwalde 1948.
© Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-580474/ Fotograf: Walter Heilig.



Between July and October, an estimated 73,000 tons of foodstuffs – almost two-thirds of which were potatoes and other vegetables – were purchased in the surrounding Brandenburg area and illegally transported to West Berlin.

Black marketing continued to be another strategy of the inhabitants of West Berlin. Trade took place on improvised markets at the central squares and crossroads of the three sectors. But it was also in the backyards and at spontaneous meetings of neighbours that everything needed for daily life was traded. Smuggling and black marketing thus were not limited to organised crime but became everyday phenomena. At the beginning of the Blockade, only goods traffic was subject to controls. It was only in October 1948 that checks were extended to private vehicles. Effective road barriers were being erected by the police of East Berlin as late as February 1949. Transit by bicycle or on foot remained possible throughout the entire Blockade. For the people of West Berlin, the Blockade thus remained relatively permeable. That way, many goods arrived in West Berlin on illegal routes from East Berlin – after all, some 200,000 inhabitants of Berlin would cross the sector borders each day and, in the process, would transport essential goods into the West. The resale of goods on the black market was a profitable and necessary business, with in fact manageable risks.

In the spring of 1949, the Airlift had become efficient enough to ensure the basic supply of the people of West Berlin also on official routes. Moreover, the first restaurants, cafés and *Handelsorganisation (HO)* department stores had reopened in the city's East as early as 1948. There, the people of West Berlin could also get supplies – and on more favourable terms than on the black market, owing to the D-Mark being more valuable a currency than its East German counterpart. Already in 1948, the Blockade as a provocation toward the Western Allies proved a relatively short-sighted and hardly adequate means for achieving political objectives. There is nothing to indicate that a deliberate starvation of the

population was part of the political calculus on the part of the Soviet Union. Right at the start, the offer had been made to all to use food ration coupons to get supplies in the East. This cynical offer by the Soviet Union, which was perceived as an aggressor, met with decisive rejection by the population in the West. It was only in the winter months that about 100,000 inhabitants of West Berlin accepted it. It was also thanks to a mild winter that no humanitarian crisis unfolded in the Western sectors. Ultimately, the Western Allies and the people of West Berlin were capable of securing their own supplies. The tactics of the Soviet Union failed, not least because of the resilience of the people of Berlin.

The relative permeability of the Blockade also had rather pragmatic reasons, however. Economic and administrative activities in the city were so closely intertwined that a total blockade would have affected the Soviet occupation zone, too. The output of the businesses in the East was directly linked to service providers and suppliers in the West. For the Soviet Union, too, a complete blockade of all traffic routes would have meant economic damage and an increased need to provide the Eastern sectors on its own. This was obvious also to the Western Allies, who in 1949 responded by establishing a counter blockade that made it harder for the people of East Berlin to get supplies from West Berlin and the Western occupation zones. It did not, however, have much impact, as it was effective only in Berlin.

Conclusions and Situation after the Blockade

The additional supply strategies devised by the population in the Western sectors contributed greatly to bridging the shortages of the Blockade. At the same time, the Airlift was an affirmation of the Western occupying powers' willingness to permanently assume responsibility toward the inhabitants of their respective sectors. Offers by the East to supply the people of West Berlin largely remained unaccepted, partly because the Blockade had very little effect on day-to-day private transport. The people of West Berlin played their part in

resisting the Soviet provocation and imagined themselves as a community of suffering that, within that political conflict, clearly saw itself at the side of their protective power, i.e. the Western Allies.

Even after the Soviet side had lifted the Blockade on 12 May 1949, the Western powers, intent on building up a reserve for emergencies, used not only the land routes to bring goods into the city but also continued to airlift supplies into West Berlin until 30 September 1949. With the D-Mark as official currency of West Berlin and the capitalist orientation of the Federal Republic of Germany,

the foundations for secure supply, increased production and a predictable future had already been laid at this point. By the end of 1949, the population had become capable of supplying itself with the most important items of daily life, even without rationing and food coupons. Barter and black marketing lost their relevance as luxurious goods, too, became available in department stores and shops. Companies and tradesmen became capable of ramping up production and capacities. The general economic rise in West Germany had a positive influence on the situation in West Berlin, too.

