

# *Challenging détente*

A European multilateral perspective on détente that originates from the checkpoint Charlie standoff and the threat to European security

[Y.vanhattem@students.uu.nl](mailto:Y.vanhattem@students.uu.nl)

Yannick van Hattem

(5989701)

International Relations specialisation

History Bachelor Thesis

(GE3V18002)

Supervisor:

Dr. Paschalis Pechlivanis

Words: 7971

Pages: 33

*Date: 22-01-2021*

*Annotation Style: Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition - Notes and Bibliography Style*

## Abstract

The historiography surrounding the Cold War was dominated by a bipolar and American conception of its course immediately after its conclusion. Authors such as J. Hanhimäki and Angela Romano challenged this perception by addressing the multilateral dynamic that was found in Europe. This challenge opened the door for détente to be viewed from a distinctly European perspective. Subsequently, this thesis exposes that détente was seen as a viable route to pursue in Europe in the early 1960s. Memorandums and government documents surrounding the Berlin Crisis of 1961 and the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 uncover a European rhetoric focussed on détente that diverged from their American ally, who pursued detente in the late 1960s. The Checkpoint Charlie standoff proved to be the tipping point enabling this European mindset towards détente.

## Table of contents

<b>Introduction</b>	4
i. <b><u>The Cold War and European détente;</u></b>	
The multilateral aspects of the Cold War	8
ii. <b><u>European détente in practice; A comparative case study</u></b>	
Checkpoint Charlie standoff	14
Cuban Missile Crisis	21
<b>Conclusion</b>	26
<i>Bibliography</i>	28

## Introduction

After the devastation of the Second World War, two superpowers emerged dominating global politics: The USA and the USSR. The period that followed came to be known as the Cold War, lasting from 1945 until 1991; the year that saw the disintegration of the Soviet Union. In this period that lasted short of 50 years, Europe became an important arena in which the Soviet Union and the US sought to expand their influence and effectively, their power. Whereas the Soviet Union promoted communism, the US boasted liberal capitalism. Crisis occurred as the manifestation of efforts on both sides to increase their power over the other. The Berlin blockade of 1949 and the subsequent airlift or the missile crisis in Cuba in 1962 are examples in which this balance of power is challenged, and the US and USSR came close to eliminating the 'cold' aspect of the war.<sup>1</sup> Ever-increasing tensions, however, were not a phenomenon throughout the entire Cold War. In certain instances during the Cold War, a relaxation of tensions can be found of which the period of *détente* is the most prominent example. *Détente* in Cold War historiography is often regarded to occur from the late 1960s until the late 1970s. It placed a lot of emphasis on figures as Nixon, Henry Kissinger and to some extent Brezhnev as the primary figures that were able to facilitate this relaxation. John Lewis Gaddis adheres to this view, as in his works a picture is painted of Kissinger and Nixon facilitating *Détente* between the USA and USSR in the late 1960s.<sup>2</sup> *The Cuban missile crisis* by James Hershberg provides another example of a bipolar view. It stressed the efforts of Kennedy and Khrushchev and their conflicts, albeit in the early 1960s.<sup>3</sup> This bipolar view is not limited to these authors only, but appears to be a popular one in historiography after the end of the Cold War.

In the period after the Cold War, the historiography surrounding it was indeed dominated by a bipolar perspective of the USA and USSR. However, in *The Rise and fall of Détente*

---

<sup>1</sup> Richard C. Hanes, eds., *Cold War Reference Library*, vol.6 (UXL, 2004), Gale eBooks & Bradley Lightbody, *The Cold War* (Taylor & Francis Group, 1999), ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>2</sup>John Lewis Gaddis and John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (Cary, UNITED STATES: Oxford University Press USA - OSO, 2005), ProQuest Ebook Central & John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War : A New History* (New York : Penguin Press, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> James Hershberg, 'The Cuban missile crisis', in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War: Volume 2: Crises and Détente*, vol. 2, Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 65–87, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521837200.005>.

Hanhimäki touches upon a European contribution to the process of Détente.<sup>4</sup> Continuing in his chapter *Détente in Europe*, he establishes that Europe was indeed more influential and diverging from the American power than often is cared to admit. Several aspects as trade, retaliation and increasing cooperation made Europe challenge the American or Soviet hegemony.<sup>5</sup> Angela Romano argues that forces from within Europe progressively saw cooperation as a viable option, for instance, because the Eastern nations had great difficulty to keep up with the Western economy.<sup>6</sup> Together with Hanhimäki and Romano, increasingly more authors seem to focus on a multilateral world in the Cold War spectre.<sup>7</sup> This multilateral perspective, however, is often still seen in the overarching American structure; many authors place the beginning of détente in the mid to late 1960s. Early signs of Europe's approach are mentioned by several authors, but most refrain from attributing real significance to those early signs. Romano, for instance, mentions Stalin's death in 1953 or Nikita Khrushchev's new attitude from 1956 onwards as early signs but does little more than mentioning them.<sup>8</sup> Richard Williamson acknowledges initial steps of Détente in the early 1960s surrounding the crisis of Berlin but still views these early signs in this existing bipolar American perception.<sup>9</sup>

The checkpoint Charlie standoff in Berlin in 1961 that Williamson mentions can be seen as a tipping point for détente in such a European context that Hanhimäki and others refer to. During this standoff, tanks from the Soviet Union and the United States faced each other in Berlin after tensions rose regarding allied zone access.<sup>10</sup> Thomas Flemming describes the tensions around the standoff ever so strikingly: "*if a shot was fired, it could mean the beginning of a military dispute between the US and the Soviet Union— with*

---

<sup>4</sup> Jussi M. Hanhimäki, *The Rise and Fall of Detente; American foreign Policy and the transformation of the Cold War* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Jussi Hanhimäki, 'Détente in Europe, 1962–1975', in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War: Volume 2: Crises and Détente*, vol. 2, red. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 198–218, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521837200.011>.

<sup>6</sup> Angela Romano & Federico Romero, eds., *European Socialist Regimes' Fateful Engagement with the West: National Strategies in the Long 1970s* (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY : Routledge, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429340703>.

<sup>7</sup> Geir Lundestad, *The United States and Western Europe since 1945: From empire by invitation to Transatlantic drift* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2009) & Richard D. Williamson, *First Steps toward Détente : American Diplomacy in the Berlin Crisis, 1958–1963* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Angela Romano, Federico Romero, eds., *European Socialist Regimes*, 32-33.

<sup>9</sup> Williamson, *First Steps toward Détente*.

<sup>10</sup> W. R Smyser, *Kennedy and the Berlin Wall : "A Hell of a Lot Better than a War"* (Lahnman, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 106.

*unforeseeable consequences.*"<sup>11</sup> Although the tanks belonged to the USSR and US it was very much Germany, if not all of Europe, that would see its landscape turned to ruins. This perception of immediate threat sparked efforts by the nations of Europe to exert more influence upon the decision-making process. The European nations from both East and West ventured on a journey that saw the period of *détente* arrive 'early' on their continent. This perspective on *détente* does not only reinforce the existing challenge to the conception of a bipolar Cold War but also challenges the still popular vision of *détente* occurring in the late 1960s. The research question '*Was the checkpoint Charlie standoff the tipping point for the emergence of a European détente?*' will be central to this thesis. I aim to approach *détente* both from a European perspective and timespan and differentiate it from its American counterpart. Wherever deemed needed and adequate, Soviet influences will be incorporated but the main focus will remain on American and Western European perceptions. The research question can be separated into two distinct parts. '*How can a European perspective challenge the common American bipolar notion of détente?*' will be the main theme of the first chapter, whereas the second chapter concerns itself largely with the question '*is the checkpoint Charlie standoff pivotal in sparking European détente?*'

To establish this, I will investigate various speeches and memorandums of political figures involved and government documents to and from several leaders. The US digital National archives provide useful primary sources surrounding the Berlin crisis and are used primarily for this section. The Cuban Missile Crisis was picked as a complimentary case study since the nature of the event can be seen as similar for Americans as the standoff would have been for Europeans; a threat close to home that could potentially have very devastating consequences. This provides an excellent opportunity to establish whether the European and American rhetoric differed merely depending on the situation or that a true European aspect can be discovered as early as 1961. The Wilson centre is a database containing abundant documents such as speeches, memorandums or notes that I incorporated in my research surrounding the Missile Crisis in Cuba. Finally, this paper will conclude with a comparison between the two historical events of the Cold War and distinguish if the European rhetoric surrounding both events can be attributed to an

---

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Flemming, *Berlin in the Cold War: The Battle for the Divided City* (Berlin: Berlinica Publishing LLC, 2010), 7.

earlier development and a distinct European project of détente, in which the standoff proved to be the tipping point that saw the European mindset change.

