

The Berlin Wall crisis: perspectives on Cold War alliances. Edited by John P. S. Gearson and Kori Schake. Basingstoke: Palgrave. 2002. 232pp. Index. £45.00. ISBN 0 333 92960 8.

If Germany was the major stage upon which the Cold War drama was enacted, it was Berlin that occupied centre stage. It was there that East met West militarily, 'eyeball to eyeball', and, as Khrushchev put it, it was but natural for the slightest fluctuation in the pressure of the world political atmosphere to be registered in Berlin, where the forces of the two sides were squared off against one another. The Berlin Crisis of 1958-62 was an attempt to use West Berlin as a lever to make the West recognize the GDR as also the territorial, political and socio-economic status quo in Europe. Waxing and waning in intensity, the crisis brought the two superpower blocs to the brink of nuclear war and dominated relations between the major powers until the end of the Cuban missile crisis in the autumn of 1962. Furthermore, Khrushchev's threat served as a catalyst for once again scrutinizing Allied principles and methods in dealing with the German question.

Since the archives containing sources from the late 1950s and early 1960s have been opened, scholars have re-examined the crisis years with the help of official records. Consequently, the origins of this collection of articles date back to the early 1990s when, with the exception of Lawrence Freedman and Gregory Pedlow, the authors of this volume were nearly all junior academics whose research was funded by the Nuclear History Programme. In the meantime, most of them have presented their findings in journals and/or monographs. The value of this collection therefore does not lie in the revelation of new sources; in fact, there is little that is not already known. However, the volume does get its lasting value from the fact that the sum is greater than the individual parts-which, without a single exception, are by themselves carefully researched, thought provoking and thoroughly readable. There could be slight misgivings about the book's title. Though the authors cover, for good reasons, the entire Berlin Crisis, the title ought not to confine the book merely to the Berlin Wall Crisis, for this would imply a historical inevitability that simply did not exist at the time.

In his opening chapter, Freedman describes Berlin's importance to the Cold War as 'a source of pride and a sort of prize' (p.3). Equally thoughtful is Pedlow's analysis of General Norstad's three-hatted role in the crisis, as SACEUR, as USCINCEUR and as 'supervisor' of the top secret tripartite military planning staff LIVE OAK. While clearly demonstrating the limits of Norstad's influence, especially under President Kennedy, Pedlow, in line with recent research, portrays the general as a pioneer in the development of NATO's new strategy-flexible response-that was adopted only in 1967. The volume's main objective, however, is to highlight the complex intra-alliance politics through the prism of national policies. Against the historical background and the inescapable constraints imposed by, and in the context of, the international system, the volume deals with the long-term interests and the perceptions, perspectives and policies of the powers concerned. In his critical account of Macmillan's foreign policy, John Gearson succeeds in highlighting intra-alliance friction. Not only does he illustrate 'the hollow nature of Britain's pretensions to independence' (p.67) but he also endorses the recent scholarly assessments of a prime minister who at times failed to observe the distinction between reaching compromise and being compromised, as well as of a government whose preferred course was barred by alliance constraints that obliged it to pursue a policy set by the Germans and its western partners.

Kori Schake pays particular attention to the highly ambivalent, and at times erratic, policies of the Kennedy administration. She emphasizes that it was internal friction and constraints which proved to be a hindrance to a coherent American foreign policy rather than considerations relating to allied governments. Other contributions to the volume include a skilful analysis by Cyril Buffet of de Gaulle's ambitions, an original piece on Italy's unsuccessful efforts to influence policy choices of the central actors and an interpretation of Adenauer's crisis behaviour which tends to overestimate the extent to which the chancellor was driven 'into an isolated corner both at home and abroad' (p.125).

Arguably, the most controversial contribution comes from Hope Harrison (*The German Democratic Republic, the Soviet Union and the Berlin Wall crisis*). Drawing on the released Russian and East German sources, she stops short of suggesting that the East German tail managed to wag the Soviet dog. There is not enough room here to go into the details of the argument. It is one thing to say that the 'Soviet leaders had to take into account the preferences of the East Germans ... in their handling of the crisis' (p.96) and to differentiate between Khrushchev's 'larger, more global concerns' and Ulbricht's 'narrower' goals, which 'focused on preserving his tight hold on power' (p.103). It is, however, a completely different matter to conclude that simply because the Wall option had been Ulbricht's favourite course from the outset, 'the East Germans ... push[ed] (!) the Soviets into a situation in which they saw the Berlin Wall as the only realistic option for saving the GDR' (p.116). The mere fact that Khrushchev's position eventually converged with Ulbricht's is not tantamount to the Soviet leader having been driven by an East German Cassandra to build a barbed-wire monument to failure. And yet, whether or not one agrees with Harrison's interpretation, her contribution will no doubt stimulate further research on the subject.

In sum, this is an impressively comprehensive compilation, and it is as such an ideal book for students of the Cold War.

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