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The Opening Phase of the Struggle for Germany

Ever since the Berlin blockade of 1948 the attention of historians of modern and recent international relations has been engaged by the problem of how Germany and its capital, Berlin, came to be divided, first among the major powers of the anti-Hitler Grand Alliance—Great Britain, the United States, the Soviet Union, and France—and then, in 1949, into two rival states, the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany. This problem lies at the heart of the much-debated question regarding the origins of the Cold War. This review article makes no pretense at being a comprehensive report on the literature of the German problem. My aim is, rather, to call attention to some recent contributions to the literature and place them in context. In order to do so it is useful to start by sketching briefly the evolution of historians' views on the German question since 1945, with special reference to U.S. policy.

In the years immediately following the German surrender, a number of memoirs, personal accounts, and polemical articles and books were published by those who had either taken a direct part in shaping policy or had observed its implementation. Overlapping these publications and to some extent basing their work on them, the first wave of academic studies and attempts at large-scale synthesis appeared.

With the publication in 1956 of an extensive selection from the documentary records of the major wartime conferences, the United States became the first of the wartime allies to open its archives to scholarly research.¹ The result was to give new impetus to the study of Allied policy toward Germany, particularly that of the United States. The availability of these voluminous and revealing materials, at a time when a new generation of scholars was making its debut, provided an excellent opportunity for a reevaluation of U.S. wartime policy planning. Two factors ensured that the principal thrust of that reexamination would be sharply critical. First was the deepening split between the government and an influential body of informed public opinion, the origins of which date back to the late Eisenhower years (the *U-2* incident of May 1960 marked the first occasion on which a significant number of intelligent United States citizens realized that their government was capable of deliberately and systematically lying). The split gathered strength during the Kennedy administration and reached its fullest extent under the Johnson and Nixon administrations as the war in Vietnam

1. The collection of wartime documents published by the Department of State in the series, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, various years), includes volumes on the conferences at Malta and Yalta, the conference at Teheran, and the conference at Berlin (Potsdam). Multivolume annual collections accompany these documents in the same series.

dragged on. A second factor that strengthened the tendency of a number of American historians to criticize U.S. foreign policy was the fact that the documentary record on that policy was incomparably fuller and more revealing than that for any of the other wartime allies. The documentary record of Soviet policy, in particular, was meager indeed, and few American scholars made any serious effort to use even the scanty archival materials (and there were some) which the Soviet government saw fit to publish.²

The so-called "revisionist" school of historians emerged under these conditions. Differing among themselves in matters of emphasis and interpretation, the revisionists shared certain views, including a tendency to assign to the United States the lion's share of the blame for the breakdown of the wartime alliance, the splitting of Germany, and other ills and misfortunes of the postwar era. The revisionists also tended to regard the makers of Soviet foreign policy as men more sinned against than sinning, a view usually accompanied by professions of inability to obtain adequate documentation on Soviet foreign policy.³ By forcing their traditionalist colleagues to rethink their basic concepts and reevaluate the evidence on which these concepts were based, revisionists made a valuable contribution to the study of wartime and postwar international relations, including the German problem. Publishing at the height of the antigovernment movement which flourished during the Vietnam War, they evoked a sympathetic response from a disillusioned public and earned a respectful hearing from the historical profession.

It is significant, however, that in West Germany, the country most directly affected by the conflict between U.S. and Soviet policy, revisionists received less acclaim than they did in the United States. Moreover, as their work was subjected to critical scrutiny, its inherent weaknesses became increasingly apparent. What really brought the revisionist movement to a halt, however, was the opening of new archival resources on the war and early postwar years, especially those of the British Foreign Office (opened in the early 1970s), together with a more intensive study of U.S. archives. Fueled by these new materials, the study of the German problem entered a new phase, in which the abundance of archival sources held out the promise of a more balanced and impartial approach. The sheer wealth of archival materials, of course, carried with it problems of its own, among them the temptation to concentrate on a particular tree to the detriment of the whole forest. Furthermore, the growing lapse of time since the end of the war involved a certain loss of the sense of immediacy and a tendency to apply anachronistic standards of judgment to the actions and policies of the earlier period. Consequently, some of the early postwar treatises on the German problem, even though they are grounded on what would now be considered an inadequate evidential base, have a balance and directness that is lacking in some of the more recent works.⁴

