

## Berlin 1970 - Four Powers meet in Berlin

There was little world media attention to the "ambassadorial level" talks held in Berlin on the status of the city. In Spring 1970, interest was focused on the war in Vietnam and on efforts to control the development and deployment of atomic weapons. Nevertheless, at the former Prussian Supreme Court building in the American sector of Berlin, important work for diplomatic and military professionals was taking place, covered by German media and a handful of people from the Allied countries: France, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States.

On the meeting dates, there was a kind of ritual. First would come the additional West Berlin police and U.S. Army Military Police. The U.S. Army Ordnance Corps specialists would check the site for bombs-- not an unreasonable precaution in that period. Media personnel and a handful of curious civilians would converge. A tiny photographer for the

DPA  
(German  
Press  
Agency)  
would arrive  
with his  
stepladder.  
Then the  
lower level  
diplomats  
would  
converge.  
The limos  
came next.  
Here, the  
British staff  
roll through  
the gates.  
Note some of  
the period  
touches: the  
MP sergeant  
is a 1st  
Cavalry  
veteran of  
Vietnam,  
now in a



rather different environment. The "video" cameraman holds his 16 mm newsreel camera. If something important happens, his film could be quickly processed and then flown to New York City for broadcast the *next day*!

<http://www.berlin1969.com/#troubled-times/3998813>

[Return to Troubled Times.](#)

<http://www.berlin1969.com>

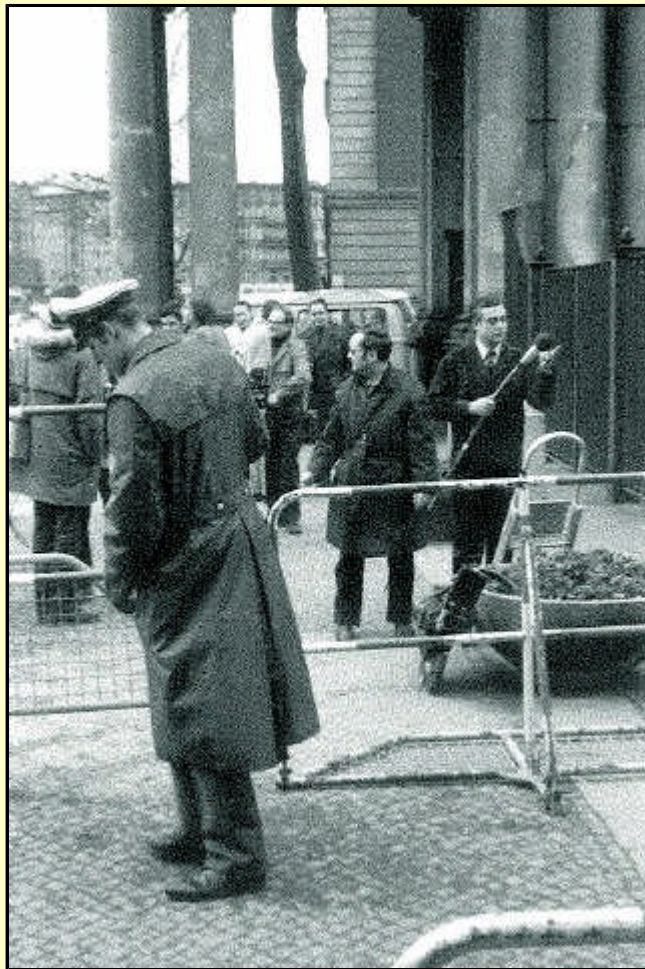
[Return to](#) **Berlin 1969**

## Berlin 1969-70 - Four Powers Under Sharp Eyes

As the cast of characters assembled for the negotiating sessions in the former court building, a careful observer would see how many different interested parties were represented. And one would see how much care was taken to make sure that no one uninvited crashed the party.



While the U.S. Command Berlin (USCOB) photographer readies his classic 4x5 camera, a West Berlin city policeman carries a crowd control barrier into place. Journalists mill around at the upper right of the photo.



Police officer moves the next piece of crowd control barrier into place. Note how it is designed so that people standing on the crowd side will help to hold it upright with their weight.

