

Causes of two crises

This essay will discuss the Berlin Blockade, which took place from June 1948 to May 1949, and the North Korean invasion of South Korea, that took place from June 1950 to October 1950 when UN forces began pushing back North Korean forces, sparking the Korean War that would last till July 1953. The Berlin Crisis was mainly caused by security concerns of the USSR, which led to differing interpretations on the division and future of Germany. Meanwhile, the Korean Crisis mainly arose from tensions between North and South Korea, with the superpowers only providing a favourable outcome for the conflict to begin.

Firstly, the Berlin Blockade emerged from conflicting aims regarding the political future of Germany. Evidence suggests that Stalin wanted to integrate Germany into the Eastern European Communist Bloc, while the US wanted to use a recovered and independent Germany to generate growth in Europe and prevent the spread of communism. Germany thus became a powerful political pawn for both of the superpowers, both as a symbolic representation of their ideology and as a breeding ground for superpower tensions. Kennan expressed his distrust of the concept of shared occupation as early as 1945, mentioning that it was only a temporary stopgap as measures such as demobilisation and demilitarisation of the economy were more pressing. This demonstrates tensions existing within the new Germany as early as its inception. Stalin wanted Germany to be as weak as possible, in order to have a buffer system via Eastern Europe and promote Soviet Security. Stalin also attempted to reunify Germany and integrate it into the Communist Bloc. In April 1946, the Soviets forced a merger of Communists and Social Democrats in their zone to form the Socialist Unity Party, demonstrating a clear intent to develop Communist influence in the Soviet zone. The Soviets also feared that with the merger of Bizonia in 1947 and Trizonia in 1948, the West would attempt to establish a separate German state in the West. Conversely, the US had a vested interest in the revival of an independent, capitalist Germany as a proponent for ideological and economic growth. Byrne made a speech in 1947 supporting the political revival for Germany, and on 7 June 1948, Germans in the western zones were granted permission to create a constitution for a federal democratic West Germany. Elections were held in October 1948, which increased the USSR's fears of an independent, Western allied Germany. This would result in increasingly aggressive Soviet action, which ultimately led to the Berlin Blockade, which was a threat to the Western powers to abandon their plans for an independent West Germany.

Furthermore, there were disagreements between the two superpowers over the economic future of Germany. In May 1946, Clay announced that there would be no further deliveries of reparation goods until the overall plan for the German economy. The Soviet saw this as an attempt by the US to force Soviets to conform to a capitalist reconstruction of Germany, which would benefit both US and British industries as it would integrate into their trading systems. The Soviets responded in June 1946 by increasing eastern Germany's industrial production, and directly exporting these products to the USSR as reparations, while taking over control of over 213 German companies. During the conference of ministers on July 1946, Molotov insisted that Germany pay the USSR the equivalent of \$10 billion in reparations. This was likely rude to the fact that much of the USSR's industry and factories had been

stripped down and brought back to Germany during WWII. However, Byrnes argued that Germany had to first recover and create a trade surplus that would cover the costs of food and raw material imports for the US and British zones. The USSR saw this as unfair toward the immediate economic needs of the USSR, and feared that a united Germany dominated by trade with the US and with economic strength would pose a security threat. The Marshall Plan pouring into West Berlin also put economic pressure on East Berlin. The biggest threat was in 20 June 1948, when the Western allies introduced a new German currency. The Soviets would respond by introducing a new currency for the eastern German zone, and initiating the Berlin Blockade, which they claimed was a defensive measure to prevent the Soviet zone from being swamped with devalued Reichsmark. Thus, economic aggression on the part of the US through the Marshall Plan and refusal to pay reparations would ultimately exacerbate the security concerns of the USSR, which ultimately resulted in the Berlin Blockade.

On the other hand, the Korean Crisis was largely driven by the actions of North and South Korea themselves. Korea was divided along the 38th parallel in August 1945, as Japanese troops in the north surrendered to the Soviets, while those in the South surrendered to the USA. In the north, the Democratic Republic of Korea, or North Korea, was formed under the leadership of Kim Il Sung, while in the south the Republic of Korea was formed under the leadership of Syngman Rhee. This division resulted in tensions between the two nearly formed republics, as both saw themselves as the true government of Korea and desired reunification. Furthermore, border clashes between the two nations took place between 1949 to 1950. These clashes demonstrated an inability of the South Korean forces to launch successful offensive attacks, as seen by how the NKPA was able to repel South Korean warships in the skirmish of July 1949. There were also military desertions from South to North Korea in this period, making Kim feel that Rhee's regime was weak both politically and militarily, emboldening him to attack in what he perceived would be a quick victory. This was also emboldened by Kim's negotiations, as he was able to secure the support of China in the event of a drawn out war, so he felt as if he would be able to quickly subjugate South Korea.

However, the role of superpowers was still significant in the Korean Crisis. US inaction and apparent passivity meant that the North Koreans felt it would be opportune to launch an invasion. The withdrawal of Soviet troops in December 1948 and the subsequent withdrawal of US troops in June 1949 had a destabilising effect on the nation, as the withdrawal of occupation troops made civil war increasingly likely. Furthermore, lackluster US commitment to the defence of South Korea further emboldened the North. In January 1950, Acheson's defensive perimeter speech made it clear that both South Korea and Taiwan were excluded from the American defensive perimeter in the Western Pacific, a sentiment which Truman supported. These comments may have led both Stalin and Kim to believe that the USA would not defend South Korea, increasing the likelihood of an offensive. Furthermore, Gaddis suggests that Stalin's opportunism spurred him to take advantage of the Acheson perimeter speech and instigate a North Korean invasion. This could be seen by how Stalin gave Kim support from an invasion in April 1950, as he wished to dominate Korea through Kim, and saw potential in a fully communist Korea as an economic and military ally, similar to Japan and the US. However, Stalin was not unconditionally supportive, as he did make his final approval of the North Korean attack

dependent on Mao's consent, and he told Kim that he should ask the PRC for support, as the Soviets would not fight for Korea. Thus, the extent of Soviet influence was a limited factor, and it was rather the role of the PRC, who offered support in the form of the return of Korean Divisions and the promise of support.

In conclusion, the Berlin Crisis was mainly driven by the burgeoning superpower rivalry, and was due to tensions over the division of Germany between members of the Grand Alliance. Meanwhile, the Korean Crisis mainly originated from the national interests of North and South Korea, and was only tangentially affected by the superpower tensions. It was rather the passivity of the US and the encouragement of the USSR that allowed the crisis to emerge, instead of the superpowers playing a direct role. In short, the Berlin Crisis was a crisis that sprung directly from the tensions of the Cold War, while the Korean Crisis was merely a matter of national interest that eventually resulted in the involvement of the superpowers on ideological grounds. This can be seen in their aftermaths — while both nations remained divided, Berlin stood as a powerful symbol of Cold War tensions, and events like the erection of the Berlin Wall and Ostpolitik would shape the