When historians first began to look for the origins of the division of Germany and the anomalous position of postwar Berlin, their attention came to rest

2. For example, no American scholar appears to have made use of the Soviet publication, *Otchet o rabote Evropeiskoi konsul'tativnoi komissii* (Moscow, 1947).

3. One of the best revisionist studies is Gabriel Kolko, *The Politics of War: The World and United States Foreign Policy 1943-1945* (New York: Random House, 1968).

4. An example is a University of Geneva doctoral dissertation: Harold Strauss, *The Division and Dismemberment of Germany, from the Casablanca Conference (January 1943) to the Establishment of the East German Republic (October 1949)* (Ambilly, 1952).

not on the great wartime conferences—Teheran, Yalta, and Potsdam—but on the activities of a sober-minded, industrious, and relatively obscure body known as the European Advisory Commission (EAC). Set up in accordance with a decision reached at the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers in October 1943, the EAC held its first regular meeting in mid-January 1944 and thereafter met more or less continuously until the immediate aftermath of the Potsdam Conference in August 1945, when it was disbanded, its work accomplished. Originally a brainchild of British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, the EAC met in London and enjoyed the full support of the British, who hoped that it would develop into a body capable of resolving a wide range of inter-Allied problems concerning post-war Europe, including the treatment of Germany.

The fact that this goal was only partly achieved and that the EAC's accomplishments were much more limited than the British had hoped was attributable, in large part, to the negative attitude toward the EAC adopted by the Americans—particularly President Roosevelt—and by the Russians, neither of whom wanted to entrust the EAC with responsibility for actions which they regarded as the prerogative of top-level decisionmakers. If one judges the EAC's record in terms of the ambitious hopes entertained for it by the British, therefore, the verdict is likely to be highly unfavorable.⁵ Yet the fact remains that it was the EAC, as a thoughtful West German historian has recognized, which was “the decisive—and also the only—instrument for the preparation and determination of Allied postwar policy in Germany.”⁶

Any serious study of the origins of the German problem must therefore pay due attention to the EAC and its work. Two recent monographs, one American, the other British, do just that. Regrettably, both of them, though published since 1974, belong to the pre-1973 era in terms of sources, since they are not based on a study of the EAC materials now available at the Public Record Office in London.

The American study (completed in 1972, but not published until six years later), Daniel J. Nelson's *Wartime Origins of the Berlin Dilemma*,⁷ is a revised version of his Columbia University doctoral dissertation begun under the supervision of Professor Philip E. Mosely, who had served as a member of the American delegation to the EAC, and who, in 1950, published two articles—still fundamentally important today—on its activities.⁸ Using as his principal source the

5. For example, Bruce Kuklick dismisses the EAC as “a monumental failure” in his article, “The Genesis of the European Advisory Commission,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 4, no. 4 (October 1969): 189–210. John L. Gaddis renders a somewhat less damning but basically similar verdict in his book, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War 1941–1949* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1972), pp. 105–12.

6. Ernst Deuerlein, *Die Einheit Deutschlands*, vol. 1: *Die Erörterungen und Entscheidungen der Kriegs- und Nachkriegskonferenzen 1941–1949: Darstellung und Dokumente* (Frankfurt/Main: Alfred Metzner Verlag, 1961), p. 36.

7. Daniel J. Nelson, *Wartime Origins of the Berlin Dilemma* (University, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 1978).

