BERLIN 1961: THE RECORD CORRECTED

by Raymond L. Garthoff

Anniversaries of critical events in the late and unlamented Cold War still provide useful occasions to review presumably well-known events and to reconsider the lessons we believe we have learned. One of the most dangerous confrontations of the Cold War occurred in late October 1961 when, for the first and only time, U.S. and Soviet tanks squared off against each other. The setting was Checkpoint Charlie, the famed crossing point in the recently constructed Berlin Wall. The tanks were armed and had contingent instructions to fire. The world came closer than ever to a nuclear-age equivalent of the Wild West showdown at the OK Corral.

Recalling this event for a new generation that did not experience it, or for an older one that has forgotten it, would be reason enough for an article. Now, however, startling information on the *Soviet* view of that crisis has become available for the first time—information that changes the whole picture as understood until today. The new sources reveal why the confrontation was even more dangerous than believed at the time and tell the undisclosed story of how it was peacefully resolved. Even as the Cold War fades, with the Wall and what it symbolized now gone, a proper understanding of this crisis will help us cope less perilously with new crises in the future.

The West saw the 1961 incident as a bold Soviet test of Western resolve to defend West Berlin, a challenge U.S. forces overcame by facing down the Soviet tanks. Soviet leaders, on the other hand, viewed the episode as a *Western*

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provocation challenging their position in East Berlin, a test they withstood by facing down the U.S. tanks. Political leaders have enough difficulty resolving real conflicts of interest; they should not approach the brink of war through an unnecessary confrontation involving serious misperceptions on both sides. Western observers have not understood the Soviet perspective at all, much less that there was foundation for the Soviet view, even though it was in error. There were real conflicts of interest and ambition in the Cold War, and in the recurrent Berlin crises of that era; but the dangerous tank confrontation would not have occurred had each side not believed the other was posing a challenge to its vital interest. New information shows that *both* sides were mistaken.

The logical starting point is to recall the Western perception in 1961 that has held ever since. Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev touched off the Berlin crisis in November 1958 with an arbitrary demand that the Western Powers withdraw from West Berlin, an enclave in communist East Germany and, for the Soviets, a disruptive anomaly complicating the consolidation of Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe. West Berlin was, in Khrushchev's words, a "bone stuck in our throat" that needed to be removed. Apart from not wanting to facilitate communist control in Eastern Europe, the West feared Soviet attempts to undercut the Western Alliance. While the Western view understated the "defensive" Soviet aim in the East, concern over the "offensive" aim of weakening the West was valid. By the summer of 1961, after a series of actions and counteractions, tensions were high. But after the building of the Berlin Wall in August 1961 checked the massive outflow of East Germans, the crisis seemed to abate. On October 17 of that year, in a speech to the 22d Congress of the Soviet Communist party in Moscow, Khrushchev withdrew his unilateral year-end deadline for signing a German peace treaty. The crisis appeared to be ending, but the West remained watchful for renewed probes and demands.

On Sunday evening, October 22, the senior American diplomat in Berlin, Deputy Commandant Allan Lightner, and his wife were about to enter East Berlin at the Friedrichstrasse cross-

ing point, nicknamed Checkpoint Charlie. The couple was taking a routine trip to attend the theater. The East German police (*Volkspolizei*) asked to see their diplomatic passports. While the request may seem reasonable (the Lightners were in their private automobile), compliance would have implied recognition of East German (rather than Soviet) authority in East Berlin—a concession the United States was determined not to offer. (British officials in Berlin, regarding the matter as less important, had acceded to similar requests.) In accordance with precedent, Lightner refused and demanded to see a Soviet officer. He then tried, initially without success, to drive through without permission. When he returned with his car escorted by a squad of eight American soldiers on foot with fixed bayonets, backed up by four M-48 tanks and additional troops at the checkpoint, the East German border guards stepped aside. When news of the incident reached Washington, the State Department instructed the U.S. mission in Berlin to cool it. But General Lucius Clay, recalled to Berlin as President John Kennedy's special representative a few months earlier in a demonstrative move at a time of high tension, personally called the president and obtained approval to maintain a tough stance. What followed was a series of assertive American probes, East German attempts to check the documents of American civilian officials, and, after refusal, entries into East Berlin by these Americans accompanied by U.S. military escorts. On October 25, Clay decided to drive the point home a little harder by moving 10 M-48 tanks near Checkpoint Charlie, assembling a force of unprecedented strength near the Wall.

