

**BERLIN
ON THE
BRINK
The Blockade,
the Airlift,
and the
Early Cold War**

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**CHAPTER 1
Opportunity**

The agreements that divided postwar Germany into zones and Berlin into sectors seem to defy common sense. Although the Soviet zone surrounded the city, the accords did not define Western transit rights across it. This omission seemed criminal during the Cold War, and many sought explanations. The most common was that, during the war, few Westerners had given much thought to access, and those who did were overruled by others who naively trusted Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin. Dwight Eisenhower summed up these views when he told GOP leaders in 1952 that the problem resulted from Franklin Roosevelt's concessions to the Russians, which he derided as "bribing a burglar."¹

As all good detectives know, opportunity alone does not result in crime; motive must accompany it. Eisenhower saw no need to explain Soviet motivations. Convinced that Stalin's mind buzzed with larcenous thoughts, he assumed that opportunity alone was a sufficient explanation. Yet decisions made during the war did not cause the blockade; they only made it possible. A full explanation must combine opportunity and motive, the goal of this chapter and the next.²

The broad outlines of how Germany came to be divided into zones are well known. In what remains the best short introduction to the subject, State Department historian William Franklin chronicled a series of missed opportunities and assumptions disproved by time. The United States and Great Britain began discussing the postwar occupation in 1943. Planning quickly became entangled in bureaucratic quarrels between the Department of State and the Pentagon, and it was distracted by a disagreement between Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill over which country should occupy northwestern Germany. Meanwhile, a European Advisory Commission (EAC)—created at a meeting of the British, American, and Soviet foreign ministers in Moscow in October 1943—worked out a zonal plan that omitted provisions for Western access to Berlin. The Yalta conference approved this EAC plan. The French joined the EAC in November 1944, and at Yalta they were granted a zone of Germany, a sector in Berlin, and a seat on the Allied Control Council (ACC), the committee of military governors charged with overall responsibility for the occupation. Franklin described how approaches to the Soviets in 1945, culminating in a meeting among Soviet Marshal Georgi K. Zhukov, U.S. Lieutenant General Lucius D. Clay, and British Lieutenant General Ronald Weeks on June 29, 1945, left Western transit arrangements ill-defined.³

Yet Franklin did not explain why the Western powers paid so little attention to ensuring their ability to reach Berlin. Exploring Western plans and assumptions, this chapter argues that the failure to work out access arrangements had sources other than naiveté or gullibility. In sketching out what would become the boundary of the Soviet zone, British planners in 1943 simply overlooked the issue. They expected a brief occupation, assumed that zonal boundaries would merely mark where each country stationed its troops, and believed that each power's forces would move freely in all zones. The EAC did not correct the British omission. The French joined the commission too late to affect

the zonal protocol, the Soviets had no interest in expanding outsiders' presence in their sphere, and no American alternative to the British proposal reached the commission. Roosevelt toyed with a scheme whereby the U.S. zone would abut Berlin, but he abandoned it after learning that the Russian representative in the EAC had endorsed the British plan. Shortly thereafter, American officials debated making free access to Berlin a condition of American acceptance of the boundaries in the British plan, but they later set aside the idea. Once the commission agreed on a zonal protocol, those worried about access did not push hard to resolve the issue, and those who approached the Russians about access met polite evasion.

ALTHOUGH EISENHOWER AND other Cold War critics blamed the Roosevelt administration for the opportunities provided to the Soviets by wartime plans, those plans originated in London. From the start, British planners believed the Allies would have to occupy all of Germany. Partial occupation after 1918 had not worked; only complete occupation had any chance of success this time. Total occupation could take one of two forms: stationing small contingents from all the occupying powers throughout Germany, in what was known as a "mixed" occupation, or dividing the country into zones, one for each occupying power. The British chose the latter.⁴

By mid-October 1943, the Post-Hostilities Planning Subcommittee under Gladwyn Jebb of the British Foreign Office had drafted a plan that included a "Combined Zone" around Berlin, as well as a map detailing zonal boundaries. The most important line on Jebb's map—the western boundary of the Soviet zone—would divide Germany throughout the Cold War. Jebb's proposal made no mention of Western transit across the eastern zone to Berlin.⁵ Following review by a committee chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Clement R. Attlee, Sir William Strang submitted the plan to the EAC on January 15, 1944.⁶

Time would treat harshly the assumptions underlying the so-called Attlee plan. Its authors expected that a peace conference would convene quickly, as had occurred after the First World War, and replace the zones with more lasting arrangements. British officials thought the military phase of the occupation, and hence the zones, might last between six and twenty-four months (U.S. Army officers thought it might last no more than two months).⁷

Nor did planners expect the zones to become exclusive preserves. In Jebb's view, the zones would exist for garrisoning purposes only and would have no effect on day-to-day life. The prospect of "rigid international frontiers wandering up German hills and down German valleys," as one of his colleagues put it, was the furthest thing from anyone's mind.⁸ Strang's proposal envisaged that each zone would have an international staff under the host commander, as well as token forces from the other zones. The idea of token forces suggests why the British took access to Berlin for granted. With Western troops moving freely throughout the Soviet zone, special provisions for Western transit to Berlin must have seemed superfluous.⁹

Planners did not see the access routes as west Berlin's sole lifeline, which now seems instinctive to us. Rather, they assumed the city would draw its supplies from the area surrounding it, as it always had done. As a senior staff officer of Eisenhower's Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) put it in mid-April 1945, "Berlin must, from the supply point of view, be treated as part of the Russian Zone." The access routes would support the Western garrisons, not the German population. Soviet insistence in July 1945 that each occupying power furnish food and coal for its own sector came as an unwelcome shock and made access much more important than any planner had imagined.¹⁰

Yet the main reason why access seemed unimportant was that Westerners did not expect the Soviets to make trouble. Wartime planners approached the occupation from a perspective different from ours. The major purpose of the occupation was to prevent renewed German aggression, which officials regarded as an overriding common interest that would bind the wartime Allies together far into the postwar period. They began their work in the summer of 1943, when optimism about postwar cooperation with the Soviet Union was at its height. They did not—could not know that the Grand Alliance would collapse. Optimism was no mere planners' conceit; it was government policy, set at the highest level, and it was not called into question until the spring of 1945.¹¹ By then, the zones were a fixture of Allied diplomacy, and not even Churchill could compel a reconsideration of them.