8. Philip E. Mosely, “Dismemberment of Germany: The Allied Negotiations from Yalta to Potsdam,” *Foreign Affairs*, 28, no. 3 (April 1950): 487–98; Mosely, “The Occupation of Germany: New Light on How the Zones Were Drawn,” *ibid.*, no. 4 (July 1950): 580–604. Both essays were reprinted with additional notes in Philip E. Mosely, *The Kremlin and World Politics* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), pp. 131–54, 155–88.

Department of State's files which deal with the American delegation to the EAC, Nelson has been able to follow the delegation's work step by step, and in so doing he has been able to cast new light on a number of complicated transactions: for example, the tortuous process whereby the British and Americans worked out their occasionally sharp differences over the question of which nation's troops were to occupy which of the two zones of occupation in West Germany, a division they agreed should be established after the German surrender.

Steeped in the EAC archives and guided by Professor Mosely's vivid recollection of its work, Nelson appears to have formed a strong personal identification with the wartime agency. In part, this orientation serves as a source of strength, since it has enabled Nelson to reach an evaluation of the overall record of the EAC which is more accurate than that of some of its critics.⁹ At the same time, however, the EAC-centered picture drawn by Nelson suffers from distortions which lead him to unbalanced conclusions. Correctly recognizing in President Roosevelt the ultimate source of the administrative confusion and jurisdictional contradictions which bedeviled the efforts of the American delegation to the EAC and seriously limited its capabilities, Nelson delivers a stinging indictment of U.S. wartime policymakers, Roosevelt in particular. His verdict is softened only by the fact that he holds the British and, to a lesser degree, the Soviet leaders as *only slightly less culpable*.

It may be asked, however, whether Nelson has faced the question of what policies were in the best interests of the United States and the Western Allies with regard to postwar Germany. He evidently assumes that a continuation of the Grand Alliance into the postwar era would have provided a sound basis for a peace settlement resting in part on four-power control of a united Germany. This assumption is open to serious doubt, however, given Soviet and Western efforts to shape their zones of occupation in accordance with their own image as well as the great probability that a united Germany, ruled by an Allied Control Council in which Russia wielded the veto, would have fallen prey either to economic and political chaos or to absorption into the Soviet sphere, or possibly both. Stalin's actions and policies during the final months of the war in Europe, as Vojtech Mastny and William O. McCagg, Jr. have recently pointed out,¹⁰ were aimed at maximizing Soviet gains in Germany and Eastern Europe at the expense of the Western Allies and in defiance of the agreements Stalin had concluded with them, thus undermining the kind of inter-Allied cooperation which served as the guiding principle of the American and British delegations to the EAC. Consequently, it would seem that Roosevelt's reluctance to assign greater responsibility to the EAC in such matters as postwar reparations from Germany or the treatment of German prisoners of war—questions on which the views of the Soviet Union and the Western powers were widely at variance—was in fact an act of statesmanship, since it left the way open for American policymakers and those of other nations

9. Nelson sums up his evaluation of the EAC by calling it "certainly one of the most useful and most extraordinary bodies in the history of allied wartime diplomacy" (Nelson, *Wartime Origins*, p. 170).

10. Vojtech Mastny, *Russia's Road to the Cold War: Diplomacy, Warfare, and the Politics of Communism, 1941–1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), pp. 263–65; William O. McCagg, Jr., *Stalin Embattled 1943–1948* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978), p. 173.

in the early postwar period gradually to evolve new policies in response to changed conditions and perceptions.¹¹

Nelson correctly stresses the development of a limited but genuine spirit of cooperation among the Russian, British, and American delegations to the EAC. But his assumption that this spirit could and should have continued in the postwar years disregards the fact that the principal significance of the war in Europe, as perceptive observers recognized shortly after its conclusion, turned out to be the struggle for Germany,¹² a struggle in which the entire history of the contestants ruled out the continuation of genuine cooperation between them.

