

## STUDENT STUDY SECTION

## Review questions

- 1 What issues/events prevented any lasting Cold War 'thaw' during this period?
- 2 Explain the meaning of the following: co-existence, massive retaliation, New Look.
- 3 Who or what was each of the following, and how did each one affect East-West relations during the 1950s?
 

a the Suez Crisis	e Sputnik
b the Eisenhower Doctrine	f the Gaither Report
c the Hungarian Uprising	g the U-2 incident
d the Geneva Summit	

N.B. For some of these, you may need to do extra research. See also Chapter Sixteen.

## Essay practice

## Structuring the main body of an essay

Here again is the question posed at the beginning of this chapter:

- *To what extent was there a thaw in the Cold War after 1953?*

**Introduction:** Look back at the work you did on introductions in the previous chapter and at the guidelines in Chapter Three. What would be your starting point with the introduction for this essay?

**Main body of the essay:** As explained in the essay flow chart in Chapter Three, you need to have a clear opening sentence to start each paragraph. This sentence must make it obvious what the point of the paragraph is going to be, and it must clearly link back to the question. The rest of the paragraph should then provide evidence to support your opening statement.

## Task 1

Look at the statements below. They can be grouped into three paragraphs to form the main body of the essay. Decide which statements fit better as:

- opening statements for one of the paragraphs of this essay
- evidence in the main body of the paragraphs.

The war in Korea was brought to a close.

There were positive steps towards a reduction of tension and thus a 'thaw' after 1953.

The USA continued to see the USSR as a threat in such areas as Asia.

Tension increased dramatically in the late 1950s due to a series of incidents, which make it clear that there was in fact no fundamental change in relationship between the superpowers.

Austria was finally unified.

The shooting down of the U-2 spy plane ended any good relations that had been built up during Khrushchev's visit to the United States.

Nothing concrete was achieved at the Geneva Summit regarding the arms race or the German question.

There is much evidence that there was still tension between the USA and the USSR after 1953.

Sputnik raised new fears of superior Soviet technology and of a 'missile gap'.

Khrushchev raised tensions over Berlin with an ultimatum to the West to leave.

There was co-operation in cultural and economic areas following the 'spirit of Geneva'.

Cuba brought the Soviet Union and the United States close to a direct nuclear confrontation.

## Task 2

In which order would you place the paragraphs? What other evidence might you add in each paragraph?

Write a conclusion that supports the arguments that are in the main body of the essay.

## WHY WAS GERMANY SUCH A SOURCE OF TENSION?

Before reading this chapter, refer back to Chapters Two and Three and consider the following essay questions:

- What factors made Germany such an important country for both the West and the Soviet Union?
- What were the steps by which the (a) economic (b) political and (c) military division of Germany took place after 1945?
- What factors prevented an agreement on Germany taking place?
- How can events in Germany be seen to support the (a) Orthodox (b) Revisionist and (c) Post-revisionist historical interpretations of the origins of the Cold War?

## Timeline of events affecting the post-war development of Germany 1945-1961

- 1945 Yalta Conference  
Potsdam Conference
- 1948 Marshall Aid agreed to by Congress  
Berlin Blockade
- 1949 NATO established  
Federal Republic of Germany established (FRG – West Germany)  
German Democratic Republic established (GDR – East Germany)  
USSR proposes neutralized Germany
- 1953 East German uprising
- 1955 West Germany admitted to NATO and permitted to rearm  
Germany discussed at Geneva Summit – no agreement
- 1958 Khrushchev demands German peace treaty and demilitarized West Berlin
- 1960 Khrushchev reissues ultimatum over Berlin
- 1961 Berlin Wall is built

... underlying all the questions that separated the Great Powers in the first 16 years of the Cold War was Germany.

From Colin Bawn and Peter J. Mooney, *Cold War to Détente 1945-1980* (Heinemann Educational, 1981) p.66

## The two Germans

As you have read in Chapters Two and Three, Germany had, by 1949, become two countries. It was this division of Germany that did much to fuel the Cold War in the years up to 1961. Significant differences existed between West Germany and East Germany in the economic and political spheres.

