

H-NET BOOK REVIEW

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Christof Munger. *_Kennedy, die Berliner Mauer und die Kubakrise: Die westliche Allianz in der Zerreissprobe, 1961-1963_*. Paderborn: Schonningh, 2003. 404 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. EUR 39.00 (cloth), ISBN 3-5067-7531-6.

Reviewed for H-German by Petri Hakkarainen, Wolfson College, University of Oxford

A Nuclear Solution to the Crisis of the Western Alliance

Ever since the dissolution of the Soviet Union there has been more than enough talk about the virtues of multi-archival research and the need to write Cold War history from a broad and international perspective. Yet for all the ink that has been spilled on the uses of an extensive inter-archival approach in theory, in practice there still are surprisingly few outstanding, truly multilateral studies of the key turning points of the latter half of the twentieth century. Despite impressive lists of archival collections consulted, many a publication during the past fifteen years has left readers unimpressed of the added value resulting from their use. Regardless of promises of an international approach made in introductory chapters, the majority of recent scholarship on Cold War history remains national--or bilateral at best--in scope.

In this respect, Christof Munger's volume on the crisis years of the early 1960s is a welcome exception. In the published version of his doctoral dissertation, the Swiss author sets out to analyze the internal dynamics of the Western alliance, focusing on the four major Western powers--the United States, the United Kingdom, France and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). Therefore, the main title of Munger's book is seriously misleading. Anyone looking for a fresh angle on U.S. policies in response to the building of the Berlin Wall or during the Cuban missile crisis will most certainly be disappointed. First of all, this is at least almost as much a book about Macmillan, de Gaulle and Adenauer as it is about Kennedy. Moreover, whereas the Berlin situation is constantly present in Munger's analysis, the dramatic events in the Caribbean in October 1962 are only covered in passing. It is thus the subtitle that contains the actual core subject of the study. Taking advantage of U.S., British, French, and West German sources, Munger aims to present the development of internal tensions among the four allies, especially with regard to the Berlin question, during the Kennedy presidency (p. 16).

The basic contours of the story are naturally familiar enough. Given that the early 1960s is one of the most thoroughly scrutinized periods of the Cold War, Munger is maneuvering in heavily congested territory. However, by choosing to focus on the internal dynamics of the Western alliance, he does manage to bring valuable new nuances into it. Munger approaches the topic chronologically, dividing the period into three main stages. The first section begins with the summit meeting between Kennedy and Khrushchev in Vienna in June, 1961, and ends with the sharpening controversies in German-U.S. relations in the spring of 1962. The second part spans the actual core of the inner-Western

crisis, the tumultuous months of late 1962 and early 1963, starting with the Cuban crisis and moving on to the Nassau meeting of Kennedy and Macmillan, de Gaulle's veto of British EEC membership, and to the Franco-German treaty of January, 1963. Finally, in the third part, Münger highlights the efforts to patch up the Alliance, especially the eventually successful U.S. attempts to help the West German Atlanticists to outweigh the Gaullist forces around Chancellor Adenauer.

During the latter half of 1961, Münger argues, the potential for inter-allied conflict grew dramatically, to a large extent because differences in the views on how to deal with renewed Soviet ultimatums on Berlin were on the rise. Previously, the British had been left alone in arguing for a negotiated solution with the Soviets. But the new Kennedy administration started to redefine U.S. policy on Berlin, without consulting the allies in advance. Suddenly, the United States was also expressing its willingness to negotiate over Berlin, as long as the "three essentials" regarding West Berlin were not violated. The erection of the Berlin Wall in August, 1961, only strengthened Kennedy's view. Just a week later, he argued for a decisive U.S. lead in direct negotiations with Moscow over Berlin instead of four-power discussions, writing to the Secretary of State Dean Rusk that the United States should "make it plain to our three Allies that this is what we mean to do and that they must come along or stay behind" (p. 110).