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The next morning, October 26, a battalion of 33 Soviet tanks entered East Berlin, matching the American tank force in West Berlin. (Soviet tanks were not normally deployed in the city itself.) The Soviet tanks did not then approach the crossing points. The next day, however, 10 of the Soviet tanks moved up to the East

German side of Checkpoint Charlie, facing the 10 American tanks still there in a symmetrical standoff.

Many officials in Washington, including the president, were alarmed. The British, too, expressed their concern over what they regarded as an unnecessary confrontation. An irritated Kennedy reportedly had said with reference to Lightner's initial foray that "We didn't send him over there [to West Berlin] to go to the opera in East Berlin." But he had not wanted to override Clay on an issue concerning the possible erosion of Allied rights in East—and, by extension, West—Berlin.

Only 17 years later did it become known, although virtually without public notice, that Kennedy had resorted to an unofficial line of communication with Khrushchev to defuse the crisis. In 1978, Arthur Schlesinger reported that then Attorney General Robert Kennedy had revealed that the president asked him to convey to Khrushchev through Georgi Bolshakov, press attaché at the Soviet Embassy in Washington (and, as then suspected, a KGB officer), that "the President would like them to take their tanks out of there in twenty-four hours."

On the morning of October 28, within 24 hours, the Soviets withdrew their tanks from the checkpoint. Half an hour later, the United States did the same. The tank confrontation had ended. To borrow a phrase coined by Secretary of State Dean Rusk during the Cuban missile crisis just a year later: "We are eyeball to eyeball, and the other fellow just blinked." The American show of force had succeeded. From Clay's standpoint, he had forced *Soviet* intervention, thus reemphasizing Four Power, not East German, authority in East Berlin. As Peter Wyden put it in his book *Wall* (1989): "Clay had been correct again: the Soviets were bluffing," and Khrushchev had backed away.

Except for the important later footnote about Kennedy's back-channel message to Khrushchev, this has been the story of the confrontation at Checkpoint Charlie from October 1961 to this day. When the Soviets tested Allied will, the United States stood up firmly, forcing the Soviets to back down. The only risk was not to have met the challenge. As Clay is reported to have commented to an associate at the height

of the confrontation, "If the Soviets don't want war over West Berlin, we can't start it. If they do, there's nothing we can do to stop them."

The Soviet Perspective

Published Soviet accounts of the confrontation have been sparse. But their image of the outcome is the mirror image of the American view: From their perspective the *Soviet* dispatch of tanks to Checkpoint Charlie effectively deterred an assertive *American* challenge.

Khrushchev himself, in his taped memoirs and in conversations with foreigners (including West German Ambassador Hans Kroll and Kennedy's press secretary Pierre Salinger) and close associates (his son Sergei, and his son-in-law Alexei Adzhubei), has given slightly varying accounts. All focus on his decision to match the American force with Soviet tanks, despite the concern of his military, and on his move to defuse the crisis by ordering the Soviet tanks to withdraw, confident that the Americans would follow suit.

Soviets have thus viewed the crisis as an American provocation and Soviet response. Khrushchev relied successfully on matching force with force, and then initiated a deescalation. The West has interpreted this view as an attempt to put the best face possible on a Soviet backdown—an explanation that fits the U.S. account and has undergirded the judgment of Western historians.

New disclosures and a reexamination of the record now yield an entirely new Soviet perspective on the crisis. Khrushchev and the Soviet leadership did not intend to put pressure on the West; instead, they discerned an aggressive Western challenge. Similarly, they believed that with a firm reaction and prudent crisis management *they* had succeeded in facing down the Western threat.

Over the years, Soviet accounts have proclaimed this outcome, but in very terse reference, with no explanation of how the Soviets perceived a Western provocation. Accordingly, Westerners have simply rejected such statements as attempts to camouflage a Soviet defeat. Until very recently, Khrushchev's unofficial memoir was the only source to specify a Western threat. Khrushchev claimed the Amer-

icans intended to knock down the Wall and burst into East Berlin—until they encountered Soviet tanks. And, he said, he ordered the Soviet tanks to move back once he was sure the U.S. commanders would then promptly withdraw their tanks, ending the confrontation. Again, because no Western sources believed that the United States intended to dismantle the Wall, his account was dismissed as self-serving.