## Economic differences between West Germany and East Germany

Economically, West Germany was larger than East Germany with a larger population and greater industrial output. It had also received Marshall Aid. In fact, West Germany in the 1950s and 1960s experienced what became known as the 'economic miracle' and,

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## Economic differences between West Germany and East Germany

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accordingly, the standard of living of most West Germans rapidly increased. Meanwhile in East Germany, leader Walter Ulbricht's post-1949 programme of forced collectivization of farms and of socialization was disastrous for the economy. With the hardships and drop in living standards that this entailed, many East Germans fled to the West via Berlin.

### Political differences between West Germany and East Germany

Politically, West Germany had democracy. In East Germany there had been no free elections since 1946 and, by the 1950s, it was a rigidly Stalinist, authoritarian state. Discontent with the situation in East Germany manifested itself in the riots of 1953. Workers in East Berlin and elsewhere in the East rose up in revolt. The riots were quickly put down with the help of Soviet tanks. This was the first major rebellion within the Soviet sphere of influence. (See Chapter Sixteen, page 198.)

As a result of these differences, there were no further efforts by either side to reunite as one country. Changing the situation seemed more risky than maintaining the status quo. However, the potential for conflict remained, and particularly in the increasingly untenable situation of Berlin, which Khrushchev described as 'a fishbone in East Germany's gullet'.

### Why did the Berlin Crisis develop?

#### Khrushchev and the crisis of 1958

After the Berlin Blockade (see Chapter Three), Berlin remained divided under joint American-British-French-Soviet occupation and the economic and political inequalities of the two Germanys could be clearly seen in the differences between West Berlin and East Berlin. West Berlin appeared to be a glittering, dynamic example of what capitalism could achieve. This factor, along with the political freedoms and open lifestyle of the West Berliners, encouraged East Germans to escape from the hardships of the East to the prosperity and freedom of the West through the open frontier in Berlin. All East Berliners had to do was to travel from East Berlin to West Berlin, which could be done by train or subway, and from there emigration to West Germany was easy.

This exodus of mainly young and skilled East Germans – which was encouraged by the West – meant that between 1945 and 1961 about one-sixth of the whole German population took the opportunity to move to the West via Berlin. In addition, the divided city of Berlin allowed the West to maintain a unique propaganda and espionage base 186 kilometres (110 miles) deep into East German territory.

In 1958, Khrushchev proposed a peace treaty that would recognize the existence of the two Germanys. On 27 November 1958, he then demanded that Berlin should be demilitarized, Western troops withdrawn and Berlin changed into a 'free city'. If the West did not agree to these changes within six months, Khrushchev threatened that he would turn over control of access routes to the Western sectors of Berlin to the GDR (East Germany). This was clever diplomacy; it would allow the GDR to interfere at will with traffic using land corridors from the FRG (West Germany). The Western allies would then have to negotiate with the GDR, which would force them to recognize the existence and sovereignty of the GDR. It was a dangerous situation. The West could not contemplate losing face over Berlin or giving up its propaganda and intelligence base, but to resist Khrushchev could mean the possibility of war.

Why was Khrushchev prepared to precipitate this Cold War crisis? Evidence from the Soviet archives points to the fact that the most important influences on Khrushchev's policy making at this time were:

- Soviet fear of West Germany acquiring nuclear weapons
- concern over the failing East German economy
- pressure from Walter Ulbricht, leader of the GDR.

In the face of Western outrage at his proposal, Khrushchev dropped his ultimatum. He was successful, however, in forcing the Allies to discuss the German question. In February 1959, they agreed that a foreign ministers' conference should meet in Geneva in the summer. At Geneva both sides put forward proposals for German unity, but no agreement was secured. Khrushchev then met in the United States with Eisenhower in September 1959, but again no agreement was reached. A follow-up summit to be held in Paris in May 1960 was called off at the last minute after the shooting down over the Soviet Union of an American U-2 spy plane (see Chapter Seven, page 79).