On this day, it was unnecessary, as the Four Power Talks did not generate much public attention in comparison to events related to the anti-Vietnam War movement or West Berlin protests against the West German draft. Now, take a close look in the center of the picture. Until I enlarged this photo, I had not noticed the man standing apart, partly screened by the socializing journalists. Blue arrows in the photo blown up below highlight the heavy-set man who watched me as I watched the set-up activities.







In the outside world these talks drew little attention. Most of the American public's focus was on talks to try to bring the war in Vietnam to a close.

Europeans and others were interested in the arms talks that took place in Vienna and Helsinki.

The small group of journalists covering the talks were mainly Germans. In the photo above, they press the MP on duty at the gate for admittance.

He had not yet received the order to admit them.



There were other people who took these talks seriously.

Among them were top officials of the Four Powers.

Governments of the two Germanies watched it closely.

Berliners found themselves to be in the position of a hostess who has a party in her home, but is not invited to it.

While the Berlin police were there because it was their duty, the attitude of many in West Berlin could be expressed by the photographs below.

In one, journalists are almost relieved by the distraction caused by a group of pre-schoolers

that came walking through the security zone in front of the Allied Control Authority building.

In another, a glance that combines curiosity and skepticism is taken by a hurried passer-by.

His skepticism seemed reasonable. An account of these negotiations may be found in M. E. Sarotte's *Dealing with the Devil: East Germany, Detente, and Ostpolitik, 1969-73* published by the University of North Carolina Press. According to Sarotte, the negotiations when these photos were taken (November 1969 and April 1970) had only reached the traditional stage in which historical issues were cited by both sides.



Rather than hold a meeting of foreign ministers or special delegates, the decision was made to use the existing ambassadors of the Four Powers, Great Britain, France, the Soviet Union, and the United States to conduct these talks. This made the event intentionally low-key, which even at the time I found inspiring in an age in which diplomacy was already being conducted as a media event by "star" players, such as U.S. National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger.

Soviet Ambassador to Germany (East Germany) Pyotor Abrasimov had taken a hard line, lecturing the Western ambassadors on the great Soviet victory that had been obtained in the capture of Berlin in 1945.

Kenneth Rush, United States ambassador to Germany (West Germany), countered with the historical record that Allied troops in the West had halted short of Berlin in order to yield the right-of-way to the Red Army and had later withdrawn from areas assigned by treaty for Soviet occupation forces.



This led to a lengthy discussion of the historical circumstances and eventually to a grudging acceptance that the Soviet Union and the Western Allies had won World War II together.

Happy stories were not coming out of the conference at this point.

The appearance of the children, those who might benefit most by an agreement, was a happy moment in serious times.

Otherwise, the mood was one of watchful waiting.



On a side street, a police truck is ready. It has grills behind the windshield, to protect its occupants in a riot. The car in front of it is a conspicuously unmarked police or intelligence agency car, with civilian "B" plates. Elaborate though these precautions may have seemed at the time, they were relatively low-key compared to events featuring heads of state.

With we edgy pawns in position on the chessboard, it now was time for the main pieces to be placed. The following pages offer more detailed photographs that show the context for the stern faces seen above and for the arrival of the diplomats.

<http://www.berlin1969.com/#/chronos-midpoint-of-cold-war/4217618>  
[Chronology of Events: 1969-71](#)

**Berlin 1969**

## Berlin 1970 - MP stands firm



With the pre-school group having passed, things returned to normal outside of the Allied Control Authority building. Journalists pressed the Military Policeman on duty at the gate for information as to when they would be admitted to the conference. A photographer for the German Press Agency (DPA) carries a step ladder in order to get angles for photos that might be missed by others.

Our MP stands his ground.

<http://www.berlin1969.com/#/troubled-times/3998813>  
[Return to Troubled Times.](#)

**Berlin 1969**



## Berlin 1969-70 - Path to the future



Perhaps that title sounds overly grand, but that is what the Four Power Talks on the Status of Berlin turned out to be. Many observers thought of them as cleaning up the mess of the past two decades, a period during which informal and conflicting procedures had developed. The legal status of Berlin had evolved over that time, but it had evolved on different tracks on the East and West side of the Iron Curtain. Leaders on all sides recognized that Berlin's unsettled status was a danger to world peace.

