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Review: Options on the Berlin Problem  
A Review Article

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# REVIEWS

## OPTIONS ON THE BERLIN PROBLEM: A REVIEW ARTICLE\*

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Few post-War European disputes have received greater long-term attention than the question of the division of Berlin. During numerous crises, Berlin has been regarded as the greatest existing threat to peace and during the era of detente it has been touted as a barometer of East-West relations. There has always been considerable rhetoric about the need to "resolve" the Berlin problem or, as Khrushchev said, to "normalise" the Berlin situation. The 1971 Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin has been seen by many as an important step in the long approach to a solution. The contributions of this agreement are carefully examined by Honoré M. Catudal, Jr. in *A Balance Sheet of the Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin* (Berlin: Berlin Verlag, 1978). Although the scope of Catudal's study is narrow, his examination does help the reader chart the evolution of the Berlin situation in terms of several scenarios for possible resolution of this problem.

There are three basic matters relating to the implementation of the Quadripartite Agreement examined in this book. First is the question of transportation between West Berlin and the Federal Republic of Germany. Four chapters, those related to access controls, rail transport, waterways, and air traffic, are devoted to this. The second topic is personal concerns such as private communications and living conditions and is covered in two chapters, one dealing with freedom of movement between East and West Berlin and the other with resolution of such urban problems as sewage disposal. Finally, in three chapters the study examines a number of legal and political questions ranging from consular representation of West Berlin to the role of the West Berlin question in major foreign policies. The interesting text of the book is supplemented by a 150 page section of appendices including a chronology of events from 1943 to 1978, official texts of various statements on Berlin, and ten tables of data on trade and traffic of Berlin.

In order to consider where Berlin is today, it is useful to analyse the full range of possible options for resolution of the question of

\*A review of Honoré M. Catudal, Jr. *A Balance Sheet of the Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin* (Berlin: Berlin Verlag, 1978)

the status of the city. From the East German viewpoint, the most desirable solution is total incorporation of West Berlin into the GDR. The tangible benefits are obvious: the territory and people of West Berlin would be added to the GDR. The psychological gains are even more impressive. First, there would be a considerable increase in East German prestige as its capital city becomes the largest in both Germanies. Second, this enhanced prestige would do much to dispel notions of the GDR as a "rump" nation created from a fragment of the once enormous unified Germany. Elimination of West Berlin as a "Pan-Germanic symbol" constitutes still another value of this option. It is also easy to see the political gain accruing to the SED regime as the hated Berlin Wall is removed. The significance of such an action would be felt not only by Berliners and Germans, but also by the many foreign visitors who have viewed the Wall. A fifth psychological advantage comes with the elimination of what Erich Honecker has described as a "thorn in the flesh of the GDR . . . ." For years SED leaders have expressed concern about the use of West Berlin by escape organisations, espionage services, and non-Communist radio and television stations. With total incorporation, such a situation would no longer exist. Finally, the SED regime would benefit from this option by ending its continuing dependency on the USSR as its representative in Four-Power negotiations on Berlin.

There is, however, one possible loss for the SED associated with this resolution. Many observers have commented that the SED has grown accustomed to tension since its creation and still needs a degree of tension to compensate for the absence of a durable sense of national identity. West Berlin's presence has provided the leadership its best opportunity for occasional confrontation with the West as a means of stressing that "enemies" were in their midst. The SED has been able to create a sense of tension by expressing alarm at West Berlin-based spies, agents, and provocateurs. Without West Berlin as a "thorn in the flesh", the SED might be deprived of a useful unifying element.

The fundamental problem of this option is its feasibility. A diminished Western interest in West Berlin is required for fulfillment of this scenario, either disinterest permitting a sudden Eastern military move on West Berlin or one promoting a Western trade-off of West Berlin for some corresponding Eastern concession elsewhere. Catudal's study provides firm evidence that no such loss of Western interest has yet occurred. He notes, for example, the Allied insistence in 1975 that the Senate of West Berlin reject an East German legal formulation declaring the Berlin Wall a "state frontier" in the middle

of Berlin because acceptance would have implied reduced Western responsibility for Berlin. (pp.102–103)

Another possible scenario for resolution of this problem is incorporation of West Berlin into the GDR by a territorial exchange. It is not inconceivable that the GDR might agree to yield some of its territory in order to acquire West Berlin. A population transfer would be necessary to avoid the sort of incidents associated with construction of the Berlin Wall and the securing of the East–West German frontier in the GDR's early years. Such an exchange would be characterised by orderliness and bi-lateral negotiations between East and West Germany. A most cordial East–West atmosphere would be a pre-condition for such an exchange and the four occupying powers would have to agree to surrender their rights in Berlin.