## The Cold War and European détente

### *The multilateral aspects of the Cold War*

A new order of the world hierarchy was established after the devastation of the Second World War. Whereas the old European powers sought to rebuild and repair, America and the USSR appeared as the two dominant players in world politics. They entered the Cold War, that would last from the end of the Second World War until the fall of the Berlin wall and subsequently the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. The term 'Cold War' was coined by George Orwell, already in 1945.<sup>12</sup> The notion refers to the 'undeclared state of war' that would exist between the USSR and the USA at the closure of the World War.<sup>13</sup> John Lewis Gaddis refers to the book by Orwell and argues that this tension at the conclusion of the war could be found in the fact that the principal actors that brought the World War to a conclusion already found themselves at war in an ideological and geopolitical sense before the actual Second World War had concluded.<sup>14</sup> David Engerman would agree with Gaddis' notion, arguing that American and soviet ideologies were set in direct opposition to each other and were bound to lead to disagreements between the nations.<sup>15</sup> Over the span of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the US and the USSR would find themselves pitched against each other in these disagreements in various places and regarding various crisis. The early 1960s saw some of the worst crises according to Hanhimäki, who mentions the erection of the Berlin wall and the Cuba crisis that saw tensions rise to a high.<sup>16</sup> The policy of containment that the United States practised made other places such as the Middle East and Asia areas of conflict. Proxy wars, as they came to be known, were wars to keep communism at bay.<sup>17</sup>

Increasing tension is not a reflection of the entire Cold War. In certain instances, tensions decreased and cooperation became a more viable route to pursue. The primary instance

---

<sup>12</sup> Odd Arne Westad, "The Cold War and the International History of the Twentieth Century" In *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 3.

<sup>13</sup> Odd Arne Westad, "The Cold War and the International History of the Twentieth Century," 3.

<sup>14</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History*

<sup>15</sup> David Engerman, "Ideology and the Origins of the Cold War, 1917-1962," Chapter in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad eds., 20-43, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 23, 34-43, doi:10.1017/CHOL9780521837194.003.

<sup>16</sup> Jussi M. Hanhimäki, "Détente in Europe," 199.

<sup>17</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*.

of the relaxation of tensions can be found in the period of *détente*, typically described as ranging from the late 1960s until approximately 1979. Despite the SALT II agreements of 1979 between the USSR and USA, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan later in that year would mean the end of the period of *détente* and the agreements on arms reduction<sup>18</sup>. During this period of *détente* however, cooperation between the two superpowers occupied a more fundamental position. Often, this softening of attitudes is attributed to the leaders of both nations; Leonid Brezhnev promoted it from the Soviet sphere, while Richard Nixon and later Jimmy Carter promoted a similar approach from the United States.<sup>19</sup> Gaddis for instance attributes a lot of credit for this period of relaxation to Nixon and his secretary of state Henry Kissinger. Kissinger, he argued, no longer thought of the balance of power as a zero-sum game but shifted more towards an overall calculus of power. This meant that not every loss materialized in gain for the other power but could lead to openings on other fronts. From the settlement on arms control that Gaddis also mentions as an opening, it is not hard to see the cooperative aspects in his argumentation.<sup>20</sup> Westad mentions *détente* as a phenomenon of superpowers and places it in the mid-1970s. For him, the cold war revolved around the notions of power and the balance thereof and mentions important aspects as the strategic arms race and alliances that lend a higher degree of stability and predictability facilitating *détente*.

Flemming, Westad, or John Lewis Gaddis are examples of authors who cover many aspects of the history of the Cold War, and it appears hard to think of a prominent event that has little to no extensive research on the subject. What most of these authors have in common, however, is the scope through which they view this Cold War history. This scope appears limiting; it is a scope in which the world exists in a mere bipolar phase with the US and democracy at one end of the spectre, and the USSR and communism at the other. *Détente* is facilitated by the balance of power and the decisions of the nation's leaders. By holding on to this particular conceptual framework, other aspects or factors that do not adhere to this scope are often considered as nothing more than incidents. This holds true for incidents such as the standoff in Berlin, as its occurrence is often viewed within this rhetoric of increasing tension and crisis before the period of *détente* in 1968. But one

---

<sup>18</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 348-349.

<sup>19</sup> Jussi M. Hanhimäki, *The Rise and Fall of Detente*, 38-41 & Craig Daigle, *The Limits of Détente : The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1969-1973* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 275.

could argue that this view does not appear feasible from every perspective. A European perspective on the process of détente would see the standoff in Berlin not as adhering to this bipolar and crisis saturated view of the early 1960s, but as the tipping point of détente in a Europe perspective.

Several authors already challenged this bipolar conception. Westad himself shifts to focus on the third world and their efforts to escape the superpower influences in his work *The Global Cold War*.<sup>21</sup> Geir Lundestad discusses both conflict and cooperation in the Cold War period between the United States and Europe and accurately notices that ‘there were differences amongst the Western Allies which occasionally caused difficulties in Atlantic relations.’ Lundestad, moreover, notices a European focus on the Harmel report of 1967 emphasising a policy of détente.<sup>22</sup> With his chapter *Détente in Europe* Hanhimäki argued that European détente was ‘first and foremost, a European project.’ Hanhimäki argues that in essence the relaxation of East-West tensions can be attributed to a European challenge to the ‘excesses of bipolarity.’<sup>23</sup> Reasons varied; France’s Gaullism was an effort to enhance France’s international standing and East German chancellor Willy Brandt’s Ostpolitik in a long-term effort at reunification are mentioned as pivotal reasons. But also trade, economics and security are mentioned as aspects more relevant for European nations than for their superpower ally.<sup>24</sup> Angela Romano shares a similar view, and argues that “*European détente had a transformative intent, as it aimed to overcome the Cold War partition of the continent through a gradual process of expanding contacts and interdependence between Western and Eastern Europe.*”<sup>25</sup> Western European governments diverted from their superpower ally and used trade, economic, financial and cultural cooperation as a means to open dialogue with the East, aiming to overcome a political divide of the entirety of Europe.<sup>26</sup> But she also focusses on the Eastern perspective in this debate and Khrushchev’s policy of peaceful coexistence that came into force from 1956 onwards. Moreover, as the socialist nations had struggles keeping up with the western

---

<sup>21</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War : Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), <https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.1017/CBO9780511817991>.

<sup>22</sup> Geir Lundestad in *From empire by invitation to Transatlantic drift*, 8-10.

<sup>23</sup> Jussi M. Hanhimäki, “Détente in Europe, 1962-1975,” 198.

<sup>24</sup> Jussi M. Hanhimäki, “Détente in Europe, 1962-1975,” 198, 201-204.

<sup>25</sup> Angela Romano, Federico Romero, eds., *European Socialist Regimes*, 31.

<sup>26</sup> Angela Romano, Federico Romero, eds., *European Socialist Regimes*, 32-33.

economies, trade became an important aspect of economic growth in the European arena.<sup>27</sup>

In creating this multilateral European perspective, the door is opened to a different look upon the notion of détente, one in which for instance Europe invited the United States into their politics rather than dominating it.<sup>28</sup> There is no denying the significance that the USSR and the US had on the developments in Europe, nor does this thesis aim to do so. But nuance is needed to understand Europe's role in the process of détente. In *The Rise and Fall of Détente* Hanhimäki clearly distinguishes his views on détente from an American perspective to that of Europe. In this work, the importance of Nixon and Kissinger is valued for their part in the American détente. This, however, does not discredit his argumentation for a European détente.<sup>29</sup> The key difference is that détente in Europe should be considered distinctly different from détente practised in the US. As captured in the *International History of the Twentieth Century and Beyond*, "It is important to underline that in any discussion of détente one needs to separate the bilateral Soviet-American détente from the multilateral East-West détente in Europe."<sup>30</sup> Hanhimäki rightly mentions European initiatives as West German Ostpolitik to influence the working of détente in Europe, while having less influence on American Détente.<sup>31</sup> This adds nuance to the perception of détente most commonly seen as an American initiative that resulted in a more cooperative foreign policy of both the US and USSR. It sheds a different light on the role that the Europeans played in the process of détente. In this light, authors as Romano, Gundestad and Hanhimaki see the significance of this European project. But it does not only allow us to see the significance of the European project. It additionally allows us to look at events from a different perspective and apply a different historical argumentation, such as a change in its duration. Hanhimaki already challenges the timespan of this European détente but argues that it continued longer in Europe than the bipolar détente lasted. While this holds, I would argue that it also started earlier from a European perspective. This aspect is overlooked by many authors and is perhaps most notably captured by Hanhimäki's own statement that the early 1960s showed the true

---

<sup>27</sup> Angela Romano, Federico Romero, eds, 'European Socialist Regimes', 30-32.

