Berlin Shivers As Cold War Warriors Set to Clash: The Kennedy Administration’s Deterrence Policy in the Berlin Crisis of 1961

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Abstract

In order for a deterrence policy to be effective and credible, there needs to be a successful application of certain fundamental principles. Of these, one of the most important is perception. Perception, in this context, is defined as the neurological process of observation and interpretation. This dissertation examines the role of perception in the foreign policy making process during the Berlin Crisis of 1961. The focus is primarily on the actions of the two protagonists in the crisis, U.S. President John F. Kennedy and Soviet leader Nikita S. Khrushchev. The dissertation argues that Kennedy embarked upon an unprecedented U.S. deterrence policy, known as Flexible Response, to bolster his credibility as an enforcer of deterrence and a champion of the U.S. commitment to Berlin. Moreover, it is suggested that Kennedy's success in implementing the Flexible Response policy in the context of a highly volatile situation was to a great extent assisted by the Soviet leader's own perception of Kennedy's resolve. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to fully assess the foreign policy strategy of the U.S. or the U.S.S.R. on the European continent during the early 1960s. Instead, this dissertation aims to demonstrate that Kennedy astutely applied the necessary criteria of a successful deterrence policy. The evidence of this success is seen in Khrushchev's changing perception of the American leader during the course of the crisis. This changing perception was sufficiently credible to deter the Soviet leader from sanctioning a separate German peace treaty.
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Introduction

The Cold War era, from the end of the Second World War to the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, saw foreign relations between the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, become increasingly polarized. Richard Rosecrance asserts that deterrence was the key military doctrine of the post-Second World War era.\(^1\) The atmosphere in which deterrence was formally devised and employed was dominated by a tense hostility between the Soviet Union and the United States. In retrospect, the likelihood of a nuclear war between these two superpowers after 1945 has driven much interest in the psychology of deterrence.\(^2\) Theoretically, deterrence is best explained by, and most practically applied to, heightened bipolar confrontations, where vital commitments are at stake and where there is a capability for massive destruction.\(^3\) In the case of post-1945 U.S. foreign policy, the primary focus relied on projecting U.S. deterrent power across the Pacific in order to protect its political interests from Soviet ambitions.\(^4\) A focus on American foreign policy as one of the best examples for historically styled deterrence has shown the significance of ‘perception’ in decision-making pathologies for the conduct in, and outcome of, political crises.

Alexander George and Richard Smoke assert that at the heart of deterrence theory is the concept of a contingent threat.\(^5\) In other words, ‘if you do X to me, I shall do Y to you’. However, if an opponent expects the cost of Y to be greater than the benefits of X, he or she will refrain from doing Y. An opponent is therefore

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4 ibid, p.59.
deterred from carrying out an action. A deeper exploration of deterrence theory reveals that complex psychological issues are involved in the decision making process on both sides. Perception of another leader’s intentions and of their resolve is a pivotal element of policy-making. Deterrence situations can arise when these perceptions are incorrect. For example, what influences a potential aggressor’s understanding and/or perception of any deterrence threat? Deterrence policies are more complex than simply having a retaliatory threat in place. Instead, they involve policies and actions designed to ‘convince’ an adversary of the credibility of the available deterrent while at the same time questioning their perception about the effectiveness of any challenge. William Kaufmann, an influential deterrence theorist, has argued that commitments need to have ‘an air of credibility’ in order for deterrence to succeed. Furthermore, the reality of a vulnerable commitment is not a necessary pre-condition for a commitment to be challenged; rather that an aggressor has the perception that such a vulnerable commitment exists.

This corroborates the notion that deterrence succeeds or fails through the eyes of an aggressor. As such, it is necessary to determine the essential conditions in which an aggressor can be induced to perceive a deterrence policy as credible.

There are three essential conditions that emerge from the study of deterrence theory, which determine whether or not a deterrence policy can be

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perceived as credible. Firstly, commitments must be defined explicitly and overtly communicated. Secondly, a state must develop the means for realistic reprisals and a defence structure able to combat challenges. Thirdly, the state needs to demonstrate resolve to follow through on defending commitments. These essential conditions of deterrence offer a means of assessing the credibility of the commitments that are challenged. They also provide a template to measure how those actors involved perceived the vulnerability of the commitment they challenged.

There are generally considered to be two types of deterrence policy, immediate and general. Immediate deterrence is the conflict between two opposing states when one is seriously considering a challenge to their opponent’s commitment whilst the other is mounting a retaliatory threat to inhibit the aggressor. General deterrence refers to the maintenance of defence structures in order to regulate each party's intentions. Immediate deterrence can emerge when a state unintentionally induces a perception of weakness and irresolution in a potential aggressor’s mind. This can lead to the aggressor questioning the credibility of the state’s commitment and even forming a belief that the commitment will be abandoned when challenged. As a result, an immediate deterrence crisis can occur where general deterrence appears to be, or is, about to fail. In this context, it is crucial for the state to reassert its position on the

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13 Therefore, a commitment is said to be credible when it is clearly defined, potential challengers are aware of its presence and understand the risks involved, is sufficiently defended, poses a formidable threat to potential challengers, and the deterrer has demonstrated their resolve to maintain the status quo.


15 Ibid.
commitment in order to regain credibility. Deterrence theory assumes that credible commitments will not be challenged, unless done so intentionally to provoke conflict.\footnote{Richard Lebow, \textit{Between Peace and War}, p.83.} What is more, deterrence theorists argue that an aggressor updates their perception of defender credibility throughout any crisis.\footnote{Elli Lieberman, \textit{Reconceptualizing Deterrence: Nudging Towards Rationality in Middle Eastern Rivalries}, New York, Routledge Global Security Studies, 2013, p.23.} Thus immediate deterrence can succeed even after an initial credibility failure.

The U.S. reaction to the 1961 Berlin Crisis may be considered an example of immediate deterrence. The goal of the Western Allies, United States, Britain and France, as stipulated by a classified report from the Four-Power Working Group on Germany (including Berlin) on 10 February 1961, was ‘to prevent the Soviet Union from inducing states outside the Eastern Bloc to participate in a separate peace’.\footnote{Foy. D. Kohler, “Report of the four-power working group on Germany Including Berlin on Planning to Deal with a ‘separate Peace Treaty’ Between the Soviet Union and The ‘German Democratic Republic”, February 10, 1961, p.6.} Consequently, by aiming to directly prevent an impending challenge by the Soviets on the U.S. commitment to Berlin, this deterrence policy can be categorized as an immediate deterrent situation. This ultimately proved to be successful in preventing the Soviet Union from following through on a separate peace treaty.

As deterrence can be described as a psychological relationship, it is best analyzed at an individual level, through an exploration of the decision-making processes undertaken by those in power.\footnote{Patrick Morgan, \textit{Deterrence}, pp.148-149.} Consequently, this dissertation will analyze the psychological relationship between the two-superpower leaders in the post-1945 period. This involves examining decision-making processes in relation to their beliefs of each other’s resolve and strategies. It will focus not only on how perception or misperception can be a fundamental driver of foreign policy but also
on the impact that reliance on deterrence policies has on the understanding and the capability of influencing an adversary's perceptions on their own resolve.

Deterrence is largely a 'context dependent' study, involving an array of variables, many of which are moderately subjective, that are highly reliant on context.\textsuperscript{20} As such, when assessing the success of deterrence policies it is crucial to examine them at an individual case level. This dissertation will focus on the 1961 Berlin Crisis as a case study for examining the success of President Kennedy's \textit{Flexible Response} deterrence policy.

\textbf{Literature Review}

The political, economic and social impacts of the Cold War period, which are still in evidence today, have helped to generate a growing body of literature considering the psychology of foreign policy. Deterrence theory has emerged as one of the main doctrines of the Cold War era and the rise of thermonuclear arsenals has made contributions to this discipline all the more interesting and important.

One of the earliest scholars of this subject, William W. Kaufmann, developed an approach to assessing the criteria for general nuclear deterrence. In \textit{The Requirements of Deterrence} (1954), he identified three features that make a deterrence policy credible: cost, capability and resolve.\textsuperscript{21} Cost is the level of risk that a 'deterrer' has taken on and the personal price of disengagement. Capability is the ability to defend a commitment. Resolve is the demonstration and willingness of a deterrer to protect commitments from challenges. Although Kaufmann laid the foundations for studying deterrence theory, his approach

\textsuperscript{20} Alexander George and Richard Smoke, \textit{Deterrence}, p.54.
lacked a comprehensive assessment of the decision-making process, the context, and the motivation of the potential aggressor.

By the 1960s a new and deeper understanding of deterrence theory had developed, assisted by the scholarly contributions of writers such as Thomas Schelling, Thomas Milburn and Henry Kissinger. These writers stressed the importance of credibility as the key to deterrent success. In *The Necessity For Choice* (1960) Kissinger sought to expand Kaufmann’s three requirements of deterrence credibility and the conditions for successful deterrence. Kissinger concluded that the challenger must understand the choice between resisting and pressuring. Furthermore, the challenger should also be rational and thus make decisions based on self-interest. In addition, the implementation of the deterrent threat must be sufficiently realistic so that it is not taken as a bluff, and in light of self-interest, the adversary must conclude that the risks outweigh the benefits of an attack. These conditions, although useful, are still in relation to general deterrence where the use of nuclear weapons is the main source of deterrence. It does not take into account the conditions for implementing a deterrence policy after general deterrence has already failed.

In *The Strategy of Conflict* (1963), Thomas Schelling asserts that leaders obtain credibility for nuclear deterrence by encouraging a reputation of irrationality. In *Arms and Influence*, he emphasizes the importance of leaders being both vague in defining commitments and in what the activation path of the policy entails in order to enhance that deterrence. In other words, ‘leaving

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24 ibid.
something to chance’ will create the uncertainty needed to inhibit adversaries from challenging commitments for fear of undefined escalation. Since the 1970s, deterrence theorists have largely dismissed this assessment. Instead, there is a greater focus on the importance of clarity and explicitness for deterrence threats to be viable. This is most clearly seen in cases of immediate deterrence with the risk of mass nuclear destruction.