As the numbers of refugees fleeing from East Germany via Berlin continued to grow, Ulbricht grew increasingly frustrated with Khrushchev's failure to solve this problem. He wanted Khrushchev to sort out the Berlin problem immediately and not in the context of a broader German peace settlement with the West.

Khrushchev, however, hoped that he would have more luck in getting concessions over Berlin with the new American president, John F. Kennedy.

### Kennedy and flexible response

John F. Kennedy was elected president in 1960. His approach to containment was a policy of 'flexible response', as we have seen in his approach to Vietnam (see pages 62–3). In terms of his wider Cold War policy, it involved:

- more spending on conventional forces
- enlarging the nuclear arsenal
- continuing with CIA covert work
- giving economic aid to developing countries to help them resist Communism
- continuing negotiations with the Soviet Union.

Therefore, Kennedy broadened the range of options for resisting Communism, as it seemed to his administration that the Communist threat was much more diverse than it had been previously. Not only was it more geographically diverse, but Communist forces now were giving assistance to revolutionary movements in the developing world. With flexible response, Kennedy was moving away from Eisenhower's policy of 'massive retaliation' or, as he put it, 'We intend to have a wider choice than humiliation or all-out nuclear war'.



John F. Kennedy, U.S. president from 1961 to 1963.

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Compare Eisenhower's 'New Look' with Kennedy's 'flexible response'. What aspects of their containment policies are similar? What aspects are different?

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## Khrushchev, Ulbricht and the crisis of 1960–1961

President Kennedy first met Nikita Khrushchev at the Vienna Summit of 1961. Khrushchev believed that he might be able to exploit Kennedy's relative inexperience in foreign affairs. He also had an advantage in that Kennedy had just suffered the embarrassment of the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion (see Chapter Nine, page 94).

### ToK Time

How do political leaders attempt to maintain their 'credibility'? Which is more important for this – using reason, morality or emotion when addressing the public?



Khrushchev, therefore, decided to renew his ultimatum on Berlin. However, Kennedy, in his determination to appear tough with the Soviets, was not prepared to give any concessions to the them. Calling Berlin '... an island of freedom in a Communist sea ...' and '... a beacon of hope behind the Iron Curtain ...', he announced in a television broadcast that 'We cannot and will not permit the Soviets to drive us out of Berlin, either gradually or by force'. He also responded with an increase in military spending and a civil defence programme to build more nuclear fallout shelters.

