

Tanks at Checkpoint Charlie: Lucius Clay and the Berlin Crisis, 1961–62

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The stand-off of Soviet and American tanks in the heart of Berlin in October 1961 constituted the most dangerous moment of the Cold War in Europe. It has been attributed to unnecessarily confrontational policies of General Lucius D. Clay, who served as President Kennedy's Special Representative in Berlin. This article assesses how the crisis evolved from the Berlin Wall to the tank confrontation. It centres on the role of General Clay, his communication with Washington, and his activities in Berlin. This is a study of the process by which US government policy was translated into diplomatic and military action. The article concludes that the resulting combination of force and diplomacy is crucial to understanding the crisis management of John F. Kennedy.

On 27 and 28 October 1961 Soviet and American tanks stood face to face at Checkpoint Charlie, the crossing point at Friedrichstrasse in Berlin between the sectors of the opposed forces. The tank stand-off was the culmination of a series of border incidents that pitted American officials against East German border police. Right of access, without requirement to show identification papers, had been granted routinely since 1945. Presentation of documentation by American officials to East German border guards was problematic, because the United States did not recognize the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The tank confrontation was a calculated manoeuvre by American authorities in Berlin. The intent was to force their Soviet counterparts to humiliate publicly the East German regime and thus demonstrate that the sovereignty of the GDR was fictitious. The affair ended peacefully, as a result of secret negotiations between Robert F. Kennedy and a Soviet agent in Washington. Serious tension in Berlin continued, but the situation was no longer driven by Soviet desire to achieve American recognition of the GDR by force. This episode of the Berlin Crisis has been

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overshadowed by the previous events of 13 August when East German authorities closed the sectoral border, began to build a wall, and effectively divided the city.¹

The American tanks were ordered on the scene by retired army general Lucius D. Clay, who had served since September as President Kennedy's Special Representative in Berlin. Clay was the former military governor of the American Zone of occupied Germany. Berliners revered him for his role in the 1948–49 airlift.² Historians and government officials have maintained that his presence in 1961 was meant to boost the morale of the population. It is a widely held belief that President Kennedy was committed to a policy of restraint. Clay has thus been portrayed as a hawk who exceeded his mandate in order to force a showdown. While contemporary observers in Berlin applauded his intent and method,³ the majority of recent commentators have condemned Clay's risk-taking.⁴ Secretary of State Dean Rusk expressed the opinion of most State Department officials when he called the crisis 'the silly confrontation at Checkpoint Charlie brought on by the macho inclinations of General Clay'.⁵ All commentators agree that Clay provoked the crisis, and that Kennedy had no choice but to consent.⁶

In September and October 1961, the US acted unilaterally.⁷ This essay focuses on US policy and the process by which it was translated into military and diplomatic action in Berlin. Through analysis of government documents, personal papers, and memoirs of eye-witnesses and government officials, it evaluates Clay's role in Berlin, his reasoning for decisive action, his communication with the president, and his authority to act. The article will argue that John F. Kennedy endorsed Clay's activities because signalling willingness to use force strengthened the position from which the United States could attempt to negotiate a more permanent solution for the status of Berlin.⁸ It concludes that John F. Kennedy learned that pragmatic options existed between the extreme poles of surrender of western rights and nuclear war.

The Berlin Wall Crisis

The Berlin Crisis began in 1958, when Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev threatened to conclude a separate peace treaty with East Germany unless the western powers recognized the GDR.⁹ The Soviet Union was capable of cutting off access to Berlin from West Germany, but it is unlikely that Khrushchev intended to act upon his rhetoric since the exposed position of the American, British, and French sectors in Berlin offered the Soviets constant opportunity to pressure the western allies. The crisis simmered through 1960. It escalated at the Vienna summit between Khrushchev and Kennedy in June 1961, when Khrushchev reissued his ultimatum.¹⁰ President Kennedy left Vienna visibly shaken and expected the worst from the Soviet leader.¹¹ Kennedy's advisers on matters of international security assumed that 'it is probable that in the coming fall or winter Khrushchev will bring about a crisis designed to result eventually in the expulsion of the Western garrisons from Berlin and in a GDR capability to isolate West Berlin'.¹² To prepare for confrontation, the Kennedy

administration decided in July to increase the personnel strength of the military and augment US armed forces in Europe.¹³

On 13 August East German police units and construction workers closed the border between the Soviet sector and the three western sectors of Berlin. The division of Berlin and building of a wall at that time took the Kennedy administration by surprise.¹⁴ Most US government officials had expected that the crisis would revolve around interference with western access to the American, British, and French sectors of Berlin. NATO had developed military options to address such a challenge.¹⁵ There were some in the administration, however, who had thought that the East German government would take drastic measures to stop the flow of refugees from East Germany, and now a faction in the State Department, including Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Soviet expert Charles Bohlen, believed that the border closing might relieve pressure rather than lead to escalation.¹⁶ President Kennedy himself was reported saying that 'a wall is a hell of a lot better than a war'.¹⁷ But a highly visible reaction was nevertheless necessary, as acceptance of the Wall would have caused strain in relations with West Germany.¹⁸

One possible reaction was to accelerate the timetable for the augmentation of US armed forces in Germany. But General Lauris Norstad, the NATO commander, counselled against alterations to the military build-up as an end in itself. He pointed out that no new military options had arisen since the end of July. He concluded that as long as West Berlin remained accessible, rapid military mobilization could send the wrong signal to Moscow. It could be perceived as a sign of escalation that might preclude negotiations. Norstad claimed that all Western European powers except France favoured negotiations, even West Germany.¹⁹ Norstad's claim was certainly correct for the French, but the West German position was more ambiguous. Chancellor Adenauer took great care to calm an enraged public that believed the Americans were doing nothing. But shortly before national elections in September he had to avoid any perception of offering concessions to the Soviet Union or accepting a permanent division of Germany. Later in the autumn, however, Adenauer privately endorsed negotiations as the only sensible course of action.²⁰ Historian Irwin Wall noted in his study of Franco-American relations: 'The United States had called up its reserve, had more troops ready for combat over Berlin than all the other NATO powers combined, and was negotiating from strength.'²¹

President Kennedy decided to consult with General Lucius D. Clay. Clay had retired from the army and served as chairman of the Continental Can Company in New York. His role during the Berlin Blockade and airlift, his close relations with the Eisenhower administration, and his stance during the Berlin Crisis have contributed to the public image of a hard-line anti-Communist, who was prepared to risk war rather than offer concessions. But Clay had been a moderate, who had advocated cooperation with the Soviets for most of the occupation period after World War II. Even after the Soviets initiated the Berlin Blockade in 1948, he retracted his initial call for a military response and called for the airlift to supply the city.²² Immediately after the building of the Wall, Clay made it known to Maxwell Taylor, John F. Kennedy's military adviser, that he was

prepared to assist the administration in the current crisis. Clay believed that his presence in Berlin might be useful because 'sometimes a gesture means more than a lot of words. At the risk of being considered egotistical, I believe my name means something to Berlin and perhaps, even to the Russians too.' Clay asked to be recalled to active service and given command in Berlin for the duration of the crisis.²³

On 17 August Taylor invited Clay to the White House for discussions with the President, Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, General Lyman Lemnitzer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, and National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy. It had already been decided that Johnson was to depart for Berlin on the next day, to show US resolve for the defence of that city. Kennedy asked Clay to join the vice-presidential party.²⁴ Moreover, the President ordered a battle group of 8th Infantry Division, 1,500 soldiers, to march from West Germany to Berlin. This move, a symbolic gesture to the citizens of Berlin, the West German administration, and the Kremlin, was opposed by the military.

Generals Lemnitzer and Taylor spoke out against it at the White House.²⁵ General Norstad and General Bruce C. Clarke, commander of US Army, Europe, also saw little use in deploying an additional battle group in Berlin. Norstad stated unequivocally that Berlin was indefensible.²⁶ The deployment was supported by the State Department and Clay endorsed it at the White House meeting.²⁷ On 20 August Johnson, Clay, and hundreds of thousands of cheering Berliners welcomed the American soldiers to Berlin.²⁸ The commander of the battle group thought that the excitement of the occasion was only matched by the liberation of Paris in 1944.