The principal advantages of this plan over the previous one are, first, that no East–West confrontation is required and, second, that this proposal serves the interests of the current policies of detente. These factors greatly increase the feasibility of this alternative. All the gains which the GDR would have enjoyed under the previous option are preserved in this plan with two exceptions. First, East Germany would not gain the West Berlin population and, second, since an orderly population transfer is envisaged, it is reasonable to conclude that much of the material wealth of the city, including industrial installations, would be removed. However, the primary disadvantage is that the FRG would have to be recognised as the power with the right to act on the disposition of the West Berlin issue. As Catudal's study on the Quadripartite Agreement indicates, there would be a reluctance on the part of the USSR and the GDR to accept such a proposition.

A Communist controlled West Berlin is a third scenario for resolution of the Berlin problem. With this option West Berlin continues to exist as an essentially separate city with its own government. Control would be exercised through the Socialist Unity Party of West Berlin (SEW), the West Berlin branch of the GDR's SED. Allied rights in Berlin would become a special concern since a continuation of four-power duties would probably be opposed by the dominant West Berlin political forces.

How could the SEW gain control of West Berlin? Political and economic turmoil would be necessary to produce a favourable climate. Should the West suffer a serious economic depression, West Berlin would be affected and the SEW might, as a result, take control through the electoral process. The SEW would certainly be able to count on substantial support from the GDR and the latter could even

attempt to subvert the political process to aid the SEW. The GDR and the USSR might promise the city that it would enjoy special benefits as a result of showing its "political maturity" and electing the SEW. The prospect of removal of the Berlin Wall or the institution of other improvements in West Berlin's status might be raised as incentives to vote for the SEW. Catudal demonstrates the desire of the West Berlin Senate for local improvements and his account of such progress in overcoming the rupture of East and West Berlin does reveal the prospects for a gradual incorporation of West Berlin into the GDR. The latter point is significant because there would be a serious question regarding the permanence of a separate SEW-controlled West Berlin.

The advantages of this scenario over the previous ones are that it involves no serious East-West confrontation, it requires no territorial exchanges, nor does it demand recognition of the FRG as the custodian of West Berlin's interests. The GDR still enjoys the benefits of an increase in its real estate, enhanced prestige and stability, and the removal of the "thorn in its flesh". Removal of the Wall would also be possible once "hostile elements" in West Berlin were subdued.

Failing to gain full political control of the city, the GDR and the USSR might be content with a "Finlandised" West Berlin. This resolution requires neither a social nor a political transformation of West Berlin. In this variation, West Berlin's relations with the East are cordial and its trade with East Germany is of special importance. Four-Power control and Western troops have been eliminated and West Berlin is regarded as a sovereign political entity.

However, in spite of West Berlin's independence and neutrality, it is subject to Communist intervention in its internal affairs. Soviet insistence on special procedures for invitations to international congresses and contents held in West Berlin, a matter discussed by Catudal, might be viewed as one current manifestation of this tendency. Soviet-led boycotts of Eastern participation in West Berlin-based events have been a convenient device when the city's Senate has refused to yield to pressures (pp.114-116). With West Berlin a thoroughly "Finlandised" entity, the instruments of coercion would become more powerful. Vital trade and economic agreements could be jeopardised, East German representatives in West Berlin could be re-called, or military actions could even be mentioned if the issue seemed serious enough. The objective of such measures would not be a physical takeover, but merely the correction of offending policies or conditions in West Berlin. Good

relations, of course, could be rewarded by a number of positive actions by the GDR and its allies.

The principal advantage of this arrangement, from the East German viewpoint, is that West Berlin would cease to be an irritant and West Germany's presence in the city, the most disputed aspect of the implementation of the Berlin agreement, according to Catudal (p.123), could be completely eliminated. A "Finlandised" West Berlin might emerge as a result of continued East-West detente combined with Allied neglect of West Berlin. No upheavals in West Berlin or GDR-Soviet pressures are required. In fact, Communist benignity would do more to advance this development since it would foster the belief that West Berlin could co-exist peacefully with its neighbours. The six years of successful implementation of the Quadripartite Agreement discussed by Catudal might constitute a significant contribution to the encouragement of such a belief.