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“AIRCRAFT THAT LOOT US” – AN ETERNAL AIRLIFT MYTH?

MATTHIAS HEISIG

“Airlift to Berlin + Western powers in Berlin = looting of Berlin”. This equation was used by the East German cinematic newsreel “Der Augenzeuge” in 1948 to explain the Berlin Airlift to its audience. Back then, East Berlin’s propaganda in film, radio and especially in print media claimed that the “raisin bombers” did not return empty from blockaded West Berlin to the Western zones but were instead loaded with valuable goods and industrial equipment.

The first measures to counter this so-called looting were implemented as early as 1 April 1948. The Soviet military authorities and the newly established East German border police jointly tightened controls of Western occupying powers’ transit traffic with Berlin. “No longer can we allow,” demanded Colonel Tiulpanov, one of the leading figures of the Soviet Military Administration in Germany, that very same day, “that Berlin is being looted under measures taken by the British and the Americans, and that the threat of unemployment is thus provoked. Thousands come from the Western zones and, in the light of the currency reform that is being prepared in West Germany, try to weaken the Eastern zone’s economy with large amounts of money.” (*Neues Deutschland*, 2 April 1948). He goes on to say that 2,000 loaded goods wagons had left the city as late as February, and another 790 wagons had rolled from Berlin into the Western zones in the last third of March.

On 15 April, Berlin city councillor for transportation, Ernst Reuter, commented on the looting allegations in front of city delegates. In 1947, a monthly average of 12,000 to 15,000 loaded wagons had arrived in Berlin from the Western zones, while some 3,000 had rolled back

into the Western zones from Berlin. According to Reuter, goods exchange of this scale was in fact fairly common for a city the size of Berlin, but the situation in the ongoing year was no longer acceptable as the city had come to register a mere 10,000 to 11,000 loaded wagons received per month on average, and less than 1,000 wagons departed the city each month, sometimes only a few hundred. Reuter went on to say that the economic strangulation that had occurred with the recent controls would ruin Berlin if the Allied Kommandatura did not take “friendly action” in response.

At that time, Reuter’s call for constructive cooperation of the victorious powers was nothing more than a well-intentioned appeal because the rift in the coalition of the four victorious powers had been obvious since 20 March 1948. On that day, Marshall Sokolovsky, the Soviet representative, had ceased cooperation in the Allied Control Council. The meetings of the Allied Kommandatura of Berlin likewise had been characterised by mutual accusations and serious dispute for quite some time. It was in this circle that Soviet deputy city commander Colonel Jelisarov issued a detailed statement on the export of goods from Berlin. According to this, the export of non-ferrous metals from Berlin had increased many times over, and in the British sector the export of industrial goods and raw materials exceeded imports by four times, and in the American sector by six times. Altogether, industrial production in the Western sectors trailed that of the Soviet sector by 20 percent, according to Jelisarov. (*Berliner Zeitung*, 22 April 1948).