But, as Münger points out, "1961 was not 1945"--the United States was no longer capable of making unilateral decisions bearing heavy consequences for the European allies (p. 111). Individual national interests and different takes on the Berlin problem led to increased polarization of the four allies, with Kennedy and Macmillan favoring negotiations, and Adenauer and de Gaulle rigidly opposing them. In the end, it was the West German leak to the press of a confidential U.S. draft for a negotiation approach in April, 1962, that effectively sabotaged efforts for a Soviet-U.S. Berlin solution. Subsequently, the formation of competing blocs within the Alliance accelerated remarkably, leading to the critical events of 1962-1963 covered in the second part of Münger's book.

But it was, of course, not Berlin alone that was behind this Consolidation of the inner-Western blocs--the Anglo-American special relationship on the one hand, Franco-German rapprochement on the other. One of the major strengths of Münger's book is the skillful way in which he combines the Berlin problem with considerations of nuclear strategy. As he points out, the U.S. motivation for détente was naturally pragmatic rather than altruistic (p. 363). With the change of the U.S. doctrine from massive retaliation to flexible response, and especially after the Cuban crisis, it became increasingly important for Washington to have central control over the use and proliferation of nuclear weapons within the Alliance. And on numerous occasions, the disagreements of the four allies over the Berlin problem were directly entangled with the nuclear ambitions and desires of each of them.

In fact, Münger's central argument is that the first agreement on nuclear armament control, the Limited Test Ban Treaty (LTBT), signed in August, 1963, served also as a "hidden" and informal agreement on Berlin and Germany. Having been blocked by the French and the Germans

in its efforts to reach a direct agreement on Berlin with the Soviets, the Kennedy administration discovered that the Test Ban--while significant in its own right--provided a bypass to that end as well. In Munger's view, the LTBT stabilized both the territorial and nuclear status quo of Europe. Simultaneously, it was the West German signature of the LTBT that marked the end of the Franco-German bloc building within the Alliance (p. 357).

As a result, he argues, the idea of Franco-German cooperation as an alternative to, instead of a part of, the wider Alliance, turned out to be just a brief interlude. Furthermore, Munger continues, this cooperation helped the divided continent to enter an "era of stability." Although East-West confrontation still persisted in Europe for a quarter of a century, its intensity was significantly reduced. There was no longer an immediate threat of nuclear destruction, as the Cold War gave way to a cold peace.

Christof Munger's work is a solid piece of diplomatic history. It makes effective use of a wide variety of sources, avoiding the major pitfalls of inter-archival scholarship. Although time-consuming, conducting research in numerous archives around the world is in and of itself pretty simple, once you have learned the idiosyncrasies of each individual archive. Quite another thing, however, is to translate the results of such research into an argumentative and fluent monograph. In this respect, Munger has, on the whole, done a tremendous job, writing vividly and keeping his analysis focused. The force of the multilateral approach is uncontestable whenever Munger is able to directly compare how differently a given event or discussion was perceived in various Western capitals.

Speaking of translation quite literally, nevertheless, there is one major technical shortcoming which in my view makes the study, otherwise running so smoothly, significantly more difficult to read. Throughout his book, Munger uses lengthy direct quotations in abundance. While that alone would suffice to make the manuscript more heavy-going, the fact that these quotations come in three languages--German, English and French, depending on the source--in the midst of the bulk of the text written in German, occasionally results in something of a cacophony. One could, of course, argue that this method increases the feel of authenticity, enabling the reader, as it were, to take a seat in the various archives himself. But while the quotes are often illuminating, at times the sources seem to have taken charge, and some pages of the book read more like a commented collection of documents than an argumentative piece of scholarship. Furthermore, the notion of authenticity is severely undermined by the fact that the few direct quotes from Soviet leaders, such as Khrushchev's speech in Moscow in January, 1961, (p. 208) or Gromyko's report from a meeting with Kennedy in October, 1962, (p. 203) are laid out, neither in the original Russian nor in the author's German, but in English, stemming as they are either from reports written by U.S. officials at the time or from translations of original documents by the Cold War International History Project. In all, one would at least have wanted to read some kind of an explanation for Munger's chosen practice of multilingualism.

