

Background Essay on Berlin Airlift

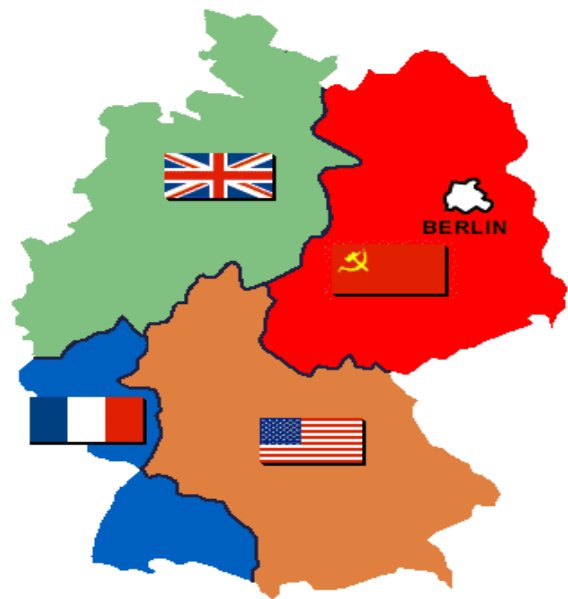


Truman Presidential
Museum & Library

One of the most brutal conflicts in recent history, World War II devastated 113 countries from six continents. Beginning in 1939, the Allied forces - primarily Britain, Russia and the USA - sought to stop Nazi Germany in its conquest for European domination. In the six years that followed, Adolf Hitler's Nazi party devastated Europe and wreaked violence against many social minority groups. By 1945, Western Europe had been ravaged, an entire race of people had come close to extinction and the dynamic of power in several affected countries had been forever changed. Hitler committed suicide in May 1945, and the Nazi regime collapsed. Japan surrendered in August. Even after peace was declared, the world felt the political and economic repercussions for decades.

Following the war, a defeated Germany was divided into four sections, each of which was to be occupied by one of the Allied Powers. The Soviet Union took control of the eastern part of Germany, while France, Great Britain and the United States took control of the western part. The German capital of Berlin was also divided into four sections, even though Berlin itself was in the middle of the Soviet-controlled part of Germany.

Although they had been allies during the war, the United States and the Soviet Union clashed philosophically on many issues. The superpowers disagreed about how to rebuild Germany, and tensions quickly rose, resulting in what later came to be known as the Cold War. Fearing that the Soviets would try to extend their communist philosophy to other countries, the United States adopted a policy of "containment," which involved rebuilding war-torn Europe and promoting democracies to halt the spread of communism. In March 1948, Britain, France and the United States decided to combine their sections of Berlin into one unified West Berlin, angering the Soviets further. In June 1948 the Soviet Union, whose territory fully surrounded the capital, cut off all ground traffic into and out of West Berlin in an attempt to force the Allies to abandon the city. The blockade of Berlin had begun.



President Truman suddenly faced a crisis. The citizens of West Berlin were quickly running out of food, supplies and time. Truman's advisors suggested several options. They could evacuate the citizens of West Berlin, try to negotiate with the Soviet Union with the support of the newly-formed United Nations, figure out a way to get supplies into the city or simply abandon Berlin altogether. Their decision would determine exactly how involved the United States would be in Berlin - and in rebuilding post-war Europe.

Ultimately, Truman determined that it was of utmost importance that the United States remain a presence in Berlin. He and the remaining Allies began the Berlin Airlift, an operation that carried food, fuel and other supplies into West Berlin by plane. The effort required a lot of careful planning and many resources, but the Airlift allowed the United States to keep a foothold in post-war Germany.

Source 2

Report to the National Security Council: U.S. Military Courses of Action with Respect to the Situation in Berlin, July 28, 1948. Truman Papers, President's Secretary's Files. Meetings: 17: August 5, 1948.

Note: This source is an excerpt from a report made to the National Security Council by the Secretary of Defense concerning the situation in Berlin.

C O P Y

THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
Washington

26 July 1948

MEMORANDUM FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL:

Subject: U. S. Military Courses of Action with
Respect to the Situation in Berlin

I am forwarding herewith, for the information of the National Security Council, the following views which have been expressed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the matter of United States military courses of action with respect to the situation in Berlin:

The following discussion is intended to set forth in general terms, and from the military viewpoint, the salient features of the present Berlin situation. The Joint Chiefs of Staff are prepared to supply such further and more detailed information as may be requested. They would appreciate opportunity to comment on such determination as may later be reached by the National Security Council on aspects of the situation in Berlin that have military implications.

As a fundamental basis for consideration of the Berlin problem, it is assumed that it is United States policy to maintain our position in Berlin. This makes it essential to examine the courses of action that this policy necessitates and those to which it may lead.