A valuable part of Nelson's book consists of a series of appendixes in which he provides the texts of several EAC drafts and protocols, as well as the text of the Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin of September 3, 1971. Nelson considers this agreement a belated but welcome return to the wartime spirit of four-power cooperation in matters relating to Germany. Here too, however, the reader senses the distorting effect of Nelson's EAC-centered view of things, because the 1971 agreement, as Honoré Marc Catudal, Jr. has convincingly argued, was reached as a result of concessions reluctantly granted by the Soviet Union in response to its need for Western, including West German, industrial technology.¹³

Nelson's monograph, closely argued and well crafted though it is, suffers from other self-imposed limitations. Thus, he makes little effort to probe the reasons for Soviet policies pursued in the EAC, using the standard defense that such matters are beyond the comprehension of Western scholars. Nelson also fails to link developments in the EAC with the shifting and often directly relevant fortunes of the various battle zones.

Tony Sharp's recent study, *The Wartime Alliance and the Zonal Division of Germany*,¹⁴ another reworked doctoral dissertation, avoids these limitations and to that extent achieves a more satisfactory balance in its evaluation of the EAC's place in the wartime scheme of things. Although Sharp completed his work too early to benefit from the release of the EAC archives, he had access to the wartime cabinet papers, including several which enabled him to trace in detail the evolution of the British plan for dividing Germany into zones of occupation, from its origin in the so-called Attlee Committee of mid-1943 to its formal presentation at the second working session of the EAC on January 15, 1944. Sharp fails, however, to offer any explanation as to why the British developed this plan without consulting the Americans and why they rushed its presenta-

11. In one of the first American studies to be based on the Department of State archival publications, John L. Snell (*Wartime Origins of the East-West Dilemma over Germany* [New Orleans: Hauser Press, 1959]) attributed to Roosevelt a deliberate "policy of postponement" in regard to postwar planning for Germany (chapter 2). For a grudgingly favorable evaluation of Roosevelt's policies toward Germany by a West German historian, see Günter Moltmann, "Zur Formulierung der amerikanischen Besatzungspolitik in Deutschland am Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 15, no. 3 (July 1967): 308.

12. See, for example, Strauss, *The Division and Dismemberment of Germany*, pp. 145-46; William H. McNeill, *America, Britain, and Russia: Their Co-operation and Conflict 1941-1946* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), pp. 724 and 733.

13. Honoré Marc Catudal, Jr., *A Balance Sheet of the Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin: Evaluation and Documentation* (West Berlin: Berlin Verlag, 1978), p. 18.

14. Tony Sharp, *The Wartime Alliance and the Zonal Division of Germany* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). A recent article by Sharp is a valuable supplement to his book (see

tion before the EAC so precipitously.¹⁵ It should be remembered that it was this plan, which included what the British themselves later ruefully recognized as an overly generous allocation of territory to the Russians,¹⁶ that became the basis for the final EAC protocol on zones of occupation and consequently the blueprint for the ultimate division of Germany into two rival states in 1949.

It is, in fact, Sharp's failure to give due attention to the American connection which causes his book to fall short of the goal proclaimed by its title. While the London archives hold the key to much of the EAC's work, they cannot in themselves answer all the questions historians need to raise about it, nor can a full account of its significance be written from the standpoint of a single nation. It is regrettable, therefore, that Nelson, with his detailed investigation of American participation in the EAC, and Sharp, who concentrated on the British side of its activities, never became aware of each other's studies while they were in progress. Had he lived, Professor Mosely would undoubtedly have provided the necessary link, but his untimely death nullified that possibility.

Two other recent studies of the EAC deserve mention. In 1971, Boris Meissner published one of the best studies of its work in any language.¹⁷ Like Sharp and Nelson, however, Meissner was unable to utilize the EAC archives in London. The first historian to do so was Sir Llewellyn Woodward, who included some dozen pages on the work of the EAC in the fifth volume of his history of British wartime foreign policy.¹⁸ This work also fails to meet the need for a full-scale study of the EAC, however, because it is limited to a bare account of the factual record with little attempt at analysis.