Apart from this weakness, Munger handles his sources very convincingly. With a firm hand, he fluently combines sources from various archives and document publications. And there certainly has not been a shortage

of them. As far as the U.S. and French sources are concerned, he has been able to substantiate his research in the important archives with the official document collections covering the period at hand. In the British corner of the quadrangle, there are no similar collections from that period, but Munger has made good use of what the Public Record Office in London has to offer. It is the German side that still suffers from quite a significant declassification problem, as Munger acknowledges in the introduction (pp. 28-33). For the years 1961 and 1962, there is still a gap in the AAPD publication series.[1] With the fairly restrictive declassification policies of the archive of the German Foreign Office, the AAPD series and the accompanying document collection B150 subsequently made available in the archive are simply indispensable, often the only means to lay one's hands on secret and confidential West German documents. This value of the AAPD series becomes clear as soon as Munger turns to 1963. Finally able to use at least some of the classified West German documents, he instantly gains more depth to the German side of the story.

There is also a certain structural imbalance in the book as far as the Soviet Union is concerned. To be sure, the declared purpose of Munger's study is to focus on the internal dynamics of the Western Alliance. Therefore, he argues, both the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Soviet Union only figure as "agents provocateurs" and it is enough to reflect on their views on the basis of the latest scholarship and published sources (p. 28). This approach is, however, not completely unproblematic, since it has left Munger taking a fairly one-dimensional view of Soviet intentions and motivations, as has already been pointed out by another reviewer.[2] For instance, Munger's argument on the Soviet position on the possible nuclear armament of the FRG is slightly peculiar. The Soviet Union was certainly strongly opposing the prospect of the FRG gaining access to nuclear weapons, but the primary reason for that was hardly a concern of a reoccurrence of the 1953 East Berlin revolt, as Munger seems to imply (p. 365). But for most of the time, Munger's relatively shallow presentation of the Soviet positions is indeed easily sufficient for the purposes of this book.

This revised version of Munger's doctoral thesis has been published relatively quickly, less than a year after it was approved as a dissertation at the University of Zurich. A rapid schedule such as this is always welcome. Pushing the latest, up-to-date research out into the open as soon as possible should be encouraged further. In a time when the suitability of history dissertations for monograph publication is increasingly questioned, Munger sets an excellent example in this. Unfortunately, however, the study does not seem to have been updated too extensively during the process leading to its publication. Although the book was published in 2003, there are hardly any references in the footnotes or in the bibliography to research published since 2000. Some regrettable omissions include Nigel Ashton's brilliant work on the special relationship between London and Washington as well as Jeffrey Glen Giauque's research on U.S.-European relations.[3]

Being a fairly traditional example of diplomatic history, Munger's work will certainly attract criticism from those that dislike the genre in general. The characteristic, inherent weaknesses of orthodox diplomatic history are to be found here as well. It does focus almost solely on cabinet diplomacy, often leaving the decision-makers to operate in isolation from the surrounding world. Even within those cabinets, the

impact of personalities remains somewhat shallow. And even within the narrow confines of diplomatic history, Mürger does limit himself to political and security issues, neglecting for example the economic elements more or less completely. For instance, consideration of the monetary aspects of the crisis in the Western Alliance, recently eloquently portrayed by Francis Gavin, would have further strengthened Mürger's study.[4]

But generally speaking, when it comes to the interaction of the key Western powers during the critical years of the early 1960s--which is what he has set out to investigate--Christof Mürger has written a very balanced and thoughtful analysis. This book is a valuable piece of international Cold War history. In order to reach a wider audience, it would certainly deserve to be translated--completely--into English.

Notes

[1]. Published jointly by the German Foreign Office and the Institut für Zeitgeschichte, the series Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (AAPD) currently covers the years 1949-53 and 1963-74.

[2]. Gerhard Wettig, "Review of Mürger, Die Berliner Mauer, Kennedy und die Kubakrise," H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews, March, 2004.

[3]. Nigel Ashton, Kennedy, Macmillan and the Cold War: The Irony of Interdependence (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Jeffrey Glen Giauque, Grand Designs and Visions of Unity: The Atlantic Powers and the Reorganization of Western Europe, 1955-1963 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

[4]. Francis J. Gavin, Gold, Dollars, and Power: The Politics of International Monetary Relations, 1958-1971 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

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