<sup>28</sup> Geir Lundestad in From empire by invitation to Transatlantic drift.

<sup>29</sup> Jussi M. Hanhimäki, *The Rise and Fall of Détente*, chapter 1 & 2.

<sup>30</sup> Anthony Best, J. Hanhimaki, J. Maiolo, K. Schulze (2015). *International History of the Twentieth Century and Beyond* (London: Routledge, 2010), 286, <https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.4324/9781315739717>.

<sup>31</sup> Jussi M. Hanhimäki, *The Rise and Fall of Détente*, 41.

meaning of the term bipolarity as the US and USSR faced each other "*eyeball to eyeball*."<sup>32</sup> Instead, this thesis uncovers that the early 1960s exposed the start of the multilateral détente in Europe.

As Romano argues, already after Stalin's death in 1953 Western European governments were given the opportunity to normalise exchanges with the East.<sup>33</sup> Despite Romano's argumentation that these attitudes only became mainstream in the second half of the 1960s, she touches upon the 'early signs' of this European détente. Richard D. Williamson describes in his work *First Steps towards Détente* the American foreign policy in the years of the Berlin crisis of 1958 to 1963 and sees several contributions made towards the process of détente. He argues that events in these years, such as the construction of the Wall in Berlin and the Standoff there, the Cuban Missile Crisis and Kennedy's famous speech in Berlin while Khrushchev's still met with both Eisenhower and Kennedy, marked a significant novel approach that the US adopted in foreign policy despite the ongoing crisis. Nuclear dangers and pressure for arms controls, according to Williamson, being pivotal considerations in the US change of course. As he states, "[t]here were a few intervals offering glimpses of détente, however brief, during this protracted crisis over Berlin."<sup>34</sup> Raymond Garthoff acknowledges similar symptoms that the crises of the early 1960s recapitulated. He concludes the importance of the Cuban Missile Crisis "*not only as the most dangerous confrontation of the Cold War, but also as a turning point in focusing the leaders of both countries [US and USSR] on the absolute priority of avoiding nuclear war.*"<sup>35</sup>

However, much like other authors, Williamson and Garthoff largely focus on the relation between the US and the USSR and see these events as early signs for a bipolar détente to develop in the later 1960s. Garthoff addresses more importance to the Cuba crisis by calling it a turning point, and as such does acknowledge the importance of the event to a specific extend. Yet Garthoff, like Romano, does not see détente already at play in the early 1960s but merely sees its early signs. Moreover, Garthoff emphasises the Cuba crisis as pivotal for the bipolar détente of the late 1960s to develop and thus refrains from

---

<sup>32</sup> Jussi M. Hanhimäki, "Détente in Europe, 1962-1975," 198 & M. E. Sarotte, *Dealing with the Devil: East Germany, Detente, and Ostpolitik, 1969-1973* (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

<sup>33</sup> Angela Romano & Federico Romero, red., 'European Socialist Regimes', 32.

<sup>34</sup> Williamson, *First Steps toward Détente*,

<sup>35</sup> Raymond Garthoff, *A Journey through the Cold War: A Memoir of Containment and Coexistence* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2001), chapter 10, 187, ProQuest Ebook Central.

connecting it to a possible European détente. Williamson makes a keen distinction in which he does acknowledge the seriousness of the Checkpoint Charlie standoff and its impact on the people of Berlin and all of Europe.<sup>36</sup> He argues that the standoff in 1961 exposed the true dangers of the excesses of bipolarity in Europe and despite still viewing the standoff in a bipolar narrative, Williamson touches upon the importance of the standoff for Europe. It proved to be the tipping point for a multilateral European détente. From political, economic and safety standpoints the European nations had more reasons to seek cooperation than the US. The crisis in Berlin exposed this extremely visually to the European nations. Unlike Garthoff and Williamson, who view both crises in regards to the bipolar American detente, I see them in relation to a multilateral détente. From a European perspective, the standoff exposes a tipping point regarding the mindset of European détente

In essence, I continue the previously mentioned multilateral narrative but place the European realization of détente in the early 1960s rather than the common notion that the entirety of détente occurred in the late 1960s. Moreover, I do not merely categorise this event as an early sign or a first step towards détente, but instead see the Berlin standoff as exposing the need for a European détente. Whereas for the United States the crises of the early 1960s laid the foundation for détente to evolve in the late 1960s, the Checkpoint Charlie standoff in Berlin was the tipping point for détente in Europe to become strongly emphasised.

---

<sup>36</sup> Richard D. Williamson, *First Steps toward Détente*, 137.

## The Checkpoint Charlie standoff & the Cuban Missile Crisis

*A comparative discourse case study*

### Checkpoint Charlie

On the morning of the 29th of October in 1961, frontpages would be covered with an event that brought the world close to all-out war; The Checkpoint Charlie Standoff. According to Williamson, it could be traced back to the evening of 28th October. An American general, Lucius Clay, ordered three tanks within a quarter-mile of the checkpoint at the Friedrichstrasse. Clay had been the American commander responsible for the airlift in 1948/49 and was rather keen using force and direct actions where he saw fit.<sup>37</sup> The Soviets responded in kind, and both sides continued until twenty American tanks faced twenty USSR tanks around checkpoint Charlie in Berlin and held their position throughout the night. According to W. R. Smyser it was not the night from the 28th to the 29th of October on which the standoff happened, but rather on 25 October. He also argued that not Lucius Clay was pivotal in Berlin, but rather men like Allan Lightner. Lightner was part of the American embassy in Berlin and was denied access to the Eastern part, despite the agreement that the occupying forces were allowed to move freely between the zones.<sup>38</sup> Several more of these incidents happened before long, after which tensions increased to such a high that tanks took to the streets and faced each other at the checkpoint.<sup>39</sup> Both sources mention a similar course of events but focus on different aspects as being influential or state slightly different details.

However, whether the standoff took place on the 25th of October or the 28th, if 12 or 20 tanks faced each other, or even if Clay were to be blamed more so than men as Lightner is an issue of mere details and does not exert a particular exceptional influence on the point I wish to argue for. What is important, however, is the feeling that the standoff left

---

<sup>37</sup> Richard D. Williamson, *First Steps toward Détente*, 137, Daniel F. Harrington, *Berlin on the Brink : The Blockade, the Airlift, and the Early Cold War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012) & Gerry van Tonder, *Berlin Blockade : Soviet Chokehold and the Great Allied Airlift 1948-1949* (Havertown: Pen & Sword Books, 2017), ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>38</sup> W. R. Smyser, *Kennedy and the Berlin Wall*, 106.