Today historians can reconstruct the situation, and a new picture emerges. General Clay was skeptical of the U.S. decision to accept the Berlin Wall. Clay's principal objectives were first to prevent any further Soviet or East German encroachments on West Berlin or on Allied access to East Berlin, and second to boost the morale of West Berlin and its confidence in the Allies. But he also hoped to roll back the communist position if the opportunity arose. Clay had been in command in Berlin during the Berlin airlift in 1948; to the German population, he embodied Western resolve. Clay understood that his appointment on August 30 as the president's personal representative in West Berlin was designed as a signal of U.S. fortitude, but he went further in taking his position as a mandate for vigorous action.

Soon after Clay returned to Berlin on September 19, he secretly ordered the U.S. military commandant in West Berlin, Major General Albert Watson, to have combat engineers replicate a section of the Berlin Wall in a secluded, forested area of greater West Berlin. Clay wanted to determine the best way to breach the Wall. After construction of the model barrier, tanks with bulldozer attachments experimented with assault techniques to break it down. When, presumably through Watson or his staff, the commander-in-chief of U.S. forces in Europe, General Bruce Clarke, learned of this action—taken without his knowledge or approval—he angrily countermanded Clay's order. In an unpublished personal communication, Clarke later wrote: "As soon as I learned of it, I stopped it and got rid of what had been done." Clarke bawled Clay out, but did not report the incident to Washington.

In fact, *no one* in Washington was fully aware of the project, much less knew that Clay had

actually built a section of wall and tested specially configured bulldozer tanks against it. But Soviet military intelligence, probably through the East Germans, quickly learned of the construction and its purpose. Again, until today, only Khrushchev had claimed, in his heavily discounted memoir, that Marshal Ivan Konev, Clay's counterpart (also recalled from retirement to Berlin in a reciprocal move), reported that "he had learned through intelligence channels on what day and at what hour the Western powers were going to begin their actions against us. They were preparing bulldozers to break down our border installations [i.e., the Wall]. The bulldozers would be followed by tanks and wave after wave of jeeps with infantrymen."

In fact, two knowledgeable retired Soviet military intelligence officers said in recent interviews that the GRU (Soviet military intelligence) not only learned of the mock wall and the exercises to breach it, but photographed them. This visual evidence powerfully supported reports of an American plan to break down the Wall. A third source, a senior Communist party adviser directly involved in the crisis, Valentin Falin, has confirmed this account and reported that the intelligence reached the leadership in Moscow, by his recollection, on October 20–21.

Soviet military intelligence closely monitored Western moves to gradually increase the number of tanks intermittently stationed near the Wall. With these maneuvers, the Allies apparently sought to establish a pattern of accepted deployments. On August 30, for example, three U.S. tanks and five armored personnel carriers (APCs) approached the Wall during a routine dispute over border access. Four U.S. tanks and two APCs came within 500 yards of Checkpoint Charlie on October 22, just hours after Lightner's first incident. On October 25, when the United States first brought as many as 10 tanks to Checkpoint Charlie, three APCs and several jeeps of soldiers accompanied them. Later that day, the force withdrew from the immediate border area. At the same time, three British tanks and a company of infantry appeared at the Brandenburg Gate crossing point, even though there had been no incident there. Soviet intelligence closely monitored these move-

ments. At that juncture, Konev, then in Moscow for the Communist Party Congress, reported personally to Khrushchev.

The next day, October 26, three U.S. tanks returned to the checkpoint during another incident. Later that day, as earlier noted, the Soviets moved 33 tanks (one tank battalion, roughly equal to the number of U.S. tanks then in West Berlin) into East Berlin. Soviet tanks had not entered the city since the suppression of rioting in June 1953. The tanks stayed about one mile from the checkpoint.