Johnson had also received an enthusiastic reception, especially since he had by his side General Clay, the hero of the airlift.²⁹ Upon returning to Washington, the Vice President drew a stark picture of the situation. Johnson pointed at the significance of public opinion in shaping West German policy and stated that 'if we failed to rise to the levels of these sombre events, all would be lost, for there would be no one who could remove the sense of failure created by our default.'³⁰ He advised Kennedy to appoint General Clay to an influential position in Berlin because 'his name and fame have an almost legendary power among the people of Berlin.'³¹ Johnson concluded that the United States should meet the Soviet threat by 'stepping up the pace of our military preparations and exploiting this new Communist repression in our propaganda.'³² Johnson's report contributed to a hardening in the President's position.

The State Department was less sanguine about a diplomatic confrontation. Its approach was guided by a report that Dean Acheson, former Secretary of State and presidential adviser on matters of European security, had submitted after the Vienna summit. Acheson had argued for a tough response to a Soviet challenge to Allied access rights to West Berlin.³³ Unobstructed access of western officials to the Soviet sector, while desirable, was not worth a confrontation, because the US position in Berlin was exposed and vulnerable, and any discussion of access rights to the Soviet sector would commence from a weak position.³⁴ The Berlin Wall was an imperfect solution, but it was one that even hard-liners in the State Department could tolerate.

President Kennedy intended to seize upon the current crisis and achieve a lasting settlement of open questions in Central Europe in negotiations with the Soviets.³⁵ But first it was necessary to ensure the long-term viability of West Berlin, both politically and economically. Kennedy considered sending Clay to Berlin for the duration of the crisis in order to boost morale in the city, but also to create conditions that would persuade Soviet leaders to join in serious negotiations. The first option was to appoint the retired general the US military commander in the city, as Clay himself had proposed. Kennedy was persuaded by Robert McNamara not to do so because it 'would strain the command channel and the command relationship between the Berlin Commander [and US Army, Europe and NATO headquarters]'. Instead, McNamara and General Lemnitzer recommended appointing Clay Chief of Mission with the rank of Ambassador.³⁶ This was opposed by the State Department, since the Ambassador to Germany, Charles Dowling, also served as Chief of Mission in Berlin.

McGeorge Bundy was not convinced that Clay should not command the American armed forces in Berlin despite McNamara's concerns. He advised the President that Clay 'should leave all routine military channels alone, but for command decisions he should have full control of the Berlin garrison. This is not perfect from Norstad's point of view, but it is good from yours.' But Bundy also warned Kennedy that opinions were 'sharply divided on [Clay's] ability to carry out a policy set by others, unless he fully agrees with it'. This was particularly critical because Bundy perceived the possibility of a settlement with the Soviets, including acceptance of the Oder–Neisse border between Poland and East Germany, in return for a guarantee of freedom for West Berlin and access rights for the Allies. If Kennedy decided to adopt this position in the future, Clay could deflect domestic opposition and mollify the West Germans. But if Clay opposed such a policy publicly, he would become a liability. Bundy told the President that he needed to discern 'whether Clay is with you on the political issues. Maybe you are tougher than the line of thought I have sketched, and maybe Clay is not inflexible.'³⁷ Kennedy met with Clay on 29 August and decided to appoint him as his Special Representative in Berlin with the rank of Ambassador.

Clay's authority in this new position was only vaguely defined. Kennedy officially appointed Clay on 30 August although a premature announcement had been made at a press conference after the meeting of the previous day. The assignment was to begin on 15 September and last until the immediate crisis, 'which appears to be ahead of us as a result of Soviet actions', had passed. Kennedy advised Clay that he would be 'the senior American official in [Berlin] and you will communicate directly with the Secretary of State and me as Ambassadors ordinarily do'. Kennedy expected 'to authorize [Clay] to carry out specific tasks and exercise authority in such cases as I may indicate' even though the regular military chain of command remained unaltered and Ambassador Dowling still functioned as Chief of Mission. Kennedy concluded that he anticipated Clay's greatest task to be the interpretation of American policy to the leaders of Berlin, but that he also expected Clay to advise the White House 'in the consideration of anticipatory actions and effective responses to any sudden Soviet or Communist moves in the Berlin area.'³⁸ Clay's understanding of his mandate was

broadened, however, in a private conversation with the President. He recalled that John F. Kennedy told him that the text of the letter had been significantly diluted on the advice of the State Department, which had objected to a paragraph that would have given Clay complete responsibility for all decisions in Berlin.³⁹ As Clay understood Kennedy, the President implied that he regretted the omission.

Clay in Berlin

General Clay arrived in Berlin on 19 September. He began to challenge East German authorities immediately by employing high-profile border patrols, patrols of the access routes to the city, and combative rhetoric. Clay reasoned that it was necessary to establish beyond a doubt that the Soviet authorities in East Germany, rather than the Ulbricht government, were in control of policy and operations. W.R. Smyser, who was assigned to the American Mission in Berlin and served as Clay's confidential aide during the crisis, recalled that 'to end the Berlin crisis, Clay had to make it unpredictable and potentially dangerous enough for Khrushchev and Koniev [Commander of Group of Soviet Forces Germany] to clamp down on Ulbricht'.⁴⁰

Unbeknownst to higher authorities, Clay built a replica of the Berlin Wall and American soldiers began to train how to tear it down. Soviet intelligence services learned about this provocative measure, which led to fears in Moscow that the US intended to infringe upon Soviet rights in East Berlin. General Clarke shut down the project as soon as he became aware of it.⁴¹ Acrimony between Clarke, Norstad, who commanded both NATO forces and the US military in Europe, and Clay stemmed from two sources. First, Clarke and Norstad resented the informal installation of a military officer outside of the established chain of command, but with a direct line of communication to the President. Second, neither Clarke nor Norstad favoured a confrontational course of action in Berlin.⁴² Clay blamed Norstad for a defeatist attitude, while he understood Clarke's difficult position and accepted his decision to defer to higher headquarters in Paris.⁴³

On 21 September Clay challenged the Soviets and their East German clients at Steinstücken. Steinstücken was an outlying village of the borough of Zehlendorf that was entirely surrounded by East German territory, but still belonged to the American sector of Berlin. Since 13 August access to the village had been controlled by East German border guards and restricted to the small population of 190.⁴⁴ Clay learned that seven East Germans had found refuge within the perimeter, but could not leave the exclave for Berlin proper. He decided to appear personally and assess the situation. Having been turned back at the access road by media presence that made a stealthy approach to the border-control post impossible, Clay commandeered a helicopter and flew to the village. On the next day, Clay returned to Steinstücken with a patrol of American military policemen. Three of them were billeted in the village to assure the safety of the population. The seven refugees were air-lifted to Berlin. Bruce Clarke, who had not been informed of the action in advance, was outraged. His meeting with Clay on 24 September led to a heated exchange in which Clarke told Clay, a native of

Georgia, to 'keep his cotton picking fingers off my men'. Clarke also ordered the commander of US Army forces in Berlin, Major General Albert Watson, to clear any action of his troops with Clarke's headquarters in Heidelberg.⁴⁵

One week prior to the incidents, on 14 September, President Kennedy had approved a policy for dealing with blocked access to Steinstücken.⁴⁶ He had authorized General Watson, the US Commandant in Berlin and commander of US Army forces in the city, to send a mounted or helicopter-borne military police patrol to the village. The patrol could not use force unless General Norstad, upon conferring with the President, ordered otherwise. In the event, Norstad approved the helicopter flights to Steinstücken, but he told Vice President Johnson that he had rejected a request to deploy a motor convoy and he feared that Clay's probes of 'communist intentions in regard to the territory presented very high risks of launching a war'.⁴⁷ Clay did not think so. His actions were based on the assumption that the Soviets would not start a war over Berlin. Lyndon Johnson came away from his discussions in Paris with the notion that Clay's role in Berlin had to be defined more clearly. None of the American diplomats and military commanders knew for certain what Clay was authorized to do.⁴⁸

On 14 September Kennedy also outlined policy in case the Soviets or East Germans closed the crossing point at Friedrichstrasse and barred Western officials from entering East Berlin. Kennedy ordered that in such an event, the western allies should retaliate by barring all Soviet personnel from West Berlin, with the exception of the Soviet air control officer and the personnel of Spandau prison. If General Watson saw fit, additional American military forces could be moved to the sector boundary. A protracted closing of the crossing point might lead to American countermeasures outside of Berlin and Germany.⁴⁹ This was not satisfactory to Clay, who spent the better part of a month to obtain authorization for more forceful action.

