

Berlin, 1948



*Three hundred thousand
Berliners assemble in front of
the ruins of the Reichstag to
hear the mayor, Ernst Reuter,
call for international support
for blockaded Berlin.*

supplies, all were brought in by air. It began to look as if the airlift could after all supply the city on through the winter, which everyone prayed would not be severe; there were no reserves of coal.

Inside West Berlin, electricity was available only four hours a day. People got used to the limited rations and to feeling cold. The blockade in any case was not absolute. Many West Berliners registered for food rations with the Soviet authorities, and about one in ten drew food and coal from the east. There was no restriction on travel within the city. West Berliners regularly visited the



ABOVE: A German child's drawing commemorates the airlift: "We thank the pilots for their work and effort." RIGHT: A new game, "Airlift."

eastern part of the city, where there were dance halls bathed in electric light and properly heated, a magnetic attraction to the hungry citizens of the west.

West Berliners were still fearful that the West might not continue the airlift. On 6 September another meeting of the city assembly in East Berlin was broken up by Communist activists — again with violence and intimidation. The western representatives decided that the council was no longer functional, so they left and agreed to meet in the safety of West Berlin. Ernst Reuter appealed to all Berliners to help condemn the Communists, and three days later a huge gathering of 300,000 Berliners, mostly from the city's western zones, collected outside the ruins of the Reichstag. In front of the vast crowd Reuter, standing on a pile of war rubble, called on the Western governments not to abandon Berlin.

The airlift became almost a way of life. Although expensive, its cost represented only a fraction of total American aid to Europe. Despite bad weather and constant harassment by Soviet fighters, the transports continued to bring their cargoes into West Berlin. By December 1948 the goal of 4,500 tons flown in each day was reached. At Gatow and Tempelhof flights landed every 90 seconds. Enough coal was freighted in to keep West Berliners from freezing. The

gamble had paid off. Production in the city picked up, and output grew rapidly. The feared economic collapse did not materialize. And the winter, fortunately, was unusually mild.

The West secured a major propaganda victory through the airlift. It was a reminder to the Soviet Union, and the whole world, of Western technological superiority, especially in the air. Conversely, the Berlin crisis showed the Soviets in a poor light; they seemed willing to threaten 2 million people with starvation.

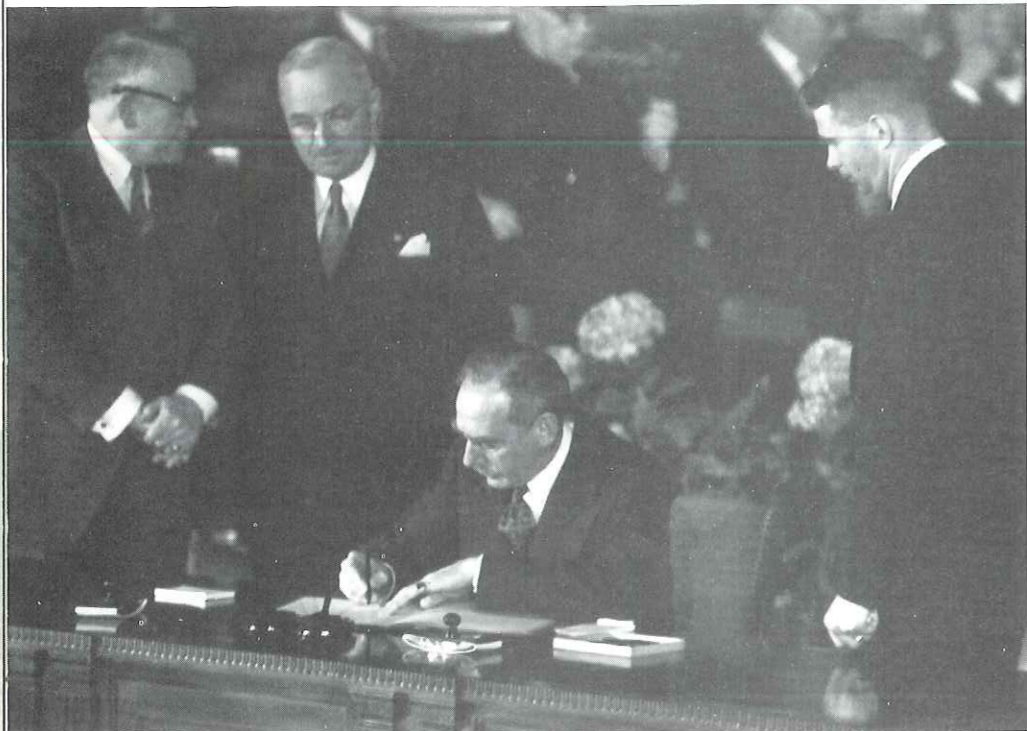
The Soviets, operating outside the framework of American loan credits and facing the Western alliance, saw themselves to be increasingly threatened. We now know that Stalin felt less strong than was realized at the time, but in 1948 many Americans genuinely believed that Stalin sought to dominate all of Europe. The policy of containment meant confronting Communists at agreed critical points, and Berlin was one of these. As far as Western public opinion was concerned, old wartime loyalties to Russia were being replaced by fear of Soviet ambitions; a "them and us" syndrome had emerged. Marshall reported, "There has been a definite crystallization of American public and Congressional opinion over the Berlin issue. . . . The country is more unified in its determination not to weaken in the face of pressure of an illegal blockade than on any other issue we can recall in time of peace." The Berlin blockade made clear to most Americans that the new enemy was definitely the Soviet Union.