The critical confrontation began on October 27. Another dispute over credentials occurred at Checkpoint Charlie that afternoon. Yet even *before* that incident, the U.S. command brought up 10 M-48 tanks, accompanied by two APCs and five jeeps carrying infantry. The lead tanks were equipped with bulldozers. These were hardly the "waves" that Khrushchev colorfully described, but the force was far stronger than had been required to obtain access earlier. Bulldozer tanks could clear away parked vehicles or other obstructions at the checkpoint—or could batter through the Wall. After obtaining access again, the American contingent, with the tanks, began to withdraw. Ten Soviet tanks, however, arrived just after the U.S. tanks had departed. The Soviets, in turn, soon departed—but by then the U.S. tanks, advised of the arrival of the Soviet tanks, had returned. So, then, did the Soviet tanks as well. At the conclusion of this bizarre dance, 10 U.S. tanks and supporting units faced 10 Soviet tanks. All remained through the night, in all for 16 hours. The lead tanks kept their engines running, even "gunning" them at times. On both sides, the tank guns were uncovered and (as recently confirmed) ready to fire.

A massive Berlin crisis management system had been functioning in the Kennedy administration for five months. The State Department and Pentagon watched the developments of October 22–28 closely. Kennedy did not, however, "unleash" the Berlin Task Force. On October 23, he talked by phone with Clay, confirming his determination to prevent Soviet encroachments. But it seems clear that the president did not regard Clay as the one to

resolve the confrontation. Since the incident began, the State Department had tried to cool the ardor of the U.S. mission in Berlin, suggesting the suspension of all "probes." During their conversation on October 23, however, Clay felt the president had endorsed the stiff stance he subsequently assumed.

The State Department, with White House approval, instructed the U.S. ambassador in Moscow, Llewellyn (Tommy) Thompson, to see Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko and protest the East German attempts to change the procedures for U.S. access to East Berlin. Thompson conveyed the message on October 27. But his State Department instructions preceded and did not mention the tank confrontation. Gromyko, in turn, rejected this démarche and protested the repeated entry of armed American soldiers into East Berlin.

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On October 27, President Kennedy turned to a confidential back channel of communication with Khrushchev, bypassing the Soviet and U.S. embassies and foreign ministries. As noted, Robert Kennedy passed a message from the president to Khrushchev through his contact, Soviet embassy information attaché (and KGB colonel) Georgi Bolshakov. Robert Kennedy's account, posthumously disclosed, was this: "I got in touch with Bolshakov and said the President would like them to take their tanks out of there in twenty-four hours. He said he'd speak to Khrushchev and they took their tanks out in twenty-four hours. So he [Bolshakov] delivered effectively when it was a matter of importance." This contact has only been known to a few historians of the Berlin confrontation, in particular Peter Wyden and Michael Beschloss.

The incident that triggered the crisis, from the U.S. perspective, was the East German attempt on October 22 to obtain a display of identification from Lightner. The Soviets in

East Berlin, however, did not even know of this action until later, much less instigate it. Upon learning of the dispute, they did permit the East Germans to repeat the demands. Soviet leaders in Moscow, however, had not intended to test Western resolve, nor were they aware that the West saw the tank confrontation as such a test.

On the contrary, when U.S. activity escalated on October 25 with the arrival of 10 tanks, Soviet leaders saw confirmation of the military intelligence report that had arrived some four days earlier with allegations of an American plan to assault the Wall. Moreover, the timing seemed deliberate and sinister. First, the Soviet Communist Party Congress was in session, and the leadership had problems in other areas—in an internal dispute over de-Stalinization, and in the international communist movement, with both Albania and, more important, China. The time might have seemed opportune for the United States to open a "second front" while the Soviets were occupied elsewhere. Second, the Soviet Union had just made a major concession on Berlin itself, defusing the intensifying crisis of the preceding four months. As noted, on October 17, the opening day of the Congress, Khrushchev had removed the ultimatum demanding the resolution of the German problem by the end of the year. The United States, instead of reciprocating Soviet moderation, seemed to press its advantage.

Finally, underlying these considerations was the strategic context, marked by new U.S. assertiveness. On October 21, just one day before the Lightner episode, Deputy Defense Secretary Roswell Gilpatric, in a major Kennedy administration statement, exploded the "missile gap" and coolly affirmed vast U.S. strategic superiority, claiming that "we have a second strike capability which is at least as extensive as what the Soviets can deliver by striking first." Gilpatric not only deflated exaggerated Soviet claims of military superiority, but also Moscow's political expectations based on a changing "correlation of forces." And he specifically warned the Soviets over Berlin.

No one in Washington had the offensive strategy the Soviets discerned. Nor did any Americans realize that such was the perception

in Moscow. But even if incorrect, the Soviet view was reasonable, based on the information available to the leadership.