As it turned out, the process of achieving these treaties showed that a certain amount of agreement could be reached between the Soviets and Western powers, when there were motives for cooperation. By reducing the grounds for confusion at the border crossings, the opportunities for trouble were reduced.

And that brings us to an important element in this picture. The responsibility for carrying out the burdens of foreign policy on both sides of the Wall fell on young men and a few women, such as this USCOB Public Information Office Specialist 4 (paygrade E-4 out of a system that started at E-1 and worked up to E-9) heading to his role as an

official photographer for the U.S. delegation.

In M. E. Sarotte's *Dealing with the Devil* on page 121 of the paperback edition, there is a photo of the four ambassadors posing for photos on 3 September 1971. As news photographers snap away, two young MP's in

khaki flank the successful diplomats, saluting. One of them is a Specialist 4.

The "rules" followed by each of the Four Powers and Two Germanies varied, conflicted, and only made sense in terms of their historical development. Determining the correct course of action was not easy. I was always amazed at the responsibility placed on young shoulders and impressed by how well most carried it.

Now, as these "Talks" took place, was the opportunity for an older generation to give the Baby Boomers something concrete with which to work.

<http://www.berlin1969.com/#/chronos-midpoint-of-cold-war/4217618>  
[Chronology of Events: 1969-71](#)

<http://www.berlin1969.com>  
[Return to](#) **Berlin 1969**

## Berlin 1969-70 - Was ist los?



A passer-by on foot and visitors in a sightseeing bus turned to look at the small group of journalists, police and American soldiers gathered at the gate of the Allied Control Authority building on Potsdamer Strasse.

Most traffic on this piece of the former Reichsstrasse 1 -- Aachen to Koenigsberg across the German Empire -- continued in its usual hectic manner.

<http://www.berlin1969.com/#/chronos-midpoint-of-cold-war/4217618>  
[Chronology of Events: 1969-71](#)

<http://www.berlin1969.com/#/troubled-times/3998813>  
[Return to Troubled Times.](#)

**Berlin 1969**

## Berlin 1970 - In Berlin you can't swing a dead cat without hitting symbolism



As if in a Deeply Meaningful European film, a troop of the expected beneficiaries of the Four Power Conference -- pre-schoolers -- came through the scene outside of the former Prussian Supreme Court building. The tension around the set-up for the arrival of the diplomats was broken for a moment as children excitedly eyed the cameramen and their gear, while journalists smiled at the kids -- and their adult leaders.

The building to the rear of the pillars is the headquarters of the BVG, Berlin's city transit system operator. That is one of their "two-man" double-decker buses to the left. Passengers swung onto the rear platform through the open door and paid their fare to a conductor who circulated through the bus. As we now know, the world was about to change, albeit very slowly, through the negotiations about to get underway here, but life in the big city went on as usual. These children were to be adults by the time that negotiations here led to the eventual fall of the Berlin Wall. The two-man double-deckers were gone before that.

<http://www.berlin1969.com/#/troubled-times/3998813>

[Return to Troubled Times.](#)

**Berlin 1969**



## Berlin 1970 - Barriers set up



With the arrival of police dog teams and erection of the usual red-and-white barriers, the security cordon was complete.

Inside the Allied Control Authority building, military personnel provided security. In that context, I almost became an honorary member of the bomb squad. Here's the story:

*Barracks friends of mine who worked on the security for this event knew of my interest in historical geography, railways, etc. and reported to me that they had found a vast library of German maps and other research material that had been assembled in the upper floor and/or attic of the building. This had been organized for the use of the Allied staff that expected*

*to rule Occupied Germany from this location. According to these casual observers, there was much information on hand about the Deutsche Reichsbahn.*

*I told them how interesting this sounded to me, and somehow we formed a plan to include me in the next sweep of the building for bombs. This would also allow them to concentrate on some more likely areas. I had an adequate clearance, but knew almost nothing about bombs. This did not bother us, because we were not expecting that I would find one in the attic where I would search, far from the Four Power ambassadors.*

*This plan was nixed when it came to the attention of higher-ups.*

*"What would happen if he actually found a bomb?"*

That was the unpleasant intrusion of reality from the officer responsible. We did not have a good answer for that question, which to us seemed very hypothetical. In a little more than two months' time, the answer came from a manifesto issued by the Red Army Faction, which declared a form of war on German and Allied authorities. To read it, click on the link to [Troubled Times](http://www.berlin1969.com/#/troubled-times/3998813) and then click on the button marked "Founding Document - 1970". There was one outcome of the canceled plan that worked out well. Having already arranged to have the day free, and being known to some of the U.S. hosts, I went to the Potsdamer Str. location and shot these photographs.