On 25 September, in an address at the United Nations, President Kennedy declared that 'a peaceful agreement is possible which protects the freedom of West Berlin and Allied presence and access, while recognizing the historic and legitimate interests of others in assuring European security'.⁵⁰ This seemed to imply acceptance of a permanent division of the city, and the use of the term 'West Berlin' in a public address caused great concern. Not surprisingly, the speech was received more positively by the East German press than by West German media and politicians.⁵¹ Clay, however, reported to Dean Rusk that Kennedy's words had 'greatly encouraged the thinking Germans in Berlin'. Indeed, Kennedy had stated very clearly that Allied rights in West Berlin were non-negotiable, and that the US was prepared to defend its position by force. Clay found that the address 'was exactly what needed to be said and clearly proved that our policy is strong and determined. . . We are fighting a political battle here, not a war. Of course, we cannot win a war in Berlin but we can win the political battle.' To improve upon the US position in Berlin, Clay urged Rusk to streamline command relations so that rapid approval of urgent measures could be gained. During events in Steinstücken, for example, it had taken discussion between three commands before the refugees could be removed. Clay also pointed out that the State Department had approved the removal of refugees by helicopter only if it could be done covertly.⁵²

Such a clandestine approach ran counter to the intention of meeting Soviet pressure directly and in full view of the public.

After the episode in Steinstücken, Clay began to anticipate that the real test of will in Berlin would be over the right of western officials to enter the Soviet sector without having to provide documentation to East German border guards. The designated crossing point at Friedrichstrasse was controlled by East Germans, and since the US government did not recognize the GDR, showing identification papers would undercut American policy. This was a difficult issue, because established procedures were not the equivalent of clearly expressed agreements. Clay proposed to precipitate a crisis that would force Soviet authorities to take control over all Communist operations in Berlin. He explained to Dean Rusk that 'it would be of great advantage to us if we could force Soviet participation in event Friedrich Strasse [*sic*] is closed'. It was particularly important to maintain the right of access to East Berlin in principle to stem the decline in the morale of West Berliners. Clay suggested the use of a small group of tanks to force a barrier:

These tanks would then take defensive position in East Berlin immediately in front of entrance where they could not be cut off awaiting further development. Our Berlin Commander would demand immediate conference with Soviet commander and in such conference, would insist on restoration of our entry rights so that our tanks could be withdrawn. If seriously attacked by East German forces or if confronted by Soviet forces, our tanks would withdraw to defensive position in West Berlin engaging in action only if necessary to withdraw or if followed into West Berlin. While such withdrawal may be construed as weakness, *it is far less weak than no action at all and no action could be interpreted as abandonment of right*. I believe it adds little to risk of accidental war and the little it does must be taken if we are to convince the Soviet government of the risky course it pursues. It does maintain our right in principle; it may force the Soviet forces to show their intent and the determination behind it.⁵³

Clay had no objections to a tripartite agreement regulating the proper identification of American officials at the checkpoint to Soviet border guards. He did believe, however, that the requirement to show identification could not be accepted under pressure.⁵⁴

In reply to Clay, President Kennedy explained that the military and political situation of the US in Berlin was delicate. But he also solicited Clay's advice on how to respond to a blockade of ground access to West Berlin. The alternative courses of action were a swift military reaction that could escalate to general nuclear war or a more graduated response that would allow the Soviets to analyze the situation and back down.⁵⁵ Turning to specific incidents in Berlin, Kennedy assured Clay that, 'your views are most carefully weighed here' and 'your experience and your alertness are invaluable to us in working out this issue in specific cases'. But Kennedy also stated that *de facto* East German sovereignty over border control was acceptable to Washington in return for a guarantee of a robust system of Allied rights to access West Berlin. A negotiated settlement to the Berlin Crisis was thus possible, but Kennedy assured Clay that West Berlin as a politically free and economically successful entity was a crucial element of American Cold War policy.⁵⁶

Clay waited for ten days before responding to the President's letter. He claimed that he had needed the time to understand the situation in Berlin more fully. There were two basic issues that the US government had to be concerned about. First, American inaction would lead to a loss of confidence, which in turn would trigger a mass exodus from West Berlin. Moreover, Clay argued, the risk of war was not contingent on American action but on its inaction. He was convinced that the Soviets had no intention to start a war over Berlin. But to avoid the danger of escalation, the US needed to show that the crisis had reached a breaking point. Clay was highly critical of the slow erosion of Western rights in Berlin over the course of 1961, for which he blamed US military commanders in Europe. Finally, Clay made the argument that became familiar to White House staffers and State Department analysts: if West Germany lost faith in the United States, the country might change course and turn to neutralism and nationalism.⁵⁷

Clay did not directly respond to Kennedy's question about the best military course of action in the event of a Soviet or East German blockade of Berlin. In the event, the President showed his tough-mindedness on the issue in his policy directive to General Norstad on 20 October. Kennedy outlined a graduated-escalation model, beginning with a show of force by a platoon-size unit of the *Live Oak* staff that oversaw planning for Berlin contingencies. Then the Allies should turn to an economic embargo, maritime harassment, and UN action, while building up forces for larger military operations. The third step was to be division-size attacks into East Germany. If the Soviets did not back down at this point, the President would authorize the selective use of nuclear weapons. Kennedy acknowledged that this course of action might result in general nuclear war.⁵⁸ But at the same time, the President remained hopeful that the Berlin Crisis could be resolved in direct negotiations with the Soviet leadership. Exploratory talks between Dean Rusk and Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko had taken place on 21 September, and Kennedy and Khrushchev exchanged long letters in the autumn.⁵⁹

In Berlin, events were approaching their climax. The standard narrative of the tank crisis maintains that Clay only cleared his course of action with the President after an incident at the checkpoint on 22 October, but in fact the White House had been kept informed about Clay's intentions. The general explained his rationale and suggested to the Secretary of State the employment of tanks to remove barriers. Clay's proposal was debated in the presence of President Kennedy on 14 October. Defense Department and Joint Chiefs of Staff supported Clay's suggestion to remove forcibly any barriers at Checkpoint Charlie and have American tanks take up a defensive position inside the Soviet sector. The State Department was concerned with the diplomatic ramifications and cautioned that Clay's course of action would not establish permanent Allied rights of access to East Berlin. State Department officials furthermore questioned that it made much difference whether the Soviets or the East Germans controlled policy and operations in East Berlin. Facing opposition not only from General Clay, but also from the defence establishment, and sensing that the President was favourably inclined to pursue Clay's course of action, the State Department offered a modified proposal that President Kennedy ultimately accepted.⁶⁰

On 18 October Secretary Rusk informed American embassies that the President had issued new instructions based on the State Department modifications to General Clay's proposed course of action:

Two or three tanks would be used to force barrier and demolish any obstacle barring entry; Tanks used for purpose would be withdrawn immediately after accomplishing mission and stationed nearby *inside* West Sector. Commandant in Chair for month or, alternatively, USCOB [US Commander Berlin] could then call Karlshorst [Soviet headquarters] immediately to protest GDR action and demand urgent meeting with Soviet Commandant, as well as assurance safe conduct through sector boundary for purposes this meeting. Press statement would be issued soonest in Berlin, explaining Allied forces had destroyed barrier illegally erected by East Germans; matter was being protested Soviet Commandant; Allies continued to hold Soviets responsible for assuring unrestricted Allied circulation in East Berlin. In our view, among advantages of this course of action: Would demonstrate our insistence on continued right of access to and circulation in East Berlin; Cause Soviet to pause before taking further encroaching action in Berlin and affect nature subsequent actions; By withdrawing tanks into West Sector, immediately after completion demolition action, we not only forestall problem of disengaging forces; we would also limit possibility of unduly raising hopes Berliners and consequently reduce possibility of uncontrolled popular demonstrations.⁶¹

General Clay had not received the green light for the action he intended, but he had received sufficient authority to act with force in response to East German infringement on Allied rights of access to East Berlin. It should be pointed out that General Watson, in spite of his orders from General Clarke, did all he could to support Clay. It was Watson who had the command authority during the crisis, although it was obvious to any observer that Clay was directing American operations in Berlin.⁶²

On 22 October Allan Lightner, the American minister to Berlin, and his wife, approached the Friedrichstrasse crossing point by car, on their way to attend an opera performance in the Soviet sector. They were stopped by East German border police, who requested to see their documentation. The Lightners refused, since unobstructed access to the Soviet sector for American, British, and French officials had been granted routinely since 1945, even if they wore civilian clothing, as long as they were travelling in a vehicle with official licence plates. Eventually, Allan Lightner was escorted past the East German policemen by a squad of armed American soldiers on foot, who were supported by armoured personnel carriers.⁶³ Soon thereafter, a Soviet political adviser, Lieutenant Colonel Lazarev, arrived at the scene to confer with an American official. Lazarev admitted that the East Germans had exceeded their authority and assured his counterpart that such incidents would not recur. But the next day, East German media blamed American authorities for the incident, and on 24 October two vehicles driven by American officials were denied access to East Berlin.⁶⁴ It is unclear whether Lazarev's concession was genuine and the East Germans acted on their own volition. The matter was left unresolved in discussions between General Watson and his Soviet counterpart, Colonel Solovyev, on 25 October.⁶⁵ In any event, a private reassurance that the Soviets controlled the border was insufficient for Clay's purposes. Consequently, he seized upon the next opportunity.

Also on 25 October two more American officers were refused access to East Berlin at Checkpoint Charlie. Upon consulting with Clay, General Watson ordered ten M-48 Patton tanks to the crossing point. The officers were escorted through the checkpoint by three military police jeeps and armed soldiers. In the evening a Reuters newsagent in East Berlin counted 30 Soviet tanks that were approaching Friedrichstrasse. At first, the Soviet tanks remained in the background. On the next day, Clay asked Rusk what he thought of a raid in force into the Soviet sector with 'quick but rather deep penetration, tearing down parts of the Wall as we return'.⁶⁶ Rusk reminded Clay that access to East Berlin was not a vital issue in itself. The Secretary of State was 'unable to see what national purpose would be accomplished by the proposed raid in force'.⁶⁷

With the demonstrative raid denied, the American tanks left the crossing point in the afternoon of 27 October but returned within 15 minutes when seven Soviet tanks moved up to the border. At that point the Soviet tanks withdrew, but shortly thereafter Marshall Koniev, upon orders from Khrushchev, moved up ten tanks to confront one for one the American tanks at the checkpoint. An American tank commander worried that 'a nervous soldier discharging his weapon or some tanker stepping accidentally on his accelerator' might start a nuclear war.⁶⁸ In the meantime, crowds had gathered on both sides of the border and at least one East German citizen used the distraction of the border guards to run through the maze into West Berlin.⁶⁹ Clay immediately seized upon the development at the checkpoint, and called for a press conference at US headquarters during which he stated that the Soviet action proved that East German sovereignty was a fiction.⁷⁰

Historian Lawrence Freedman argues that 'this was the sort of situation Kennedy dreaded: a contrived incident over a secondary issue that could lead to a tank battle in the middle of Berlin with who knew what consequences to follow'.⁷¹ It was indeed true that most officials in the White House and the State Department were alarmed by the course of events and incensed at Clay.⁷² Kennedy, however, was not among them. At 11:55 a.m., Washington time, Clay discussed the situation with the President over the phone. He assured Kennedy that he would not launch a military probe for several days and definitely not without prior consultation.⁷³ Clay thought the situation was tense but stable and could last for several days.⁷⁴ Later in the afternoon, Washington time, Kennedy called Clay. The general expressed his confidence in a peaceful solution of events at Checkpoint Charlie. His argument was bolstered when he learned from an aide during the phone conversation that the Soviets were bringing up 20 more tanks, matching the total number of American tanks in Berlin. Clay told Kennedy that this proved the Soviets were well informed and prepared to find a solution short of war. He asked Kennedy about the state of mind of his advisers. The President replied that many of them had lost their nerve, but he himself was calm.⁷⁵

Once the Soviet military had been forced to respond, it became possible for the Kennedy administration to end the crisis without loss of face. Neither Kennedy nor Clay had serious objections to the regulation of access right to East Berlin as a result of a negotiated agreement rather than a unilateral decision. The termination of the tank stand-off is still shrouded in secrecy officially, but enough of the veil has been lifted in

recent years to conclude that Robert F. Kennedy, the Attorney General, had entered into negotiations with Georgi Bolshakov, a KGB officer operating under the guise of press attaché at the Soviet embassy in Washington. Arthur Schlesinger recalled the content of President Kennedy's message, which was to be conveyed to Nikita Khrushchev: 'the President would like them to take their tanks out of there in twenty-four hours.'⁷⁶ The Soviet tanks indeed withdrew on 28 October. The American tanks did so, too, and the stand-off was over.

Clay's action had forced Soviet military commanders in East Germany to show publicly that they controlled the East German authorities. This was precisely what Clay had intended to prove. W.R. Smyser concluded that 'the Checkpoint Charlie confrontation, although taking place at the sector border, helped win a key phase of the battle for Berlin. Some Western diplomats criticized Clay, but he had actually kept open for negotiations an outcome that Ulbricht and perhaps Khrushchev had wanted to settle by force.'⁷⁷ From the US perspective, any negotiations, whether official or in secret, had to be with Soviet emissaries. Dealings with East German officials, even on a very low level at a crossing point would have amounted to a tacit recognition of the GDR. But now it had been established that the border guards answered to the Soviets. Clay might have been disappointed with the lack of support from General Norstad, and he was certainly concerned with the counsel the President received from his foreign policy advisers, but he found that Kennedy had held up well in the crisis.

The Decline of Clay's Influence

From the tank stand-off President Kennedy drew the lesson that it was possible to confront the Soviets without automatic escalation to a shooting war.⁷⁸ But despite the assessment that the outcome of the confrontation had been positive, Kennedy decided not to pursue a provocative military course of action in the future. Instead, the US settled for reciprocity in showing identification papers, forcing Soviet officials to properly identify themselves as well.⁷⁹ Clay rejected the utility of reciprocity, still fearing that it would establish a precedent in the question of East German sovereignty.⁸⁰ Moreover, it might lead the Ulbricht government to try to regulate American, British, and French access to West Berlin.⁸¹ But he was willing to tone down his rhetoric. On 9 November McGeorge Bundy informed Kennedy that 'General Clay... was most grateful for the assurance of your confidence; he agreed entirely with our tactics on public comments.'⁸² On the other hand, Kennedy had told General Norstad on 7 November that he was aware of the difficulties Clay was causing for Norstad, and expressed concern about Clay's tendency to make dramatic statements to the press that indicated dissatisfaction with US policy.⁸³ Kennedy recognized that the confrontation had served its purpose and that the US could enter into serious negotiations with the Soviets. But to reassure the public in the US, West Germany, and West Berlin, he needed Clay to remain on his post.