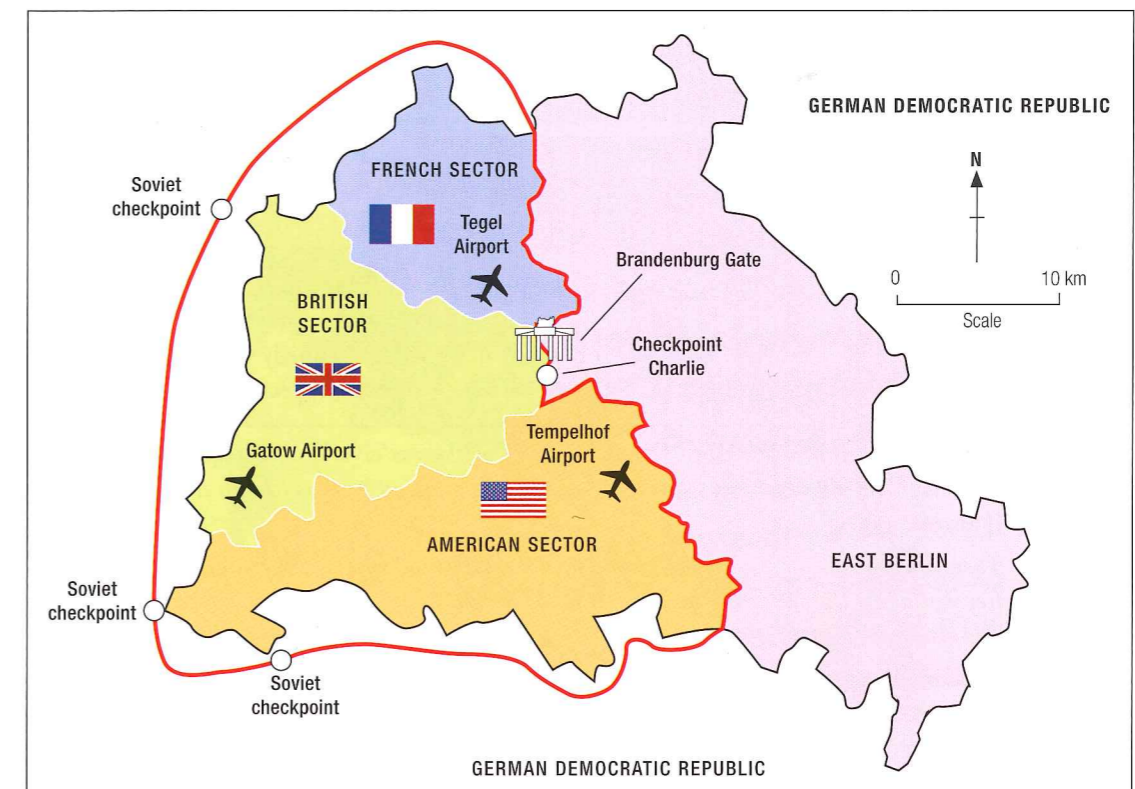
A 19-year-old East German guard escaping to West Berlin on 15 August 1961 two days after the border was sealed.



### The Wall

With the tension growing over the situation in Berlin, the number of refugees moving from East to West increased. On 12 August 1961 alone, 40,000 refugees fled to the West. Given Kennedy's response and the growing crisis in East Germany, Khrushchev bowed to Ulbricht's pressure and agreed to the closure of the East German border in Berlin. On the morning of 13 August 1961, barbed wire was erected between East and West Berlin. This was followed by a more permanent concrete wall.

East Berlin children watching the building of the wall, with concrete blocks. It had an average height of 3.6 metres (11¾ feet).



This shows the wall encircling West Berlin.

## What did the building of the Wall mean ... ... for Khrushchev?

For Khrushchev, the Berlin Wall was a defeat in the sense that it was a visible admission that the Communist propaganda message had failed: the Soviets had to create a barrier to keep the people in the East. However, it meant that he was able to regain control over the situation and free himself from the continuing pressure from Walter Ulbricht and the danger that Ulbricht might act independently. Once the Wall was built, Khrushchev went back on his promise to Ulbricht and did not sign a separate peace treaty with the GDR that would have given East Germany control over the access routes to Berlin.

## ... for Ulbricht?

Although Ulbricht did not get his peace treaty, the closed border in Berlin, combined with Soviet assistance, helped him to consolidate Communist control in the GDR.

## ... for the citizens of Berlin?

For the citizens of Berlin, the erection of the Wall was a horrifying experience. Families and friends were immediately cut off from each other with no hope of reunion. They continued to be on the front line of the Cold War.

## ... for the Cold War?

In terms of the Cold War, however, the building of the Berlin Wall had the effect of settling the question of Germany and removing it as a key issue in Cold War negotiations. The Americans complained vigorously about the Wall – at one point U.S. tanks confronted Soviet tanks at Checkpoint Charlie (the official border post between the two Berlins) for

several hours – but the USA was actually relieved that a war over Berlin had been averted. The focus of the Cold War moved from Europe, although it is important to note that for the Soviet Union the situation of U.S. missile bases in Turkey on the eastern fringe of Europe remained an important issue.