NO AMERICAN ALTERNATIVE to the British proposal emerged before the EAC convened or for weeks thereafter. Planning for the occupation, by its nature, united categories that Americans put in separate mental compartments: wartime and postwar, military and diplomatic, and the U.S. government lacked the mechanisms to consider it coherently. They found themselves working in isolation on two zonal plans: the British one in the EAC, and a military one called Rankin (or, more precisely, its third variant, Rankin C), being considered by the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). Roosevelt was the only one who could have pulled things together, but he thrived on the lack of system, had an instinctive distaste for postwar planning, and gave no lead.¹²

Scholars have erroneously conflated Rankin and the Attlee plan. Drawn up by British Lieutenant General Sir Frederick E. Morgan's Anglo-American planning staff in London, Rankin outlined Western military responses should Germany collapse, as it had in 1918. Under Rankin C, the plan's most ambitious variant, troops would fan out across Europe to disarm the Wehrmacht and the SS. What they did later was of no concern to the Rankin planners. Rankin C was, in short, a plan for the war's last phase, not the occupation's first, and it covered all of Nazi-occupied western Europe, not just Germany. It divided the Continent into three great "zones" that radiated out from the heart of Germany: the southwestern zone, consisting of southwestern Germany, France, Italy, and Austria; the northwestern zone, consisting of northwestern Germany, the Low Countries, Denmark, and Norway; and the eastern zone, including all the countries to the east, which would be left to the Soviet Union. Morgan allotted the southwestern zone to the United States and the northwestern one to Britain, paralleling how they would deploy in his other major plan, Overlord.¹³

In a famous meeting with the JCS on the battleship *Iowa* in mid-November 1943, Roosevelt insisted that the United States occupy the northwestern zone. His stance had nothing to do with Germany and everything to do with France. "France is a British baby," he declared, and he would accept no commitments there. He went on to outline the zones he wanted in Germany. His quick strokes on a National Geographic map carved out a huge American zone that reached as far east as Berlin and as far south as Frankfurt. The Russians would occupy the area to the east, the British the area to the south.¹⁴

The joint chiefs, naturally enough, took this as a directive from their commander in chief and asked Morgan to rewrite Rankin. Churchill and the British chiefs of staff resisted, triggering a deadlock that would continue until September 1944, when Roosevelt relented.¹⁵ No one could object when Roosevelt and the JCS argued with Churchill and the British chiefs of staff over what shape Rankin should take. However, the argument took on ramifications outside military channels when, months into the debate, the EAC began considering postwar occupation “zones” in Germany. The American chiefs of staff (and FDR himself) could not distinguish between the two types of zones, insisting that all zonal planning was a “military matter” and hence none of the diplomats’ business. Furthermore, they interpreted all questions regarding zones against a background of suspicion and hostility toward the British.

After more than a half century of extolling the AngloAmerican “special relationship,” it is difficult to recall how distant the two countries were in the early days of the Second World War. Ironically, tensions increased after Pearl Harbor, due to quarrels over the Mediterranean. The British wanted to expand operations there, while the Americans regarded it as a strategic dead end.¹⁶ The War Department connected the EAC with these disagreements. Even before the foreign ministers decided to create the commission, Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy had warned his boss, Henry L. Stimson, that the British were reviving a scheme to “run Eisenhower” in the Mediterranean; Stimson passed the story on to Roosevelt.¹⁷ McCloy had mistakenly interpreted a request to have Harold Macmillan, Britain’s resident minister at Eisenhower’s headquarters, serve as “the channel” between the general and London for reports about political developments in Sicily as a plot to put Macmillan in Eisenhower’s chain of command; furthermore, McCloy was sure that only his tough response had thwarted the scheme.¹⁸ Another transatlantic argument soon followed over the relative authority of civil affairs planning groups in London and Washington. This bureaucratic donnybrook and the quarrel over Rankin were in full swing when British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden won approval for the EAC at the Moscow foreign ministers’ meeting. McCloy and his colleagues in the Pentagon jumped to the conclusion that the EAC was yet another maneuver to make London the center of wartime and postwar planning.¹⁹

The vagueness of the commission's charter did not help. It was to make recommendations on "European questions connected with the termination of hostilities" that were referred to it by the governments involved—specifically, terms of surrender and the control machinery to enforce them.²⁰ McCloy saw this elastic wording as a deliberate move to create openings for the commission to meddle in operational matters. Armistices and surrender terms were traditionally military topics, and issues "connected with the termination of hostilities" could have military implications. The occupation would begin when Allied troops entered Germany, which could be months before a final defeat. In other words, control measures devised by the EAC for the occupation might begin during the war, not after it, and might tie commanders' hands. McCloy had no doubt that the commission was simply the latest scheme to subordinate wartime coalition strategy to the postwar goals of the British Empire, and British assurances to the contrary fell on deaf ears.²¹