In his later work, *Arms and Influence*, Schelling suggests that bargaining becomes necessary in cases where the balance of power is more equal. As such, the process and the outcome of bargaining do not necessarily rely on military capabilities, but instead on 'bargaining power'. Therefore, the leader who appears to be more willing to suffer physical, emotional and/or economical losses holds a position of strength in achieving the desired outcome, rather than the leader who has the greatest power to inflict force.

Schelling’s approach to deterrence can be applied to the psychology of nuclear standoffs where nuclear weapon superiority purely in numerical terms does not necessarily mean a superior bargaining position. This idea has been further developed by Alexander George and Richard Smoke who assert that raw capabilities between the United States and the Soviet Union were not as important as their perceptions of each other's intentions and willingness to endure.

During the 1960s some intellectuals also began to consider the limitations of deterrence strategies. In the book, *The Concept of Deterrence: Some Logical*

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28 Alexander George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence*, p.64, dismisses this and instead finds that it is necessary to communicate explicitly the full formulation of a state’s intention to protect a commitment; Richard Lebow, *Between Peace and War*, pp.86-87, find that deterrence commitments need to be overt and explicit to be able to be successfully.
30 ibid, pp.1-9.
31 Alexander George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence*, p.53.
and Psychological Considerations, Thomas Milburn suggests that deterrence as a military doctrine can only exist within violent confrontation.\textsuperscript{33} He proposes that, below the threshold of nuclear threats, ‘deterrence has little effect or significance’.\textsuperscript{34} This assessment on the limitations of deterrence does not consider the possibility of a flexible deterrence policy. Later works have stressed the importance of deterrence policies having flexibility to meet challengers below the nuclear threshold.\textsuperscript{35}

Building on Kissinger’s conditions for successful deterrence, Yehoshafat Harkabi suggests three criteria for deterrence success in his work \textit{Nuclear War and Nuclear Peace} (1966). The retaliatory threat must be communicated to the adversary, the strategy must have credibility in order for the adversary to believe the retaliation will be carried out and the adversary must be rational to reasonably weigh the gains against the risks of a challenge.\textsuperscript{36}

Harkabi further divides the concept of credibility into intentions and capability, both of which need to be demonstrated and achieved in order to be successful in deterring the adversary.\textsuperscript{37} Christopher Bertram in \textit{Strategic Deterrence in a Changing Environment} (1981) supports this assessment concluding that deterrence is the product of credibility and capability.\textsuperscript{38} However, the concept that increasing the level of punishment that a defender can inflict on a challenger will increase credibility is not necessarily reliable as more recent

\textsuperscript{33} Thomas Milburn, \textit{The Concept of Deterrence}, p.4.
\textsuperscript{34} ibid.
\textsuperscript{36} Yehoshafat Harkabi, \textit{Nuclear War}, pp.9-25.
\textsuperscript{37} ibid.
\textsuperscript{38} Christopher Bertram, \textit{Strategic Deterrence}, p.7.
theorists, like Robert McCalla (1992), argue that it is the belief of escalation and belief of response that matter, rather than the reality of destructive power.  

In *Rationality in Deterrence* (1968), Stephan Maxwell has explored the idea that 'commitments to be respected cannot inhibit an adversary's vital interests'. This is of particular interest when considering the events surrounding the 1961 Berlin Crisis. By not challenging the construction of the Berlin Wall, Kennedy allowed Khrushchev the opportunity to respect the U.S. West Berlin Commitment as it accommodated Soviet concerns over the mass exodus of East German refugees.

By the 1970s, deterrence situations became more segregated. In *Deterrence: A Conceptual Analysis*, (1977), Patrick M. Morgan differentiates between two main types of deterrence, that is, general and immediate. This interpretation can help explain how deterrence is applied in long-standing tensions or within a crisis context. This differentiation saw scholars focus on the requirements for deterrence to function effectively during a crisis. By studying events such as the Cuban Missile Crisis, deterrence theorists are able to examine the conditions under which an immediate deterrence situation operates.

More recent attempts to assess the validity of deterrence continue to stress the importance of credibility. However, these re-assessments of the effectiveness of deterrence strategy illustrate a shift towards policies that have a flexible yet firm approach. In *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (1974), George and Smoke attempt to fill the gap of applying deterrence to challenges below the nuclear threshold.

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42 Patrick Morgan, *Deterrence*, p.28.
They argue that when deterrence is placed in a wider context, challenges below overt attacks, described as ‘probes’, can be seen as attempts by adversaries to test a state’s resolve.\textsuperscript{43} It is important for states to meet these probes in order to demonstrate their resolve to act in the defence of their commitments.

George and Smoke also focus on the motivation and process of the U.S. government’s long-held strategy of projecting their deterrence policies to protect third-party nations by means of preclusion. They identify three conditions for the success of projecting deterrence policies across borders. These include having an absolute formulation of one’s intent to protect interests, the acquisition of means to back up this intent and the communication of intent to the potential challenger.\textsuperscript{44} However, other theorists suggest that having clear demonstrations of resolve is the key to the successful application of deterrence.\textsuperscript{45}

In \textit{Flexibility and Commitments in International Conflicts} (1978), Charles Lockhart argues that a flexible deterrence policy is not always contradictory. He contends that deterrence policies that rely on their firm determination not to submit to pressure can have flexible components to enhance credibility.\textsuperscript{46} Glenn Synder and Paul Diesing further develop this idea in their work \textit{Conflict Among Nations} (1977) by discussing the importance of having a deterrence policy that demonstrates determination to uphold and defend commitments whilst also allowing for accommodations of adversarial tensions.\textsuperscript{47} They argue this is

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{43} Alexander George and Richard Smoke, \textit{Deterrence}, p.58.
\item \textsuperscript{44} ibid, p.64.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Richard Lebow, Between Peace and War, p.97; Terrence Roehrig, \textit{From Deterrence to Engagement: The US Defense Commitment to South Korea}, Lexington books: Plymouth, 2007, pp.18-19.
\end{itemize}
applicable to situations where the adversary has a vital share in the commitment and as a result attempts to change the status quo to their advantage.\textsuperscript{48}

Scholars continue to debate the requirements of deterrence, including the notion that commitments need to be defined explicitly and overtly communicated to adversaries. Richard Lebow (1984) stresses the importance of commitments being clearly defined and communicated to adversaries through a number of channels.\textsuperscript{49} He argues that a commitment has no deterrent value unless the adversary is aware of 'the full scope and dimensions of the commitment'.\textsuperscript{50}

Bruce Russet and Paul Huth are influential scholars in the study of deterrence theory. During the 1980s they contributed to the growing body of knowledge in works such as \textit{Deterrence Failure and Crisis Escalation} (1988) and \textit{What Makes Deterrence Work? Cases from 1900-1980} (1984). Russet and Huth suggested that deterrence is likely to succeed in cases where immediate forces favour the defender.\textsuperscript{51}

This analysis contrasts with other interpretations of deterrence particular in the nuclear age, which is considered from 1945 to the dawn of the twenty-first century.\textsuperscript{52} Most contemporary theorists argue that reality of immediate forces matter little when each side has amassed nuclear arsenals and the case for escalation far exceeds contained pre-atomic wars.\textsuperscript{53} Although deterrence requires the capability to defend commitments, the reality of having superior force matters

\textsuperscript{49} These channels can include public, private, 'back channels', and indirectly through leaking information: Richard Lebow, \textit{Between Peace and War}, pp.88-89.
\textsuperscript{50} ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} Robert McCalla, \textit{Uncertain Perceptions}, p.16; Alexander George and Richard Smoke, \textit{Deterrence}, p.53.
\textsuperscript{53} ibid.
little if challengers doubt the willingness of defenders to use them.\textsuperscript{54} Furthermore, in the case of nuclear crisis, immediate force in the form of conventional warfare acts more like tripwire that if crossed carries the threat of escalation.\textsuperscript{55} As a result, having superior conventional forces can be seen as outdated as a requirement for successful deterrence.

Robert Jervis, Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein have all contributed to a deeper understanding of the psychology of deterrence. In \textit{Psychology and Deterrence} (1989), they explore the psychological aspects of deterrence theory by examining the relationship between decision-makers’ emotions, perceptions and motivations as well as domestic political needs.

This analysis, with contributions from Patrick Morgan and Jack Snyder, is critical of the reliance by early deterrence theorists on surface assessment of each actor's cost-benefit calculations.\textsuperscript{56} Instead, they argue that an aggressor’s perceptions play a key role in the emergence of an immediate deterrence situation.\textsuperscript{57}

In \textit{Between Peace and War: The Nature of International Crisis} (1984), Richard N. Lebow explores the requirements of deterrence through an examination of why adversaries challenge deterrence policies. He examines deterrence by focusing on the perspective and decision-making processes of the aggressor rather than the deterrer.\textsuperscript{58} He applies this framework to crises of the twentieth century, including the 1948-49 Berlin Crisis and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Although his work offers valuable conclusions about the source and dynamics of international crises, including useful criteria for deterrence, the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{54} Alexander George and Richard Smoke, \textit{Deterrence}, p.53.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Thomas Schelling, \textit{Arms and Influence}, p.99.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Robert Jervis, Richard Lebow, and Janice Stein, \textit{Psychology and Deterrence}, pp. vii-x.
\item \textsuperscript{57} ibid, p.1-3.
\item \textsuperscript{58} Richard Lebow, \textit{Between Peace and War}, pp.ix-xi.
\end{itemize}
practical requirements of a credible deterrence policy are vague when applied to specific case studies.\textsuperscript{59}

The assumption of rationality on the part of the potential aggressors to estimate the risks versus the benefits that will arise from challenging the commitment is a consistent theme throughout the theorization of deterrence.\textsuperscript{60} Another major assumption advocated by many theorists is that challenges between nuclear powers, due to the unacceptable costs involved, will not intentionally provoke war, stopping just short of it.\textsuperscript{61}

Although there has been extensive research and examination of the criteria for projecting a credible deterrent, applying this framework to the 1961 Berlin Crisis has been relatively superficial. While there have been attempts to assess the crisis from a psychological approach, a systematic assessment of the 1961 Berlin Crisis based on the three main criteria of deterrence has been unsatisfactory. As a result, this dissertation endeavours to expand the understanding of the 1961 Berlin Crisis as an immediate deterrence success by applying a deterrence theoretical framework.

