

## Crisis over Berlin, 1958 – 61

*Nikita Khrushchev allegedly said, "Berlin was the testicles of the West: every time I want to make the West scream, I squeeze on Berlin!"*

<p><b>What was the (Second) Berlin Crisis?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The (Second) Berlin Crisis took place between 1958 (Khrushchev's first ultimatum) and 1961 (When the wall was constructed) <i>The first crisis was 1948-49 (Stalin's blockade and the allied airlift.</i></li> <li>The Berlin Crisis concerned the status of the city and the numbers of East Germans fleeing to West Berlin, said to be some 3.5 million people by 1961.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Why did people move to West Berlin during the Berlin Crisis?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Life in the West seemed more attractive for <b>economic</b> and <b>political</b> reasons:</li> <li>Wages were higher in West Berlin.</li> <li>West Berliners had more freedom and more variety in the goods (especially consumer) they could buy.</li> <li>The Allies poured money into West Berlin (Marshall Aid), so the contrast between the affluence of the city's two sides was more obvious.</li> <li><b>Politically</b> – there was freedom of speech and a less oppressive regime.</li> <li><b>West Berlin was effectively an 'open border'</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>How was the East German economy affected during the Berlin Crisis?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Economically, East Germany was losing too many skilled workers, intellectuals and professionals such as engineers, teachers and lawyers. (Defections)</li> <li>The proportion of the population that was of working age dropped from 70% in 1939 to 61% by 1960.</li> <li>The migration (defections) made the communist government look politically unpopular and created negative propaganda. (1000 per day by July 1961)</li> <li>The defectors tended to be well-educated and young, which affected East German society.</li> <li>The West German economy benefited from the addition of skilled labourers, while the East suffered a skills shortage.</li> </ul>
<p><b>How did the USSR react to the Berlin 'issue'?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In 1958 Khrushchev issued an <b>ultimatum</b> for the West to leave Berlin. The West ignored it.</li> <li>In 1961, during the Vienna Summit - Khrushchev insisted (again) that the West withdraw from Berlin. Kennedy refused – but responded by activating 150,000 reservists and increasing defence expenditure. (Tensions rising)</li> <li><b>Therefore:</b> At 2am on Sunday, 13th August, 1961, East German soldiers began to place barbed wire fences between East and West Germany.</li> <li>This was replaced by an elaborate structure / concrete wall (Over time)</li> </ul>
<p><b>What were the immediate outcomes of the Berlin Crisis?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>By October 1961 West Berlin was entirely shut off from East Germany. (<i>The Wall was 155km</i>)</li> <li>However - French, British and American troops remained in West Berlin.</li> <li>Families were divided / some workers could not attend their workplace.</li> <li>There was an 18-hour standoff when Soviet tanks faced US tanks after the USSR stopped Americans crossing the border on 27th-28th October, 1961.</li> <li>A 'conventional skirmish' between nuclear powers brought the risk of escalation.</li> <li>It immediately became a physical symbol of the cold war. (Remaining in place until 9 November 1989).</li> <li>There were fewer military alerts in Berlin as the situation had stabilised.</li> </ul>
<p><b>What was the US 'response' to the wall?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>JFK said "A wall was better than a war"...but viewed it as a propaganda victory</li> <li>JFK visited West Berlin in June 1963, where he gave the 'Ich bin ein Berliner' speech to show his support for West Berliners – confirming Western commitment to West Berlin.</li> </ul>
<p><b>What was the impact of the Wall for the USSR and Khrushchev?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It stopped the 'skills / brain drain. Although it didn't stop people defecting completely - In the first year c. 1000 East Germans risked their lives and escaped. c.5000 escaped until it's fall in 1989. c. 239 others were shot.</li> <li>It prevented the West from having any influence in the East <b>AND</b> made Western espionage operations more difficult.</li> <li>Khrushchev would claim they had built a 'protective shell' to protect them from the perils of the capitalist / fascist west. (Soviet propaganda called the wall an anti-fascist rampart)</li> <li>It sent a strong message to the Eastern bloc that the USSR was 'in control'.</li> <li>Khrushchev argued Kennedy as weak as he had not stopped the wall from being built.</li> <li><b>BUT</b> - Khrushchev / communist ideology had suffered a humiliating 'defeat' – which may have led Khrushchev to place missiles in Cuba to show he could stand up to the USA.</li> </ul>