Roosevelt's senior military adviser, Admiral William D. Leahy, warned that the EAC "will mean nothing but trouble for us," a prophecy that proved selffulfilling.²² Obstruction by the Pentagon made AngloAmerican consultations impossible in the weeks before Strang introduced the British proposal. The timing was critical. Once

the British plan was on the table, any American alternative that put postwar access on a sounder basis would have required the Soviets to give up population and territory. As Franklin noted years ago, "This would have required some hard bargaining and/or considerable compensation."²³ Neither was likely. Thus, any American alternative had to reach London in time to influence British planning *before* Strang's submission. Morgan's American deputy, Major General Ray W. Barker, made just such a plea, urging wide-ranging bilateral consultations before the commission convened.²⁴ The Pentagon's suspicions of the British ensured that this did not happen, even though there was time to consult. The U.S. Army chief of staff, General George C. Marshall, had a copy of Jebb's plans by November 3, and (contrary to Franklin's claims) the State Department had copies two weeks before that.²⁵ Leahy and the joint chiefs talked over British plans with the president in midNovember. When the Department of State tried to establish an

interagency Working Security Committee to coordinate instructions to the U.S. EAC delegation, army and navy planners did their best to paralyze the group. Echoing McCloy's suspicions, they complained that the commission would meddle in questions that "would normally go to the Combined Chiefs of Staff for consideration" and demanded to know what "safeguards" would be created to "avoid shifting the center of policy decisions on civil affairs matters from Washington to London." They insisted on complicated clearance procedures and would commit their departments to nothing.²⁶ Instead of a venue for expediting U.S. actions in the EAC, the Working Security Committee became a forum where initiatives were talked to death.

State Department planner Philip Mosely recalled a vivid and telling example. He had drafted a plan to divide Germany into zones that included an overland corridor connecting Berlin with Western-controlled areas, and he shared it with a colonel in the army's Civil Affairs Division. Days passed. Finally, Mosely visited the Pentagon to inquire about his suggestion. The officer pulled open the bottom drawer of his desk and pointed. "It's right there," he said. Leaning back in his chair, he put both feet into the drawer and continued, "It's damn well going to stay there, too."²⁷ Mosely's plan never reached the Working Security Committee, much less the EAC. Preoccupied with wartime plans such as Rankin, and obsessed by fears of British machinations, the American military blocked efforts to deal with postwar issues, including access to Berlin.

WHEN STRANG PRESENTED the British proposal to the EAC in mid-January 1944, his American colleague, Ambassador John G. Winant, was awaiting instructions because the Pentagon had blocked all action in the Working Security Committee. The situation was unchanged a month later when the Russian delegate, Ambassador Fedor T. Gusev, offered his government's plan, which accepted the western boundary of the Soviet zone outlined by Strang. Assuming that Winant had also submitted a plan, FDR asked Acting Secretary of State Edward Stettinius for details of the three proposals. He needed to know, he wrote, to ensure that the American submission "conform[ed] with what I decided on months ago." What he had decided was a mystery to Stettinius, and it remained a puzzle when the president offered an explanation three days later. His memo delineated no zonal boundaries in Germany and bore no relation to anything under consideration at the EAC. It would have made perfect

sense to Morgan and the Combined Chiefs of Staff, however, because it was Roosevelt's rationale for swapping the Europeanwide zones envisaged in Rankin C. But thanks to Pentagon secrecy, no one at Foggy Bottom knew that.²⁸

Word that Roosevelt had given the Department of State even this small glimpse of his thinking regarding Rankin broke the logjam in the Working Security Committee. A Pentagon staffer suggested that the committee be given a copy of the December JCS paper calling on Morgan to reverse his zonal allocations and incorporating the Pentagon's version of FDR's *Iowa* map. The army representative, Lieutenant Colonel Edgar P. Allen, was careful not to give away too much. His "impression" was that FDR had approved these papers, but he would not (perhaps could not) explain their background or context. All he knew was that the JCS wanted them sent to Winant.²⁹

Stettinius's dispatch to Winant included Allen's papers and a map comparing the zones the JCS wanted and those already approved by the British and the Russians. With tongue in cheek, Stettinius described the JCS papers as "self-explanatory" and waited for Winant to explode. The ambassador did, saying he could not advocate these proposals in light of the British-Soviet agreement on boundaries. He was sending his assistant, George F. Kennan, to Washington for fuller explanation.³⁰

When Kennan reached the White House, he found the president focused on the dispute over the northwestern zone. The conversation ran on for some time before Roosevelt understood that Kennan had crossed the Atlantic to talk about an entirely different topic: the boundary of the Soviet zone. As Kennan outlined the problem and described the JCS map, Roosevelt suddenly laughed and said, "Why that's just something I once drew on the back of an envelope." Adding that the British zonal proposal was "probably a fair decision," he authorized Winant to accept it, as long as he continued to insist on American occupation of the northwestern zone.³¹

The Working Security Committee set to work drafting new instructions to Winant. In the process, it produced the only documented attempt to write access into the EAC protocol. The committee's initial draft reflected Roosevelt's instructions, authorizing the ambassador to join his colleagues in accepting the zonal boundaries but insisting on the northwestern zone for the United States. Roosevelt's *Iowa* plan would have assured

Western access to Berlin; his abandonment of it left access uncertain. That troubled someone on the committee, and its second draft added a paragraph that tied American acceptance of the zones to agreement that “freedom of movement between the respective zones and such central zone as may be established in Berlin or elsewhere will be accorded, without restriction of any kind, to all forces and other such personnel of the Governments participating in the occupation and control of Germany.” The committee dropped this sentence two days later.³²