The foreign policy strategies of the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. during the 1960s became increasingly entwined, to the extent that U.S. foreign policies became positively reactive to perceived Soviet aggression.\textsuperscript{62} This is particularly true of the Kennedy administration’s \textit{Flexible Response} policy, which was a reaction against a Soviet move to gain unilateral concessions on Berlin by a strategy of pressure and intimidation.\textsuperscript{63} Kennedy explained his new flexible approach to Congress on 28

\textsuperscript{59}Richard Lebow, \textit{Between Peace and War}, p.229.
\textsuperscript{63}ibid.
March 1961, stating its purpose was to 'deter all wars, general or limited, nuclear or conventional, large or small'. Flexible Response was formulated with the intention of meeting this challenge and as an answer for the apparent failings of the Eisenhower administration's Massive Retaliation doctrine. In Kennedy's Flexible Response policy, the motivation behind a crisis was seen as a pathway to its resolution. Consequently, Flexible Response can be considered an immediate deterrence strategy, as it was aimed at inhibiting the challenge on their commitment and posing a credible threat if continued.

The political tensions that defined more than a generation ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989. The pieces of wall that remain stand as a reminder of how the city of Berlin, at one time, was considered the most dangerous place on Earth. Throughout the 20th century, no other city held as much weight as Berlin.

The famous quote, later popularized by Vladimir Lenin, 'Whoever controls Berlin controls Germany and whoever controls Germany controls Europe' is often cited as an evidence of the city's importance. Its geographic location and strategic political significance meant that the fate of Berlin was a defining feature of the Cold War period. It was the epicenter of the manifestation of Soviet and U.S. mutual suspicion and apprehension. It was caught up in crisis, from Stalin's

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67 Berlin was at the center of both the First and the Second World Wars and again during the Cold War in Europe. During the Cold War, the fate of Berlin was linked to the freedom and liberty of the West, with Presidents like Kennedy continually stressing its importance.
69 It was considered both geographically and strategically central, as it was physically where the occupying sectors met as well as representing Germany's division.

The alliance between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. during the Second World War has often been labelled as a ‘marriage of convenience’.\textsuperscript{70} After the defeat of the common enemy, the alliance broke down, allowing simmering tensions to come to the surface. The result was a city divided, East and West Berlin, with no mutually agreeable formal unification treaty in place to settle the Berlin problem. Although Britain and France shared control of the Western sector, it is often considered a primarily American venture. The chief source of tension between the West and East was the recognition of East Germany’s sovereignty and the control it had over access to Berlin. The 1961 Berlin crisis stands as a hallmark for Cold War historians, and more recently it has attracted political scientists to scrutinise the events that led to the building of the Berlin Wall.\textsuperscript{71}

It was the crisis that brought the tensions of the post-war era to a boil, or as Kennedy put it, Berlin was ‘a focal point where our solemn commitments ... and Soviet ambitions now meet in basic confrontation’.\textsuperscript{72}

President John F. Kennedy fundamentally rejected John Foster Dulles and Dwight D. Eisenhower’s \textit{Massive Retaliation} doctrine, advocating instead what

\textsuperscript{70} Historians have looked back on the Grand Alliance between the West, Britain, France, and the United States, and the Soviet Union as an alliance based on a common goal, to defeat Nazi Germany. They put aside their ideological conflicts until the common enemy was defeated and the alliance, ‘marriage of convenience’, fell away with no common purpose.


came to be termed as *Flexible Response*. It was a doctrine that raised the nuclear threshold through preparedness and willingness to mount a substantial conventional defence and use nuclear weapons as a way to control escalation. Kennedy sought ways in which to convey to Khrushchev that his administration would be no less resolute than the former administration regarding the American commitment to remain in and protect the freedom of West Berlin, whilst simultaneously seeking a *modus vivendi* with them as a long-term goal.

The Vienna Conference on 4 June 1961 was an opportunity for President Kennedy to lay the foundations of a new era of calm in U.S./U.S.S.R. relations. However, Khrushchev approached the summit with brutal confidence, intending to intimidate the new president into unilateral concessions on the U.S. position in Berlin. Having taken office just four months prior, and in the wake of the Bay of Pigs embarrassment, Kennedy came to the conference in a position of weakness. While Khrushchev, whose nation had just sent the first person into space, felt convinced of his ability to intimidate his apparently inferior opponent and intended to capitalise on this confidence, for Khrushchev, the conference would herald the resumption of his ambition to integrate West Berlin into the German Democratic Republic. Khrushchev wore Kennedy down with a tirade of U.S. failures and continuous provocative outbursts. After the summit the embattled President was handed Khrushchev’s aide-memoire, outlining an ultimatum on the

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73 Although Eisenhower was content that the risk of nuclear reprisals was sufficient enough to deter Khrushchev from any confrontational moves in Berlin, Kennedy was not convinced that the threat of preemptive use of nuclear deterrence was sufficiently credible or wise. See James Richardson, *Crisis Diplomacy*, p.210.

74 ibid.


settlement of Germany’s unification with a six-month deadline. The aide-memoire crisis of 1961 can be considered as resulting from the Soviet leader’s apparent reading of a failing U.S. deterrence posture.

It was designed to generate a crisis that targeted this perceived failing as a way to pressure the U.S. into concessions.\textsuperscript{79} The document listed eight points defining the nature, timeline and the options available to the U.S. in responding to the Soviet demands for a German peace treaty.\textsuperscript{80} The key point of concern for the Kennedy administration was the ultimatum that the U.S. must accept unilateral concessions on their position in Berlin or the Soviet Union would sign a separate treaty with the East German Government on unilateral Soviet terms where, under the proposed peace treaty, all Western ‘commitments stemming from Germany’s surrender would become invalid. This would include all institutions, occupation rights, and access to Berlin, including the corridors’.\textsuperscript{81} It was received by the Kennedy administration as a challenge on their commitment to West Berlin. This tactic was not unique to Khrushchev, however the unique motivation for the resumption of pressuring the U.S. and following response to the deadline crisis is the primary focus to this dissertation. Khrushchev’s challenge motivated Kennedy to introduce his \textit{Flexible Response} policy as a reinvigorated U.S. deterrence strategy.\textsuperscript{82}

This dissertation will not assess the wider context of the Western alliance. Rather the focus remains on the decisions made by the Kennedy administration.

\textsuperscript{79} Alexander George and Richard Smoke, \textit{Deterrence}, p.417.
\textsuperscript{82} Michael O’Brien, \textit{Rethinking Kennedy}, p.128.
This will allow for a deeper exploration of the psychology behind the decision-making processes.

Furthermore, this dissertation will not consider the Cuban Missile Crisis as this event does not fit within the theoretical framework being explored and could distract from a fuller assessment of the 1961 Berlin Crisis. As Khrushchev later recalled ‘the main thing was that the installation of our missiles in Cuba would, I thought, restrain the United States from the precipitous military action against Castro’s government’.\textsuperscript{83} As such, the Cuba crisis was a Soviet attempt to balance out ICBM capabilities between the two superpowers as a way to bolster general deterrence, not immediate.\textsuperscript{84}

This dissertation aims to judge whether the 1961 Berlin Crisis can be considered as a U.S. deterrence success based on the extent to which the Kennedy administration successfully employed the three key criteria of deterrence theory during the crisis. It will seek to establish that a new and immediate deterrence crisis occurred as a result of a failure of the \textit{Massive Retaliation} general deterrence policy. The \textit{Flexible Response} policy was designed to tackle Khrushchev’s dangerous perception and through this policy the president communicated his administration’s policy and position on Berlin overtly and explicitly. Furthermore he acquired and developed the means necessary to pose a formidable threat to any challenge on his commitment.\textsuperscript{85}

Finally, Kennedy successfully demonstrated the resolve of his administration to follow through on any challenge to the U.S. commitment in Berlin. The \textit{Flexible Response} policy was a distinctive strategy aimed at enhancing

\textsuperscript{84} ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{85} Joseph Siracusa and David Coleman, \textit{Scaling the Nuclear Ladder}, p.285.\end{flushleft}
the U.S. deterrence posture. It can be considered as a successful deterrence policy as it fulfilled the three main criteria for projecting a credible deterrence and as a result maintained the status quo of the U.S. commitment to Berlin.

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Chapter One

The Bear and the Eagle: Perception as a Fundamental Driver of Foreign Policy

Perception and Deterrence

The more attention the 1961 Berlin Crisis receives from historians and political scientists the more the role of perception has become paramount to the study. When practicing deterrence, perception is inextricably linked, where it is considered a fundamental driver of foreign policy.\(^1\) It is the balance of the psychological relationship between the deterrer and the challenger, where perception surpasses reality in the decision-making process.\(^2\) A guide to the cognitive processes of the challenger is a vital asset to policy-makers when operating an effective deterrence policy.\(^3\) Foreign policy decision-makers require a clear understanding of how a specific opponent perceives their commitments and how this opponent makes political judgments, in order to tailor their deterrence stance appropriately.\(^4\) However, as these cognitive maps are often unreliable or not always available, the deterrer compensates by focusing on their own state’s reputation in relation to their commitments, particularly when nuclear annihilation is at stake.\(^5\) As a result, to fill the uncertainty of the opponent’s objective, ‘one will reinforce, by whatever means necessary, a reputation that seeks to minimize misjudgment’.\(^6\)

President Kennedy relied on his understanding of Khrushchev’s political cognitive processes whilst also bolstering his own political reputation in order to