<sup>39</sup> W. R. Smyser, *Kennedy and the Berlin Wall*, 106-107.

behind in Europe and the minds of the Europeans.<sup>40</sup> In this aspect, the standoff differed from the blockade a decade earlier. The Berlin blockade of 1948 was seen more in the context of a struggling Soviet Union, making efforts to obtain the entirety of the city under Soviet Control and as a response to the newly introduced D-Mark in West Berlin. The sense of the 'eyeball to eyeball' definition of the Cold War, however, had not yet settled in the world. Whereas the standoff in 1961 was seen in the context of the struggle for world dominance, the international crisis that led to the Berlin airlift in 1948 was still seen as a struggle for Germany and its undecided future, and as such had less impact on the European perception.<sup>41</sup> The causes of the standoff in Berlin did not appear instantly but can be traced back through a series of events unfolding ever-increasing tension on European soil. The Berlin blockade and its subsequent airlift in 1948 do largely entail the beginning of these tensions in Berlin. In 1961, three months prior to the standoff, the construction of the Berlin wall that would divide Berlin and Germany by means of a guarded border appeared as a thorn in the eyes of President Kennedy and the entire Berlin problem. It diminished the hope that still lingered for a negotiable solution. Since the construction of the Berlin Wall, however, the standoff was the first real confrontation between East and West.<sup>42</sup> It would leave behind a vivid picture in the minds of the Europeans, who were reminded once more of the sheer danger war could pose on their soil. The Checkpoint Charlie standoff was an important event in the early 1960s that countless historians would categorize as capturing the essence of the bipolar worldview that emerged in the wake of the Cold War. Hanhimäki called the Berlin crisis not entirely without truth to be an illustration of the 'eyeball to eyeball' condition of the Cold War.<sup>43</sup>

The perception that the early 1960s was swathed by crisis and high tensions is true to some extent at the very least. In these crises, military means were at times considered to solve disputes. In Berlin, a month prior to the standoff, the Steinstrucken and Friedrichstrasse crossing point in Berlin were the subjects of a national security action memorandum. This file addressed to the secretary of State and Defence at the White House informed on the course of action that the president had taken regarding the events

---

<sup>40</sup> A more detailed account of the standoff that does justice to its complexity can be found in the books by W.R. Smyser, Williamson, Lundestad, John Lewis Gaddis and other authors mentioned in this thesis but does not contribute to the overall argumentation of this paper.

<sup>41</sup> Daniel F. Harrington, *Berlin on the Brink* & Gerry van Tonder, *Berlin Blockade*.

<sup>42</sup> Richard D. Williamson, *First Steps toward Détente*, 136-137.

<sup>43</sup> Jussi M. Hanhimäki, "Détente in Europe, 198.

unfolding at these crossing points. For Steinstrucken, it was decided that the USCOB (United States Commander of Berlin) had the authority to establish the intention of a Soviet blockade by sending a patrol if such a blockade should occur. Force was authorized from Washington only.<sup>44</sup> Regarding the Friedrichstrasse, on which Checkpoint Charlie was located, measures were already stronger. Not only could all Soviet personnel be barred from West Berlin, but military forces were also allowed to be moved to the “sector boundary” if considered useful.<sup>45</sup> In a similar memorandum on US foreign policy a month later, on the prelude of the standoff, military force is deemed preferable only whenever the Soviet Union interferes with the free access to Berlin. It relates back to certain measures in the previously mentioned memorandum but continues to mention other measures. Non-combatant activity is considered in the equation, but more noticeably are the expanded military courses of action such as ground defensive strength, local air superiority and ground operations into the Soviet zone. The final header on the document signalled ‘IV’ heads nuclear courses of action to protect American ‘Vital interest,’ and starts with selective nuclear attacks and mentions general nuclear war as a final resort.<sup>46</sup> Despite realizing that such security actions often prepared for the worst-case scenario, non-combatant measures in the documents were both limited in number and less extensively clarified.

A document relating to America’s military countermeasures in Berlin indicate what other measures could be taken. The document states that it provides a ‘shopping list of countermeasures’ that can be used if deemed necessary to provide aid in the Berlin crisis and proposes measures that range from moderate to very severe. Examples of measures mentioned are increased frequency of allied patrols, unilateral military police patrols on the German autobahn, opening fire whenever East German police fires upon refugees after they have made the crossing into the Allied zones of control and even a worldwide

---

<sup>44</sup> “National Security Action Memorandum No. 94: Steinstuecken and Friedrichstrasse Crossing Point,” National archives, 10/23/1961, College Park, MD, identifier 6037034, Collection 59, *The Berlin Crisis of 1961: Documents at the National Archive*, <https://www.archives.gov/research/foreign-policy/cold-war/1961-berlin-crisis/nara-documents.html>.

<sup>45</sup> “National Security Action Memorandum No. 94: Steinstuecken and Friedrichstrasse Crossing Point,” National archives, 10/23/1961, College Park, MD, identifier 6037034, Collection 59, *The Berlin Crisis of 1961: Documents at the National Archive*, <https://www.archives.gov/research/foreign-policy/cold-war/1961-berlin-crisis/nara-documents.html>.

<sup>46</sup> “National Security Action Memorandum No. 109: U.S. Policy on Military Actions in a Berlin Conflict,” 10/23/1961, National archives, College Park, MD, identifier 6037139, Collection 59, *The Berlin Crisis of 1961: Documents at the National Archive*, <https://www.archives.gov/research/foreign-policy/cold-war/1961-berlin-crisis/nara-documents.html>

blockade of USSR/GDR, the destruction of several military aircrafts or seizing and holding small parts of East Germany.<sup>47</sup> Another government document regards the 'level plan Jack Pine' and deals with the expansions of the tripartite operational. The document mentions AAA/SAM fire counteractions such as the destruction of Soviet AAA/SAM locations in order to retain unrestricted air access into West-Berlin.<sup>48</sup> Both of the latter documents were drafted after the Standoff in Berlin, signalling American willingness to continue confrontational approaches even after the confrontation. According to Smyser, who himself was stationed in Berlin and complemented his experiences with additional research, Kennedy himself noted that "Berlin policy could be more politically controversial and sometimes more explosive than he had first realized."<sup>49</sup> Kennedy's '*ich bin ein Berliner*' speech of 1963 illustrates this further when stating "*there are some who say in Europe and elsewhere we can work with the Communist, [l]et them come to Berlin.*"<sup>50</sup> Williamson acknowledges that general Lucius Clay, being a U.S. commander, was keen on stressing if not using the military power of the States as he quickly was of opinion that Soviet provocations became too considerable.<sup>51</sup>

At times, even some European nations seemed eager to occupy a more militaristic stance. In a memorandum from France's President De Gaulle to President Kennedy, de Gaulle makes it clear that "I [De Gaulle] believe that the opening of negotiations in the present circumstances would be considered immediately as a prelude to the abandonment, at least gradually, of Berlin and as a sort of notice of our surrender." De Gaulle continues to note that France is reinforcing its defences as a precaution due to Soviet threats and actions and refrains from engaging in negotiations with Moscow unless the situation changed.<sup>52</sup> Konrad Adenauer, the Chancellor of West-Germany, agreed with President

---

<sup>47</sup> "Military Countermeasures," 12/5/1961, National archives, College Park, MD, identifier 6037139, Collection 59, *The Berlin Crisis of 1961: Documents at the National Archive*, <https://www.archives.gov/research/foreign-policy/cold-war/1961-berlin-crisis/nara-documents.html>.

<sup>48</sup> "Expansion of Tripartite Operational – Level Plan Jack Pine," 12/5/1961, National archives, College Park, MD, identifier 6037139, Collection 59, *The Berlin Crisis of 1961: Documents at the National Archive*, <https://www.archives.gov/research/foreign-policy/cold-war/1961-berlin-crisis/nara-documents.html>.

<sup>49</sup> W. R. Smyser, *Kennedy and the Berlin Wall*, 125-127.

<sup>50</sup> John F. Kennedy, "Ich bin ein Berliner" (speech, Rathaus Schöneberg rally, Berlin, June 26, 1963). The full text of the speech is derived from Historische Bronnen [Historic sources], <https://histobron.nl/tekst-ich-bin-ein-berliner-kennedy-1963/>.

<sup>51</sup> Richard D. Williamson, *First Steps toward Détente*, 136-138.

<sup>52</sup> "Letter and Translation from President Charles DeGaulle to President John F. Kennedy" 8/26/1961, National archives, College Park, MD, identifier 6037210, Collection 59, *The Berlin Crisis of 1961: Documents at the National Archive*, <https://www.archives.gov/research/foreign-policy/cold-war/1961-berlin-crisis/nara-documents.html>.