<http://www.berlin1969.com/#/chronos-midpoint-of-cold-war/4217618>  
[Chronology of Events: 1969-71](#)

<http://www.berlin1969.com/#/troubled-times/3998813>  
[Return to Troubled Times.](#)

<http://www.berlin1969.com> 

## Berlin 1970 - Soviet staff hurries up



The arrival of diplomatic staff was choreographed. First came the support staff, for example the British shown in a previous picture. With the security cordon set up, others began to arrive. Here the Soviet support staff speeds down Potsdamer Strasse from Checkpoint Charlie to the Allied Control Authority Building in a clean, late-model Volga. A white-coated policeman is on duty to the right, ready to wave them through the temporarily halted traffic.

Note the observers in the balconies across the street. In West Berlin, they may have just been curious neighbors. However, historian Arik Komets' research shows that the Ministry for State Security (East Germany's "Stasi" - MfS) planted long-term observers in apartments outside of the Marienfelde Refugee Center to watch gate traffic. It follows then, given the uneasiness in East Berlin about these talks and the fear that the Soviet Union would sell them out, that on one of the balconies overlooking this street someone was reporting to the MfS.

And what became of the Volga car? According to *Automotive News* of 12 Dec 05, construction of the cars began in 1956 at the GAZ (Gorky Automobile Factory). In 1994, the firm was privatized, and in December 2005 it announced that in 2007 production of the Volga would end.

<http://www.berlin1969.com/#/troubled-times/3998813>  
[Return to Troubled Times.](#)

<http://www.berlin1969.com> **Berlin 1969**

## Berlin 1970 - Traffic policeman does good deed for the day



If you are an elderly lady, you just ask the nice young police officer who does not appear to be doing anything to help you across busy Potsdamer Strasse. The traffic officer was on point duty to direct the arriving diplomats into the gate at the Allied Control Authority building, but there was a pause in the choreographed arrivals of the Important People, so he was able to help this pedestrian.

<http://www.berlin1969.com/#/chronos-midpoint-of-cold-war/4217618>  
Chronology of Events: 1969-71



<http://www.berlin1969.com/#/troubled-times/3998813>  
[Return to Troubled Times.](#)

**Berlin 1969**

## Berlin 1970 - There was a Ford in their future



U.S. Ambassador to Germany, Kenneth Rush, arrives in a motorcade of Ford Motor Company cars. First, the Military Police escort in one of their standard Taunus (German Ford) 20M sedans. Next is the ambassador's stretch Lincoln limousine. Then come lower ranking State Department people in what appears to be a Mercury equipped for motorcade duty with flashing lights and other features, and then at the tail another MP escort in another Taunus 20M. In their wake, Berlin traffic returns to normal, as two VW Kombi bus/vans jockey for the same space on Potsdamer Strasse.

*On a less notable occasion, I had the opportunity to ride in the ambassador's limo. (He was elsewhere.) A friend of mine served as the U.S. Army driver for this car. It also had a professional Berlin chauffeur, but a G.I. was needed if the car was to be driven into East Berlin. On a trip from Andrews Barracks, I took the limo instead of the Line 11 bus. In Berlin traffic, it felt as long as the bus, but lower. I tried out the ride in the rear VIP seats. Facing me were the jump seats for security men, but on that trip I rode in splendid isolation. The many small cars around us seemed of little importance.*

Later, this car was involved in a swap with the Berlin Command's stretch Mercedes limousine. For media events such as the Four Power arrivals, the Lincoln continued in its diplomatic role, lest American autoworkers see their ambassador stepping out of a Mercedes on television news.