What of the Russians? To a greater extent than has been generally recognized, Soviet scholars have shown a continuing awareness of the importance of the European Advisory Commission (in Russian, *Evropeiskaia konsul'tativnaia komissia*) and have published fairly extensive documentary and analytical studies of its work, from the early postwar years to the present.¹⁹ It goes without saying

Tony Sharp, "The Russian Annexation of the Königsberg Area 1941-45," *Survey*, 23, no. 4 [105] [Autumn 1977-78]: 156-62).

15. When Anthony Eden visited Washington, D.C. in March 1943, Roosevelt, at the suggestion of Hopkins and in Eden's presence, agreed that the British and Americans should work out a plan for the occupation of Germany "and the one agreed upon between the two of us should then be discussed with the Russians" (see Robert E. Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins: An Intimate History* [New York: Harper and Brothers, 1948], p. 715). Eden, however, made no comment on this proposal and simply ignored it after his return to London.

16. Sharp cites a Foreign Office memorandum evidently dating from May 1945 which noted the "unusual alacrity" with which the Russians accepted the British proposals [on zones of occupation] in February 1944, [which] suggests 'that we gave them more than they had ever expected to get' (Sharp, *The Wartime Alliance*, p. 146).

17. Boris Meissner, "Die Vereinbarungen der Europäischen Beratenden Kommission über Deutschland in 1944/45," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 46 (November 14, 1970): 3-14.

18. Sir Llewellyn Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War*, vol. 5 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1976), pp. 249-60. Sir Llewellyn notes: "It has not been possible within the scope of this History to deal at greater length with the work of the European Advisory Commission" (*ibid.*, p. 249).

19. In addition to the work cited in note 2 above, Soviet documentary publications on the EAC include a selection of documents in the series, "Iz materialov Evropeiskoi

that the Soviet materials must be used with caution because of the partisan tendencies which guided their selection and the often slanted character of their conclusions. However, it is because the Soviet documentary materials have been chosen to serve current political interests that they have a significance not limited to the wartime period. From the way in which Soviet spokesmen have used the EAC records to bolster the current Soviet line toward Germany, a great deal can be learned about Soviet priorities and goals.²⁰ In any case, it is essential that future studies of the EAC and its influence on the evolution of the German problem take into account what the Russians have published on the subject.

The French, it may be noted briefly, joined the EAC only toward the end of its existence and played no significant role in shaping its major decisions. Nevertheless, a full study of the EAC should mention French participation in its activities.

If the European Advisory Commission laid the groundwork for the postwar structure of Germany, it was the U.S.-Soviet dispute over reparations that precipitated the actual breakup of that nation into two rival states located on the territories of the former Soviet and Western zones of occupation. Recognizing that fact, a revisionist historian, Bruce Kuklick, has argued that responsibility for splitting Germany, in violation of the Potsdam agreement to treat the country as an economic unit, must be laid at the door of the Truman administration, which acted in pursuit of long-term American aspirations to reshape postwar Europe into its own socioeconomic image in order to maximize America's economic well-being.²¹ Kuklick's thesis, however, like much of the work of the revisionist school, has been somewhat tarnished as more archival information has become available and as the actual evolution of policy has been worked out by historians in greater detail.

konsul'tativnoi komissii," *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn'*, 1968, no. 4, pp. 151-60; no. 5, pp. 152-60; no. 6, pp. 151-60; and no. 7, pp. 154-59. A new Soviet collection of documentary materials from the wartime conferences was launched in 1978: A. A. Gromyko et al., eds., *Sovetskii Soiuz na mezhdunarodnykh konferentsiakh perioda Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny 1941-45* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1978-).