Clay's attitude in the autumn and winter of 1961 was expressed in letters to former President Eisenhower and to Dean Acheson. Within days of the tank stand-off, Clay

told Eisenhower that it was necessary and ‘timely to confront the Soviet government; not truculently but with determination’. Clay was convinced that for the Soviets, the Berlin Crisis was but a means to the end of breaking up the NATO alliance. He feared that the Soviets were succeeding. But at the same time, Clay believed that the Soviet leadership did not want war over Berlin. He lamented that ‘I seem to be rather alone in my thinking these days which makes the pressure great. But I cannot give up my efforts to bring us to the critical test sure of our purpose.’⁸⁴ Clay was more blunt in his letter to Acheson. He noted that

if we do not have the courage or if we are deterred by Allied weakness in the short remaining period in which military odds are in our favor, what will we do when this is no longer true. I cannot see any evidence that the free world is not prepared to concede more and to resent less as Soviet pressure increases. I hope that our leadership can stop this swing. . . I believe that we can succeed and that, in our own interest, we should seek the confrontation sooner rather than later. If the free world is unwilling to face the risk of nuclear war to save freedom wherever it is threatened, whereas the Communist is taking this risk to expand, there can be only one outcome. . . I am not being critical of anyone and I have confidence that the President understands the challenge. I hope our people do.⁸⁵

But one year later Clay acknowledged that the uncompromising response to the Berlin Wall had forced Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko to enter into serious negotiations.⁸⁶

At the end of 1961, the White House steered toward conciliation in Berlin, but Clay’s request to leave his post was denied and he discussed his role privately with the President in Washington on 7 January.⁸⁷ McGeorge Bundy had advised the President that Clay should be retained in Berlin. It was also useful to allow him to speak candidly, although he should do so in private communication rather than through public channels. Bundy was uneasy about Clay’s tenacity in pursuing a diplomatic confrontation, however, and so was Kennedy. Clay’s methods had served their purpose in September and October 1961, but now it was necessary to monitor his activities closely, as he was prone to ‘make choices [Kennedy] would not approve’.⁸⁸

Clay was mollified only temporarily by the meeting with the President. He had learned about the secret negotiations between the President’s brother and Soviet officials, but of course he could not be told officially. Clay resented the content of the negotiations, as far as he could surmise, because he feared that it would lead to a decline of the Western position in Berlin and American influence in West Germany.⁸⁹ At the end of January, Clay again offered his retirement, reasoning that his mission had been fulfilled and tensions were less severe.⁹⁰ Just then the crisis flared up again, this time over the question of air corridors. Three such corridors were reserved for American, British, and French flights to Berlin, but in February 1962 the Soviets announced temporary closures in order to conduct air exercises.

The air corridor crisis lingered into March and Clay was convinced that this was another instant of Soviet harassment tactics that had to be confronted. He recommended the deployment of fighter escorts alongside commercial flights. But he found no support in the White House and had to observe policy advanced by General

Norstad in Paris, which Clay thought surrendered Allied rights needlessly. Eventually, it was agreed that the corridors would remain open above 10,000 feet, but that no planes would be allowed to fly at a lower altitude. Despite rejecting Clay's position, the President remained convinced that his presence in Berlin was useful and that his advice should still be solicited.⁹¹ But Clay realized that from then on his role would be merely symbolic, and he was unwilling to provide a facade for American resolve while the White House pursued a policy of conciliation. During the air corridor crisis, Clay had sent a private letter to President Kennedy in which he outlined his reasons for retirement. Kennedy dispatched Maxwell Taylor to Berlin to persuade Clay to remain at his post at least until the current crisis had passed.⁹²

On 12 April Clay returned to Washington for consultations with the President. He believed that he had achieved his primary mission: to force Khrushchev to seize control from Ulbricht. He felt that the crisis had settled down sufficiently to allow him to retire from his post in Berlin. This time Kennedy agreed, but he asked Clay to return to Berlin until a formal announcement was made. On 1 May Clay appeared at a May Day rally and was celebrated by a crowd of close to one million Berliners. He announced that his job was done and that he would leave the next day. Incidentally, Marshall Koniev retired almost simultaneously after the air corridor crisis had passed.⁹³ On 5 May Willy Brandt, the Governing Mayor of West Berlin, presented Clay with honorary citizenship, a rare honour for a foreign national. Upon returning from Berlin, Clay remained a consultant to President Kennedy until September 1962, when he decided that he could no longer support the conciliatory policies that he believed could only end in disaster.⁹⁴

Conclusions

Lucius Clay did not intend to start a war. He wanted to win the political battle and believed that the Soviet leaders felt the same way. He believed that war would not start as a result of controlled political and military actions in Berlin. On the other hand, he was convinced that war became more likely if the United States did not defend its rights. Conciliatory policies could only embolden the Kremlin. Political confrontation was a necessity, not a choice. Thus, Clay went to Berlin with two primary objectives. He intended to contribute to an improvement of morale among the citizens of Berlin and, more importantly, he attempted to prove that East German sovereignty was a fiction. At the end of the tank crisis, Clay had achieved the second goal, and morale improved steadily in the course of 1962. But his triumph on 28 October directly led to a change in presidential policy, which in turn marginalized Clay. By forcing the Soviets to commit tanks, Clay had indeed proved that East German sovereignty did not extend to the area of security and foreign policy, but this opened the door for conciliatory policies toward Moscow. Subsequently, Clay, the *agent provocateur* sent to Berlin by the President, had to play an uncomfortable role. He became a symbol rather than an actor.

It is surprising that Clay remained in Berlin for half a year after the conclusion of the tank crisis. He became aware of his waning influence when he could not convince

Kennedy that tolerating restrictions of access to East Berlin was detrimental to the American position in the city and to the morale of the population. But the White House installed such a policy only after 28 October. Kennedy understood that the events of 27–28 October had transformed the context of the crisis and he reverted to the position held by the State Department that access rights to East Berlin *per se* were inconsequential. Clay was also displeased with secret negotiations between Washington and Moscow. Since he was not informed of the content of the discussions and letters, he assumed the worst. The air corridor crisis, and Kennedy's decision to accept General Norstad's proposals while dismissing Clay's advice, proved to be the last straw. But even then the President wanted Clay in Berlin. He was a valuable symbol. For this reason, Kennedy made sure that Clay remained as a consultant to the administration even after the general had left his post.

The time period during which Clay exerted a decisive influence on American policy was brief, spanning only from mid-September to late October 1961. In that month and a half, however, he showed how much personality mattered. Did he overstep his authority? President Kennedy had left the boundaries of Clay's mandate only vaguely defined. Clay did not act without consulting with the State Department and the White House. Both in the case of the Steinstücken episode and the tank confrontation, he used tactics that the State Department, and indeed most of John F. Kennedy's advisers and American military commanders in Europe, found unnecessarily provocative. But the available record indicates that the President did not share this sentiment or at the very least was conflicted. Clay had not been sent to Berlin to enforce US policy arrived at by committee. He was in Berlin upon John F. Kennedy's request, and it was quite natural for Clay to believe that he was supposed to conduct operations that allowed the President to terminate the crisis. He won the political battle because Kennedy had asked him to do so. Clay, however, might not have interpreted it as a victory. To him, winning entailed tangible results, but the Berlin Crisis did not end. Still, the division of the city proved to be a useful, albeit painful, means to deactivate a potentially explosive situation.

President Kennedy's decisions in the autumn and winter of 1961 illustrated his strengths as a crisis manager as well as his tendency to rely on personal emissaries rather than established channels of communication through the State Department. Kennedy seized opportunities in pursuit of a strategic objective. That objective was not limited to Berlin. John F. Kennedy intended to improve the stability of international relations at a point in the Cold War when nuclear conflict appeared more likely than ever before, or ever since. This was not a question of victory or defeat; it was a question of the survival of the human race. In the literature and interpretation of the Berlin Crisis, Clay's disillusionment with US policy for Berlin from November 1961 on has come to overshadow the political triumph he shared with the President. John F. Kennedy had forced Khrushchev to settle for a wall that symbolized the imprisonment of a society. Clay forced Khrushchev to admit publicly that Walter Ulbricht was little more than a puppet, and that the GDR was not a sovereign state. In doing so, both men, in their own ways, changed the dynamics of the Cold War in Germany.