## The symbolism of the Wall

Between 1961 and 1989, the Berlin Wall stood as a powerful symbol of the division between East and West. Indeed, it seemed as if the idea of an 'Iron Curtain', as put forward by Winston Churchill during his Fulton speech in 1946, had become a reality – in the form of a concrete wall. Following the building of the Wall, President Kennedy visited West Berlin and gave his emotive and highly publicized 'Ich bin ein Berliner' speech:

*Two thousand years ago the proudest boast in the world was 'civis Romanus sum' [I am a Roman citizen]. Today, in the world of freedom, the proudest boast is Ich bin ein Berliner [I am a Berliner].*

*There are many people in the world who do not understand what is the great issue between the free world and Communism. Let them come to Berlin. And there are some who say in Europe and elsewhere that we can work with the Communists. Let them come to Berlin.*

*Freedom has many difficulties and democracy is not perfect: but we have never had to put up a wall to keep our people in. I know of no city which has been besieged for 18 years and still lives with the vitality, force, hope and determination of this city of West Berlin. While the wall is the most obvious and vivid demonstration of the failures of the Communist system, we take no satisfaction in it, for it is an offence not only against history but against humanity ...*

*In 18 years of peace and good faith this generation of Germans has earned the right to be free, including the right to unite their family and nation in lasting peace with the goodwill of all people. When the day finally comes when this city will be joined as one in this great continent of Europe, the people of West Berlin can take great satisfaction in the fact that they were in the front line for almost two decades.*

*From a speech given in West Berlin by President John F. Kennedy on 26 June 1963*

East German border guards remove the body of 18-year-old Peter Fechter, shot dead trying to escape into West Berlin in September 1962.



### STUDENT STUDY SECTION

#### Document analysis

- In what ways does Kennedy use the building of the Wall as a propaganda weapon against the USSR? Quote directly from his speech, above, to support your arguments.

Over the next three decades hundreds of people were killed attempting to defect to the West. East German border guards were instructed to shoot to kill. There were also many spectacular and ingenious escapes.

When the collapse of the Soviet Union began in 1989, it was again the Wall – or rather the rapid and eager dismantling of it by the people of Berlin – which was the most vivid symbol of political reality: the Cold War was over.



Crowds dismantling the Berlin Wall in 1989.

### STUDENT STUDY SECTION

#### Document analysis: cross-referencing skills

Read these sources, look back at the Student Study Section at the end of Chapter Five and then answer the following question. There is a sample answer at the end of this section.

#### Question

How do these documents compare in their analysis of the results of the building of the Berlin Wall?

#### Document A

*The Berlin crisis has been a dreadful moment, but this was followed in Europe by a prolonged period of stability, if not calm. The Soviet Union was not unhappy with the outcome ... [There was] a sense of Soviet satisfaction. A problem had been solved. For the 190 people who were to die in the attempt to escape across the Wall, it was solved with grim finality. For the seventeen millions left in the German Democratic Republic, as East Germany called itself, their citizenship was now uncomfortably close to imprisonment. The continent's political permafrost settled deeper ... Europe settled down into its two armed camps ...*

From Martin Walker, *The Cold War* (Vintage Press, 1994) p.159

#### Document B

*The Berlin Wall was an ideological defeat of colossal proportions for the Soviet Union and world Communism. The Wall became a symbol of the Cold War, concrete evidence of the inability of East Germany to win the loyalty of its inhabitants. It was also seen as hard proof that Soviet-style socialism was losing its economic competition with Capitalism. Although the Wall ended the mass emigration that had been destabilizing East Germany and also led to a period of prolonged stability in Europe, no one at the time knew that this would be the outcome. When a crisis arose in October 1962 over Soviet missiles in Cuba, the initial U.S. reaction was that the Soviets had put the missiles there as a way of forcing the West out of Berlin.*

David Painter, *The Cold War: An International History* (Routledge, 1999) p.53

● **Examiner's hint:**

Notice that in this sample answer the documents are cross-referenced throughout each paragraph. Also, relevant quotes are included to support key points.