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\(^2\) Terrence Roehrig, *From Deterrence to Engagement*, p.15.
\(^3\) Patrick Morgan, “Saving Face For the Sake of Deterrence”, p.133.
\(^4\) ibid.
\(^5\) ibid.
\(^6\) ibid, pp.133-134.
effectively reinforce his deterrence policy during the 1961 Berlin Crisis. This may be seen as an attempt to avoid any misjudgment that might lead the two superpowers to the brink over Berlin. Many in the U.S. government understood that during the post 1945 period, image was pivotal to deterrence policymaking.\(^7\) In addition, Kennedy was known to be generally uneasy about utilizing nuclear weapons.\(^8\) As such, these factors were instrumental in bringing about a reinvigorated, more flexible deterrence policy.\(^9\) Perception of will and determination of resolve can either enforce a deterrence policy, or lead to its failure.\(^10\) George and Smoke, assert that while both sides in this superpower test of wills had ample raw capabilities, the attention should be focused on their 'perceived' intentions.\(^11\) They emphasize the concept of credible commitments. In other words, it is not whether commitments are necessarily sufficiently protected and fixed, but rather if the atmosphere of resolve that surrounds them is relatively convincing and apparent. It is the 'atmosphere of resolve' that allows them to be readily deterrable to potential challengers.\(^12\)

Thus, it is the perception of the deterrer’s will and resolve that dictates whether or not a commitment will be challenged. For Premier Khrushchev and President Kennedy, perception of resolve became a focus in their actions and counteractions during the 1961 Berlin Crisis. For Nikita Khrushchev, it was the

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7 Patrick Morgan, “Saving Face For the Sake of Deterrence”, pp.137-139.
9 Patrick Morgan, “Saving Face For the Sake of Deterrence”, p.148; American Foreign Policy: Current Documents 1961. Part I, Principles and Objectives of American Foreign Policy, Doc.8. "We Have No Alternative But to Deal With the World as it is and to Address Ourselves to the Problems That Actually Confront Us": Address by the Under Secretary of States (Bowles) at a Regional Foreign Policy Briefing Conference, Kansas City, Missouri, October 26, 1961 (Excerpts), *Department of State Historical Office Bureau of Public Affairs*, New York, Arno Press, 1971, p.47.
12 Ibid.
negative perception of Kennedy’s resolve that drove his brinkmanship policies. Conversely, as Kennedy identified the perception Khrushchev held of him, he was able to address Khrushchev’s pressure tactics by correcting the flaws and reinforcing the then current U.S. deterrence approach to the Berlin issue. This recognition was in line with the key component of immediate deterrence, where Morgan asserts one state must be planning a challenge and the other must recognize this intention and understand the motivation behind it. This awareness and effort resulted in a shift of perception for Khrushchev and a change in his stance over Berlin.

For strategic deterrence, the concept of resolve is crucial and has two main components when assessing its credibility. First, a state’s reputation for enforcing strategic deterrence is heavily judged on past actions. Reputation is defined as ‘the culmination of judgments on someone’s character, which is then used to predict future behavior’. Reputation is crucial to the credibility of a leader’s ability to conduct foreign policy effectively, as Schelling asserts, ‘what one does today in a crisis affects what one can be expected to do tomorrow’. The second aspect is the state’s apparent intention and perceived determination with regard to commitments. Therefore, a leader’s actual resolve is far less important to deterrence than the perception of their resolve to preserve their foreign commitments.

14 Michael O’Brien, Rethinking Kennedy, p.128.
15 Patrick Morgan, Deterrence, p.36.
17 Elli Lieberman, Reconceptualizing Deterrence, p.25.
18 Thomas Schelling, Arms and Influence, p.93.
19 Richard Lebow, Between Peace and War, p.89.
Credibility as a leader is based on perception rather than reality. Perception theorist, Robert McCalla explains this phenomenon in international crises in the following way:

In trying to explain why a person takes an umbrella in the morning, it is irrelevant to the explanation of this behaviour whether or not it rains that day or even if there was any objective (true) likelihood of rain. All that matters for the explanation is that the person thought there was a chance of rain.20

Consequently, just the perception of weakness in the face of an external threat can seriously diminish the authority and credibility of a leader.21 Brinkmanship, originally popularized by John Foster Dulles, has become linked to a policy of manipulating the shared risks of war in order to prove an adversary’s relative lack of resolve, or even significance.22 A 'brinkmanship' crisis occurs when a state intentionally challenges a central commitment of an adversary in the hope of compelling the adversary to back away from its obligation.23 For brinkmanship to occur, the aggressor must perceive that a vulnerable commitment exists and it is caused, in part, by the failure of the challenged nation to make a commitment sufficiently credible.24 As a result, deterrence and brinkmanship policies are intertwined through this relationship, when the failure of one may result in the emergence of the other.

Therefore, deterrence consists of manipulating the opposing state's assessment of interests and seeks to prevent a specified behaviour by convincing the potential aggressor that the costs involved outweigh any benefits that might come from embarking upon a policy of brinkmanship.25 The 1961 Berlin Crisis is a

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20 Robert McCalla, *Uncertain Perceptions*, p.16.
22 ibid, p.57.
23 ibid.
good example of this intertwined relationship, as the deterrent structure of American's Berlin commitment failed to be perceived as sufficiently credible by the U.S.S.R. Khrushchev was thus encouraged by this perception to embark on a policy of brinkmanship to gain Soviet concessions.

**Khrushchev’s Perception of Kennedy**

In June 1957, Khrushchev’s political rivals, Malenkov and Molotov, united in an attempt to remove him from power. The attempted coup d’état failed and the two men were removed from the Soviet leader’s inner circle. With no effective challengers left to question his actions, Khrushchev was officially recognized in March 1958 as the undisputed head of the Soviet government. For the first time since March 1953, a sole Soviet leader had achieved enough power to rule autonomously, which proved to have a destabilizing effect. However, Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali suggest that ‘enthralled by his colorful gestures and barraged humor, observers of this impetuous and erratic man generally missed the strategist inside. For all the bluster, there was a consistency of goals’. These goals included the economic utopia he envisioned would come from a grand settlement with the U.S.

Khrushchev imagined a grand settlement with the United States that would demilitarize the Cold War, enabling him to redirect Soviet resources to the civilian economy and restrict the East West conflict to ideological and economical realms. Confident of the advantages of Marxism-Leninism, he blamed his

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27 Michael Beschloss, *The Crisis Years*, p.45.
29 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
economic troubles on Stalin’s excesses and the military contest with the West and thus looked for a resolution on Berlin that would mollify the West and allow for domestic economic concentration.\textsuperscript{33} However this grand settlement had to be on his terms in order to stabilize and secure his position as leader of the Soviet Union. It was clear that this grand settlement Khrushchev envisioned was beyond his grasps. The nature of the Cold War conflict and the fact that Khrushchev never appreciated the fear of appeasement Americans held, derived from the Munich disaster, would not see significant gains to demilitarization until the Gorbachev era. However, according to Aleksandr Furenko and Timothy Naftali, “what varied was his strategy for attaining this settlement.” Where, “Khrushchev alternated between trying to seduce the West and scheming to scare it”.\textsuperscript{34} However, after failing to intimidate Eisenhower, Khrushchev postponed his challenge on Berlin’s post World War Two status quo until the arrival of a new U.S. administration.

Evidence of Khrushchev’s paranoia about retaining absolute power can be seen in his tendency to make foreign affair decisions independently of the Presidium.\textsuperscript{35} Thirty-five years after the overthrow attempt by Malenkov and Molotov, the 1962 Moscow party boss Nikolai Yegorychev stated:

You have to understand that the Presidium hadn’t changed much from Stalin’s time. Anyone who dared come out against Khrushchev would have to leave the Presidium, everyone understood this perfectly. Could anyone say directly to Khrushchev, ‘You’re wrong’? No one would have dared.\textsuperscript{36}

Yegorychev further stated that, ‘he [Khrushchev] overestimated himself, developed an inflated sense of himself as if he knew it all, considered his opinion beyond any reproach’.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{33} Aleksandr Furenko and Timothy Naftali, \textit{Khrushchev’s Cold War}, p.540.
\textsuperscript{34} ibid, p.541.
\textsuperscript{35} William Taubman, \textit{Khrushchev}, p.364.
\textsuperscript{36} William Taubman interview with Nikolai Yegorychev, June 2000, as seen in William Taubman, \textit{Khrushchev}, p.364.
\textsuperscript{37} Furthermore, Anastas Mikoyan, \textit{Soviet statesmen under Khrushchev}, asserts ‘after 1957 Khrushchev believed he did not have to reckon with anyone, that everyone would just agree with him’ Nikolai Yegorychev, “Napravlen Poslom,”
Georgy Kornienk, a Soviet diplomat from the time, asserts that the Khrushchev era can be divided into two: before and after 1958. After 1958 Khrushchev stopped consulting and surrounded himself with ‘yes-men’.38 According to William Taubman, as Khrushchev sat alone at the top, his supremacy became his biggest blunder.39 No longer constrained by any effective opposition, he was free to act on issues of which he knew very little, to consult or not as he pleased and to introduce significant policy on impulse.40 As a result, Khrushchev’s foreign policy was a reflection of his temperament: that is, assertive, ambitious, confident and, at times, reckless.41 This led to policies characterized by coercive diplomacy, brinkmanship and ignoring the advice of colleagues who advised caution.42 Khrushchev’s political persona was undoubtedly a major factor in decision making during this period, given the concentrated nature of power within the U.S.S.R.43 The Soviet Union’s foreign strategies were at the mercy of Khrushchev’s perception and inclination towards brinkmanship, making an examination of his motivation a key factor when assessing Kennedy’s decision to reinvigorate U.S. deterrence policy.

Khrushchev focused much of his attention on the character of Western leaders.44 For example, he believed Winston Churchill was ‘an arsonist and a militarist’, Harry Truman was an ‘aggressive man and a fool’ and Dean Acheson was ‘a political half-wit’.45 Khrushchev’s individual perception of adversaries in

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39 ibid, p.366.
40 ibid.
41 Paul Marantz, “Internal Politics and Soviet Foreign Policy”, p.142.
43 Paul Marantz, “Internal Politics and Soviet Foreign Policy”, p.142.
45 Although Marxism-Leninism dictated that economic imperatives should drive policy, Khrushchev concentrated instead on his perception of Western leader’s characteristics. He was often crude and belligerent in the way he attempted to
the international sphere was pivotal to how he formulated foreign strategies and decisions, particularly towards the U.S. As a result, Khrushchev’s perception of Kennedy’s resolve as a weak enforcer of U.S. deterrence on the Berlin commitment was critical in his brinkmanship strategy over Berlin in 1961.