In the photo below, the U.S. motorcade pulls into the entry gate of the Allied Control Authority building. The winner of the VW Kombi battle seen in the photo above hustles along Potsdamer Strasse, about to overtake the convoy. In 2004 I showed this photo to a Colonel serving then in the U.S. Army's Military Police and she was rather critical of -- perhaps horrified by -- the casual security arrangements portrayed in this series of photos. Of course, it was at the close of an era, just months before radical Leftists in Berlin declared war in their manifesto translated in Troubled Times . It was, more significantly in that year of 1970, the end of the era of U.S. dominance of the world's energy markets. In these big Detroit autos, the conversation must have been about how to work out a deal with the 25-year old Soviet empire, and not the dawning age of The Terror Tax , the energy-tight world reported in Chronology 1970 .



<http://www.berlin1969.com/#/the-terror-tax/3838578>  
The Terror Tax.

<http://www.berlin1969.com/#/chronos-midpoint-of-cold-war/4217618>  
Chronology of Events:1969-71.

<http://www.berlin1969.com/#/troubled-times/3998813>  
Return to Troubled Times.

**Berlin 1969**

## Berlin 1970 - *Imaginez la conversation*



In a car with Consular Corps plates, French officials arrived for the negotiations. As in later years, the French role was defined by their singular idea of their national interests, rather than what the Americans or the British thought their interest should be. However, in a new role, the French also took the interests of the Federal Republic of Germany into account. Arriving in a Mercedes Benz seemed appropriate in that context. These negotiations were characterized as being "three-dimensional chess" in that both sides were negotiating with their partners as well as with the opposing side, including the German partners who were outside of the official negotiations.

That these negotiations took place on run down Potsdamer Strasse fascinated me over the years since. I had learned about the Treaty of Vienna that shaped Europe for the century from 1815 to 1914. I had read about the Versailles Treaty that unleashed all sorts of 20th Century issues. I pictured carriages with spit and polish lackeys jumping out to open doors and statesmen with snuff boxes and powdered wigs, or at least morning coats. Here we stood at the hinge of history, aware that this could be a turning point of some sort in the Cold War, and the event unfolded like a meeting of corporate executives. As it turned out, that was what it was intended to be, a business deal, carried out in an intentionally boring manner, while world attention focused on other issues.

As in those celebrated or castigated mega-negotiations at Vienna and Versailles, multiple interests were being considered. Unlike those times, this process was happening in pieces all over Europe, as well as in Beijing. Walter Isaacson in 1992 described Henry Kissinger's hand in this in his biography:

**"Although he was too likely to see a Moscow-inspired threat in every regional crisis, Kissinger was correct in resisting the dovish and isolationist forces of the period that sought to abandon the competition with the Soviets...In**



**addition, Kissinger and Nixon turned the world's bipolar tug-of-war into a three-dimensional chess game that provided the U.S. with more opportunities for creative diplomacy. The new relationship with China, which previous presidents had barely contemplated, gave both of the world's communist giants an incentive to maintain better relations with the U.S. than they had with one another."**

So, our contacts with Soviet soldiers who were being transferred to the Chinese border, the changes in East German leadership, the harassment of interzone traffic, the sonic boom practice flights of the Red Air Force, the tragedies of split families and the changes in West German leadership were about to be put on a table near West Berlin's red light district. Now, there was one more limousine for which all waited.

<http://www.berlin1969.com/#/chronos-midpoint-of-cold-war/4217618>  
[Chronology of Events: 1969-71.](#)

<http://www.berlin1969.com/#/troubled-times/3998813>  
[Return to Troubled Times.](#)

<http://www.berlin1969.com/#/links-page-related-political/3815346>  
[Links to related political accounts.](#)

**Berlin 1969**

## Berlin 1970 - *Быстроногий Человек!*



There was a pedestrian hurrying down the street, camera in hand. He did not acknowledge me as he hurried past, though he had to walk around me. He was intent on getting to the entry gate. I was in the way.

Later, I was told by a usually well informed source that this was the correspondent for TASS, the official Soviet wire service, and that he always walked from Checkpoint Charlie to the Allied Control Authority Building.

This was apparently a subject of discussion, given the apprehension of U.S. agencies responsible for this sector of Berlin. There were several theories:

- + That he liked the attention given him by American intelligence personnel. Americans are suspicious of anyone who does not drive a car.
- + That the accountants in Moscow had sent one of the notorious "downhold expenses" Teletype messages familiar to Western correspondents.
- + That he walked through the rundown district from "Charlie" to the ACA Building so that he could see capitalist decadence at first hand. There were several types of decadence available on his route.
- + That he wanted his colleagues to envy him, by insinuating that he was partaking in the capitalist decadence available on his route.
- + That he enjoyed breathing city air that made him free.