Kennedy in a letter days before the standoff that “vital interests of the Western Powers that must be defended by force if necessary.” Adenauer even argued against Kennedy that not confrontation is dangerous, but the reduction thereof.<sup>53</sup> From the other side of Europe, East German leader Ulbricht likewise stressed military means. In his view, by closing the border around West Berlin and showing their military capacity under Soviet Leadership, the West no longer would be able to provoke the East with small military provocations nor would they see a small civil war to overcome the German divide as an option to pursue.<sup>54</sup>

When we continue to examine the rhetoric enveloping the event and look beyond the first appearances, we can see a European component that stresses efforts for détente with the East that differs from the US. De Gaulle for instance, mentions in the same memorandum that France “Strongly desires [...] a broad and real international détente.” In his view, détente can only occur from Soviet acts, in the same manner that tensions occur from Soviet actions.<sup>55</sup> This rhetoric, however, also indicates *Gaullism* at play; France’s effort of enhancing their position in the world out of both the US and Soviet shadow. This can be observed in his letter to Kennedy as he emphasizes that if the Soviets would act in the right manner, it would allow objective discussions between “*the United States, Soviet Russia, Great Britain and France on all the problems of the world.*” This effectively promotes France to a world power position that it arguably did not occupy. After the Standoff, De Gaulle would continue such premises when in December 1961 negotiations were judged to be no option, but rather a course of De Gaulle himself was pursued, free of Soviet and US influences. This was, however, not only a phenomenon in France. A year later Adenauer followed suit, being afraid that the Americans would settle with the Soviet at

---

<sup>53</sup> “Letter from Chancellor Konrad Adenauer to President John F. Kennedy” 11/22/1961, National archives, College Park, MD, identifier 6037207, Collection 59, *The Berlin Crisis of 1961: Documents at the National Archive*, <https://www.archives.gov/research/foreign-policy/cold-war/1961-berlin-crisis/nara-documents.html>.

<sup>54</sup> “Letter from Ulbricht to Khrushchev on Closing the Border Around West Berlin,” September 15, 1961, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Published in CWIHP Working Paper No. 5, “Ulbricht and the Concrete ‘Rose.’” Translated for CWIHP by Hope Harrison. SED Archives, IfGA, ZPA, Central Committee files, Walter Ulbricht’s office, Internal Party Archive, J IV 2/202/130. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116212>

<sup>55</sup> “Letter and Translation from President Charles DeGaulle to President John F. Kennedy” 8/26/1961, National archives, College Park, MD, identifier 6037210, Collection 59, *The Berlin Crisis of 1961: Documents at the National Archive*, <https://www.archives.gov/research/foreign-policy/cold-war/1961-berlin-crisis/nara-documents.html>.

the expense of the Germans and instead wished to negotiate with the Soviets themselves.<sup>56</sup>

This correlates closely to the position Adenauer also describes in the memorandum to Kennedy. Although he thought that the reduction of confrontation was dangerous, his reasoning does very much indicate that this was with possibilities for negotiations and a relaxation of tensions in mind. Adenauer argued that like in Korea, clashes often occurred in demilitarised or neutralised zones.<sup>57</sup> In other words, by solidifying the divide in Germany and Europe, Adenauer foresaw a lesser prospect of truly dangerous confrontations developing, which in turn could hinder negotiations. This argumentation appears in line with that of De Gaulle, who also increases military defences as a precaution but indicates a strong desire for détente. In this memorandum, however, De Gaulle explicitly places the ball in the court of the Soviet Union. Great Britain saw itself more closely aligned with the American position given their somewhat special relationship and provides fewer alternative options to pursue. These positions might seem paradoxical but work within this framework of a European component of détente. De Gaulle for instance, aimed at enhancing his prestige and position in the world in which he parted ways from the United States, reinforcing the multilateral perspective on the Cold War period of détente. Moreover, and perhaps more significantly, De Gaulle's efforts at entering negotiations free of foreign influence not only made Adenauer follow his example, but made cooperation more viable from a European perspective since it was less closely tied to the American interests. These on the eye contradictory developments fit in neatly with the multilateral and earlier development of détente in Europe.

When it came down to using force as an alternative to threats or negotiations, the European figures were also more cautious compared to the United States. During the checkpoint Charlie standoff, files indicate that Clay wrote: *"There is no longer time for either caution or timidity when our basic rights are threatened . . . We must be bold without truculence, quietly and not ostentatiously determined, and completely sure of those rights to*

---

<sup>56</sup> Manfred Wilke, *The Path to the Berlin Wall : Critical Stages in the History of Divided Germany* (Berghahn Books Incorporated, 2014), 298-309.

<sup>57</sup> "Letter from Chancellor Konrad Adenauer to President John F. Kennedy," 11/22/1961, National archives, College Park, MD, identifier 6037207, Collection 59, *The Berlin Crisis of 1961: Documents at the National Archive*, <https://www.archives.gov/research/foreign-policy/cold-war/1961-berlin-crisis/nara-documents.html>.

*which we are committed.*"<sup>58</sup> British prime minister Macmillan felt that Clay overreacted when he ordered the first three tanks close to the checkpoint, and even appeared to have doubted the appointment of Clay altogether.<sup>59</sup> Besides, in a letter from Kennedy to Macmillan, it becomes apparent that despite major agreements between the UK and the US, Macmillan faced opposition at home. For instance, topics as the conventional military build-up and nuclear balance did provide "*pressures and problems*" for Macmillan.<sup>60</sup> From the East side of the wall, a comparable response as that of Macmillan was found to the actions of East Germany leader Ulbricht. Like Clay, Ulbricht too favoured a strong, military response if needed. Soviet leader Khrushchev requested rather that Ulbricht avoided any actions that would worsen the situation in Berlin. Khrushchev was hesitant to jeopardize the ongoing negotiations with the US.<sup>61</sup> This becomes clear in Khrushchev's response to Ulbricht's letter of September 15, in which Khrushchev makes clear that "*since the Western powers are tending towards negotiations and contacts between the USSR and the US have already been made in New York, such steps which could exacerbate the situation, especially in Berlin, should be avoided.*"<sup>62</sup> Kennedy on the other hand endorsed Clay as his man in Berlin and as late as 1963 publicly stated his support for Clay.<sup>63</sup>

Granted, several voices from an American perspective can be heard that articulated concerns to the likes of European powers. American diplomat Foy D. Kohler agreed with Macmillan that Clay was overreacting, and both Zbigniew Brzezinski and William Griffith called for 'peaceful engagement' in 1961 when Kennedy seemed to favour a more direct approach.<sup>64</sup> Nonetheless, they seemed outnumbered in the US, or at least less successful, whereas this tone was shared more broadly in Europe. On several occasions, European powers pursued a route of their own rather than being dominated by their overarching

---

<sup>58</sup> W. R. Smyser, *Kennedy and the Berlin Wall*, 134.

<sup>59</sup> W. R. Smyser, *Kennedy and the Berlin Wall*, 126 - 130.

<sup>60</sup> "President John F. Kennedy to Prime Minister Harold Macmillan" 11/22/1961, National archives, College Park, MD, identifier 6037208, Collection 59, *The Berlin Crisis of 1961: Documents at the National Archive*, <https://www.archives.gov/research/foreign-policy/cold-war/1961-berlin-crisis/nara-documents.html>.

<sup>61</sup> Manfred Wilke, *The Path to the Berlin Wall*, 298-309.

<sup>62</sup> "Letter from Khrushchev to Ulbricht Regarding the Situation in Berlin," September 28, 1961, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, SED Archives, IfGA, ZPA, J IV 2/202/130. CWIHP Working Paper No. 5, "Ulbricht and the Concrete 'Rose.'" Translated for CWIHP by Hope Harrison. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116213>.

<sup>63</sup> John F. Kennedy, "Ich bin ein Berliner." (speech, Rathaus Schöneberg rally, Berlin, June 26, 1963). The full text of the speech is derived from Historische Bronnen [Historic sources], <https://histobron.nl/tekst-ich-bin-ein-berliner-kennedy-1963/>.

<sup>64</sup> Richard D. Williamson, *First Steps toward Détente*, 137 & Hanhimäki, "Detente in Europe," 207.

superpower, with France as the most explicit example. This shows the multilateral narrative that has been argued for by many authors. It also illustrates a different approach towards détente pursued by European nations. Indeed, many did stress military means if necessary and applicable, but in general as a means to enhance cooperation. Moreover, De Gaulle and Adenauer even separated from the US negotiations when they felt that their own, European interests were overlooked.