Khrushchev had a number of reasons to perceive the West had a weakening commitment to Berlin. Of the many contributing factors that influenced Khrushchev’s perception of the West, the two that appear to have been most influential were the loss of the nuclear ‘hardliner’ John Foster Dulles, Eisenhower’s Secretary of State, and the perceived character of the new U.S. administration. Khrushchev believed that President Eisenhower was ‘much too dependent on his advisors’, particularly Dulles, described by Khrushchev as Eisenhower’s shadow. Khrushchev considered Dulles to be the architect of Eisenhower’s Massive Retaliation policies. Indeed, during the Geneva summit of July 1955, Khrushchev said Eisenhower was ‘like a dutiful schoolboy taking his lead from his teacher... it certainly appeared that Eisenhower was letting Dulles do his thinking for him’. Thus, while Eisenhower seemed weak, Khrushchev perceived Dulles as his staunchest opponent. Khrushchev summarized his feelings during the 1958-59 Berlin Crisis by saying,

Eisenhower was very much under the influence of Dulles, an aggressive man who had a physical revulsion against the Soviet Union and an ideological hatred for everything new, everything communist, everything socialist.

46 Paul Marantz, “Internal Politics and Soviet Foreign Policy”, p.142; William Taubman, Khrushchev, p.331.
47 Alexander George and Richard Smoke, Deterrence, p.419.
48 Nikita S. Khrushchev, Khrushchev Remembers, p.102.
Dulles’ death from cancer in 1959 was a massive blow to the credibility of the *Massive Retaliation* deterrent policy, one that Kennedy struggled to mend.\(^{51}\)

Khrushchev narrowed in on Kennedy’s character, believing it to be critical to deciding which strategy he would embark upon to realize his grand settlement.\(^ {52}\) Khrushchev knew very little about Kennedy, as a man or as a politician.\(^ {53}\) Shortly after Kennedy became the leader of the Democratic Party in 1960, Soviet officials in Washington compiled a profile for Khrushchev on the young nominee. According to the report, Kennedy would not go out on a limb politically and that unlike previous administrations Kennedy would grant the possibility of a mutually acceptable settlement, in joint efforts to avoid nuclear war.\(^ {54}\) The transcript contains the following sentence, which has been underlined,\(^ {55}\) ‘Kennedy, in principle, is in favor of talks with the Soviet Union, rejecting as “too fatalistic” the opinion that "you can't trust" the Soviet Union, that it "doesn't observe treaties", and so on’.\(^ {56}\) It appeared that, for the first time since President Roosevelt’s administration, the Soviet Union was witnessing a U.S. leader not chained to a set of adverse preconceived conceptions about the U.S.S.R.\(^ {57}\) The report also suggested that Kennedy was capable of, and inclined towards, making, ‘the final decision on serious problems himself, not entrusting this function to his underlings’.\(^ {58}\)

\(^{51}\) Alexander George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence*, p.419.


\(^{53}\) ibid, p.239.


\(^{55}\) It has been suggested that Khrushchev drew the line as he read through the document, Vladislav Zubok, *Inside The Kremlins Cold War*, p.239.


\(^{57}\) Vladislav Zubok, *Inside The Kremlins Cold War*, p.239.

The 1961 U.S. Presidential election offered Khrushchev the possibility of a new, more open-minded administration and a malleable young President who could be pressured into a Soviet-friendly resolution on Berlin. This perception of ambiguity and weakness encouraged Khrushchev's brinkmanship and the new President Kennedy did little to dissuade this perception by allowing his deterrence approach to falter during the Bay of Pigs incident.  

For Khrushchev, the U.S. nuclear deterrent under Kennedy's leadership did not appear credible. Historians Richard Lebow and Janice Stein assert that U.S. missile capabilities mattered little to Khrushchev as long as he doubted Kennedy's resolve to defend his Berlin commitment when it came to the ultimate cost. Kennedy's youth and swift rise to power suggested to Khrushchev that he might be a simpler opponent to manipulate than those that he had previously challenged and he intended to capitalize on this. The fact that Kennedy was the son of a millionaire had not gone unnoticed by the Soviet leader. Khrushchev had remarked upon this more than once and as a believer of Marxism-Leninism, this fact did not sit well with him. As an older man from a humble background, Khrushchev assumed that he would be more than a match for a rich young boy, who had 'known nothing of struggle and sacrifice'. Moreover, he wanted to meet and influence the President before his policies were firmly in place.

A K.G.B. report from 31 May 1961 stated that Kennedy was 'unlikely to possess the qualities of an outstanding person', which further contributed to

\[60\] The Bay of Pigs invasion took place on 17 to 19 April 1961. It was a failed invasion by Central Intelligence Agency operatives to aid a counter-revolutionary military attempt to depose Fidel Castro. The invasion was humiliatingly defeated within three days, with Kennedy turning down the option to send in reinforcements. Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, p.140.
\[61\] ibid.
\[63\] Michael Beschloss, *The Crisis Years*, p.45.
\[64\] Nikita S. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, p.488.
\[65\] Michael Beschloss, *The Crisis Years*, p.45.
Khrushchev’s perception of an inferior opponent between the two superpowers in their battle of wills.\textsuperscript{66} As a result, Khrushchev embarked upon a policy of brinkmanship believing pressure, not war, would see the young President abandon his commitment to Berlin. He was confident that, when it came to the brink, Kennedy would not, ‘fight over West Berlin, which it needed like a dog needs five legs’\textsuperscript{67} Khrushchev’s confidence in his policies towards Kennedy and the U.S. grew after the first successful space flight of Yuri Gagarin in April 1961 and Kennedy’s reputation was damaged after the Bay of Pigs incident. Kennedy’s reluctance to follow through in the Bay of Pigs operation suggested to Khrushchev that Kennedy had a tendency towards hesitation in a crisis.\textsuperscript{68}

Lyndon Johnson suggested that Khrushchev ‘has tasted blood in Cuba and Laos and now Berlin, and he’s out for more. He thinks he can push a young President around and a new administration and is probing to see how far he can go’.\textsuperscript{69} Arnold Horelick and Myron Rush go so far as to argue that Khrushchev might have not renewed the offensive on Berlin if it had not been for the U.S. debacle at the Bay of Pigs.\textsuperscript{70} Furthermore, Robert Kennedy, in an interview for the Kennedy Library, said:

> The Russians thought they could kick [the President] around [and that] Khrushchev got the idea...that he was dealing with a rather weak figure because [J.F.K.] didn’t do what Khrushchev would have done in Cuba, in not going and taking Cuba...that he was dealing with a young figure who perhaps had no confidence. It was a shock to [Jack] that somebody would be so harsh and definitive as this.\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{66} Aleksandr Furensko and Timothy Naftali, \textit{Khrushchev’s Cold War}, p.340.
\textsuperscript{67} William Taubman, \textit{Khrushchev}, p.539.
\textsuperscript{70} Arnold L. Horelick and Myron Rush, \textit{Strategic Power}, p.123.
Khrushchev took advantage of Kennedy’s perceived failures to predict Kennedy's future actions if the U.S.S.R. was to challenge Berlin.\textsuperscript{72} To Khrushchev, the Bay of Pigs failure proved that the United States strategic deterrence approach was no longer in firm or even capable hands.\textsuperscript{73} He was quoted as saying, ‘I would say the chance is more than ninety five percent there would not be a war’.\textsuperscript{74} This gave Khrushchev the confidence, precedent, and the perception that Kennedy would bend under pressure.\textsuperscript{75} Khrushchev was confident that Kennedy would not risk war and therefore he would ‘help him solve the problem, give him a choice to go to war or sign a peace treaty’.\textsuperscript{76}

To Khrushchev this all added up to a perception that the young President would go to great lengths to avoid conflict, especially if Khrushchev seemed hell-bent on one.\textsuperscript{77} At a Presidium meeting ten days prior to the Vienna Summit, Chairman Khrushchev declared his intention to pressure the U.S. President on Berlin.\textsuperscript{78} In response to Mikoyan’s caution, Khrushchev insisted excitedly that the weakness Kennedy had so overwhelmingly demonstrated at the Bay of Pigs must be exploited.\textsuperscript{79} When he returned to the Soviet Embassy in Vienna, his first session with President Kennedy only confirmed and heightened his confidence. In commenting on his meeting with Kennedy he reported to Troyanovsk, ‘what can I tell you; this man is very inexperienced, even immature. Compared to him, Eisenhower was a man of intelligence and vision’.\textsuperscript{80} Khrushchev’s miscalculation at Vienna was to drive Soviet policy from that point on.