Unfortunately, the committee’s files do not indicate who urged the addition and who insisted on its removal. The odds are that someone from the Department of State—Mosely or James W. Riddleberger suggested the insertion, and the military deleted it. Comments by Colonel George A. “Abe” Lincoln, one of Marshall’s top planners, reveal the military’s indifference at the time to zonal boundaries and their implications. The location of the western boundary of the Soviet zone was, in Lincoln’s opinion, “a matter for very little moment from a military standpoint.” As it was, the Civil Affairs Division put the cable in final form, and Riddleberger, who, as secretary of the committee, had drafted all three versions, concurred for the State Department. Then it went to the White House for FDR’s approval.³³

The British plan’s merits were another reason why no alternative emerged in the EAC. As Roosevelt said, it was “a fair decision,” a straightforward approach to the problem at hand: preventing renewed German aggression. The Soviets accepted it at once because it offered them more territory than their own plans did, and its equity and logic forestalled challenge.³⁴ In terms of equity, it divided Germany, within its 1937 borders, into three roughly equal zones one each for Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States. To avoid confusion, the boundaries followed existing administrative borders wherever possible. The British drew the zones in such a way as to encourage separatism, leaving the way open for permanent partition or dismemberment if the Allies decided on either.

At Yalta, the Big Three would approve the plan without debate, although Churchill would persuade Roosevelt and Stalin to amend it by giving France a zone and a seat on the ACC.³⁵

The EAC accepted the Attlee plan in part because Strang and Winant shared many of its authors' views: the zones would be temporary, a peace conference would soon convene, and in the meantime, the zones would not become exclusive preserves. Strang recalled, "It was not our expectation that the zones would be sealed off from one another." officials expected that a central German administration would survive and keep the country united. Others expected that the ACC would wield more power than the individual zonal commands. As Winant commented in January 1945, planners assumed that governments or the ACC would set broad overall policies, with zonal commanders retaining merely "the residue of powers."³⁶

Like the planners, Winant and Strang (and their political superiors) assumed

good relations among the victors. This was not a naive faith in Soviet goodwill or confidence that Western leaders could "handle Uncle Joe." Everyone realized the war would leave the Soviet Union weakened but without rivals on the Continent, and many were apprehensive about Russian intentions. France was powerless, Britain exhausted, Roosevelt determined to limit postwar American responsibilities. Western leaders realized the Soviets would do as they pleased in eastern Europe and saw the unity of the Grand Alliance as the best means of restraining them. Nowhere was cooperation more important than in Germany, where the victors shared a vital interest in preventing renewed German aggression. Discord would allow the Germans to evade controls and once again threaten world peace. Given the presence of Soviet armies in Germany, cooperation was not only desirable; it was unavoidable. Whether one trusted the Russians or not, presidential adviser Harry Hopkins argued, "it is certainly a risk that we have to take."³⁷

The commission's work seemed to strengthen prospects for future cooperation. Strang recalled no serious misunderstandings or broken promises, while Winant felt a sense of trust and "common purpose."³⁸ The commission formally discussed access to Berlin only once, and Gusev's stance was encouraging. The topic came up in a roundabout way.

When Roosevelt relinquished his claim to the northwestern zone, Churchill responded by ceding control of the ports of Bremen and Bremerhaven to the United States and promising unimpeded transit to them across the British zone. U.S. Army officials demanded a detailed agreement on transit, triggering a tedious and drawn-out negotiation with the British.³⁹ This squabble threatened the completion of the zonal protocol at an awkward time. France would be joining the commission soon, and the three delegations wanted to finish as much as they could beforehand. To speed things along, Gusev urged the insertion of a general proviso on transit to the ports, leaving the details for military officials to settle later. In support of this idea, he remarked that similar arrangements would be made regarding Berlin. According to the British record, Gusev merely discussed procedures (who would decide what), while according to the American record, he pledged that arrangements “will be made, providing United States and United Kingdom forces and control personnel full access to the Berlin zone across Soviet occupied territory.”⁴⁰

Winant’s postblockade critics among them Major General John H. Hilldring, wartime chief of the Civil Affairs Division—would condemn him for taking Gusev’s assurance at face value. Yet they all took the same position in 1944. When it came time for the U.S. Army to approve the zonal protocol Winant had negotiated, Hilldring pointed out that it made no provision for Western transit across the Soviet zone to Berlin. “The agreement is weak in this respect,” he commented, “but I suppose that we may take it for granted that such facilities will be afforded. No change in the agreement in this particular is believed to be desirable.” McCloy agreed.⁴¹

Another of Winant’s critics, Robert D. Murphy, claimed that when Riddleberger urged that the zones converge on Berlin like slices of a pie, Winant rejected the idea. Murphy and people close to him would later suggest that the ambassador had assumed that the right to be in Berlin included the right to go there and that he had taken Soviet good faith for granted. Timing ranked higher in Winant’s calculations, however. The EAC had completed the zonal protocol a few weeks before, and, as noted earlier, the three delegations wanted to nail down as much as they could before France joined. Winant believed it was too late to reopen the text.⁴²

Thus the zonal protocol, completed by the EAC on September 12, 1944, and approved by the three governments the following February, contained no provisions for Western transit across the Soviet zone to Berlin.⁴³ Western access would depend on whatever arrangements could be made in a separate agreement; several apparent missed opportunities developed in 1945.