More than once Kennedy voiced similar views and stresses cooperation and negotiations. An important distinction to be made is that the relaxations of tensions that the European figures argue for are not similar to those to which J. F. Kennedy refers to, albeit noted frequently in some of the documents. Indeed, Kennedy stressed détente if possible and applicable but seemed to be more pragmatic at times than inherently favouring détente. For instance in *Negotiating Strategy Berlin*, a document from the US Department of State: Policy Planning Council, other aims come to light. Not only would the continuous focus on negotiations and the subsequent rejection of them by the Soviet shed a favourable light on the American position, but it would also create opportunities to strategically manoeuvre military forces and even agreements, if reached, to be in favour of the United States and potentially their allies.<sup>65</sup> After the standoff in Berlin in particular, Kennedy's positions seems to become more in favour of harsh measures and language whereas the European powers shift more towards the relaxation of tensions. This diverging approach between the United States and the European powers is further illustrated during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

### **The Cuban Missile Crisis**

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of May in 1962, Khrushchev proposed an initiative (Operation ANADYR) that would secretly deploy medium and intermediate-range missiles to the Island of Cuba. The 'joint defence' plan was ratified on the 10th of June and would see 24 missiles with a 1,100-mile range, 16 missiles with a range almost double of that and even some tactical nuclear weapons ship to Cuba.<sup>66</sup> Afterwards, the Soviet plan would expand to 50.000 Soviet troops, (nuclear)missiles, fighter, and bomber aircrafts, ships, and submarines and

---

<sup>65</sup> "NEGOTIATING STRATEGY BERLIN – Germany Crisis," 9/16/1961, National archives, College Park, MD, identifier 6037216, Collection 59, *The Berlin Crisis of 1961: Documents at the National Archive*, <https://www.archives.gov/research/foreign-policy/cold-war/1961-berlin-crisis/nara-documents.html>.

<sup>66</sup> James Hershberg, 'The Cuban missile crisis', 65–68.

potentially even a submarine base.<sup>67</sup> Khrushchev had several reasons to “take this most provocative step since the Berlin blockade” despite being considered by Kennedy to normally be “awfully cautious.”<sup>68</sup> A successful Castro in Cuba under Soviet Leadership would provide a fine example of the viability of communism. Moreover, the Soviet new communistic rival China might take it on themselves to help Cuba, should Soviet aid prove unsuccessful. This could deal an effective blow to Soviet leadership.<sup>69</sup> According to David Holloway, it would also enable to Soviet to put pressure on the United States after the setbacks of Berlin. It would strengthen the Soviet strategic position compared to that of the US, who for instance had missiles in Turkey that could reach Soviet soil.<sup>70</sup> On 15 October 1962, the Kennedy administration uncovered the previously secret plan of the Soviets in Cuba and announced on October 22 that a naval blockade of Cuba would be imposed until the withdrawal of the missiles was completed. On both sides, forces were brought to high alert and the US assembled forces in Florida in preparations of an invasion of Cuba. Khrushchev wished not to unleash war over Cuba that could spiral into a “big war” but rather deter the United States from invading Cuba. When Fidel Castro, leader of Cuba, proposed a pre-emptive nuclear strike if the US invaded Cuba, Khrushchev reacted strongly against this.<sup>71</sup> He even wrote to Kennedy expressing his fear for such a nuclear war and hoping to peacefully resolve the crisis.<sup>72</sup> 28 October marked the end of this 13-day crisis after Kennedy agreed not to invade Cuba and to withdraw his Jupiter missiles that he had placed in Turkey, while Khrushchev retreated his missiles from Cuba.

The Cuban Missile Crisis evolved as another struggle for power between the US and USSR and was the first major international crisis since the standoff in Berlin. In October 1962 Khrushchev found an ally in Fidel Castro and Cuba and was able to place nuclear missiles on the island located so close to the US homeland that it posed a direct threat of a measure previously unknown to the US since the Civil War. In the years leading up to the event, “US

---

<sup>67</sup> David, Holloway, “Nuclear Weapons and the Escalation of the Cold War, 1945–1962,” *In The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, edited by Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 394.

<sup>68</sup> James Hershberg, ‘The Cuban missile crisis’, 67 & Sheldon M. Stern, *Averting ‘The Final Failure’: John F. Kennedy and the Secret Cuban Missile Crisis Meetings* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 432.

<sup>69</sup> Ralph B. Levering, *The Cold War : A Post-Cold War History*, 101.

<sup>70</sup> David, Holloway, “Nuclear Weapons and the Escalation of the Cold War, 1945–1962,” 394-395.

<sup>71</sup> David, Holloway, “Nuclear Weapons and the Escalation of the Cold War, 1945–1962”, 394-396.

<sup>72</sup> “NSC 30: United States Policy on Atomic Warfare,” September 10, 1948, US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1948*, vol. VI, (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1975), 127.

*policy toward Cuba between 1960 and 1962 had violated every canon of international law and civilized bilateral behaviour. America had sponsored an invasion— which had included bombing raids— against another sovereign state; it had trained and - supplied exiles from that nation who, with the knowledge and support of the US government, then conducted repeated raids against Cuba; it had engaged in frequent efforts to assassinate Castro; and it had cancelled all trade with Cuba, virtually forcing some of the countries in Latin America that received US aid to do likewise.”* The conduct of the US regarding Cuba makes the crisis not only similar to the standoff in Berlin but can also be categorized as having a similar threat for the US as the standoff would have for the European nations. As such, it can be used as a comparative case study to establish in what way European rhetoric differed from their American ally in a crisis that was similar in nature and could wield similar potential consequences. Such a comparative analysis facilitates a deeper understanding of the different aspects of détente that penetrated either Europe or the US.

During this crisis almost exactly a year after the Berlin crisis, the rhetorical difference between the US and the European nations, including the Soviet Union to a certain degree, are noteworthy. An example can already be found in the decision of the naval blockade that Kennedy opted for in Cuba. According to Holloway, other measures were on the table as well. Examples mentioned are airstrikes and an immediate invasion of the land.<sup>73</sup> In a French document in which notes are written of a conversation between de Gaulle and Dean Acheson, the latter informing the president of France about the US blockade around Cuba, Kennedy is mentioned to have contemplated more draconian measures such as a surprise bomber attack but had rejected the idea due to the risk it would entail for his European allies.<sup>74</sup> The fact that Kennedy ultimately chose for a naval blockade considering European risks, hints at a European unwillingness to these more draconian measures. Even without contemplating with the European powers, Kennedy was apparently aware of the risks it would entail for them and possibly the backlash he would encounter and decided to act against it. Moreover, the document acknowledges the inability of France and de Gaulle to object the US naval blockade of Cuba since it is only natural to defend one's country. Yet this indicates that France would preferably see otherwise and once

---

<sup>73</sup> David, Holloway, "Nuclear Weapons and the Escalation of the Cold War, 1945–1962," 394.

<sup>74</sup> "Meeting between General Charles de Gaulle and Dean Acheson, Elysee Palace, Paris," October 22, 1962, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Documents Diplomatiques Français, 1962, Tome II (1er Juillet-31 Décembre), (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1999), pp. 315-19. Translation by Garret J. Martin. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115416>.

more hints at Gaullism at play; France, like the US, would defend the nation if possible and with similar force and determination, despite France's inability to muster similar power that the US could possibly wield. In addition, more than once the possibility of retaliation is mentioned, particularly in Berlin. This, yet again, indicates the renewed European awareness of the dangers of escalation and the strong desire to prevent that from happening. The Dutch minister for Foreign Affairs Joseph Luns even "totally disagreed with the American step" according to notes of Dutch Prime minister Jan E. de Quay, who himself was less outspoken against the US.<sup>75</sup>

The fact that Kennedy preferred more draconian measures suggests that détente, as sparked by the standoff, penetrated the United States far less than it did in Europe. In fact, American Senator Keating laid bare the position that the majority of the US occupied in a speech addressed to President Kennedy. Keating first uncovers the activities on Cuba as an "effort to interfere with our operations at Cape Canaveral," and continues to expose the troops, torpedo boats, missile base construction, amphibious vehicles and other potentially dangerous capabilities that are located so close to the United States.<sup>76</sup> His main worries regard Soviet interference with the US space program at Cape Canaveral above all, and the lack of presidential acknowledgements of the Soviet Issue at in Cuba. Only at several moments does he mention the potential consequences for the US military, and despite his own description of the dangers that are present on the island, Senator Keating calls for "prompt and vigorous action."<sup>77</sup>

Prompt and vigorous action came in October when Kennedy decided to enact a naval blockade around Cuba. West German Ambassador to the United States Knappstein analysis the American decision during the Cuba crisis, and is very much aware of the link between the situation in Cuba and a possible "aggravation of the Berlin crisis."<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup> "Dutch Prime Minister Jan E. de Quay, 23-26 October 1962," October, 1962, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Netherlands State Archives, Den Bosch, archive J.E. de Quay, diary 48, no. 5296, p. 96-98. Obtained for CWIHP by Rimko van der Maar and translated for CWIHP by Rimko van der Maar <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116746>.