\textsuperscript{72} Vladislav Zubok, \textit{A Failed Empire}, p.140.
\textsuperscript{73} ibid.
\textsuperscript{74} ibid.
\textsuperscript{75} Petr Lunák, "Khrushchev and the Berlin Crisis", p.72.
\textsuperscript{76} William Taubman, \textit{Khrushchev}, p.539
\textsuperscript{77} ibid, p.495.
\textsuperscript{78} William Taubman, \textit{Khrushchev}, p.539
\textsuperscript{79} ibid.
\textsuperscript{80} Troianovskii, \textit{Cherez gody}, p.44 as seen in William Taubman, \textit{Khrushchev}, pp.495-496, 766.
Kennedy's Understanding of Khrushchev

In the years following the end of the Second World War, American policy makers increasingly began to see that the conflict with the U.S.S.R. had an important psychological level to it. In the 1960s, a growing sense of a psychopolitical competition between the U.S.S.R. and the U.S. began to develop.81 U.S. credibility appeared increasingly fragile and susceptible to harm by all types of adverse events.82 American policy-makers had come to believe that ‘the international system was an increasingly polarized, unstable one in which a setback in one locale could have profound destabilizing effect in other locales as well’.83 Furthermore, in the early 1960s, according to Lynne Etheridge Davis, ‘American government officials became particularly concerned that deterrence might fail’.84 This sense of the impending failure of general deterrence helped to create a catalyst for an immediate deterrence situation to emerge as Khrushchev began challenging Kennedy's resolve.85

It has been argued that the complex bureaucratic nature of the U.S. government limits the autonomy of Presidential decision-making.86 Although these limitations may impact day-to-day domestic policy decision-making, Ole R. Holsti argues that ‘individual perceptual factors play a far more significant function during times of crisis’.87 Furthermore, political observers consistently argue that Presidential powers are much more at play in foreign affairs and

81 William Taubman, Khrushchev, p.136.
82 ibid.
83 ibid, p.137.
84 Lynne Davis, "Limited Nuclear Options", p.43.
85 ibid.
defence policies then they are in domestic politics.\textsuperscript{88} Scholars, such as Robert Dahl and Richard Fenno, support this idea, arguing that the autonomy of presidential decision-making is more enhanced in foreign policy than it is in domestic matters.\textsuperscript{89} Dahl insists that the President, ‘has long enjoyed substantial discretion’ in foreign policy and, according to Fenno, the Foreign Affairs Committee members ‘help make policy in an environment dominated by the President’.\textsuperscript{90} Consequently, during the 1961 Berlin Crisis, Kennedy had a relative amount of autonomy in directing decision-making.\textsuperscript{91} Therefore, a focus on his perceptions and actions is justified when examining the U.S. foreign policy decisions during this crisis.

Deterrence theory suggests that as a commitment gains credibility, a challenger revises and updates their original perception of a deterrer’s resolve.\textsuperscript{92} As such, a challenger will be forced to reassess the likelihood of success based on the new information obtained during the duration of a crisis.\textsuperscript{93}

In June 1961, President Kennedy met with Premier Khrushchev at the Vienna Summit, where he aimed to reverse the damage and humiliation to his own and his country’s international repute caused by the Bay of Pigs incident.\textsuperscript{94} He eagerly sought to convince the Soviet leader of the unwavering U.S. commitment to the people of West Berlin. However, his humiliation at the hands of Fidel Castro


\textsuperscript{91} Ole R. Holsti, "Foreign Policy Decision Makers Viewed Psychologically", pp.125-126.

\textsuperscript{92} In other words, an immediate deterrence crises, arising from the failure or appearance of a failing general deterrence policy, establishes credibility, Elli Lieberman, \textit{Deterrence Theory: Success or Failure in Arab-Israeli Wars}, Washington, Diane Publishing, 1995, p.31; Elli Lieberman, \textit{Reconceptualizing Deterrence}, p.23.

\textsuperscript{93} Elli Lieberman, \textit{Reconceptualizing Deterrence}, p.23.

\textsuperscript{94} Curtis Cate, \textit{The Ides of August}, p.18.
gave Khrushchev an important edge in the power play between the two men.\textsuperscript{95} According to William Taubman, Kennedy missed an opportunity during the Vienna Summit to ‘ignore the ideology, dismiss the bluster, propose a straight forward discussion of outstanding German issues, and, if Khrushchev refused, bid him a cool farewell with an invitation for practical negotiations when Khrushchev was ready for them’.\textsuperscript{96} Instead, President Kennedy allowed himself to be drawn into a conceptual, ideological debate on Marxist theory and the role of historical inevitability.\textsuperscript{97} The President’s apparently superficial grasp on Marxism played to Khrushchev’s advantage, and he tirelessly bombarded Kennedy with suggestions and threats about U.S. foreign policy in Europe.\textsuperscript{98} Khrushchev’s interpreter, Viktor Sukhodrev, later remarked that the Soviet leader came away from Vienna with a meager impressifon of Kennedy, a sense that ‘the guy was inexperienced, perhaps not up to the task of properly running a country such as the United States’.\textsuperscript{99}

After the Vienna Summit had concluded, Khrushchev handed Kennedy an aide-memoire. The document contained a challenge to the U.S. position in Berlin, "The U.S.S.R. will sign a peace treaty unilaterally and all rights of access to Berlin will expire".\textsuperscript{100} Although the document did not overtly contain any reference to the end of the U.S. commitment to the city, it was clear that this would be the price of any peace treaty.\textsuperscript{101} Several days later, on 9 June 1961, the aide-memoire was published in full by an official Soviet news agency, TASS.\textsuperscript{102}

\textsuperscript{95} Curtis Cate, \textit{The Ides of August}, p.18.
\textsuperscript{96} William Taubman, \textit{Khrushchev}, p.496.
\textsuperscript{97} Kennedy gave off an impression of naivety and inexperience on a global scale by allowing himself to be drawn into an ideological debate in which he had little expertise. Michael O’Brien, \textit{Rethinking Kennedy}, p.128.
\textsuperscript{98} ibid.
\textsuperscript{101} ibid.
Moreover, in a televised speech after the publication, Khrushchev declared a deadline for the acceptance of his proposal, ‘a peaceful settlement in Europe must be attained this year’. If breached, Khrushchev insisted, he would hand the settlement of Berlin over to Walter Ulbricht, who was determined to see the end of U.S. occupation rights in Berlin. Consequently, the aide-memoire deadline crisis represented a real challenge to the U.S. commitment to maintaining the status quo in Berlin. The Soviet approach had minimal risk given that the activating part of the threat, the deadline, was fairly ambiguous and could be reinterpreted, adapted, or withdrawn at any time. This allowed Khrushchev to pressure Kennedy with the option to bow out, if his original assessment of Kennedy’s temperament proved to be wrong.

Kennedy told Khrushchev on 3 June 1961 during the Vienna Summit that he wanted to avoid any miscalculation by either country, replacing it with precision in judgments. To Khrushchev this seemed like an admission of Kennedy’s reluctance to enforce U.S. nuclear deterrence.

In addition, Khrushchev’s aide, Fedor Burlatsky, believed that Kennedy’s flexibility and lack of apparent ideological conviction might have contributed to Khrushchev’s perception that Kennedy lacked backbone when it came to defending and enforcing U.S. foreign commitments.

If President Kennedy took anything away from the Vienna Summit, it was that United States’ commitments under his presidency had, in Khrushchev’s mind, lost all credibility. The Cuban invasion disaster just months before had consolidated an image in Khrushchev’s mind that told of a weak, indecisive and

103 Arnold L. Horelick and Myron Rush, Strategic Power, pp. 123-124.
104 ibid.
105 Alexander George and Richard Smoke, Deterrence, p. 418.
unprepared President, which was precisely what he had been hoping for. Kennedy when talking to John Reston about Khrushchev’s bluster immediately after last session at the Vienna Conference in 1961 confirmed this belief saying,

I think he did it because of the Bay of Pigs...So he just beat the hell out of me...I’ve got a terrible problem. If he (Khrushchev) thinks I’m inexperienced and have no guts, until we remove those ideas we won’t get anywhere with him. So we have to act.109

For weeks after the Vienna confrontation, Khrushchev’s attitude preoccupied the President as he took personal charge of planning the discussion to meet the Berlin challenge.110 Kennedy tasked Dean Acheson with preparing a proposal to deal with the crisis.111 Acheson was a wise choice given his experience handling the Berlin crisis in 1958. Acheson argued that the Soviet leader was testing American resolve.112 Berlin was, ‘not a problem, but a pretext’.113 Khrushchev was seeking to ‘discredit the United States or at least seriously damage its prestige in order to facilitate a Soviet expansion across Europe’.114 Acheson insisted that the only solution would be a strong, unwavering demonstration of Kennedy’s resolve.115

In the context of a crisis, Robert McCalla asserts that, ‘decision makers are more likely to be cognizant of the fact that what they are doing will be an important factor in their opponent’s thinking’.116 This was certainly true for the Kennedy administration. According to Robert Kennedy’s memoirs, the Kennedy administration assessed how Khrushchev would perceive their actions and what

110 ibid, pp.129-130.
111 ibid.
113 ibid.
114 ibid.
115 ibid.
affect this might have on his perception of their resolve.\footnote{117}\ Evidence of Kennedy’s
effort to identify Khrushchev’s perception of his presidential style is clear in a
Deadline interview of 4 June 1961.\footnote{118} Kennedy reported to New York Times
columnist James Reston that, after Vienna,

I felt sure Khrushchev thought that anybody who had made such a mess of
the Cuban invasion had no judgment, and any President who had made
such a blunder, but then didn’t see it through had no guts…I tried to
convince Khrushchev of U.S. determination, but had failed. It was now
essential to demonstrate our firmness.\footnote{119}

Further evidence of Kennedy’s thoughts regarding Khrushchev’s opinion of
his Presidency were clear when he spoke with Llewellyn Thompson, a U.S.
diplomat, about Khrushchev’s actions in August 1962.\footnote{120} The President was
reported to have asked, ‘do you think that Cuba and the fact we hadn’t gone into
Laos might have given him (Khrushchev) the impression that we were going to
give away Berlin?’.\footnote{121}

Kennedy greatly feared Soviet miscalculation concerning the West’s
position on Berlin.\footnote{122} The President believed that the crisis emerged from a fit of
Soviet opportunism and his failing to sufficiently demonstrate resolve and
credibility to U.S. commitments.\footnote{123} Kennedy knew that the Bay of Pigs fiasco and
his poor performance at the Vienna Summit had cost him considerable prestige
and credibility.\footnote{124} As a result, Kennedy was extremely wary of Khrushchev’s
challenge, believing that Berlin was a test of resolve rather than the weighing of

\footnote{117} The best example here is the Kennedy administration. Where Kennedy and his
advisors often made conscious efforts to ask how their actions would look to
Nikita Khrushchev, Robert F. Kennedy, Thirteen Days, New York, W.W. Norton,
1969, pp.102-106.

\footnote{118} Seymour Hersh, The Dark Side of Camelot, Toronto, Little Brown & Company,

\footnote{119} ibid.

\footnote{120} Aleksandr Furensko and Timothy Naftali, Khrushchev’s Cold War, p.543.

\footnote{121} ibid.