After the lost war, the economic situation of the whole of Berlin was indeed catastrophic. What once had been Germany’s largest industrial city and administrative and service metropolis lay literally in ruins. Following the relocations caused by the war, and the subsequent destruction at the hands of the Soviet and Allied occupying powers (though the latter on a markedly smaller scale), the Western Allies had decimated the machinery and stockpiles of Berlin’s companies. The metalworking and the electrical industries had to make do with the simplest of machines in their switch from wholesale armaments manufacture to peacetime production. At the same time, the number of employees in the mechanical engineering industry decreased by up to 90 percent after the war and remained at that level until 1950, as confirmed figures for Tempelhof district suggest. An agreement, signed in July 1945, under which Berlin’s sectors would be supplied by their respective occupying power, marked the beginning of the economic unbundling of the formerly unitary economic zone of Berlin-Brandenburg. This also marked the beginning of the migration of West Berlin’s industry into the Western zones, where they not only had the advantage of a greater economic area but also stronger demand and more favourable conditions for raising capital. The generally uncertain political situation in Berlin and cross-party initiatives by city delegates to nationalise enterprises, such as the “law on the expropriation of corporations” of February 1947, reinforced this “pull to the West”, which saw about 900 Berlin-based enterprises move their headquarters to the Western zones, as Joannes Bähr established in his study on divided Berlin’s industry.

This process, however, did not necessarily lead to closures in Berlin, because whereas the companies’ administrative, research and sales departments moved away, production often remained in the city. In this way, West Berlin began to develop into an “extended workbench” with low real net output and low-skilled employment. The “headlines of looting” published in East German reporting early in the summer of 1948 indeed

came at a time when West Berlin’s economy was weakened and in the process of being restructured and clearly showed signs of an exodus.

The question that remains is whether the looting of Berlin was in fact realised through the Airlift. What facts and figures were produced by the press of East Berlin to confirm this and what, on the other hand, did the Magistrate of West Berlin and the American and British organisers of the Airlift say?

On 1 July 1948, i.e. when the Airlift flights had just begun, the Soviet daily newspaper for Germany, the *Tägliche Rundschau*, ran the headline “Aircraft That Loot Us”, raising the allegation: “The valuable industrial equipment and the products of West Berlin’s industry, as well as other valuable goods from West Berlin, which are planned to be transported, are the real reason for the feverish use of many additional American and British transport aircraft.” Three days later, the newspaper *Neues Deutschland* reported that 40 “dismantled” AEG electronic motors had been flown out from Gatow Airfield. Of Tempelhof Airport, the same newspaper stated on 8 July 1948: “It is well known that the aircraft that transport the equipment of Berlin’s enterprises, raw materials, furniture, artwork and overly compromising demagogues to Western shores – and now and then bring goods to Berlin – land there.” For the *Neues Deutschland* newspaper, a short-term closure of the Tempelhof railway station, whose high-ground platform soon became a popular viewpoint for the action at Tempelhof Airport, was a sign that the alleged transports should remain hidden from the public eye and that the politicians of West Berlin “already had hot ground under their feet”. It was suggested that the Western powers could not be relied on: late in June 1948, the *Berliner Zeitung* newspaper wrote that the evacuation of French authorities “under rather unpleasant circumstances” would have to be expected soon and that early relocation movements of the Americans the British could be observed at the airports.

The US Military Administration in Berlin was not unimpressed by these press reports. When the Blockade began, US military governor General Clay stopped the planned evacuation of about 5,500 Jewish refugees, growing numbers of whom had been accepted into the American sector of Berlin as “displaced persons” since 1946 following pogroms in Poland. The American military government sought to avoid the impression of a withdrawal from Berlin, which might have been created with Jewish refugees being transported in American Airlift aircraft. Thus, it was only late in July 1948 that the Jewish refugees were flown from Tempelhof Airport to Frankfurt/Main, from where they could continue the journey to Israel.

Even Soviet head of state Stalin seized on the allegation of looting. When the ambassadors of the United States, France and the United Kingdom met him in Moscow to explore options for a negotiated solution to the Berlin crisis, Stalin claimed that the blockade of traffic routes was necessary so as to prevent the unwanted evacuation of industrial equipment. In the two-hour conversation, he did not produce any evidence to support this.