IN JANUARY 1945, the joint chiefs proposed raising the subject of postwar access to Berlin at Yalta. The Foreign Office preferred to wait until the three governments decided whether France would receive a zone and an ACC seat. The French would not be at Yalta, and any tripartite access accord reached there would have to be renegotiated if they joined the occupation regime.⁴⁴

Western representatives did not raise the issue with the Russians at Yalta, although the Americans discussed it among themselves. Military planners urged that the United States seek Allied acceptance of “the general principle of freedom of transit across zones of occupation” and in Berlin. Leahy grumbled that he would submit the idea to FDR, although he “questioned the president’s interest.” When the document was ready, he changed his mind, claiming the paper “unnecessarily burdens the President and took [sic] up his time.” Thanks to Leahy’s obstruction, the proposal went to London and Moscow without the weight of the Oval Office behind it. The British accepted, the Soviets never responded, and the joint chiefs did not press the issue.⁴⁵

The JCS put forward their proposal as an “interim military measure” pending broader agreements on transit, which, they commented, “may be expected from the European Advisory Commission.” This remark prompted the planning committee of the U.S. EAC delegation to draft such an agreement, only to have Mosely stifle the initiative at a delegation meeting on March 23.⁴⁶ His reasons are not clear. The committee’s draft was little more than a paraphrase of the JCS proposal and would have been superfluous if the Soviets accepted that document. Mosely may have thought that an agreement based on this vague paper would preclude a more specific accord. In the spring of 1945, he was drafting such an agreement, which would have allowed the American commander to choose any two railroads and highways. Under his proposal, the Americans could also repair railway lines, roads, bridges, and signals as they saw fit, plus operate gasoline

stations, rest areas, and repair patrols along the routes. If any route became unavailable, the Soviets would provide an equivalent. Mosely thought his proposal was more likely to win acceptance in Moscow than one allowing Western forces to wander at will in the Soviet zone. That expectation, pride of authorship, and the notion that an agreement along these lines would better protect Western interests probably led him to oppose the committee's draft.⁴⁷

When no opportunity arose to submit his draft accord in the EAC, Mosely shared it and a memo summarizing the background of the access issue with the chief of the U.S. Post-Hostilities Planning Section on Eisenhower's staff, Colonel Charles R. Kutz, in mid-May. Although historian Daniel Nelson thought matters ended there, Mosely's handiwork did influence the military's thinking, and it would reach the Russians twice in modified form.⁴⁸

Meanwhile, what many have regarded as the West's best chance of guaranteeing postwar access had come to naught. In the spring of 1945, Churchill sought to persuade the Americans to race the Russians to Berlin, but they would not listen. One may question the widespread assumption that, had the Western powers reached Berlin first, postwar access would have been assured. No one has suggested that the Western governments would have set aside the zonal protocol. The armies would have withdrawn to the agreed zonal boundaries, leaving the city surrounded by the Soviet zone. The Western powers might have secured a "better" access agreement when they left, but we cannot be sure. In any case, postwar transit depended on Soviet cooperation. If relations soured, arrangements secured after a withdrawal from Berlin would have been no more secure than those actually obtained in 1945, when Eisenhower's armies evacuated portions of the Soviet zone they had overrun in the last weeks of the war. The postwar situation would have been the same.⁴⁹

There was one other possibility: establish the seat of Allied government elsewhere. The British toyed with this idea in the spring of 1945, but by then, all four governments had endorsed the EAC's zonal protocol and its special Berlin enclave. The city's symbolic value made it almost inevitable that the Allies would govern Germany from there. The

destruction in the city at the war's end, horrific as it was, did not cause them to reconsider.⁵⁰

By the time Berlin fell to the Russians on May 2, access to Berlin and the withdrawal of Western armies from the Soviet zone had become linked. From mid-April onward, Eisenhower had wanted to withdraw Western armies and turn the zone over to the Russians as soon as the tactical situation permitted, but Churchill persuaded the new American president, Harry S. Truman, to leave the troops where they were. The zonal protocol took effect the moment Germany surrendered, but VE Day came and went with no sign of a Western departure. The Soviets concluded that their partners intended to ignore the protocol and keep the territory they had captured. At a meeting of the four Allied commanders in chief in Berlin on June 5, Zhukov refused to discuss setting up the control council until Western forces evacuated his zone. Eisenhower, Clay, and political adviser Robert Murphy persuaded Hopkins, in Frankfurt on his way home from talks with Stalin, that it was time to withdraw. Clay drafted a cable for Hopkins to send to the president calling for withdrawal to begin June 21. Simultaneously, Western forces would move into Berlin “under an agreement between the respective commanders which would provide us with unrestricted access to our Berlin area from Bremen and Frankfurt by air, rail, and highway on agreed routes.”⁵¹ With Churchill's grudging approval, Truman sent Stalin the Hopkins-Clay proposal on June 14; the prime minister dispatched a similar telegram the following day. Stalin's replies delayed the troop movements until July 1 and said nothing about access.⁵²

Clay directed Major General Floyd L. Parks, who had been appointed to command the U.S. Berlin garrison, to fly to Berlin and confer with the Russians about withdrawal from the zone, Western entry into Berlin, and preparations for the Berlin summit conference. Parks was to secure “continuing running rights” on the Helmstedt and Frankfurt autobahns, “effective at once,” including the right to detour “as required” and freedom

from “all customs duties, inspection and the like, and from any and all stoppage or interference... without exception.” In addition, Clay wanted a “continuing right of movement, effective at once,” over two rail lines, also free from inspection. American aircraft could use two airways, one from Frankfurt and the other from Bremen, without restriction. SHAEF forwarded this agenda to the U.S. military mission in Moscow on June 21 for presentation to the Soviets, the first time a version of Mosely’s transit proposals reached them.⁵³