As the heavy transports continued to fly their daily missions, the constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany, popularly known as West Germany, was being drafted. Stalin's attempt to prevent the division of Germany had failed.

RIAS, Radio in the American Sector, American-financed, with its mix of popular music and upbeat news, kept up Berliners' morale. Presenter and entertainer Christina Ohlsen became a celebrity.

NATO Is Launched

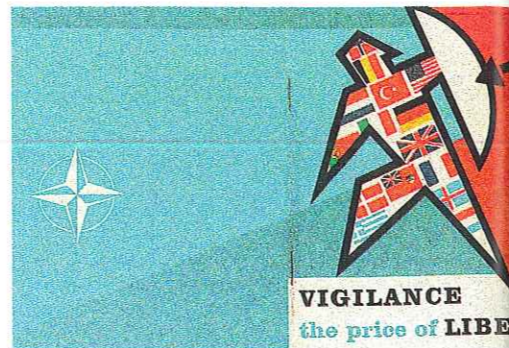
In January 1949 President Truman announced his intention to provide military aid to Western Europe. Then, in April, negotiations lasting more than a year finally came to their conclusion when the North Atlantic Treaty was signed in Washington by the United States, Canada, and ten West European governments. All signatories agreed to come to the aid of each other if attacked. A common cause was formally recognized, and American leadership of the West was duly confirmed. Ernest Bevin's mission to commit the



United States to the defence of Western Europe by treaty obligation was accomplished. Stalin had driven the West into a formal alliance based primarily on mutual defence against Soviet aggression.

In the spring of 1949 the weather improved considerably. Food supplies in Berlin could be built up and fuel stocks maintained at a good level. The airlift increased to 8,000 tons per day. In one twenty-four-hour period, on Easter Sunday, April 1949, a record number of 1,398 flights came into Berlin, carrying a total of 13,000 tons of supplies.

As the counter-blockade of East Germany hurt more and more, the Soviets took the only course left open and tried to end the whole Berlin debacle. The Kremlin released a series of hints that it would consider ending its blockade with minimal conditions imposed. The counter-blockade would have to be lifted and the Council of Foreign Ministers be reconvened. The bellicose General Clay quietly returned to Washington and ceased to be military governor. After the tensions of the preceding year he claimed to need a break anyway. On 12 May the Soviet and Western military authorities lifted their respective blockades around Berlin. Both sides claimed a victory. Berliners



LEFT: On 4 April 1949 the United States, Canada, and ten Western European nations signed the North Atlantic Treaty, committing the United States to the defence of Europe. Secretary of State Dean Acheson signs as President Truman looks on. ABOVE: A pamphlet cover shows the NATO symbol and portrays the alliance as a shield against Soviet attack.



12 May 1949. The first British truck passes the checkpoint on the British-Russian zonal border as jubilant Germans look on. The airlift has succeeded. The blockade is lifted.

were jubilant. Many thought this would be the end of the Cold War.

The sense of victory and relief felt in the West did not last long. Before summer was over an American B-29, on routine patrol at 18,000 feet over the North Pacific, picked up a radioactivity count higher than normal. Within a week more radiation was detected. Soviet scientists, led by Igor Kurchatov, had successfully tested an atom bomb. The Soviet Union had caught up. The Americans were stunned, for now there was nuclear parity between the superpowers. The balance of power would become a balance of terror.