Students of the Cold War have begun to re-evaluate a massive amount of documentation that describes the attitudes and actions of all major powers. The conclusions presented in this article are based on close reading of documents and eye-witness accounts that have been largely known to historians. But in focusing on process of decision-making, rather than on its outcome, the article offers a more nuanced analysis of policy as well as military and diplomatic activities during the Berlin Crisis. General Clay showed the still inexperienced President that there were alternative courses of action to outright concessions or nuclear war. Kennedy proved to be a careful observer. He quickly realized that Clay's assumption of Soviet intent and methods was plausible and that Soviet leaders had no more interest in a nuclear war resulting from a political crisis over Berlin than their American counterparts. Ultimately, the tank confrontation may be viewed as an example for brinkmanship, comparable to the policy of the Eisenhower administration in the Taiwan Strait crises of 1954–55 and 1958. Kennedy's success reinforced his natural tendency to blend hard-line policies of containment and confrontation with diplomacy and concessions. Clay's role during the crisis illustrated Kennedy's mistrust of established hierarchies, both in the State Department and the defence establishment. Reliance upon personal emissaries and secret negotiations also carried US policy throughout the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. But Kennedy's pragmatic policy toward Berlin in 1961 already served as an example of both military and diplomatic aspects of the new strategy of Flexible Response.

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Notes

- [1] Some historians and analysts of the Berlin Crisis have contributed to this perception. Jack M. Schick and Marc Trachtenberg, for instance, never mention the tank stand-off. See Schick, *The Berlin Crisis 1958–1962*, and Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy and A Constructed Peace*. Senior officials of the Kennedy administration also omitted the tank crisis in their memoirs. Bohlen, *Witness to History 1929–1969*; Nitze, *From Hiroshima to Glasnost*; Rusk, *As I Saw It*; Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*; and Sorensen, *Kennedy*.
- [2] For Clay's command tenure as Military Governor see Clay's memoirs *Decision in Germany*; Smith, *Lucius D. Clay*, 223–546. Recent monographs on the Berlin Blockade and air lift include Haydock, *City Under Siege* and Parrish, *Berlin in the Balance*. For the attitude of Berliners toward Clay see, e.g., Brandt, *Begegnungen mit Kennedy*, 110–13, and Riller, *Funken für die Freiheit*, 155.
- [3] Cate, *The Ides of August*, 458–86; Catudal, *Kennedy and the Berlin Wall Crisis*; McDermott, *Berlin: Success of a Mission?*, 43–6, Smith, *The Defense of Berlin*, 303–24; Smith, *Clay*, 657–63; Smyser, *From Yalta to Berlin*, 167–83.
- [4] Costigliola, "The Pursuit of Atlantic Community"; Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars*, 90–91; Garthoff, "Berlin 1961"; Gelb, *The Berlin Wall*, 245–58; Large, *Berlin*, 455–6; Schild, "The Berlin Crisis"; Steininger, *Der Mauerbau*, 305–14.

- [5] Quoted in Large, *Berlin*, 456.
- [6] Michael Beschloss concluded that Kennedy consented because he was “reluctant to provoke the General.” Beschloss, *The Crisis Years*, 333. German diplomatic historian Schanett Riller acknowledged that Kennedy permitted Clay’s actions, but only after the general’s course had been too far advanced to do otherwise. Riller, *Funken für die Freiheit*, 157. Riller’s “Decision Making in the U.S. Administration” remains the only detailed archival study of the events in September and October.
- [7] For an excellent recent study of US policy during the Berlin Crisis that considers the conflicting positions of France, Great Britain, and West Germany, see Münger, *Kennedy, die Berliner Mauer und die Kubakrise*.
- [8] Schanett Riller argues that Clay’s activities were not fully compatible with contingency plans in Washington and were potentially harmful to Kennedy’s policy of negotiation. Riller, *Funken für die Freiheit*, 157. But Riller did not consider that the demonstration of Soviet control of East German border police fundamentally altered the negotiation positions of the two superpowers. Swiss historian Christof Münger argues that Clay’s actions in Berlin served to underscore the leadership role of the US in NATO, particularly when contrasted to the weak responses of Britain and France. But he also states that Clay acted on his own volition and presented Kennedy with a *fait accompli*. Münger, *Kennedy, Berliner Mauer und Kubakrise*, 129–32.
- [9] For the Berlin Crisis from 1958 to 1960 see, for instance, Bremen, *Die Eisenhower-Administration*; Burr, “Avoiding the Slippery Slope”; Schick, *Berlin Crisis*; Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy*, 191–215 and *A Constructed Peace*, 251–82.
- [10] Petr Lužák shows that Khrushchev, having failed to force a compromise upon President Eisenhower, assumed that John F. Kennedy was weakened by the Bay of Pigs fiasco and would have to accept unilateral Soviet action in Berlin. But when the US government responded firmly, indicating that it was prepared for an escalation, Khrushchev settled for a smaller solution, trying to stem the flow of refugees from East Germany. Lužák, “Khrushchev and the Berlin Crisis.” But see also Harrison, *Driving the Soviets Up the Wall* and “Driving the Soviets Up the Wall” for the influence of the East German government on Khrushchev’s decisions.
- [11] The best account of the meeting and Kennedy’s reaction remains Beschloss, *Crisis Years*, 211–36.
- [12] Policy Planning Staff, OASD (ISA), 26 June 1961, *A New Approach to Berlin*. Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Secret and Below General Files 1961, 092 Germany 21–30 June 1961, Box 33, Record Group 330, National Archives.
- [13] National Security Action Memorandum No. 62, 24 July 1961. Records of the National Security Council (NSC), National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM), Record Group 273, National Archives.
- [14] See, for instance, Memorandum by Paul Nitze, summarized in Lemnitzer to Norstad, 26 August 1961. Lauris Norstad Papers, Subject Series, Joint Chiefs of Staff 1957 thru Oct 1961 Vol. I (4), Box 103, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.
- [15] For NATO’s *Live Oak* organization, installed in 1959 to develop plans for interference with Western access rights, and commanded by General Lauris Norstad, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, see Pedlow, “Allied Crisis Management for Berlin.” For the plans developed by *Live Oak* see also Maloney, “Berlin Contingency Planning” and Pedlow, “Flexible Response Before MC 14/3.”
- [16] See Smith, *The Defense of Berlin*, 293–5.
- [17] Quoted in Beschloss, *Crisis Years*, 278.
- [18] Relations between the two Cold War allies were already declining, as John F. Kennedy and West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer could not establish a close personal relationship, unlike Adenauer and John Foster Dulles. Adenauer believed that the new American strategy

of flexible response was ill-advised and would lead to the abandonment of Western Europe. In the late summer of 1961 he lamented the slow response of the White House to the erection of the Berlin Wall. More importantly, he believed that Kennedy openly favoured opposition leader Willy Brandt, the Lord Mayor of Berlin, over Adenauer in the upcoming national election. See, e.g., Mayer, *Adenauer and Kennedy*.