Khrushchev, in contrast to Kennedy, created an ad hoc brain trust on the crisis, almost prefiguring Kennedy's creation of an "ExComm" (Executive Committee of the National Security Council) a year later during the Cuban missile crisis. His advisers were Gromyko; senior Central Committee official Leonid Ilychev; party foreign affairs adviser Valentin Falin; Defense Minister Marshal Rodion Malinovsky; the chief of the Main Operations Directorate of the General Staff, Colonel General Semyon Ivanov; and the commander in East Germany, Marshal Konev. The Soviet plan was to meet and match U.S. moves—the United States was the apparent initiator and pace-setter in the crisis. The U.S. threat looked real: The appearance of tanks with bulldozer attachments seemed, along with the evidence of the mock "target" wall, to validate intelligence reports of U.S. and West German designs to knock down the Wall. Firm countermeasures seemed necessary—thus the stationing of armed Soviet tanks at the checkpoint on October 27.

Robert Kennedy, it is now clear, described the president's back-channel message to Khrushchev incompletely. Falin, a member of Khrushchev's brain trust in October 1961 and now chief of the International Department of the Communist party Central Committee, recently disclosed to this author more about this exchange. In the message, received late on October 27, President Kennedy did ask Khrushchev to remove the Soviet tanks—but only to do so first in the context of a mutual disengagement. Kennedy promised that if Khrushchev did so, the American tanks would withdraw in turn. Thus, instead of the somewhat improbable unilateral demand described by Robert Kennedy, the message was a plea from the president for mutual restraint and deescalation, asking Khrushchev to take the initial step. From Khrushchev's standpoint, the request delineated a reciprocal course of action compatible with Soviet objectives. Indeed, the withdrawal of the U.S. tanks would constitute a Soviet victory, removing the threat to the Wall.

On the morning of October 28, at about

10:30 a.m., some 16 hours after the confrontation at Checkpoint Charlie began, the 10 Soviet tanks withdrew. Khrushchev later described his decision in his memoir, though without revealing the secret exchange with President Kennedy. He said he ordered Konev to pull the tanks back, telling him:

> I'm sure that within twenty minutes or however long it takes them to get their instructions, the American tanks will pull back, too. They can't turn their tanks around and pull them back as long as our guns are pointing at them. They've gotten themselves into a difficult situation, and they don't know how to get out of it. They're looking for a way out, I'm sure. So let's give them one. We'll remove our tanks, and they'll follow our example.

Khrushchev explained his decision to initiate mutual deescalation to several foreigners, as well as in his taped memoir. His son Sergei said in an interview that his father had described the situation (a year before Rusk's similar remark) as one in which the two sides stood eyeball to eyeball, and he decided to take the first step back. Even then he did not disclose the clandestine deal with President Kennedy.

About half an hour after the Soviet tanks withdrew, only a little later than the 20 minutes Khrushchev claimed to have predicted, the American tanks departed. On October 27, the day before, President Kennedy had telephoned General Clay; it is now clear that Kennedy advised Clay that the Soviet side might withdraw its tanks and instructed him to follow suit promptly in that event.

No more tanks returned to the checkpoint, and no standoff resumed. Khrushchev's contention that he removed the tanks confident of a reciprocal U.S. response has heretofore been considered a belated invention or a lucky gamble. Now it is clear that Khrushchev had Kennedy's prior assurance, and the parallel withdrawals were the result of a tacit agreement to defuse the confrontation.

With this new information, the Soviet proclamation of triumph is comprehensible. In retrospect, it is also clear why some Soviets, including Falin, regarded this as perhaps the most dangerous confrontation of the Cold War. Such claims now make sense—a U.S. breach of the Berlin Wall would have violated a vital Soviet interest.

The Confrontation in Retrospect

The tank standoff at Checkpoint Charlie marked the last serious challenge of the Berlin crisis. Although minor incidents continued for some months, by April 1962 both Clay and (nine days later) Konev had been recalled. The outcome of the Cuban missile crisis the following October rendered unlikely the renewal of the Berlin crisis that a difficult outcome in Cuba would probably have presaged.