Only a short time before, the Soviet Military Administration in Germany had made quite a publicity effort when offering to supply the people of Berlin’s Western sectors. From 20 July 1948 on, the people of West Berlin could get their food rations and fuel from the Eastern sector following registration at one of East Berlin’s card centres. Only a few thousand people accepted the offer, however. Apparently, the people of West Berlin put more trust in the development of the Airlift – as the construction of Tegel Airport suggests – and in their own inventiveness to “organise” the things required for daily life. By now, print media in East Berlin reported almost daily about “border crossers” from West Berlin who were seized at the sector borders with illegally exported foodstuffs and other supplies by East Berlin’s police. The focus of the SED, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, now shifted to the “hoarders”, 200,000

of whom invaded the Soviet zone from West Berlin each day, seeking to loot it, as SED chairman Hermann Matern said on 2 October 1948. A few days later, East German border controls around Berlin and at the inner-city checkpoints were ramped up again.

After the autumn of 1948, reports about looting by means of the Airlift clearly decreased in frequency in East Berlin newspapers. One report in the *Berliner Zeitung* attempted to portray the alleged personnel augmentation of a transport division of Berlin’s US garrison – the Packing and Crating Unit – as further proof that US forces were expanding their relocation movements from the city. On 15 September 1948, one reporter described the removal of furniture from seized mansions in the American sector under the headline “Raisins for the Return Flight”, claiming to have learned from his tipster that the Airlift was used to transport valuables to their destination at Frankfurt/Main. The journalist Herbert Geßner, who initially had worked for the American radio station “Radio Munich” and in keeping with his political convictions had shifted to East Berlin’s radio in 1947, also published a withering commentary, which likewise decried the “looting” and went into print as an SED propaganda document entitled “Why Airlift?”. “It is thus that for the last 100 days, thousands upon thousands of tons of goods have been flown out of Berlin, in a process that is utterly uncontrollable by us Germans,” says Geßner there, without providing any exact figures. These were provided by the *Neues Deutschland* newspaper some months later. The newspaper quoted official statements from West Berlin, according to which a total of 23,156 tons of industrial goods from West Berlin, including radio tubes, radio sets and measuring equipment, had been flown into the West between 28 July 1948 and 20 February 1949, only to add: “The weight of the industrial equipment disassembled and abducted to the West is not made public, but is estimated to exceed 100,000 tons.” The East Berlin newspaper article, however, failed to say anything about the data forming the basis for this calculation.

Late in 1949, the traffic authority of the West Berlin Magistrate spoke of 21,318 tons of industrial products that had been airlifted into the Western zones between July 1948 and August 1949. The British final report on “Operation Plainfare” – the name given to the Royal Air Force (RAF) Airlift endeavour – provided figures of the same order of magnitude. It also put the total figure of industrial goods flown out via the American-British Airlift during the Blockade between June 1948 and May 1949 at 19,339 tons. Of these, the British moved 11,893 tons, with the rest being carried by the US Air Force. With 15,270 tons, the RAF also transported the bulk of the 18,507 tons of parcel and letter mail, which was also flown out via the Airlift. These figures are considered confirmed. As regards the import of industrial goods during the Blockade, figures vary between about 38,000 tons (in the narrower sense of raw materials and semi-finished products) and about 161,000 tons (general “industrial goods”). Compared to the imports to Berlin in 1947, this is a mere three and thirteen percent, respectively.

Allied plans for the Airlift had at an early stage factored in the need for transport of Berlin’s industry, both on incoming and return flights. The raw materials and semi-finished products that were flown in enabled the people of West Berlin to continue production – albeit at a severely limited level – and thus avoided a rise in unemployment. And even if, for the return flight, the surplus cost incurred by the expensive air transport could not be apportioned to the cost of delivery, the return on sales contributed to reducing the budget deficit of Berlin. After all, industrial goods worth 33 million Deutsche Marks were flown out in December 1948. Delivery and payment, however, were lengthy affairs. The processing of applications for transport, which needed to be filed with the Economy Authority in West Berlin and then had to be reviewed by Allied authorities, could take several weeks.