- [19] Norstad to Lemnitzer, 18 August 1961. Lauris Norstad Papers, Policy Files Series, Box 86, "Berlin – LIVE OAK 1961 thru 30 Aug. (1)," DDE Library. For Norstad's moderate course throughout the Berlin Crisis see Pedlow, "Three Hats for Berlin." The French government opposed negotiations because there was nothing to be gained and it deemed the current situation the best possible outcome. See Buffet, "De Gaulle, the Bomb and Berlin," 88.
- [20] In November Adenauer told Dean Acheson that negotiations were the only option because NATO was too weak conventionally and he rejected the idea to use nuclear weapons in the Berlin Crisis. Acheson to Marshall Shulman, 23 November 1961. Dean Acheson Papers, Post Administration Files, State Department and White House Advisor, 1960–68, Box 99, State Department and White House Advisor, 1961, October–December, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library.
- [21] Wall, *France, the United States, and the Algerian War*, 251.
- [22] See Clay's *Decision in Germany* and Smith, *Clay*, 277–95, 423–546.
- [23] Clay to Maxwell Taylor, 15 August 1961. Lucius D. Clay Papers, Box 8, Folder 1, George C. Marshall Research Library, Lexington, Virginia.
- [24] The German historian Andreas Daum argues that sending Clay, a symbolic figure for the population of Berlin, was an illustration of the significance Kennedy placed on public images and symbolism in his Berlin policy. Daum, *Kennedy in Berlin*, 30–31.
- [25] John F. Kennedy Oral History Project, Maxwell Taylor interviewed by Elspeth Rostow, 26 April 1964, 16 and General Lucius D. Clay interviewed by Richard M. Scammons, 1 July 1964, 2–4. Oral History Collection, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.
- [26] Norstad proposed to send an engineer company and nine armoured personnel carriers for the Berlin garrison, thus fulfilling a long-standing request. He argued that the convoy entering Berlin would still look impressive enough to shore up the will of the city and its population to resist Soviet and East German pressure tactics. Norstad to Lemnitzer and Clarke, 18 August 1961. Lauris Norstad Papers, Policy Files Series, Box 86, "Berlin – LIVE OAK 1961 thru 30 Aug. (2)," Lemnitzer to Norstad and Clarke, 18 August 1961. *Ibid.*, and Lemnitzer to Norstad and Clark [*sic*], 19 August 1961. Norstad Papers, Subject Series, Box 103, "Joint Chiefs of Staff 1957 thru Oct 1961 Vol. I (5)," Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library. For Clarke's opposition see also Senior Officer Debriefing Program, Interview of General Bruce Clarke by Francis B. Kish, 1982, Volume II, 204–5. Bruce Clarke Papers, Oral History, Box 3, Military History Institute.
- [27] Clay's endorsement was hardly decisive, however, as Kennedy had already made up his mind earlier in the day. See Record of Meeting of the Berlin Steering Group, 17 August 1961, *FRUS 1961–1963, Vol. XIV*, 347–49.
- [28] For the movement of the battle group and its reception by throngs of cheering West Berliners see, for instance, Cate, *Ides of August*, 417–23. For Soviet interference with the movement and resulting delays see Earle Wheeler, Memorandum for General Taylor, 21 August 1961, *After-Action Report of Movement of Battle Group to Berlin*. Berlin Crisis Collection, BC 02373, Digital National Security Archive. A narrative of the movement of the battle group also can be found in Headquarters, United States Army, Europe. *Annual History United States Army, Europe, 1 January–31 December 1961*. US Army, Europe: Heidelberg, 1962, 35–7.
- [29] See, for instance, Cate, *Ides of August*, 407–13, Daum, *Kennedy in Berlin*, 48–53, and Smith, *Clay*, 645–6. Johnson himself estimated that at least one million Berliners had turned out to greet the vice-presidential party. Memorandum from Johnson to President Kennedy,

- 21 August 1961, p. 4. Papers of Lyndon B. Johnson, Vice Presidential Security File, Box 2, Berlin, Germany: Berlin Papers for the Vice President, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library.
- [30] Johnson to President Kennedy, 21 August 1961, 2.
- [31] *Ibid.*, 3.
- [32] *Ibid.*, 5.
- [33] Acheson Report on Berlin. *FRUS 1961–1963, Vol. XIV*, 138–59.
- [34] Dean Acheson told McGeorge Bundy in November that the border in Berlin was “the wrong place for fooling around” because Berlin was indefensible and the allies were unwilling to pursue a confrontational policy. McGeorge Bundy, Memorandum for the President, 20 November 1961. National Security File, McGeorge Bundy, Correspondence, Memos to the President 11/1/61–11/20/61, Box 405, JFK Library.
- [35] See, for instance, Memorandum from President Kennedy to Secretary of State Rusk, 21 August 1961, Berlin Political Planning, in: *FRUS 1961–1963, Vol. XIV*, 359–60. Marc Trachtenberg argues in *A Constructed Peace*, 283–351, that all of Kennedy’s policies during the Berlin Crisis have to be seen as subordinate to the goal of a negotiated settlement.
- [36] Robert McNamara to President Kennedy, 24 August 1961. National Security Files, Country Series, Box 86, JFK Library.
- [37] McGeorge Bundy, Memorandum to the President, 28 August 1961, Issues to Be Settled with General Clay. Berlin Crisis Collection, BC 02415, Digital National Security Archive.
- [38] John F. Kennedy to General Clay, 30 August 1961. NSF, Country Series, Box 86, JFK Library.
- [39] Lucius D. Clay interviewed by Jean Edward Smith, 974, 991. Columbia University Oral History Collection. Unfortunately, Clay’s recollection is the only available record of the conversation. It is a problematic source, but it nevertheless denotes Clay’s perception of Kennedy’s intentions, even if the general might have misinterpreted Kennedy.
- [40] Smyser, *From Yalta to Berlin*, 170. Marshall Koniev had been brought out of retirement during the crisis to control Soviet operations in Berlin.
- [41] The Soviets learned about the exercise before Clarke did. Raymond Garthoff argues that Clay “hoped to roll back the communist position of the opportunity arose.” Garthoff, “Berlin 1961,” 147–48. But given Clay’s objective, it is entirely plausible that he merely intended to cause fear and uncertainty among Soviet political and military leaders.
- [42] Norstad’s philosophical differences with Clay are discussed in Pedlow, “Flexible Response Before MC 14/3,” 251–2.
- [43] Clay interview by Jean E. Smith, 974–75, 989–90, illustrated Clay’s surprise and disappointment at the opposition to his course of action from American military commanders in Europe, but also expressed his understanding of Clarke’s dilemma. Clay and Clarke knew each other well. Both had been officers of the Corps of Engineers before the Second World War. While their relationship suffered during the Berlin Crisis, the two generals remained in communication after the crisis. See, for instance, Clarke to Clay, 6 January 1977 and Clay’s reply of 11 January. Clay Papers, Box 2, Folder, Marshall Library.
- [44] For the history of Steinstücken and its awkward location behind the Iron Curtain see Catudal, *Steinstücken*.
- [45] As told by Cate, *Ides of August*, 467–70 and Wyden, *Wall*, 264–6. General Clarke is quoted in Wyden, *Wall*, 265.
- [46] National Security Action Memorandum No. 94, 14 September 1961, Steinstücken and Friedrichstrasse Crossing Point. *FRUS 1961–1963, Vol. XIV*, 404.
- [47] Memorandum of Conversation between Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson, Ambassador Gavin, Ambassador Finnletter, and General Norstad at the United States Embassy, Paris, France, 30 September 1961. Berlin Crisis Collection, BC 02518, Digital National Security Archive.

