

BERLIN BLOCKADE AND AIRLIFT

Key questions

What factors lead to the Soviet Union's decision to blockade Berlin?

How did the Western power react?

What lessons did the Soviet Union and the United States learn?

Content recap

Berlin in the limelight

Nowhere was the growing tension between East and West more obvious than in Germany's capital. Berlin was in the middle of the occupation, and goodwill. The Western powers promoted capitalist economic practices and supported democratic political parties in their sectors. The Soviets condemned capitalism, and communism became firmly **entrenched** in the Soviet sector. A volatile situation had evolved.

In 1948 the Soviets and Western powers quarreled over currency reforms in the Western sectors. It was on this issue that the Russians were defiant. In April 1948, Soviet troops enforced road, river and rail blocks cutting Berlin off from the West. Were the Russians trying to force the Western powers out of Berlin by leaving the population destitute or were they merely using Berlin as a convenient way of applying pressure on the West at its most vulnerable point?

General Clay the American commander in Berlin, commented, 'When Berlin falls, Western Germany will be next. If we withdraw our position in Berlin Europe is threatened ... communism will run rampant.'

Airlift for Berlin's survival

During April some traffic was permitted to enter West Berlin and it appeared that the tension had subsided. But by May 1948 the blockade had escalated. The road bridge over the Elbe was closed the Western sectors were totally isolated by road and rail. The Western powers responded to this act of Soviet aggression by launching a massive airlift (since three air

corridors remained open) in an attempt to provide food, clothing, medicine and coal to the 2.5 million **beleaguered** West Berliners. At the height of the airlift 1 400 aircraft one day.

The blockade continued through the winter of 1948-49. The hazardous conditions and rigid flight schedules resulted in accidents in which 79 people died. On June 5 1948 a Russian MiG fighter and a British Viking transport plane collided in mid-air killing both crews. By February 1949 an impasse had been reached. When the blockade was lifted in May, the Allies announced that their three zones would form the Federal German Republic (West Germany). Stalin's retort was to proclaim the formation of the Republic in the East.

Lessons for the Great Powers

The blockade showed the resilience of the German people. It also served as a warning to Stalin that the survival of West Germany was linked to the defence of Western Europe and she could not, therefore, be treated as outcast. The most important outcome of this test of strength was the realisation that the **status quo** could only be altered by outright war. As yet, neither was prepared to face that option. A new era of political paranoia dawned.

Key Terms

Entrenched – established in a strong position

Beleaguered – to be surrounded

Status Quo – the existing condition

THE IRON CURTAIN SPEECH

"...A shadow has fallen upon the scenes so lately lightened by the Allied Victory. Nobody knows what Soviet Russia and its Communist international organization intends to do in the immediate future or what organization intends to do in their expansive and proselytising tendencies. I have a strong admiration and regard for the Valiant Russian people and for my war-time comrade, Marshal Stalin. There is sympathy and goodwill in Britain — and, I doubt not, here also — towards the people of all the Russians, and a resolve to persevere through many differences and rebuffs in establishing lasting friendships. We understand the Russian need to be secure on her western frontiers from all renewal of German aggression. We welcome her to her rightful place among the leading nations of the world. Above all, we welcome constant, frequent, and growing contacts between the Russian people and our own people on both sides of the Atlantic. It is my duty, however, to place before you certain facts about the present position in Europe.

From Stettin, in the Baltic, to Trieste, in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient States of Central and Eastern Europe — Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest, and Sofia. All these famous cities...are subject in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence, but to a very high and increasing measure of control from Moscow. Athens alone, with its immortal glories, is free to decide its future at an election under British, American and French observation. The Polish Government has been encouraged to make enormous and wrongful inroads upon Germans on a scale grievous and undreamed of are now taking place. The Communist Parties, which were very small in all these Eastern States of Europe, have been raised to pre-eminence and power far beyond their numbers, and are seeking everywhere to obtain totalitarian control. Police governments are prevailing in nearly every case, and so far, except in Czechoslovakia, there is no true democracy. Turkey and Persia are both profoundly alarmed and disturbed at the claims which made by the Russians in Berlin to build up a quasi-Communist party in their zone of occupation by showing special favors to groups of Left-wing German leaders.

...Whatever conclusions may be drawn from these facts — and facts they are — this is certainly not the liberated Europe we fought to build up. Nor is it one which contains the essentials of permanent peace"

Winston Churchill: speech made at Fulton, Missouri — March 5th 1946

Hitler began his work of unleashing war by proclaiming a 'race theory' declaring that only German-speaking people constituted a superior nations, who are called upon to decide the destinies of the entire world. [An ultimatum -- accept our rule voluntarily and then all will be well; otherwise war is inevitable]

There can be no doubt that Mr. Churchill's position is a call for a war on the USSR in Vienna and Berlin, where there are allied control councils made up of the representative of four state and where the USSR has only one-quarter of the votes.

The Soviet Union's loss of life [in the war] has been several times greater than that of Britain and the USA out together. Possibly in some quarters an inclination is felt to forget about these colossal sacrifices if the Soviet people which secured the liberation of Europe from the Hitlerite yoke. But the Soviet Union cannot forget about them. So what can there be surprising about the fact that the Soviet Union anxious for its future safety, is trying to see to it that governments loyal in their attitude to the Soviet should exist in these countries?

Interview given by Stalin, March 13th 1946



Questions to ponder

- What does Churchill mean by Russia's 'expansive and proselytising tendencies'?
- List four positive statements made by Churchill about the Soviet Union and its people
- Why was the iron curtain created?
- What exactly is Iron Curtain?

VII. Describe events related to the Soviet Union's decision to blockade Berlin

i. Divided of Germany amongst the major Powers

- ❖ After the war Germany was divided into four sectors between France, Britain, US and Russia
- ❖ Berlin was in the middle of the Soviet zone of occupation
- ❖ Western rights of access by road, rail and air depended on Russian goodwill



ii. Different economic practices

- ❖ Western Powers promoted capitalist economic practices and supported democratic political parties in their sectors while Soviet Union advocated communism

iii. Quarrelling over currency reforms

- ❖ In 1948 the Soviets and the Western Powers quarreled over currency reforms in the Western sectors.
- ❖ It was on this issue that the Russians were defiant
- ❖ In April 1948- Soviet troops enforced road, river and rail blocks cutting Berlin off from the West.

Consequences

- The blockade continued thru the winter of 1948-49
- The hazardous conditions and rigid flight schedules resulted in accidents
- Feb 1949- an impasse had been reached
- Blockade was lifted in May 1949
- Allies announced that their 3 zones would form the Federal German Republic (Western Germany)

ACTIVITY: CARTOON INTERPRETATION

Resource A



1. Name the country that is represented by the bear
2. Identify the event depicted in the cartoon
3. Describe what the bear is doing?
4. Explain why did the bear act like this

Resource B



1. Identify the two events depicted in the cartoon
2. Describe the meaning of the cartoon?

IX. Describe how Western Powers reacted to the Soviet Union's action and its consequences

Reaction

- **Launching a massive airlift**

Western powers used airplanes to provide food, clothing, medicine and coal to the 2.5 million West Berliners. They landed at three minutes intervals in one day.

Activity

Resource C



1. Describe the event shown in the picture

2. Imagine you are a young woman living in Berlin during the Blockade. Describe your **feelings toward Stalin** and your **feelings towards the Western Powers** who transported food and other necessities by planes to your place

Resource D



1. Identify the event shown in the cartoon

2. Name the man sitting with his bayonet?

3. Describe what are carrying by the birds and where do they carrying the stuff to? Explain why