Now, there was still that one more limousine for which all waited.

<http://www.berlin1969.com/#/chronos-midpoint-of-cold-war/4217618>  
[Chronology of Events: 1969-71](#)

<http://www.berlin1969.com/#/troubled-times/3998813>  
[Return to Troubled Times.](#)

**Berlin 1969**

## Berlin 1970 - Chess board is set



Diplomatic plates CD01-01 and a Soviet flag flying from the fender mark the arrival of limousine of the Soviet Ambassador to Germany. A handful of Berliners watches in the background. In a few moments, the chess board of Central Europe would be set as the seats were filled at the conference table.

I headed for lunch. No bombs disturbed the progress of these quiet meetings.

--- comments and photographs by R. W. Rynerson, copyright 2006, 2013.

---

### Follow-up notes:

- The neighborhood between Checkpoint Charlie and the Allied Control Authority Building was to become a multi-ethnic district of Berlin.
- The seriousness of these negotiations were underscored by the steps taken by the Soviets in dealing with attempts by German elements to derail the talks:
  - The Stalinist leader of the German Democratic Republic, Walter Ulbricht, was removed from power.
  - Though issuing strong complaints, the Soviet Union did not allow itself to be provoked by neo-Nazis in the German Federal Republic, including their shooting of a Soviet Army soldier in the British Sector of West Berlin.
- Reichstraße 1 - the route over Potsdamer Street - was to finally have the signs in West Berlin taken down that pointed to Danzig in Pomerania and Königsberg in East Prussia. Those cities were finally acknowledged as now being Gdansk, Poland and Kaliningrad, Russia, respectively. And, in the East, maps no longer showed West Berlin as a part of the East German capital city. The negotiations of 1970-71 led to these steps.
- More information is available through:
  - Sarotte, M.E.; *Dealing with the Devil: East Germany, Detente, and Ostpolitik, 1969-73*; University of North Carolina Press; ISBN 0807849154. Ask your independent bookseller, such as [Tattered Cover Book Store](#), or university bookstore to order it for you. A paperback and a hardcover edition were available as of December 2004:
  -





The four ambassadors pose for photos after the signing of the Quadripartite Agreement on September 3, 1971. The signing took place in the American sector in West Berlin, in the building that had previously been used by the Allied Control Council. From left: British ambassador R. W. Jackson, Soviet ambassador Pjotr Abrasimov, U.S. ambassador Kenneth Rush, and French ambassador Jean Sauvagnargues. (Signatur K 0903/102 N, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz)

Germany and vice versa; it was left up to the two Germanies to negotiate the details and the treaty would not go into force until a transit agreement existed. The Soviets, in return for the right to open a consulate in West Berlin and a decrease in activities of the FRG government in West Berlin, agreed that the GDR could represent West Berlin abroad. West Berliners could hold West German passports for foreign travel.<sup>62</sup> For their part, the Western powers recognized the GDR's de facto control of East Berlin and precluded any attempt to make West Berlin a more integral part of West Germany.

A final coda to the close of treaty negotiations occurred when the SED issued its own German translation, which varied extensively from Bonn's. The formulations in the East German version were much sharper than those in the Western draft. For example, where the Western translation referred to the laws of the FRG as "suspended" with regard to West Berlin, the East German document said that they were "no longer in force."<sup>63</sup> Discrepancies between the two versions were a source of confusion. According to Kissinger, French stubbornness provided a way out. The French ambassador did not join his allies in

- Papers on European diplomacy of this period are available at the European Navigator: <http://www.ena.lu/europe/crisis-recovery/IndexEN.html> .
- An official photo of the top-ranked negotiators signing the Four Power Agreement on September 3, 1971 is available at <http://www.ena.lu/europe/crisis-recovery/signing-four-power-agreement-berlin-1971.htm> .

<http://www.berlin1969.com/#/chronos-midpoint-of-cold-war/4217618>  
[Chronology of Events: 1969-71](#)

<http://www.berlin1969.com/#/troubled-times/3998813>  
[Return to Troubled Times.](#)

**Berlin 1969**