The Berlin Wall (1989)

Historical Security Council

Overview

One of the most prominent symbols of tensions during the ongoing Cold War is the Berlin Wall, a wall twelve feet high and ninety-six miles long. It consists of piles of barbed wire, stone slabs, and heavily guarded and armed walkways at the top. The Wall symbolizes the sharp division between the lifestyles of the West and that of the East, the former of which was more prosperous. The division between the East and West was fueled by the fear of communism by the Western forces and the fear of capitalism by the Eastern forces. This division was further fueled by the US’s implementation of the Marshall Plan and NATO (North Atlantic Trade Organization), and the rising wealth in Western Germany which sparked a mass exodus of East Germans to West Germany which in turn sparked the need for a wall dividing the two.

Historical Context/Background

Before the official start of the Second World War (1939), Germany and The Soviet Union signed a non-aggression pact stating that they would not go to war with one another and that together they would invade Poland and divide it amongst themselves. At the time of this agreement, both sides were planning on using the other side to obtain their individual goals, and when the other was no longer useful, they would break the alliance. This loose alliance continued
into the year 1939 when Britain and France officially declared war on Germany; however the alliance broke up when Nazi Germany invaded Russia under Operation Barbossa. During this invasion the German Forces captured much territory, only being stopped by the Russian winter before Soviet troops could invade Moscow. However, on their way, Nazi Germany treated their Soviet prisoners poorly, frequently starving them and using them as slave labor.

The Germans and their allies had an auspicious beginning, however towards the end of the war with the American forces joining, and German forces spread thinly on two fronts, Nazi Germany lost the war. Right before the official end of the war, in 1945, a meeting between the leaders of Britain, the United States, and Russia took place at Yalta. At this meeting, these world leaders discussed what would happen after the war and what could be done with Germany to avoid future conflict. It was decided that Germany would be divided into several sections, a section for each of the major western allies including the Soviet Union. For a time, all of these nations worked together to rebuild Germany into a new nation. However, as the Western European countries and the United States began to work together to undermine the authority of the Soviet Union, the Soviet Union became increasingly paranoid about Western intervention in their part of Germany. So much so, that they completely closed off their part of Germany, which came to be called the Berlin Blockade.

“In June, without informing the Soviets, U.S. and British policymakers introduced the new Deutschmark to Bizonia and West Berlin. The purpose of the currency reform was to wrest economic control of the city from the Soviets, enable the introduction of Marshall Plan aid, and curb the city’s black market. Soviet authorities responded with similar moves in their zone. Besides issuing their own currency, the Ostmark, the Soviets blocked all major road, rail, and canal links to West Berlin, thus starving it of electricity, as well as a steady supply of essential food and coal”

(https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/berlin-airlift)
This quickly came to the attention of the United Nations as the United States and her allies claimed that it was a breach of Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter. However, there was no resolution reached in the Security Council.

Ultimately France and Britain would merge their portions of Germany with the United States to create the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), and the section controlled by the Soviet Union was called the German Democratic Republic (GDR). However, due to the growing prosperity of Western Germany and the economic decline of the Soviet Union and Eastern Germany, many eastern Germans started to jump ship and move to the Western section. Seeing this as an insult to their way of life and a way for the United States to win, the Berlin wall was constructed starting in 1961. The wall was supposed to serve as a blockade for those trying to cross the wall, but it did not deter some east Germans from attempting to cross it. The wall has stood as a physical representation for the division of not only the economic standing in the two parts of Germany but also as a division between worldwide struggle between capitalism and communism.

Since the Berlin wall was erected, the forces of the Soviet Union and those of the United States and her allies have fought against each other using the wars and conflicts of other nations. These two nations have been fighting around the world to promote their ways of life, the United States pursuing Democracy and the Soviet Union promoting Communism.

**Current situations/ Recent Developments**

In June of 1987 the current President of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, instituted two new policies, Perestroika and Glasnost. Perestroika was a series of economic and social reforms, most of which were starting to give more freedom to the people. Glasnost is a call for a new era in Russian history. These reforms, later in the year 1987, were seen as unsavory to Soviet bureaucrats who were in large favor of communism, and viewed this change as westernization, the opposite of what the Cold War was fought for. These reforms brought aspects of capitalism to the Soviet Union and were largely disapproved by the traditionalist communists.
For more information, click on this link (https://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/perestroika-and-glasnost).

Later on in the year 1988 and 1989 several of the countries under Soviet control began to reform their policies and turn to more democratic policies, the first country to turn into a democracy was Poland (1989), and Hungary was the first of the Soviet block to turn into a Republic (1989). For more information on Hungary: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17383522, and for more information on Poland: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17754512.