<sup>76</sup> "Speech by Senator Keating, "Soviet Activities in Cuba", " August 31, 1962, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, 87th Congress, 2nd session, Congressional Record 108, part 14 (August 31, 1962), 18358-18361. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/134658>.

<sup>77</sup> "Speech by Senator Keating, "Soviet Activities in Cuba", " August 31, 1962, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, 87th Congress, 2nd session, Congressional Record 108, part 14 (August 31, 1962), 18358-18361. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/134658>.

<sup>78</sup> "Cable from Federal Republic of Germany Embassy, Washington (Knappstein)," October 22, 1962, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (AAPD) 1962: Band III: 1September bis 31Dezember 1962 (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag,

Moreover, he notes that the US, due to its nuclear superiority, is willing to run an increased risk and sees an *“unconvincingly explained over-dramatization of the Berlin crisis by the American political leadership, and the increasing number of public hints according to which the United States is ready to go it alone if it has to do so.”*<sup>79</sup> Indeed, he hints that the upcoming elections might influence this stance, but the stance in the United States is clearly differentiated from the rest of Europe. Especially noting that the US would be ready to go alone if needed, marks a significant rupture in the transatlantic relationship largely absent before the Berlin standoff. This statement touches upon the core of the thesis, acknowledging the major emphasis in Europe on the search for détente that was not present in the United States. Knappstein did not merely attribute this to Kennedy and his presidential course of action but alludes to the entirety of the American political leadership. Moreover, in the memoirs of Italian diplomat Roberto Ducci the decision by Kennedy is referred to as *“a decision which, by provoking the most serious crisis for world peace since the time of the Korean war, could lead to a confrontation with nuclear weapons between the superpowers, and involve all of Europe.”*<sup>80</sup> This, once more, represents the image of Europe being drawn into an escalating conflict that it does not want to be involved in. Once more, it shows an attitude that the United States occupies risking a nuclear confrontation which the European countries wish to avoid after witnessing the crisis in Berlin and the standoff a year earlier.

---

2010), Document 408. Translated for CWIHP by Bernd Schaefer.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115392>.

<sup>79</sup> "Cable from Federal Republic of Germany Embassy, Washington (Knappstein)," October 22, 1962, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (AAPD) 1962: Band III: 1September bis 31Dezember 1962 (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2010), Document 408. Translated for CWIHP by Bernd Schaefer.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115392>.

<sup>80</sup> "Roberto Ducci, 'I capintesta' [The Big Bosses] (excerpts)," October 01, 1962, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, (Milano: Rusconi, 1982). Pages 142-48 from the chapter "La notte che non scoppiò la Guerra nucleare" [The Night when the Nuclear War did not Break Out]. Translated by Leopoldo Nuti. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115423>.

## Conclusion

The Berlin standoff and the Cuban Missile Crisis both expose the difference in attitudes between the United States and its European allies that were evolving during the Berlin crisis. The standoff at Checkpoint Charlie brought a visual reminder of what the directly threatened European nations would have to endure, once again, if the battle for power between the US and the USSR went awry. Despite that some European nations indeed had an interest in preparing a military defence and occupying strong, forceful rhetoric, the majority were already more cautious than the United States in Berlin. Only France, driven by its Gaullism and effort to carve out a piece of world power status for themselves seemed to align to the more provocative language of America. Yet, at the same time, Charles de Gaulle was the first to venture for negotiations with the Russians on his own terms and proclaimed a desire for true *détente*. Moreover, Adenauer was quick to address Clays actions as too severe and Macmillan had trouble at home when aiming for nuclear capabilities. The resulting divide in rhetoric and thought is exposed exceptionally well during the Cuban Crisis when the standoff in Berlin had left its visual reminder in Europe.

The Berlin standoff showed the possible dangers of a direct confrontation, and with the Cuba crisis occurring so close to US soil a cautious approach would not be out of place. Instead, the rhetoric of the United States became even more vigorous and their actions might have been too if Kennedy had not considered Europe's position. More than once, prominent European political figures refer to the crisis in Berlin, whether that was done so in the context of invigorating the tensions there or even fearing it to resurface altogether as a result of the Cuban Crisis. When Kennedy enacted a naval blockade of Cuba, some European figures explicitly stated the fear of Europe getting caught in this conflict or even disagreeing outright with the taken course of President Kennedy. The rhetoric used by the president and other figures of the United States differentiates more clearly surrounding the Cuba crisis, especially when Knappstein noted that the US made several notions of going in alone if they had to, illustration best the divide that occurred in the transatlantic realm. No longer were the European nations on a similar page as the United States, they realised the danger of war and direct confrontation on their own behalf. They saw the balance of power and a realisation of *détente* as the most beneficial road to pursue, as they would likely have to face the worst of the damage if the world would be ensnared in a nuclear, mutually destructive war.

This thesis strengthens the multilateral challenge to the bipolar Cold War historiography that developed at the conclusion of the Cold War. In addition, this thesis places the European détente that developed out of the multilateral narrative at the beginning of the 1960s. The crisis in Berlin and in particular the checkpoint Charlie standoff created a tipping point for the European powers that triggered their more rigorous approach towards a relaxation of tensions. As a result, they pursued cooperation and negotiations more seriously than their American ally. This change of heart, although seemingly apparent in some of Kennedy's aims and personal notes, took another decade to develop in the US, before indeed in the late 1960s the United States saw détente as a viable road to pursue in a bilateral fashion. This does not indicate a power-hungry choice of the United States in the field of International relations. Instead, the European powers had different interests and weaknesses that proved détente to be viable at an earlier point in history than it would have been for the United States. Exactly these diverging interests are the base for the multilateral approach to the Cold War historiography and enables us to see the differences between the two continents. This difference in attitudes in the early 1960s is perhaps exemplified by the lists of countermeasures that the United States could wield in Berlin, ranging from moderate to very severe, it completely lacks measures mild in nature. It is precisely the so-called 'mild' road that the European powers seemed to prefer.

## Bibliography

### Literature:

- Best, Anthony., Hanhimaki, J., Maiolo, J., Schulze, K. (2015). International History of the Twentieth Century and Beyond. London: Routledge,  
<https://doiorg.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.4324/9781315739717>
- Daigle, Craig. The Limits of Détente : The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1969-1973. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012. Accessed June 9, 2019. ProQuest Ebook Central,  
<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uunl/detail.action?docID=3421064&query=detente#>
- Engerman, David. "Ideology and the Origins of the Cold War, 1917–1962." Chapter in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*. Edited by Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad. Vol. 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Flemming, Thomas. Berlin in the Cold War: The Battle for the Divided City. Berlin: Berlinica Publishing LLC, 2010, doi:10.1017/CHOL9780521837194.003.
- Gaddis, John Lewis. Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War. Cary, United States: Oxford University Press USA - OSO, 2005.  
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uunl/detail.action?docID=422884>.
- Gaddis, John Lewis. The Cold War : A New History. New York : Penguin Press, 2005.  
<http://archive.org/details/coldwarnewhistor00gadd>.
- Garthoff, Raymond L. A Journey through the Cold War : A Memoir of Containment and Coexistence. Brookings Institution Press, 2001. ProQuest Ebook Central,  
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uunl/detail.action?docID=3004347>.
- Hanes, Richard C. et al., editors. Cold War Reference Library. UXL, 2004. 6 vols. Gale eBooks, <https://link.gale.com/apps/pub/0PHW/GVRL?u=utrecht&sid=GVRL>, Accessed 17 Dec. 2020