The revelation that Kennedy and Khrushchev used a back-channel exchange to defuse the confrontation at Checkpoint Charlie places their communication during the Cuban missile crisis in a new light. One year after the Berlin conflict, Khrushchev resorted to the same channel, asking Bolshakov to convey misleading assurances that the Soviet Union would not send missiles to Cuba. While this deceit damaged Khrushchev's credibility, the secret resolution of the Berlin crisis undoubtedly encouraged mutual confidence and facilitated communication during the Cuban conflict.

Three decades after the confrontation of Soviet and U.S. tanks at Checkpoint Charlie, new disclosures challenge the Western understanding of the crisis. There is therefore an opportunity for reflection not only on the conduct of yesterday's Cold War, but also on the lessons of that experience for future instances of crisis management. The absence of key information, largely—though not entirely—regarding the Soviet side of events, contributed most to previous misconceptions. At the same time, Kennedy administration officials were surprisingly reticent about the affair in their historical papers. The memoirs and accounts of Arthur Schlesinger, Walt Rostow, Roger Hilsman, Charles Bohlen, Dean Rusk, and Paul Nitze make no reference to the incident. Those of Theodore Sorensen, Pierre Salinger, McGeorge Bundy, Foy Kohler, and Martin Hillenbrand refer to it only fleetingly, as does Schlesinger's book on Robert Kennedy. Incidentally, Rusk, Bundy, and Sorensen were all unaware of Kennedy's use of the Bolshakov channel. Schlesinger discovered it only belatedly from unpublished notes of an interview with Robert Kennedy in 1964 by historian Robert

Bartlow Martin.

Why have veterans of the Kennedy administration ignored an incident some historians consider perilous? Since the Soviets appeared to cower before a display of U.S. force, why have American officials not gladly recalled the episode, in pride if nothing else? The answer seems to be that President Kennedy and his chief advisers, few of whom he closely consulted, regarded the crisis largely as the result of Clay's overreaction to minor harassments at the Berlin border. Clay, of course, was able to trigger the dispute only because Kennedy had called him to Berlin. Rusk's assessment may be typical: When I recently asked him about the incident, he referred to it as "the silly tank confrontation at Checkpoint Charlie brought on by the macho inclinations of General Clay."

Historians, on the other hand, have devoted considerable attention to the crisis, though most, as indicated, had to rely on incomplete Western sources. Those scholars of the Cold War include Peter Wyden, Norman Gelb, Robert Slusser, Jean Edward Smith, Curtis Cate, Howard Trivers, James McSherry, and John Newhouse; Wyden and Newhouse, who have written recently, have parts of the fuller story. But the most recent account, by far the best on this episode, is Michael Beschloss's *The Crisis Years: Kennedy and Khrushchev 1960–1963* (1991).

Clearly, it is Soviet *glasnost* that has allowed a far more accurate reconstruction of this Cold War confrontation. Without access to the Soviet perspective, scholars could never recount the complete story of the standoff at Checkpoint Charlie. This experience underscores the importance of encouraging full Soviet participation in the historiography of the Cold War.

Now that the narrative is complete, both political leaders and historians have a unique opportunity to learn from this episode. Politicians, for their part, ought to strive to understand the perspective of adversaries. In this instance, had either side understood the extent to which the other felt threatened, the mutual provocations might have stopped. The Berlin crisis also highlights the potential value of confidential communication between leaders—the Bolshakov channel was crucial to the

resolution of this confrontation. In addition, politicians should recognize the importance of tight managerial control. The unauthorized construction of the mock wall generated anxieties that the Kennedy administration could have avoided altogether.

Historians and analysts also have much to learn. Those who seek to reconstruct a situation must relentlessly pursue the perspective and interest of all parties, as well as the information available to all sides. To the detriment of their work, Western scholars of the Berlin crisis woefully lacked an appreciation of the Soviet viewpoint. Today's fuller account of this incident underscores the importance of detail—historians must work to supplement the documentary record, seeking, for example, intelligence information that is often sparse in declassified papers. Scholars hoping to penetrate the actual motivations of key figures must rise above prevailing assumptions and consider unorthodox approaches.

These ideas are hardly novel; nonetheless, historians and policymakers often fail to apply them. At Checkpoint Charlie, similar failures gave rise to a potentially explosive situation. The world, in retrospect, was fortunate to escape armed conflict. Recalling this episode may help drive its lessons home.