Also, the available transport capacity was very limited, in both directions. Coal and foodstuff deliveries into Berlin had absolute priority.

Elaborately packed general cargo and unwieldy containers for industrial goods caused significant delays in the complicated ground organisation of the Airlift fleet, especially for the return flights from Berlin. At Gatow Airfield, where most of the freight exports of the so-called “Backlift” were processed, the ground time given to Airlift aircraft was limited to 50 minutes. Of these, only 30 minutes could be used for loading and unloading. The unloading of the twin-engine Douglas C-47 took about 10 minutes; 17 minutes were needed for the larger Douglas C-54 aircraft. Due to the steady optimisation of processes, ground time could be reduced to about 40 minutes. This, of course, had consequences for the loading activities. In order to prevent time-consuming loading processes from unduly reducing the tonnage that was flown in, the RAF at Gatow used the smaller Douglas C-47 aircraft for the “Backlift”.

The robust and proven C-47 was also used to fly out 91,000 passengers on British Airlift flights, also via Gatow Airfield, and had to be scheduled within the sequence of operations at the airfield. The number of Airlift passengers arriving in Gatow was markedly lower, at about 35,000. Altogether, a total of 228,000 passengers were transported within the scope of the Airlift.

According to official statements, the final transport record of the American-British Airlift looked as follows: the total quantity of goods transported via the Airlift in the period from June 1948 to October 1949 stands at 2.1 million tons. Coal accounted for roughly two-thirds of this sum because it was used in West Berlin’s power plants to generate the electrical power needed to maintain operations in blockaded West Berlin. The 440,000 tons of foodstuffs represented one-fifth of the total tonnage flown in, but as dehydrated food accounted for a large share of this, the daily minimum supply of 1,400 tons of food, to be flown in under the “Winter Emergency Program”, could be provided almost in its entirety.

When Eberhard Heinrich, the longstanding editor of the *Neues Deutschland* newspaper, published a chronicle of the years 1945 to 1948 under the pseudonym "Hans Adler", he did not even mention the looting. "The Airlift", said Adler, "was nothing else than a permanent war manoeuvre, conducted with a view to seeing active war action develop from this war manoeuvre." Its actual purpose had been to maximise the profits the American aircraft manufacturers and oil companies could make from the "so-called Airlift", he wrote. In 1959, the Nestor of East German governance, Peter Alfons Steiniger, also devoted one page of his book "Handbuch zur Westberlin-Frage" to the Airlift. According to Steiniger, the Airlift had been not only an extraordinarily lucrative business for the aircraft industry, but had directly served war preparation purposes, giving the United States a pretext for deploying Air Force units to Europe. Not a word is said about the "looting" of West Berlin's industry, which – thanks to substantial West German aid – had clearly recovered since and counted as few as 33,000 unemployed, meaning there was almost full employment.

Thirty years after the end of the Blockade, Gerhard Keiderling finished his research project on the Berlin crisis of 1948–49 at East Germany's Academy of Sciences; his findings were published by the Academy's own publishing house, the *Akademie Verlag*. The East German historian, who was toeing the party line, pulled off the feat of citing a multitude of "Western sources" to prove that the Western powers' policy in the Berlin crisis was an "imperialistic strategy of cold war against Socialism and the division of Germany" – as the subtitle to his book says. Documents from the Politburo of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany or any other confirmation from Soviet sources are nowhere to be found in this voluminous book. There are two passages in the book where Keiderling addresses the alleged "looting" of West Berlin through the Airlift. The first "proof" is a quote by Heinrich Rau, then President of the (East) German Economic Commission: "The blue-collar worker in Berlin understands very well that his job is flying away on the Airlift,

although the Magistrate does not want to admit it." Other "evidence" for the "illegal export of goods" is provided by the sentence: "In most cases, goods got into the Western zones by way of the Western sectors – before the Soviet Military Administration in Germany introduced tighter border controls in spring 1948 they got there in sealed railway wagons, later through the Airlift."