After several days of haggling, the Americans obtained permission to bring troops forward to survey the summit site (which Westerners expected would be in Berlin). The Russians agreed only after Ambassador W. Averell Harriman twice assured them that the group would not exceed 50 officers, 175 soldiers, 50 vehicles, and 5 aircraft—numbers provided by SHAEF. Parks flew into Berlin with a small group of aides. He also commanded a larger ground force that was to set up a compound in the city for the American summit delegation. This unit’s leader, Colonel Frank L. Howley, also commanded the U.S. military government unit destined for Berlin, and the dual assignment caused trouble. Parks’s instructions to Howley were unclear, and the colonel brought his military government detachment as well as the summit survey team. Russian soldiers at the autobahn bridge near Dessau, halfway to Berlin, denied passage to his swollen column, citing the numerical limits agreed on in Moscow. Howley had never heard of the numbers and thought the Russians were being obstructive. He argued with them for several hours before receiving instructions from Parks to comply with their demands.⁵⁴

The incident had longlasting effects. Howley commanded the American sector during the blockade, and in his memoirs he treated the episode at the bridge as proof that the Soviets had been hostile from the start. He never knew the numbers had come from SHAEF, and Western historians continue to repeat his version of events. The Russians interpreted the episode as an American attempt to move troops into Berlin early, violating the Truman-Stalin agreement that withdrawal from the Russian zone and entry into Berlin would occur simultaneously. Howley’s actions reinforced the Soviets’ mistrust of the West, and Parks’s meeting failed to advance the American agenda. When

he tried to raise the Clay-Mosely points dealing with access and transit, the Russians would discuss summit preparations only.⁵⁵

Preparations for evacuating the Russian zone and entering Berlin gathered momentum. The Americans had been pressing for a meeting with Zhukov, and it was finally arranged for June 29. Major General John R. Deane, chief of the U.S. military mission in Moscow, and Parks reported that Zhukov “urgently” wanted a list of subjects the Western representatives would discuss. Eisenhower’s deputy, Air Marshal Sir Arthur W. Tedder, responded with a detailed list including the now-standard proposals for access. The Western powers wanted immediate and unrestricted use of two autobahns and two railroads, with the right to repair and maintain them. Western officials would train railway crews and supervise them, even in the Russian zone. Western traffic would not be subject to search or control by customs officials or military guards. The Western powers would enjoy unrestricted air traffic between their zones and Staaken, Tempelhof, and Gatow airfields in Berlin and exclusive use and occupancy of the first two bases. Parks gave this second version of Mosely’s ideas to General Sergei Kruglov of the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs, who promised to pass it on to Zhukov.⁵⁶

Clay, his British counterpart General Weeks, and their staffs landed at Gatow on June 29 and drove to Zhukov’s headquarters. For over four hours, Clay, Zhukov, and Weeks discussed the issues Parks had been unable to raise: withdrawing Western troops from the Russian zone, moving Western garrisons into Berlin, and Western transit across the Soviet zone. The meeting was businesslike and productive, the atmosphere cordial and relaxed.

After arranging Western withdrawal, the generals turned to access. Zhukov complained that Western control of roads and rail lines to Berlin would divide his zone and create “an extremely difficult administrative problem.” He thought one railroad, one highway, and one air corridor would be enough for the small Western contingents. Clay countered that he and Weeks were not seeking exclusive use of the routes, only “freedom of access” under “whatever regulations are set down.” After Clay and Weeks accepted the Magdeburg-Berlin railway and autobahn, Zhukov asked them to drop their request for other roads. Clay agreed but reserved the right to reopen the subject. Zhukov countered

that “possibly all points discussed at this conference may be changed.” Both sides thus regarded the day’s results as temporary and subject to revision.

Talk turned to traffic control. Clay asked for “unlimited access to roads,” a concept Zhukov professed not to understand, although according to one record of the meeting, he agreed that British and American troops could use the Helmstedt autobahn “unrestrictedly.” The generals agreed that Russian road signs and military police would control traffic “in the normal way,” according to Murphy (who was not there and received the news secondhand). The Russians would check identity documents but had no interest in inspecting cargo, Zhukov said; his people did not care “what was being hauled, how much, or how many trucks were moving.”

Airfields and air routes were next. Everyone agreed that Tempelhof would be under American control; it was in the U.S. sector. There was confusion about Staaken and Gatow. Weeks thought Gatow would be Russian and Staaken British. Zhukov said his maps showed the reverse. The two set the issue aside to be settled later (which it was, along Zhukov’s lines). With Berlin’s airfields allocated, the next question was how to reach them. The Americans wanted to fly anywhere in a triangle bounded by Berlin, Hamburg, and Frankfurt. Zhukov insisted on an air lane twenty miles wide from Berlin to Magdeburg. There it would divide, one part going to Hannover for the British, the other southwest to Frankfurt for the Americans.⁵⁷

Clay later claimed that Zhukov offered to sign a transit agreement but he decided not to accept. A document that confirmed access on any and all routes was one thing, but what Zhukov offered was far less. An agreement granting access along some routes by implication denied it on all others.⁵⁸ Clay’s story seems unlikely. Parks’s copious notes of the meeting contain no such offer. SHAEF’s position for the past six weeks had been that it wanted transit rights along specific routes, not a general right of transit in the western reaches of the Soviet zone. Clay had been part of that process. The cable he had written for Hopkins had not asked for free transit, only passage along “agreed routes.”