- [48] See undated memorandum summarizing the main points of Johnson's discussions in Paris on September 30. The memorandum is unsigned, but it appears that it was edited by Johnson. Berlin Crisis Collection, BC 02520, Digital National Security Archive.
- [49] National Security Action Memorandum No. 94, 14 September 1961.
- [50] For the full text of the address see *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy, 1961*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1962, 618–26. The Berlin Crisis is addressed on pages 624–5. The quotation is on page 625. See also Beschloss, *Crisis Years*, p.315.
- [51] Cate, *Ides of August*, 470–72.
- [52] Telegram from the Mission at Berlin to the Department of State, From Clay for Rusk only, 28 September 1961. *FRUS 1961–1963, Vol. XIV*, 441–3.
- [53] General Clay to Dean Rusk, 5 October 1961. NSF, Country Series, Box 86, JFK Library. See also Telegram from the Mission at Berlin to the Secretary of State, From Clay to Rusk, 29 September 1961. *FRUS 1961–1963: Vols. XIII/XIV/XY, microfiche supplement* (emphasis added).
- [54] Telegram from the Mission at Berlin to the Department of State, From Clay for Rusk only, 24 October 1961. *FRUS 1961–1963, Vol. XIV*, 532–4.
- [55] Letter from President Kennedy to His Special Representative in Berlin (Clay), 8 October 1961. *FRUS 1961–1963, Vol. XIV*, 484–6.
- [56] *Ibid.*
- [57] Letter from the Special Representative in Berlin (Clay) to President Kennedy, 18 October 1961. *FRUS 1961–1963, Vol. XIV*, 509–13.
- [58] Letter from President Kennedy to the Supreme Commander, Allied Forces Europe (Norstad), 20 October 1961. *FRUS 1961–1963, Vol. XIV*, 520–23. See also McGeorge Bundy, Memorandum of Meeting, 20 October 1961. *Ibid.*, 517–19. Norstad rejected the policy directive for his NATO command. See Pedlow, “Three Hats for Berlin,” 186–8.
- [59] Beschloss, *Crisis Years*, 311–53.
- [60] Memorandum from Acting Secretary of State Ball to President Kennedy, 14 October 1961. *FRUS 1961–1963, Vol. XIV*, 498–502. The State Department's counterproposal was mirrored in a message sent by General Norstad to Dean Rusk and General Lemnitzer. See *Berlin* [undated, unattributed memorandum; probably McGeorge Bundy, ca. 11 or 12 October 1961]. NSF, Countries, Germany Berlin General 10/16/61–10/19/61, Box 83, JFK Library.
- [61] Dean Rusk to Embassies, 18 October 1961. NSF, Country Series, Box 86, JFK Library (emphasis in original). See also McGeorge Bundy to the Secretary of State, National Security Action Memorandum No. 107, 18 October 1961, Friedrichstrasse Crossing Point. NSF, Meetings&Memoranda, NSAM 107, Box 332, JFK Library.
- [62] On 27 October General Clarke suggested to General George Decker, the Army Chief of Staff, that Watson effectively be demoted and that General Norstad or his deputy, General Palmer should take operational control of the US Army in Berlin. Decker's response to Clarke again indicated that there was no specific order that outlined Clay's authority, but the Chief of Staff agreed with Clarke's proposal to restructure command relations for the duration of the crisis. Decker to Clarke, 13 November 1961. Berlin Crisis Collection, BC 02625, Digital National Security Archive.
- [63] Lightner himself described the course of events in a telegram to the State Department on the following afternoon. Telegram from the Mission at Berlin to the Department of State, 23 October 1961. *FRUS 1961–1963, Vol. XIV*, 524–5.
- [64] Central Intelligence Agency, Office of Current Intelligence, 27 October 1961, *Current Intelligence Weekly*, 11–13. Berlin Crisis Collection, BC 02594, Digital National Security Archive.

- [65] Telegram from the Mission at Berlin to the Department of State, 25 October 1961. *FRUS 1961–1963, Vol. XIV*, 537–39.
- [66] Telegram from the Mission at Berlin to the Secretary of State, Eyes only from Clay for Rusk only, 26 October 1961. *FRUS 1961–1963, microfiche supplement*, no. 221. See also Telegram from Mission at Berlin to the Secretary of State, 25 October 1961, From Clay for Rusk only. *Ibid.*, no. 216.
- [67] Telegram from the Department of State to the Mission at Berlin, Eyes only for Clay, 26 October 1961. *FRUS 1961–1963, Vol. XIV*, 539–41.
- [68] Lt. Col. Thomas Tyree quoted in Beschloss, *Crisis Years*, 334.
- [69] Mission at Berlin to Secretary of State, 27 October 1961. Berlin Crisis Collection, BC 02599, Digital National Security Archive.
- [70] For a detailed narrative of the tank stand-off see Cate, *Ides of August*, 480–85 and Wyden, *Wall*, 260–67.
- [71] Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars*, 91.
- [72] Even on 27 October, just hours before the Soviet tanks were moved up, analysts in the State Department still assumed that there would be no American response to a temporary closing of the Friedrichstrasse crossing point. See Seymour Weiss to Jeffrey Kitchen, 27 October 1961. Berlin Crisis Collection, BC 02595, Digital National Security Archive.
- [73] Watson to Norstad, 27 October 1961. *FRUS 1961–1963, microfiche supplement*, no. 223.
- [74] Telegram from the Mission at Berlin to the Department of State, From Clay to Rusk, 27 October 1961. *FRUS 1961–1963, Vol. XIV*, 543.
- [75] There are several sources for the second conversation between Clay and Kennedy. Smith, *Clay*, 660–61 can be traced back to his interview with Clay, 995–7. W.R. Smyser also recalled the episode in *From Yalta to Berlin*, 175. See also Beschloss, *Crisis Years*, 334, Cate, *Ides of August*, 485, and Wyden, *Wall*, 262–3.
- [76] Schlesinger is quoted in Garthoff, “Berlin 1961,” 145. His account was corroborated by Robert Kennedy. See *Ibid.* 150. See also Wyden, *Wall*, 266 and Beschloss, *Crisis Years*, 334–5.
- [77] Smyser, *From Yalta to Berlin*, 178.
- [78] *Ibid.*, 176–7.
- [79] Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Germany, 30 October 1961, From Acting Secretary (Bowles) eyes only for Dowling and Clay. *FRUS 1961–1963, Vol. XIV*, 551.
- [80] Mission at Berlin to American Embassy, Paris, From Clay, 31 October 1961. Berlin Crisis Collection, BC 02611, Digital National Security Archive. See also Telegram from the Mission at Berlin to the Department of State, From Clay, 2 November 1961. *FRUS 1961–1963, Vol. XIV*, 552.
- [81] Clay, “Berlin.” See particularly page 57.
- [82] McGeorge Bundy, Memorandum for the President, 9 November 1961. National Security File, McGeorge Bundy, Correspondence, Memos to the President 11/1/61–11/20/61, Box 405, JFK Library.
- [83] Memorandum Prepared in the Department of State, 9 November 1961. *FRUS 1961–1963, Vol. XIV*, 557–61. But the relationship of Kennedy and Norstad was tenuous because of the latter’s opposition to the strategy of Flexible Response and rejection to include Kennedy’s directive of October 20 in NATO planning.
- [84] Clay to Dwight D. Eisenhower, 2 November 1961. Clay Papers, Box 6, Folder 18. Marshall Library.
- [85] Clay to Dean Acheson, 22 December 1961. Clay Papers, Box 5, Folder 37, Marshall Library.
- [86] Clay, “Berlin,” 54. He did not refer specifically to the tank confrontation in the article, however.
- [87] See *New York Times*, 8 January 1962, “Kennedy and Clay Agree on Tactics in Berlin Crisis.”

- [88] McGeorge Bundy, Memorandum for the President, 6 January 1962, General Clay's Problems, 3. National Security File, McGeorge Bundy, Correspondence, Memos to the President 1/62, Box 405, JFK Library.
- [89] Smyser, *From Yalta to Berlin*, 178–83. Later, however, Clay came to acknowledge the utility of negotiations as long as the US did not offer concessions on its core commitments to West Berlin and West Germany. Clay, "Berlin," 55.
- [90] Letter from the President's Special Representative in Berlin (Clay) to Secretary of State Rusk, 30 January 1962. *FRUS 1961–1963, Vol. XIV*, 775–79.
- [91] John F. Kennedy to Clay, 15 March 1962. Clay Papers, Box 7, Folder 2, Marshall Library.
- [92] Smyser, *From Yalta to Berlin*, and John F. Kennedy to Clay, 1 March 1962. Berlin Crisis Collection, BC 02728, Digital National Archive.
- [93] Smyser, *From Yalta to Berlin*, 183.
- [94] Clay to Taylor, 7 September 1962. Clay Papers, Box 8, Folder 1, Marshall Library. Clay would nevertheless accompany Kennedy on the President's visit to West Berlin in June 1963. See Daum, *Kennedy in Berlin*, 113.

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