In 1998, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Airlift, Keiderling published a book in which he distanced himself from many of his former party-line positions on the Berlin crisis of 1948–49. The "looting" argument had been a well-liked and often-quoted one for Party officials, although the figures around this had never been reliable, says Keiderling. At the end, he draws a conciliatory conclusion: "The Airlift has been a great organisational and technical achievement that helped the people of West Berlin, caused the failure of the Blockade and gained the Americans sympathy from people around the world." The Airlift's "aspect of looting" finally appeared to have sunk into irrelevance.



Pic 1, left: Signet for marking West Berlin products for transport via the Airlift, 1949.

Pic 2, above: Leaflet of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), October 1948. Sammlung Hans-Ulrich Schulz

Pic 3, bottom: Inside of an SED propaganda brochure, Berlin 1948. Sammlung AlliiertenMuseum

Pic 4, next page: Buses take passengers to the planes, Berlin-Gatow 1948. © AlliiertenMuseum / Sammlung Provan



This, however, changed with the publication of the article "Raisins from Berlin" in the culture magazine *Lettre Internationale* in spring 2012. Presenting a broad panorama of Berlin between 1945 and 1949, the Berlin-born graphic designer and author Grischa Meyer once again raised the question: "What was in the raisin bombers when they left the city?" The answer Meyer gives his readers is mostly derived from East German newspaper reports, such as those quoted above. According to Meyer, more than 500 tons were airlifted out of blocked West Berlin each day. By 12 May 1949, this would have amounted to a theoretical total of 161,000 tons. The substantially smaller figures from West Berlin sources, again quoted above, are not referred to by Meyer, despite the fact that these statistics have been known for a long time. He provides numerical examples to prove that "the removal of goods from the city was no side task of the Airlift", saying that within a period of three months in 1948, "2,480 tons were brought in and 3,402 tons were brought out". From September to November 1948, the import of goods in fact strongly declined against the export of goods (1,621 tons against 3,436 tons, according to Magistrate statements). Meyer fails to point out that the goods in question were industrial goods and raw materials and suggests that the entire Airlift supply shows a negative balance. He moreover enriches his essay with isolated quotes taken from reports from West Germany and West Berlin that deal with the relocation of industry. As described above, this movement undoubtedly occurred. However, Meyer does not succeed in proving that it was realised through the Airlift. He is utterly wrong when he claims that the entire power plant facility of *Kraftwerk West*, "including bricks, concrete and other construction materials" had been flown to Berlin in 580 flights. Rather, air transport was used only for individual parts of the power plant, which were dismantled, loaded, flown out, unloaded and reassembled with great effort. To take the air transports for *Kraftwerk West* as proof of the opportunities offered by the Airlift, which Meyer apparently considers to be endless, is an act of ignorance of historical reality.

In his opening address at the 2012 conference "Weltkulturerbe doppeltes Berlin", the President of the German Federal Agency for Civic Education, Thomas Krüger, praised Meyer's paper for its "precise analysis", which used "new archive finds" to prove that the raisin bombers "flew out the largest part of the economic infrastructure of Berlin into the West of the country, systematically and in accordance with a master plan". The "altruistic raisin bomber," said Krüger, "idealised and downplayed the ideologically motivated, ruthless exploitation of the city into a romance of freedom". It can be speculated that Krüger presented an alternative narrative of the Airlift – one that is itself grounded in ideology. One possible explanation lies in the anti-Americanism that was widespread in East Germany, which is where Krüger started his career as a political civil rights campaigner. However, the "looting myth" has found its way into the public realm again – as educational policy, approved by the President of the German Federal Agency for Civic Education. The author of the present text has himself witnessed it at forums and events in 2017 and 2019. "Do you actually know what the raisin bombers flew back with?", was the rhetorical question raised by the audience. I hope to have offered a detailed answer to that.

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