The Cold War and the Berlin blockade made this meeting appear to be a missed opportunity. Clay would blame himself for not insisting on free access as a condition of withdrawal from the Soviet zone (an admission that undercuts later Western claims that

access had been a prerequisite), while others complained he should have obtained a written agreement safeguarding access.⁵⁹ Neither alternative would have made much difference. If Clay had obtained either, the West might have had a stronger legal case against a blockade. Yet it is hard to see how that would have been an advantage. When the State Department claimed in July 1948 that free access had been a condition of withdrawal, Moscow ignored the argument. What mattered was not whether the agreements were written or oral, conditional or unconditional. The fundamental facts were ones of geography and political will. The Soviets controlled the ground. Once East and West saw each other as enemies, Moscow could impose or lift restrictions whenever doing so seemed politically advantageous, and there was little the West could do in response, short of armed force.

American military leaders, like the British planners and the EAC negotiators, did not push for more because they shared the general optimism about the future of East-West relations. Eisenhower remarked in May 1945 that Western relations with the Russians were at the same stage as British-American contacts had been in 1942. Just as Anglo-American cooperation had grown, he predicted, “the more contact we have with the Russians, the more they will understand us and the greater will be the cooperation.” In his memoirs, he would describe Berlin as “an experimental laboratory for the development of international accord.”⁶⁰ Worries about bribing a burglar never crossed his mind in these months; nor did they trouble Clay, who was determined to do all he could to make fourpower rule in Germany succeed. “It’s got to work,” he told a gathering of reporters. “If the four of us cannot get together now in running Germany, how are we going to get together in an international organization to secure the peace of the world?”

THE ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS that would be so roundly condemned in later decades worked well for more than two years. As Clay recalled, road, rail, barge, and air traffic moved to and from Berlin without Soviet interference until the end of 1947.⁶² If the Soviets resisted attempts to expand Western access, they made no effort to disrupt it

As Clay, Weeks, and Zhukov expected, the access arrangements they worked out on June 29 proved temporary. On September 10 the ACC approved a paper authorizing sixteen Western freight trains to transit the zone daily, supporting the Western garrisons and delivering the West's share of coal and food for the city.⁶³ Daily service would grow to twentyfour freight and seven passenger trains by October 1947. Road and rail traffic rested on the June 29 verbal agreements and on an October 1946 ACC directive. Soviet officials allowed the Americans and the British to open repair stations on the Helmstedt autobahn in January 1946, and at their invitation, the British operated a small railway service detachment at Magdeburg from late 1945 through the following summer.⁶⁴ A May 1946 ACC agreement set up procedures for routine Allied interzonal travel by road. The Soviets rejected a similar fourpower directive regulating barge traffic on canals and waterways. Canals linked their zone with the British zone but not with the American or French, and they insisted on a bilateral agreement.⁶⁵

These rail, road, and barge accords are less well known than the November 1945 air corridor agreement. Clay, Zhukov, and Weeks had approved air corridors connecting Berlin with the western zones, but the arrangement had not worked well, for two reasons. First, the British and the Americans thought the generals had approved a Y-shaped airway originating from Berlin and dividing at Magdeburg,

with one arm continuing toward Frankfurt and the other to Hannover. The Russian understanding was that there would be two ruler-straight corridors—one linking Berlin and Bremen, the other linking Berlin and Frankfurt. The Soviets complained of wholesale Western violations before the source of the misunderstanding was identified, and even then, the Russians insisted on their interpretation. Second, aircraft in the corridors flew under national control; that is, British controllers at Gatow directed their planes, while Americans at Tempelhof controlled U.S. flights—

hardly the safest procedure.⁶⁶ The British wanted unrestricted flight west of Berlin, subject to reasonable notice and safety considerations. Their eventual goal was freedom of flight over all Germany. Washington liked the idea, and the American air commander, General John Cannon, promised to instruct his representative in the Allied air directorate, Major General Robert Harper, to work out a common position with the British. Instead, Harper undermined British efforts by circulating a plan for an expanded corridor system.⁶⁷

Over the next few weeks, the air directorate drafted a plan that followed Harper's ideas. This proposal would establish a Berlin Control Zone, a cylinder 10,000 feet high and 40 miles across centered on the ACC building. A four-power air safety center would control traffic in this zone. Corridors 20 miles wide would radiate from the zone to Hamburg, Hannover, Frankfurt, Prague, Warsaw, and Copenhagen. The Soviets objected to the latter three as being international arrangements beyond the ACC's purview, but Zhukov assured his colleagues that these corridors would be established "in due course." Whereas the Western powers spoke of corridors to satisfy the "requirements of the Four Powers for flights over the occupied Zones," the Russians always described the Hamburg, Hannover, and Frankfurt corridors as supporting "the needs of the occupation troops in the zone of Greater Berlin" (emphasis added). The plan approved by the ACC on November 30, 1945, contained the three German corridors as well as the two conflicting rationales. The different emphases doubtless seemed unimportant at the time, but they would become the subject of much earned disputation later.⁶⁸ The corridors took effect December 19, 1945; the Berlin Air Safety Center started operation April 15, 1946. Under flight rules worked out later, aircraft of the occupying powers could use the corridors without prior notice.⁶⁹

Historians have treated this agreement as if it were unique. This written accord, so the argument goes, protected the airlift against Soviet interference in 1948, while the lack of written guarantees regarding surface access invited obstruction.⁷⁰ Yet the ACC did reach written agreements on road and rail traffic. The air agreement carried no more—and no less legal weight than the other accords. The September 1945 rail accord had

precisely the same standing as the air corridor agreement; both were numbered papers approved by the control council. In addition, the air corridor agreement said nothing about a Western *right* of access; like the other transport accords, it established practical procedures for travel. The Russians interfered with surface travel in 1948 and abstained in the air not because the air agreement was more binding than the other accords. They could impede surface travel relatively easily, through new “implementing regulations.” In contrast, interfering with Western aircraft ran serious risks. That is what protected air traffic to and from Berlin and made the airlift possible, not the written nature of the November 30 accord.