Involved Actors

The 15 Members of the Soviet Union, these countries are most likely to side with the continuation of the Berlin Wall as they are in support of Russia. These countries have supported communism and are opposed to the interference of Western Powers in the affairs of the Soviet Union, uniquely the US’s Marshall Plan. To know more, go to this website: https://www.britannica.com/place/Soviet-Union.

Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belorussia (current Belarus), Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kirgiziya (current Kyrgyzstan), Latvia, Lithuania, Moldavia (current Moldova), Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan

These countries were in the crossfire of the Cold War between the forces of the USSR and the USA. These following countries and territories where turned into battlegrounds and were used as proxy wars by the USSR and USA.

Belgian Congo, Korea, Indochina (Vietnam), Cambodia, Angola

These countries are in opposition to the USSR and have formed a pact (NATO). These countries are the western alliance standing against the Soviet Union. These countries, although once allied with the Soviet Union, have a great fear of communism, mainly due to the fear that Communism is an attack against their capitalist economies. The actions by the Russians in East Germany and also seen as a breach in chapter VII of the UN’s Charter, which states that all nations belonging to the UN should at all times uphold and make decisions that pursue world peace and global harmony. (https://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/chapter-vii/index.html)
United States of America, France, Belgium, Britain, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal.

**UN Resolutions and Activities**

At the beginning of the Berlin Crisis, the UN did not enter or view itself as necessary, until the aggression of Russia against the German people in East Berlin was elevated to extreme levels. Once the UN brought this issue to its utmost attention and discussed it in the Security Council, the issue was considered as a breach of Chapter VII of the UN’s charter. However, due to the veto power allocated to the Five permanent nations (France, Britain, the United States, the Soviet Union, and China), a resolution was never agreed upon. To learn more about Chapter VII, go to this website [https://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/chapter-vii/index.html](https://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/chapter-vii/index.html).

**Questions to Consider**

1. Ponder the cause behind the sudden mass exodus of East Germans to West Germany that produced the need for the Berlin Wall, and could these reasons be the fault of the Western Forces controlling the other half of Germany?

2. Where does your country stand on the topic of Communism and the action of the USSR in relations to Germany?

3. Is this issue necessarily an invitation for the intervention of the UN (under chapter VII), or is it an internal affair of the USSR, granted that the territory of East Germany-East Berlin included- is technically the property of the USSR given to them after World War II had ended?

**Further Resources/Cited Sources**

- [https://www.britannica.com/topic/Berlin-Wall](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Berlin-Wall)
- [https://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/berlin-wall](https://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/berlin-wall)
https://historycollection.co/six-deadliest-proxy-wars-cold-war/6/
https://www.historyonthenet.com/the-cold-war-timeline-2
https://www.historyonthenet.com/world-war-2-timeline-2
https://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/formation-of-nato-and-warsaw-pact
https://www.britannica.com/event/Yalta-Conference
https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/cifamerica/2010/oct/21/secondworldwar-russia

Images (In order of appearance)
  ○ https://www.sutori.com/item/this-political-cartoon-shows-that-singing-the-german-soviet-non-aggression-pact
  ○ https://i.pinimg.com/originals/87/50/8f/87508f824f04ef9ef08678eed7fe5fe3.jpg

Highlighted Timeline of Events

**Late August 1939** *The supposed date of the Nonagression pact of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia*

**September 3rd 1939** *Great Britain and France declare war on Germany officially starting World War II*

**June 22nd 1941** *Operation Barbarossa, Germany Invades Russia*

**November 1943** *Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt meet to discuss war plans, and plans for postwar conditions*

**June 6th 1944** *D-Day*

**February 4th- 11th 1945** *Yalta Conference*

**April 1945** *President Roosevelt dies*

**May 8th 1945** *VE Day*

**March 12th 1947** *Truman Doctrine*

**June 5th 1947** *Marshall Plan*

**June 1948** *Formation of West Germany*

**June 24th 1948 to May 1949 Berlin Blockade*

**April 4th 1949** *NATO Formed (North Atlantic Treaty Organization)*

**June 1950-1953** *Korean War*

**May 1955** *Warsaw Pact*
August 1961 *Construction on the Berlin Wall Begins*

October 1962 *The Cuban Missile Crisis*

May 1972 *SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty)*

June 1987 *Glasnost and Perestroika*

June 1989 *Tiananmen Square*

August 1989 *Poland becomes a democracy*

October 1989 *Hungary becomes a republic*