\footnote{122} Alexander George and Richard Smoke, Deterrence, p.426.

\footnote{123} ibid.

\footnote{124} ibid.
nuclear capabilities. Reflecting on the gravity of the post-1945 Berlin situation, Kennedy said:

The real problem is more the subtle struggle for Berlin, where they [the Soviets] will try and choke us off, step by step. That is going to be the real struggle, where they try to end it not with a bang but with a whimper, which never seems quite worth a war. It is going to be a test of nerve and will.

Consequently, Kennedy became increasingly occupied with the notion that the crisis was a result of a failing to impart a perception of integrity and preparedness.

Therefore, in order to resolve the crisis, the Soviet perception had to be realigned along firm and credible grounds. This was not a strategic crisis over Berlin itself, but one of Soviet perceptions of American resolve.

For Kennedy, Soviet expectation and perception about the behavior of the U.S. and its reactions was one of the most valuable assets he possessed in world affairs. Furthermore, he believed that any appearance of weakness in the face of a challenge in Berlin 1961 could seriously challenge the authority of the President as a foreign leader. U.S. foreign prestige was under threat and Kennedy had to keep the American long-standing commitment to the city to avoid a loss of further prestige.

Kennedy worried more than Eisenhower about the possibility of a miscalculation in the missile age. His actions suggest that he was very concerned about the impression his policies had on foreign leaders - particularly

125 Alexander George and Richard Smoke, Deterrence, p.426.
128 Thomas Schelling, Arms and Influence, p.125.
129 Richard Lebow, Between Peace and War, p.60.
130 Nicholas Labinski, Evolution of a President, p.89.
those in the Kremlin.\textsuperscript{132} This may have been, in part, due to Eisenhower’s rejection of the missile gap myth.\textsuperscript{133} Kennedy was certainly less sure of U.S. missile superiority and the use of nuclear weapons in general.\textsuperscript{134}

According to John Gaddis, Kennedy inherently believed that the balance of power was ‘as much a function of perception as of hardwire, position or will’.\textsuperscript{135} Gaddis further asserts that the President believed ‘minute shifts in its distribution or even appearance of such shifts – could cause a chain reactions of panic to sweep the world, with potentially devastating consequences’.\textsuperscript{136}

For the President, this misaligned perception was as critical as the crisis itself. If world opinion came to believe that U.S. credibility was undetermined, further challenges would arise.\textsuperscript{137} As a result, Kennedy’s response stemmed from a belief in the need to reassert U.S. supremacy on the world stage and his belief that the U.S.S.R. was not provoking war but instead hoping pressure short of it would produce concessions.\textsuperscript{138}

For both Kennedy and Vice President Lyndon Johnson, the U.S. had too many commitments.\textsuperscript{139} However, neither could envisage way to reduce U.S. commitments without encouraging a perception of American weakness and retreat from other world leaders.\textsuperscript{140} According to John Gaddis, both men feared, ‘the threat of embarrassment, of humiliation, of appearing to be weak’.\textsuperscript{141}

\textsuperscript{132} Aleksandr Furensko and Timothy Naftali, \textit{Khrushchev’s Cold War}, p.543.
\textsuperscript{134} Alexander George and Richard Smoke, \textit{Deterrence}, p.426, 428.
\textsuperscript{136} ibid.
\textsuperscript{138} ibid.
\textsuperscript{140} ibid.
\textsuperscript{141} ibid.
As a result, the focus on image and perception became central to the management of deterrence during the Kennedy administration.\textsuperscript{142} Believing that a retreat from Berlin might unravel the whole western deterrence structure, Kennedy insisted:

If we are expelled from that area, and if we accept the loss of our rights, no one would have any confidence in U.S. commitments and pledges. US national security is involved in this matter because if we were to accept the Soviet proposal U.S. commitments would be regarded as a mere scrap of paper.\textsuperscript{143}

Moreover, the C.I.A. handed the President a report, sourced from information given by defected spy Oleg Penkovsky, suggesting that the Soviet leader did not believe Kennedy would risk war over Berlin.\textsuperscript{144} The report inferred that this crisis was merely an attempt to jumpstart negotiations over the future of Berlin.\textsuperscript{145}

Renowned historian Arthur Schlesinger, asserts that the President,

Had never encountered any leader with whom he could not exchange ideas – anyone so impervious to reasoned argument or so apparently indifferent to the prospective obliteration of mankind...Berlin held the threat, if not the certitude of war.\textsuperscript{146}

This threat of war was not only meant to scare Kennedy, but force him into submission.\textsuperscript{147} However, Khrushchev underestimated Kennedy's resolve to uphold U.S. prestige in the face of extreme confrontation.\textsuperscript{148} More importantly, the Soviet leader underestimated Kennedy's deep understanding of the inner working psychology of foreign relations.\textsuperscript{149} After the Vienna Summit, President Kennedy reported his impressions of the Soviet leader to Hugh Sidey, saying:

I never met a man like this. [I] talked and talked about how a nuclear exchange would kill seventy million people in ten minutes and he just

\begin{footnotes}
\item[144] Nicholas Labinski, \textit{Evolution of a President}, p.94.
\item[145] ibid.
\item[147] William Taubman, \textit{Khrushchev}, p.495.
\item[148] Nicholas Labinski, \textit{Evolution of a President}, p.89.
\item[149] ibid, p.104.
\end{footnotes}
looked at me as if to say, ‘so what?’ My impression was that he just didn’t give a damn if it came to that.\textsuperscript{150}

Kennedy came away from Vienna having failed to repair the damage he had incurred from Cuba.\textsuperscript{151} Worse still, the President failed to correct, and may even have consolidated Khrushchev’s negative perception of his resolve as a weak foreign leader.\textsuperscript{152}

\textsuperscript{150} Seymour Hersh, \textit{The Dark Side of Camelot}, p.253.
\textsuperscript{152} ibid.
Chapter 2
Prodding the Bear: Commitments Must be Overt and Explicit

The Berlin crisis was caused by perception and the solution to the crisis ultimately came from a change in perception. Kennedy, frustrated by his performance at Vienna, and believing his presidential prestige had lost all credibility in Khrushchev’s eyes, recognized the importance of this moment in his presidency.1 It was clear that if he was to resolve Berlin by means of deterrence, he would first have to restore his prestige as a firm and determined President by reestablishing the credibility of his commitment to Berlin.2

Kennedy embraced the concept of deterrence, particularly the idea of communicating commitments in detailed and overt ways in order to maintain their deterrence capability.3 The President’s July Address to the Nation speech on 25 July 1961 was exactly that, resolutely describing the strength of the American commitment to West Berlin.4 It was reported that the room was tense, filled with

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1 Michael O’Brien, Rethinking Kennedy, p.128.
2 There is a consensus amongst deterrence theorists that in order for commitments to be protected by deterrence policies, the challenged nation must make their commitment clear. See Yehoshafat Harkabi, Nuclear War, pp.9-25; Alexander George and Richard Smoke, Deterrence, p.64; Richard Lebow, Between Peace and War, pp.84-88. Richard Lebow argues that, ‘a commitment has no deterrent value unless its existence is known to an adversary. Otherwise, a nation assumes risks without any prospect of commensurate gain’. Moreover, these commitments need to be made ‘clear and salient through repetition, the use of a number of different channels to communicate them, and their linkage to other important recognized interest or commitments’, Richard Lebow, Between Peace and War, pp.86-87, 88. In order to be credible, commitments must be presented to the aggressor in an overt and explicit fashion, so that they do not accidently ‘fall off the brink’. Lebow asserts that ‘Ambiguous commitments are likely to be perceived as unresolved intention to defend commitment’, Richard Lebow, Between Peace and War, p.86; Michael O’Brien, Rethinking Kennedy, p.128.
3 Richard Lebow, Between Peace and War, pp.86-87, 88.
reporters, seven television cameras and newsreels, White House aides, secret service men, technicians, and photographers, all packed into the room waiting on Kennedy. The White House was sweltering, as the air conditioner had been turned off to improve sound recording and the day had reached ninety-four degrees.\(^5\) Kennedy, sweating, began his thirty-two-minute speech, where he was to introduce the United States’ new deterrence policy, *Flexible Response*. His tone was direct and determined as he spoke of the United States’ commitment to Berlin in a new flexible, yet firm, rhetoric.\(^6\) This address was vitally important as the President knew his words would be evaluated by a worldwide audience looking for clues about his intentions, resolve, character and policy perspectives.\(^7\)

Kennedy intended the speech to be akin to a direct line to Premier Khrushchev, clearly communicating to the Soviet leader the strength of his personal commitment to Berlin.\(^8\) This strategy was also designed to alleviate Kennedy’s fear of ‘misunderstanding’ and ‘miscommunication’ as factors that could lead to nuclear destruction.\(^9\) In this way, Kennedy hoped he could remove any claim of plausible deniability from provocative moves on the part of the Soviets.\(^10\)

Kennedy believed that reinvigorating a deterrence policy’s credibility required him to take a series of deliberate steps, including making clear the consequences that would result from the any provocative moves on the part of the U.S.S.R.\(^11\) The origin of this philosophy can be found in Kennedy’s earlier political

\(^5\) Frederick Kempe, pp.293-296.
\(^7\) Curtis Cate, *The Ides of August*, p.113.
\(^11\) ibid.
writings.\textsuperscript{12} In \textit{Strategy of Peace} (1960), he stated in reference to Berlin, ‘making clear our peaceful but determined intentions is important’.\textsuperscript{13} Kennedy showed a keen understanding of the significance of clear communication when he stated, ‘I think it is important also that Mr. Khrushchev recognize what he is up against – so that he does not miscalculate our determination or underestimate our resources’.\textsuperscript{14}

Ironically Khrushchev’s bullying tactics had the opposite effect to the one intended: instead of Kennedy wavering over Berlin, it led to the U.S. taking a more absolute stance than it ever had previously articulated. The Americans now made it clear that they had so much at stake, and in that sense raised the overall stakes of the contest over Berlin. The 1961 Berlin Crisis ‘raised the West’s position in Berlin to extreme visibility and saliency’.\textsuperscript{15} Khrushchev’s brinkmanship tactics in effect illustrates deterrence theory, as it forced the Kennedy administration to raise its own commitment, raising the stakes for all concerned.\textsuperscript{16}