- Hanhimäki, Jussi M. "Détente in Europe, 1962-1975," in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (eds.) *The Cambridge History of the Cold War. Volume II: Crises and Détente* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
- Hanhimäki, Jussi M. *The Rise and Fall of Detente; American Foreign Policy and the transformation of the Cold War*. Washington D.C: Potomac Books, 2013.
- Harrington, Daniel F. *Berlin on the Brink: The Blockade, the Airlift, and the Early Cold War*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012.
- Hershberg, James. "The Cuban missile crisis', in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War: Volume 2: Crises and Détente*. Edited by Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad. Vol. 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, doi:10.1017/CHOL9780521837200.005
- Holloway, David. "Nuclear Weapons and the Escalation of the Cold War, 1945–1962." Chapter. In *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, edited by Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, 1:376–97. *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. doi:10.1017/CHOL9780521837194.019.
- Levering, Ralph B. *The Cold War: A Post-Cold War History*, John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2016. ProQuest Ebook Central, Created from uunl on 2021-01-02 08:59:20: <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uunl/detail.action?docID=4205801>.
- Lightbody, Bradley. *The Cold War*, Taylor & Francis Group, 1999. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uunl/detail.action?docID=237326>.
- Lundestad, Geir. *The United States and Western Europe Since 1945: From "Empire" by Invitation to Transatlantic Drift*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. Proquest Ebook central
- Lundestad, Geir. "Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945-1952." *Journal of Peace Research* 23, no. 3, 1986. Accessed December 22, 2020, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/423824>

- Romano, A. (Ed.), Romero, F. (Ed.). (2021). *European Socialist Regimes' Fateful Engagement with the West*. London: Routledge,  
<https://doiorg.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.4324/9780429340703>
- Sarotte, M. E. *Dealing with the Devil : East Germany, Detente, and Ostpolitik, 1969-1973*, The University of North Carolina Press, 2001. ProQuest Ebook Central,  
<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uunl/detail.action?docID=427152>.
- Sheldon M. Stern, *Averting 'The Final Failure': John F. Kennedy and the Secret Cuban Missile Crisis Meetings*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003.
- Smyser, W. R. *Kennedy and the Berlin Wall : "A Hell of a Lot Better than a War."* Lahnman, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009.
- van Tonder, Gerry. *Berlin Blockade: Soviet Chokehold and the Great Allied Airlift 1948-1949*. Havertown: Pen & Sword Books, 2017. Accessed January 10, 2021.  
ProQuest Ebook Central.
- Westad, Odd Arne. "The Cold War and the International History of the Twentieth Century." Chapter. In *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, edited by Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, 1:1–19. *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.  
doi:10.1017/CHOL9780521837194.002.
- Westad, Odd Arne. *The Global Cold War : Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. <https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.1017/CBO9780511817991>.
- Wilke, Manfred. *The Path to the Berlin Wall : Critical Stages in the History of Divided Germany*. Berghahn Books, Incorporated, 2014. ProQuest Ebook Central,  
<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uunl/detail.action?docID=1375298>.
- Williamson, Richard D. *First Steps toward Détente : American Diplomacy in the Berlin Crisis. 1958–1963*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012

### Online Archives:

The U.S. National Archives. *The Berlin Crisis of 1961: Documents at the National Archives* collection. <https://www.archives.gov/research/foreign-policy/cold-war/1961-berlin-crisis/nara-documents.html>

The Wilson Center, Digital Archive: International History Declassified. *Berlin Wall* collection. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/collection/156/berlin-wall>

### Primary Sources:

"Cable from Federal Republic of Germany Embassy, Washington (Knappstein)." October 22, 1962, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (AAPD) 1962: Band III: 1September bis 31Dezember 1962 (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2010). Document 408. Translated for CWIHP by Bernd Schaefer. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115392>.

"Dutch Prime Minister Jan E. de Quay, 23-26 October 1962." October, 1962, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Netherlands State Archives, Den Bosch, archive J.E. de Quay, diary 48, no. 5296, p. 96-98. Obtained for CWIHP by Rimko van der Maar and translated for CWIHP by Rimko van der Maar <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116746>.

Kennedy, John F. "Ich bin ein Berliner" (speech, Rathaus Schöneberg rally, Berlin, June 26, 1963). The full text of the speech is derived from Historische Bronnen [Historic sources], <https://histobron.nl/tekst-ich-bin-ein-berliner-kennedy-1963/>.

"Letter and Translation from President Charles DeGaulle to President John F. Kennedy." 8/26/1961, National archives, College Park, MD, identifier 6037210, Collection 59. The Berlin Crisis of 1961: Documents at the National Archive, <https://www.archives.gov/research/foreign-policy/cold-war/1961-berlin-crisis/nara-documents.html>.

"Letter from Chancellor Konrad Adenauer to President John F. Kennedy." 11/22/1961, National archives, College Park, MD, identifier 6037207, Collection 59. The Berlin

Crisis of 1961: Documents at the National Archive,  
<https://www.archives.gov/research/foreign-policy/cold-war/1961-berlin-crisis/nara-documents.html>.

"Letter from Khrushchev to Ulbricht Regarding the Situation in Berlin." September 28, 1961, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, SED Archives, IfGA, ZPA, J IV 2/202/130. CWIHP Working Paper No. 5, "Ulbricht and the Concrete 'Rose.'" Translated for CWIHP by Hope Harrison.  
<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116213>

"Letter from Ulbricht to Khrushchev on Closing the Border Around West Berlin." September 15, 1961, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Published in CWIHP Working Paper No. 5, "Ulbricht and the Concrete 'Rose.'" Translated for CWIHP by Hope Harrison. SED Archives, IfGA, ZPA, Central Committee files, Walter Ulbricht's office, Internal Party Archive, J IV 2/202/130.  
<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116212>

"Meeting between General Charles de Gaulle and Dean Acheson, Elysee Palace, Paris." October 22, 1962, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Documents Diplomatiques Français, 1962, Tome II (1er Juillet-31 Décembre), (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1999), pp. 315-19. Translation by Garret J. Martin.  
<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115416>.

"Military Countermeasures." 12/5/1961, National archives, College Park, MD, identifier 6037139, Collection 59, The Berlin Crisis of 1961: Documents at the National Archive, <https://www.archives.gov/research/foreign-policy/cold-war/1961-berlin-crisis/nara-documents.html>.

"National Security Action Memorandum No. 94: Steinstuecken and Friedrichstrasse Crossing Point." 10/23/1961, National archives, College Park, MD, identifier 6037034, Collection 59, The Berlin Crisis of 1961: Documents at the National Archive, <https://www.archives.gov/research/foreign-policy/cold-war/1961-berlin-crisis/nara-documents.html>.

"National Security Action Memorandum No. 109: U.S. Policy on Military Actions in a Berlin Conflict." 10/23/1961, National archives, College Park, MD, identifier 6037139, Collection 59, The Berlin Crisis of 1961: Documents at the National

Archive, <https://www.archives.gov/research/foreign-policy/cold-war/1961-berlin-crisis/nara-documents.html>

"NEGOTIATING STRATEGY BERLIN – Germany Crisis." 9/16/1961, National archives, College Park, MD, identifier 6037216, Collection 59, The Berlin Crisis of 1961: Documents at the National Archive, <https://www.archives.gov/research/foreign-policy/cold-war/1961-berlin-crisis/nara-documents.html>.

"Roberto Ducci, 'I capintesta' [The Big Bosses] (excerpts)." October 01, 1962, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, (Milano: Rusconi, 1982). Pages 142-48 from the chapter "La notte che non scoppiò la Guerra nucleare" [The Night when the Nuclear War did not Break Out]. Translated by Leopoldo Nuti. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115423>.

"President John F. Kennedy to Prime Minister Harold Macmillan." 11/22/1961, National archives, College Park, MD, identifier 6037208, Collection 59, The Berlin Crisis of 1961: Documents at the National Archive, <https://www.archives.gov/research/foreign-policy/cold-war/1961-berlin-crisis/nara-documents.html>

"Soviet Activities in Cuba." Speech by Senator Keating, August 31, 1962, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, 87th Congress, 2nd session, Congressional Record 108, part 14 (August 31, 1962), 18358-18361. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/134658>.

"Speech by Senator Keating, "Soviet Activities in Cuba"." August 31, 1962, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, 87th Congress, 2nd session, Congressional Record 108, part 14 (August 31, 1962), 18358-18361. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/134658>.