Western air traffic was not, as is commonly supposed, restricted to the corridors. As one American observed in January 1946, “we can fly over the Russian zone in other directions by giving notification 48 hours in advance.” A Russian report indicated that this practice was continuing more than a year later.⁷¹ The Russians cooperated in other ways, helping the British and French acquire their own airfields in Berlin. In August 1945, Zhukov gave the British all of Gatow airfield, which the EAC protocol had divided between the British sector and the Russian zone. Zhukov’s deputy, General Vasily D. Sokolovsky, ceded land to the French some weeks later to give the room for an airfield.⁷²

Despite such examples of cooperation, the Soviets’ general approach was to restrict the Western presence in their zone. At Potsdam, the British sought approval for the principle of freedom of movement by Allied citizens through

hout Germany. The Soviet foreign minister, Vyacheslav Molotov, blocked the suggestion, insisting that the ACC study it first. The foreign ministers agreed to refer the matter to Berlin without, unfortunately, recording the decision in the protocol or communiqué.⁷³ When Field Marshal Sir Bernard L. Montgomery raised the subject, Zhukov would not even discuss passing it on to the staff for study, saying he was too busy. Sokolovsky echoed his chief.⁷⁴ British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin tried again at the London foreign ministers' meeting, asking Molotov to remind Zhukov of their decision at Potsdam. Molotov promised to look into the subject but claimed that "no concrete decisions" had been made at Potsdam and contended that the military governors were in the best position to decide when to consider the matter.⁷⁵ Despite the high level interest in London, members of Montgomery's staff regarded the issue as of "no intrinsic urgency" and linked it to interzonal travel by Germans, which they opposed due to security worries, lack of accommodations, and fear of a mass exodus from the Russian zone.⁷⁶

In December 1945, the Americans revived the British proposal derailed by Harper two months earlier to give military aircraft of the occupying powers "complete freedom of transit over Germany." The Russians opposed both that idea and a March 1946 effort to expand the corridors.⁷⁷ When the Americans revived the free transit proposal in November 1946, Sokolovsky countered that the existing corridors were more than sufficient for the needs of the Berlin garrisons. After all, he continued, "tanks, infantry, and all other types of armed services of the Allies were in the zones allocated to them and did not roam in other zones. He did not see why this right should be granted to aviation." The issue was one for governments, he continued, shrugging off suggestions that he ask Moscow for authority to deal with it. His colleagues had no choice but to withdraw the paper. Another attempt in February 1947 met a similar fate.⁷⁸

Sokolovsky proved equally unyielding regarding surface routes. He denied a December 1945 request for direct routes to Berlin from the American zone, writing to Clay that the highways and railways in his zone were “extremely overburdened.” Clay revived the subject twice more; Sokolovsky would not budge. Even so, there was an informal arrangement at the working level, starting perhaps in 1946 and confirmed in October 1947, that allowed four freight trains a day to enter the Soviet zone from Bavaria, carrying meat for the Kommandatura, the four-power committee in charge of Berlin.⁷⁹

Despite the Russians’ uncooperative attitude, Clay recalled few problems over access. Banditry was the biggest problem in the early months. Delays were frequent, with trains taking two or three days to reach Berlin from Helmstedt. Armed gangs, often in Soviet uniforms, boarded stationary trains and stole whatever they could. Others stopped trucks on the autobahn at gunpoint, leading the Americans to escort convoys with armored cars. A request that the Russians provide train guards to work alongside Americans went unanswered. In January 1946, two drunken Soviet officers tried to force their way aboard an American train. A military policeman opened fire, killing one intruder and wounding the other. Clay complained to Sokolovsky three months later that “outlaws masquerading... as Soviet soldiers” had been stealing supplies from American trains in the Soviet zone; he asked the Russians to suppress the marauding bands.⁸⁰ He lodged another protest after the Russians began removing Germans traveling on American military trains. Sokolovsky insisted on the right to check German passengers crossing his zone. Clay denied that the Russians had a right to enter U.S. military trains and assured Sokolovsky that the trains would carry only American citizens and Germans employed by the U.S. military. If all else failed, Clay added, he would station “fifty soldiers machine guns” on each train, with orders to shoot anyone attempting to board. The two eventually reached a gentleman’s agreement. Sokolovsky would not waive his right to inspect Western military trains but would not enforce it, while Clay reiterated his promise to bar Germans who were not affiliated with the military government.⁸¹

The gentleman's agreement may have prompted the British to allow their German employees to travel on British military trains to and from Berlin. Passengers could not leave the trains in Soviet-controlled territory, and passenger lists would be available for Soviet inspection, but Russian guards were not to check passengers or remove them. Advised of this procedure when it began in July 1946, the Soviets raised no objections. Twice, in October 1946 and February 1947, Soviet soldiers inspected passengers and sent those without interzonal passes back to Berlin. The British reacted strongly, warning that their guards had instructions to prevent, by force if necessary, Soviet officials from boarding their trains, and they would carry out those orders "regardless of the consequences." The Soviets blamed overzealous junior officers and let the matter drop until January 1948.⁸² By then, the diplomatic climate had changed dramatically, and Stalin was willing to exploit the opportunity provided by the wartime accords.