Less advantageous to the GDR is the possible solution of this problem by establishing West Berlin as a "free city" under United Nations sponsorship. This alternative would involve an internationally sponsored effort to perpetuate what is essentially the status quo. The Four-Power status of Berlin would be terminated by the establishment of a UN protectorate and transit rights would be guaranteed by the UN. Such an arrangement could come about as a product of detente and Western efforts to provide a stable foundation for West Berlin's independence.

As with the previous scenario, East Germany would no longer be dependent on the USSR as sole protector of its interests regarding West Berlin. The basic problem of West Berlin is not removed by this development, but it is at least out of the hands of the East Germans, the Soviets, and the Western powers. In the UN the Soviet-led bloc would have to act jointly to advance the GDR's interests, thus the SED regime would remain dependent on the USSR for support in the General Assembly and the Security Council. However, the USSR alone would not be able to guarantee protection of East German positions. Therefore, the GDR's dependence would be diluted as appeals must be made to a variety of groups to secure support. Overall, the GDR's independence would be increased by implementation of this programme. Moreover, removal of Western troops from West Berlin would, by itself, be a victory for East Germany. In addition, the East Germans profit here by not having to recognise a special FRG-West Berlin relationship. UN sponsorship, to a great degree, would internationalise the Berlin question. Of course, there is also a negative side to this option for the GDR since

the SED would be deprived of the material gains offered by total incorporation and UN supervision would make future unilateral Communist moves against West Berlin more difficult. The same would also be true of Western moves regarding West Berlin. From Catudal's account, it appears likely that the West, however, would welcome such a solution as a means of reducing its already considerable burdens. The East, which, according to Catudal, is intent on severing West Berlin's ties with the FRG (pp.133-134) might view this as a device for firmly establishing the fact of West Berlin's complete separation from West Germany.

Still less favourable for the GDR is the prospect of West Berlin as a part of an East-West German confederation. This would bring re-amalgamation of Berlin by re-unification of both Germanies in a genuine confederation. Straight population would be the most appropriate formula for apportioning seats in an all-German legislature but this approach would reduce the political forces of the GDR to permanent minority status.

The effect of this option on GDR-Soviet relations would be revolutionary since the GDR would cease to exist as a separate entity. The principal concern would now be all-German-Soviet relations.

The only advantage of this plan for the East Germans is that they would have a chance to win control of both West Berlin and West Germany by becoming the dominant force in the confederation. Their dominance would produce a Communist Germany that could possibly be very independent of the USSR. This independence would be a function of the fact that, first, power, if legally attained, would likely have come without major Soviet assistance and, second, the united Germany would be considerably stronger economically and politically. However, the prospects for an SED victory would not be good thus raising the very real possibility that the SED would lose everything. This near certainty is enough to prevent serious East German or Soviet consideration of a confederation.

The final scenario, almost totally opposite from the first, is the establishment of West Berlin as a Land of the FRG. As Catudal's description of the status quo demonstrates, West Berlin is a long way from this. Realisation of this option would require that West Berlin have voting representatives in the West German legislature and that the FRG acquire extraterritorial rights on at least one corridor from Berlin to the FRG. The West German military would also have to be introduced into West Berlin and, with the necessary termination of Four-Power control, Allied troops would leave West Berlin.

This would be unlikely during an era of detente. It requires a complete reversal of the Western policy outlined by Catudal and, simultaneously, a considerable weakening of the USSR's international position. The creation of an FRG Land in West Berlin would have an immediate deleterious effect on GDR—Soviet relations. The SED would view this as a failure by the USSR to protect vital East German interests and might feel impelled to pursue its interests independently. However, a weak USSR, feeling Western pressure, would see any deviations from its policy line as unaffordable luxuries. The GDR, meanwhile, would suffer a tremendous psychological defeat and the permanence of the GDR would be placed in serious doubt as the Pan-Germanic role of West Berlin is re-emphasised. The domestic restiveness in the GDR noted by Catudal (pp.136—137) might become even more serious.

There is, however, another possibility concerning this option. Should West Berlin become a Land of a "Finlandised" West Germany, the impact on the GDR and the implementation requirements would be different. First, union with a neutral FRG would be possible during the current detente and would not require Eastern weakness. Second, under these circumstances there need not be a deterioration of West German—Soviet relations. The USSR could present this action as part of a long-term programme for advancement of East German interests and a prelude to creation of a re-unified Communist Germany.

The above scenarios are not a concern of *A Balance Sheet of the Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin*. They should, however, help illuminate the developments which Catudal does discuss as they relate to the overall progression of the Berlin question toward a future resolution. At the same time, a careful reading of Catudal's excellent study provides a useful framework for understanding the contemporary disposition of what continues to be one of the significant post-World War Two issues.