20. Soviet historians have paid special attention, for example, to a statement made on March 26, 1945 by F. T. Gusev, Soviet representative on the EAC, to the effect that the Soviet government considered the proposed dismemberment of Germany "not as an obligatory plan . . . but as a possible means of exerting pressure on Germany for the purpose of rendering it harmless if other measures prove insufficient." Presented at the very time when Stalin was violating the Yalta agreements by unilaterally assigning to Poland the administration (read annexation) of German territories up to the Oder and Western Neisse rivers, Gusev's statement was clearly calculated as a propaganda screen for the Soviet dismemberment of Germany, and its later citation by Soviet historians is designed to serve the same purpose. First published in *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn'*, 1955, no. 5, p. 44, Gusev's statement is cited with approval in such works as: *Pravda o politike zapadnykh derzhav v germanskom voprose: Ob otvetstvennosti zapadnykh derzhav za narushenie Potsdamskogo soglasheniia i vozrozhdenie germanskogo imperializma (Istoricheskaia spravka)* (Moscow, 1959), p. 13; *Istoriia diplomatii*, 2nd ed., vol. 4 (Moscow, 1975), p. 563; *Istoriia Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny 1941-1945*, vol. 5 (Moscow, 1963), p. 450.

21. Bruce Kuklick, *American Policy and the Division of Germany: The Clash with Russia over Reparations* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972).

On the basis of a painstaking reconstruction of American policy on reparations and on related issues, John Gimbel has shown that Kuklick's analysis leaves out a number of vital aspects of the problem.²² In return, Kuklick has described Gimbel's work as "'one damn thing after another' history" and has indicated his belief that no real progress has been or can be made toward a resolution of the dispute between traditionalists and revisionists over United States foreign policy. The choice between them is evidently, for Kuklick, merely a matter of personal preference.²³ Gimbel's work, however, is too solid to be disregarded. Indeed, it provides the first adequate basis for identifying the real causal factors in the complex process which led to the bifurcation of Germany in 1949. Particularly valuable is his analysis of the role of France as a member of the Allied Control Council for Germany, in which capacity France used its veto during the first two postwar years to block any and all attempts to deal with Germany as a political and economic unit.

Complementing and reinforcing Gimbel's work is a recent book by Edward N. Peterson, *The American Occupation of Germany: Retreat to Victory*.²⁴ Together, these two books mark a genuine advance beyond the increasingly sterile conflict between traditionalists and revisionists, and the superseding of both schools with a deeper and more penetrating historical analysis.

An attempt to achieve the same goal by the use of analytical tools derived from political science and behavioral psychology is presented in John H. Backer's book, *The Decision to Divide Germany: American Foreign Policy in Transition*.²⁵ For Backer, the real forces which led to the division of Germany were not long-range concepts or national goals, but rather faulty bureaucratic articulation, "cognitive dissonance," and the misreading by decisionmakers of "historical lessons," especially American disillusionment with reparations policy after the First World War. The thesis is not so much unreasonable as superficial; it is too remote from the daily struggle with intractable policy dilemmas to carry conviction.

The real victor in the conflict over the origins of the Cold War and the division of Germany has therefore turned out to be neither traditionalists nor revisionists but the independent-minded historian who is willing to consider all the available evidence, who distrusts easy generalizations, and who prefers a complex, untidy, but living reality to an oversimplified, emotion-laden indictment or defense of individuals, institutions, or nations.

22. John Gimbel, *The Origins of the Marshall Plan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), pp. 3 and 55; see also Mastny, *Russia's Road to the Cold War*, pp. 394-95, n. 130.

23. Bruce Kuklick, review of John H. Backer, *The Decision to Divide Germany: American Foreign Policy in Transition*, in *American Historical Review*, 84, no. 1 (February 1979): 275.

24. Edward N. Peterson, *The American Occupation of Germany: Retreat to Victory* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978).

25. John H. Backer, *The Decision to Divide Germany: American Foreign Policy in Transition* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1978).