Careful study of results to date, together with calculations of Berlin supply requirements and maximum air transport capabilities, indicates that minimum requirements can be met by air transport. This will entail augmentation of the present air transport effort to the greatest possible extent. This in turn will further and seriously reduce our air capabilities for implementing emergency war plans including the essential support by the Military Air Transport Service of those plans. Also, there will be a major and serious drain on available supplies of aviation gasoline, which may necessitate special action to provide necessary controls to overcome the inherent peacetime difficulty of meeting the heavy additional aviation gasoline demand and maintaining adequate reserve stocks.

DECLASSIFIED

E. O. 13526, Sec. 1(a) and (b) - (1)

DATE 2-11-76

BY [signature], NAME DATE 3-25-76

~~TOP SECRET~~

NSC 24

- 1 -

Sourcing questions:

- 1) Who was the author of the document?
- 2) Who was the intended audience? (Who was it meant for?)
- 3) When was the document written?
- 4) Why did the author write it? What was their purpose?
- 5) Does the author support the idea of an airlift? What is the evidence to support that?

Source 4

Recording of former President Harry S. Truman discussing his decisions during the blockade of Berlin.

Date: 1964

Library: Harry S. Truman Library

Creator: Talent Associates, Ltd. and Screen Gems, Inc.

Permanent Link: <https://goo.gl/u7ssfU>

<http://www.presidentialtimeline.org/#/object/1300>

Sourcing questions:

- 1) Who was the person on this recording?
- 2) Who was the intended audience? (Who was it meant for?)
- 3) When was the recording created?
- 4) Why did the author record it? What was their purpose?
- 5) What did you learn from the recording that you did not learn from the other sources?

Source 5

1948 Berlin Airlift Newsreel, Universal International

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2ej9vdn--4&feature=youtu.be>

Note: A **newsreel** is a form of short documentary film that was prevalent from the 1910s through the 1960s, regularly released in a public presentation place and containing filmed news stories and items of topical interest.

Sourcing questions:

- 1) Who was the creator of the video?
- 2) Who was the intended audience? (Who was it meant for?)
- 3) When was the video created?
- 4) What was the purpose of the video?

Source 6

Telegram, Alfred M. Bingham et al., to Harry S. Truman, June 25, 1948. Truman Papers, Official File. OF 198: Berlin Blockade Misc.

Note: This source is a copy of a telegram of Alfred M. Bingham, the chairman of the American Association for a Democratic Germany.

The Hague Press
Washington

W
H.WB86 NL PD

JUN 26 7 50 AM 1948

NEW YORK NY JUN 25 1948

198

Berlin Blockade Misc

THE PRESIDENT
THE WHITE HOUSE

RUSSIAN EFFORTS TO DRIVE WESTERN POWERS FROM BERLIN ARE A CRUCIAL CHALLENGE TO AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY SURRENDER WOULD DELIVER TO RUSSIAN VENGEANCE TWO MILLION GERMANS WHO HAVE DEFIED COMMUNIST TOTALITARIANISM. THERE ARE DISTURBING RUMORS OF PLANS TO EVACUATE BERLIN BECAUSE OF RUSSIAN BLOCKADE AGAINST GERMAN CIVILIAN SUPPLIES ESSENTIAL SUPPLIES

X198 misc
X230 misc

↓

FOR THE GERMAN POPULATION CAN BE DELIVERED BY AIR AND IF NECESSARY MUST BE AT WHATEVER COST. WE URGE YOU TO MAKE THIS COUNTRYS POSITION UNMISTAKABLE BY DECLARING THAT UNDER ALL CIRCUMSTANCES SHORT OF WAR WE WILL REMAIN IN BERLIN AND MAINTAIN SUPPLIES FOR THE CIVILIAN POPULATION NOTHING LESS CAN ADEQUATELY REASSURE DEMOCRATIC FORCES IN GERMANY AND ELSEWHERE THAT THIS COUNTRY WILL NOT DESERT THEM

ALFRED M BINGHAM CHAIRMAN AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR A DEMOCRATIC GERMANY MURRAY BARON NEW YORK COUNTY CHAIRMAN LIBERAL PARTY AUGUST CLAESSENS NATIONAL SECRETARY SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC FEDERATION LOUIS P GOLDBERG MEMBER NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL, ISON OAK

Sourcing questions:

- 1) Who was the author of the document?
- 2) Who was the intended audience? (Who was it meant for?)
- 3) When was the document written?
- 4) Why did the author write it? What was their purpose?
- 5) What does the author want Truman to do about the Berlin blockade?

Source 7

Typed diary of Harry S. Truman, January 6-September 14, 1948; Diaries; Memoirs File; Post-Presidential Files; Truman Papers.

Note: This source is an entry from President Truman's personal diary.