**Document C**

*In August 1961 the Soviet Union was humbled as the Berlin Wall was constructed to save East Germany from ignominious economic collapse. Peaceful coexistence had failed to attract Western concessions, particularly a settlement of divided Germany, and as the Wall was raised peaceful coexistence collapsed.*

Bradley Lightbody, *The Cold War* (Routledge, 1999)

**Sample answer**

Documents A, B and C all agree that the Berlin Wall resulted in a 'hardening' of the Cold War. Document A directly states this, 'the political permafrost settled deeper', whereas B implies this by stating that the Wall became a 'symbol of the Cold War' and indirectly led to the 'Soviet missiles in Cuba'. Document C comments that all hopes for peaceful coexistence collapsed. However, Documents A and B also show that, although the 'permafrost' deepened, the Wall led to a period of stability and a solution to the German problem. Document B, though, makes the point that at the time, 'no one ... knew ... that this would be the outcome.'

There is a direct contradiction between the sources concerning the impact of the Wall on the Soviets. Documents B and C agree that the Berlin Wall was a failure for the Soviet Union, showing that it was 'losing its economic competition with Capitalism'. Document C says that it 'humbled' the USSR, and also Khrushchev's policy of coexistence had been shown to fail. Document A, however, states that the 'Soviet Union was not unhappy with the outcome' and the Wall was in fact 'accompanied by a sense of Soviet satisfaction'. Document A also shows what B and C omit, the result for the East Germans, which is that 'their citizenship was now uncomfortably close to imprisonment.'

**Essay questions on Germany and the Cold War**

**Essay frame**

When and why was Germany the focus of Cold War hostility in the 16 years after World War Two?

This is a difficult essay because of the amount of information that needs to be covered. Notice the 'when' and the 'why'. Both have to be dealt with, and the analysis will be in the 'why' bit so don't miss it out! An essay like this needs careful planning. It would be possible to write an entire essay just on the Berlin blockade, but this question demands that other issues are covered, and that too much time and space is not spent on only one aspect.

Here are some hints for a possible approach to the content and structure. You will still need to develop your own opening sentences for each paragraph. Look back at Chapters Three and Seven for reminders on how to do this.

**Introduction:** Importance of Germany concerning strategic position in Europe. Brief overview of main decisions concerning division of Germany made at Yalta and Potsdam. Outline of main tension points to be covered and identification of the main arguments: tension was caused because of differences of aims for Germany, also events in Germany itself and increasingly because of wider developments in the Cold War.

**Paragraph 1:** When? Breakdown of agreements made at Yalta and Potsdam: 'Our first break with Soviet policy in Germany came over reparations', General Lucius Clay in 1946. Why? Agreements unworkable, difference of economic aims for Germany (see Chapters Two and Three).

**Paragraph 2:** When? 1948 Berlin Blockade. Why? Different political aims that East and West have for Germany by 1948 trigger this crisis, but the wider events of the Cold War are key to explain the actions of the West. Stalin's actions in Eastern Europe (Czech coup 1948) convince West that they must resist Stalin, also policy of containment.

**Paragraph 3:** When? 1955 West Germany enters NATO. Why? This is an issue because of USSR's fear of an armed Germany on borders. Retaliates with creation of Warsaw Pact.

**Paragraph 4:** When? Events 1958–1961. Why? Inequalities between East Germany and West Germany and issue of Berlin. Look back at Khrushchev's aims and influence of Ulbricht. Aims of the West and Kennedy – determined not to back down.

**Conclusion:** Note the effect of the building of the Wall in removing Germany as a source of tension. Don't forget to come back to the question, but don't summarize everything that you have said in the main body of the essay. Identify the key reason that comes out of your essay as to why Germany was a source of tension during this period. Possibly point to the shift in the focus of tension from Germany in general to Berlin in particular.

**Other essay questions on Germany:**

Attempt to plan or write these up.

- 1 For what reasons and with what results was Germany a centre of Cold War tension between 1945 and 1961?
- 2 Assess the role of Germany in the origin and development of the Cold War.
- 3 How far was Germany the cause of USA/USSR disagreements between 1943 and 1961?