Monday, July 19, 1948:

Have quite a day. See some politicians. A meeting with General Marshall and Jim Forestal on Berlin and the Russian situation. Marshall states the facts and the condition with which we are faced. I'd made the decision ten days ago to stay in Berlin. Jim wants to hedge - he always does. He's constantly sending me alibi memos which I return with directions and the facts. We'll stay in Berlin - come what may. Royal, Draper and Jim Forestal come in later. I have to listen to a rehash of what I know already and reiterate my "Stay in Berlin" decision. I don't pass the buck, nor do I alibi out of any decision I make.

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Source 8

War Department Classified Message Center, Incoming Classified Message, April 2, 1948.
Truman Papers, President's Secretary's Files. Berlin Crisis.

Note: This document is a transcript of telegram messages going back and forth from Washington, D.C. to Berlin between members of the military and President Truman's staff.

EYES ONLY

WAR DEPARTMENT
CLASSIFIED MESSAGE CENTER
INCOMING CLASSIFIED MESSAGE

~~TOP SECRET~~

NR: DA-TT-9300 (April '48) Page 2

WASHINGTON:
DA-1

From Bradley

DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 11652, Sec. 3(E) and 5(D)
By NLT, NARS Date 2-8-73

We are receiving many inquiries from members of Congress as to why we do not evacuate dependents from Berlin. .

Evacuation now might be plausible because it would reduce number to be supplied by air.

Such evacuation might be interpreted as either start of withdrawal from Berlin entirely, or on the other hand as a clearing of decks for action if necessary. What is your thinking on this subject in view of new situation?

DW-1

To: Dept of Army

1. Highway and air traffic conditions are normal today. Civil freight for Germans moving normally. Military freight into Berlin appears to be moving normally so far free from attempted search. Passenger trains not moving in view of Soviet action. Also, no outward movement by rail of military

freight as no loadings can be made without Soviet permission and this we will not ask.

2. Compromise believed impossible to attain now as in my view this is only Soviet first step. British Deputy visited Soviet Deputy last evening to find opening and found none.

3. We can continue under present conditions indefinitely and in my opinion should do so although this will require substantial increase in air passenger lift. British wish to propose compromise but I can not agree that such an offer would serve any useful purpose except humiliating rebuff.

4. I do not believe we should evacuate now. In emergency, we can evacuate quickly. However, evacuation now would play into Soviet hands and frighten rest of Europe.

5. I propose (A) to sit tight, spending most of my time in Berlin for immediate future. (B) to let dependents who are nervous go home. (C) to speed up planned transfer of employees to Frankfurt. (D) to gradually move unessential employees. This will be done over weeks rather than days so that each additional aggravation will find our support problem lessened. In general, in spite of some imaginative correspondents' reports, our people are calm and continuing their everyday life normally.

6. While Soviets won their victory in success in stopping move, I am sure our position has topped for time being further interference with air and highway movements which would require force to implement.

7. I anticipate in next few weeks, Soviet demand for our withdrawal because of failure of act to govern Germany. I think we should await such demand before making any decision to evacuate non-combatants.

8. While British would like to find a compromise, Robertson assured me today he would stick with us. French are firm now but not wholly reliable.

9. Finally, there are few dependents here who have any thought of leaving unless required to do so. I do wish to emphasize there is little nervousness among them here. Our stake is too high and evacuation would deceive no one as to military intent.

Sourcing questions:

- 1) Who was the author of the document?
- 2) Who was the intended audience? (Who was it meant for?)
- 3) When was the document written?
- 4) Why did the author write it? What was their purpose?
- 5) Why do the words "Top Secret" appear on the document?
- 6) Is this a reliable source? Why/why not?

Source 9

Motion Picture 342-USAF-17643 - Outtakes from "Operations Vittles", 1948

Note: This source is an excerpt from a U.S. Air Force movie concerning the Berlin airlift.

<https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/operations-vittles>

Sourcing questions:

- 1) Who was the creator of the video?
- 2) Who was the intended audience? (Who was it meant for?)
- 3) When was the video created?
- 4) What was the purpose of the video?
- 5) What does the video show?

Source 10

“Yup Sonny” Berlin Airlift Cartoon by Jake Schuffert



"YUP SONNY, AN THEM THAR LAST TWO I GOT FOR THE AIRLIFT BACK IN 1948-!!"

Sourcing questions:

- 1) Who was the creator of this cartoon?
- 2) Who was the intended audience? (Who was it meant for?)
- 3) When was the cartoon created?
- 4) What was the purpose of the cartoon?
- 5) What does the cartoon show? Explain the meaning of the cartoon in your own words.

Name:

Hour:

The Berlin Blockade

Sources:	Negotiations/UN Support:	Evacuate:	Airlift:	Do Nothing:

*As you read, view or listen to the sources choose the option(s) that is being proposed in the source. Write the sentence from the source that supports your answer in that category.