As stated previously, for deterrence policies to be effective, commitments must be made explicit and overt, in order to lay the foundations for credibility.\textsuperscript{17} The more specific the commitment appears to be, the more likely it is to be respected.\textsuperscript{18} Conversely, very broad definitions are less likely to be perceived as indicators of resolve. Thus it is imperative to be unambiguous and direct, as vague commitments are likely to be perceived as a marker of indecisive intentions.\textsuperscript{19} Kennedy successfully fulfilled this requirement of deterrence theory by using a map during his July address to define the U.S. commitment to Berlin very precisely. During the speech, the President said:

\begin{flushright}
\textbf{\begin{tabular}{l}
13 ibid.
14 ibid.
16 ibid.
19 ibid, pp.85-86.
\end{tabular}}
\end{flushright}
This map makes very clear the problem we face. The white is West Germany – the East is the area controlled by the Soviet Union, and as you can see from the chart, West Berlin is 110 miles within the area which the Soviets now dominate – which is immediately controlled by the so-called East German regime.\(^{20}\)

By clearly setting out the extent of U.S. responsibility, Kennedy gained credibility as he removed miscommunication from the equation.\(^{21}\) The explicit and frank nature of Kennedy’s July address worked to raise his commitment credibility. The emphasis upon the American commitment was unmistakable: ‘to sum it all up, we seek peace - but we shall not surrender’.\(^{22}\) The pressure was now on Khrushchev not to challenge him.

Michael Beschloss asserts that Kennedy, unlike Eisenhower, ‘was not comfortable with ambiguity when the stakes were as high as they were over Berlin. He was always afraid of nuclear war by miscalculation’.\(^{23}\) Kennedy had to ‘draw a line in the sand’ in order to avoid Khrushchev claiming he had ‘crossed the line’ accidently.\(^{24}\) In the July Address, the President ‘laid a clearly visible tripwire, one that could not simply be stumbled on’.\(^{25}\) The *Daily Herald* editorial reported Kennedy ‘made it as clear as words and precautionary deeds can make it that there will be no surrender to Russian threats or to Russian forces over Berlin’.\(^{26}\) The extensive media coverage of the address pushed the 1961 Berlin Crisis into the global spotlight.

With an audience of fifty million in the U.S. alone, the speech received an overwhelmingly positive consensus from the West. The President Kennedy was

\(^{22}\) He went on, ‘We cannot and will not permit the Communists to drive us out of Berlin, either gradually or by force’, in “John F. Kennedy Speeches: Radio and Television Report to The American People on The Berlin Crisis, July 25 1961”.
\(^{25}\) ibid.
\(^{26}\) Curtis Cate, *The Ides of August*, p.114.
seen to be taking charge of the crisis. Newspapers in the U.S. commended the President for being firm but not hostile in tone. The New York Times, on 26 July 1961, reported that, ‘at once solemn, determined, and conciliatory the President last night reasserted American leadership of the free world’. The President’s firm manner worked to regain presidential prestige and give credibility to the U.S. Berlin commitment. Kennedy successfully began the reinvigoration of his deterrence policy and he did it on the international stage.

One particularly noteworthy element of the July Address was Kennedy’s use of the word ‘West’ with the word ‘Berlin’. No U.S. President before Kennedy had differentiated so explicitly between the commitment to all of Berlin and West Berlin. As if to emphasize the importance of the city to the safety of the European continent he said:

West Europe is vital to our national interests and we have supported it in two wars, if we were to leave West Berlin, Europe would be abandoned as well, so when we are talking about West Berlin, we are also talking about West Europe.

Kennedy used the phrase ‘West Berlin’ seventeen times in the half hour address. If the implications of this phrase were lost to Khrushchev, Senator William Fulbright would go on to make them clear. Talking on the American Broadcasting Corporation’s Sunday morning program, the Senator stated:

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27 Nicholas Labinski, Evolution of a President, p.98.
28 Seymour Hersh, The Dark Side of Camelot, p.257.
29 Nicholas Labinski, Evolution of a President, p.98.
30 The Guardian, British newspaper, ‘Kennedy Plans Forces Increase of 217,000’, July 26, 1961 reported that President Kennedy was ‘expressing determination to defend Western rights in Berlin’.
33 ibid.
The truth of the matter is, I think, the Russians have the power to close it in any case...next week, if they chose to close their borders, they could without violating any treaty. I don’t understand why East Germans don’t close their borders because I think they have the right to close them.\textsuperscript{35}

This suggests that Kennedy had redefined the parameters and rules of the German problem, which had been set out in the Potsdam Agreement leaving Berlin unstable and unsettled.\textsuperscript{36} He had explicitly made clear that the U.S. would allow \textit{East} Berlin to be cut off from the U.S. commitment.

By restructuring the U.S. definition of their commitment to be limited to \textit{West} Berlin, Kennedy allowed the German problem to reach a temporary settlement.\textsuperscript{37} Seymour Hersh states that ‘no one used the term wall. What Kennedy did make clear was that they [the Soviets] had the right to control movement through their sector’.\textsuperscript{38} As Fredrick Kempe suggests, Kennedy’s policy was a case of, ‘do what you want to with what is yours, but do not touch what is ours’.\textsuperscript{39} By stating the U.S. commitment dearly and publicly, Kennedy was able to communicate a mutually agreeable solution to the Soviets.\textsuperscript{40} He allowed Khrushchev to ‘save face’ as a respected leader in the Eastern Bloc by achieving results on the East German emigration problem.

\textsuperscript{35} Frederick Kempe, \textit{Berlin 1961}, p.315.
\textsuperscript{36} The ‘German problem’ has deep historic undertones, however in terms of Cold War tensions the German problem was the result of bad planning by the Allies and a failure to understand the intentions of either side during the Potsdam Conference. The Potsdam Conference took place in 1945 between the wartime allies, United States, Britain, France, and the Soviet Union, to discuss arrangements on the postwar settlement. However they disagreed on the fate of Berlin. Berlin was divided into four sectors for the four occupying powers however in June 1948, Britain, France, and the U.S. unified their zones leaving a unified Western Berlin facing the Communist East Berlin, “The Berlin (Potsdam) Conference, July 17 – August 2, 1945, (a) Protocol of the Proceedings, August 1, 1945. The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, 1945.
\textsuperscript{37} Kennedy allowed East Berlin to be blocked off from the West in order to ease tensions by removing Berlin as a Cold War arena. “The Berlin (Potsdam) Conference, July 17 – August 2, 1945, (a) Protocol of the Proceedings, August 1, 1945.
\textsuperscript{38} Seymour Hersh, \textit{The Dark Side of Camelot}, p.259.
\textsuperscript{39} Frederick Kempe, \textit{Berlin 1961}, p.247.
\textsuperscript{40} ibid.
Not only is it crucial in deterrence theory to communicate one’s commitments, it is also important to stress why that commitment is significant.\textsuperscript{41} Lebow argues that policy makers emphasise or even exaggerate the vital nature of the commitment in order to enhance its credibility.\textsuperscript{42}

When a homeland is challenged, the threat of retaliation is naturally credible as the stakes are understandably high.\textsuperscript{43} However, a deterrer’s willingness to risk harm for the sake of an ally is inherently less credible.\textsuperscript{44} Therefore, it is necessary to clearly declare the strong conviction a state holds in maintaining its commitment.\textsuperscript{45} Kennedy communicated explicitly why the Berlin commitment could not be conceded.\textsuperscript{46} In the context of the Cold War, Kennedy placed Berlin right at the centre. In his July address he stated, ‘it is not just the safety of a city that is at stake. It is the safety of the whole West’.\textsuperscript{47} He communicated the wider implications that the West Berlin commitment held, in order to stress its significance, stating, ‘For the fulfillment of our pledge to that city is essential to the moral and security of Western Germany, to the unity of Western Europe, and to the faith of the entire Free World’.\textsuperscript{48} By doing so, he raised the status of the Berlin issues from a European stalemate to a matter of U.S. national security and Western liberty. Kennedy made connections between the importance he placed on West Berlin and how secure it was saying, ‘It is as secure, in that sense, for we cannot separate its safety from our own’.\textsuperscript{49}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{41} Richard Lebow, \textit{Between Peace and War}, pp.89-90.
\item \textsuperscript{42} ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Terrence Roehrig, \textit{From Deterrence to Engagement}, p.19.
\item \textsuperscript{44} ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{45} ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{46} ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{47} ‘John F. Kennedy Speeches: Radio and Television Report to The American People on The Berlin Crisis, July 25 1961’; Curtis Cate, \textit{The Ides of August}, p.114.
\item \textsuperscript{48} ‘John F. Kennedy Speeches: Radio and Television Report to The American People on The Berlin Crisis, July 25 1961’.
\item \textsuperscript{49} Curtis Cate, \textit{The Ides of August}, p.114.
\end{itemize}
Raising the geopolitical stakes on the U.S. position in Berlin worked to give Khrushchev pause before he considered any direct attempt to limit this position.\textsuperscript{50} According to Lebow, ‘whenever possible commitments should be linked to national interest as a demonstration of resolve’.\textsuperscript{51} Furthermore, Schelling suggests that leaders of a deterrent nation can make public pronouncements, declaring that their national security is invested in the survival of a particular state.\textsuperscript{52} In order to reinforce the connection between the U.S. national security and West Berlin Kennedy said:

Our position in Europe is worth a nuclear war because if you are driven from Berlin, you are driven from Germany. And if you are driven from Europe, you are driven from Asia and Africa, and then our time will come next.\textsuperscript{53}

By making the West Berlin commitment synonymous with U.S. national security and liberty in Western Europe, Kennedy forced Khrushchev to consider that, short of war, pressure could not force the United States to abandon its commitment.\textsuperscript{54} It was no longer a matter of territory, but one of freedom itself.

By tying together the freedom of West Berlin and the fate of U.S. prestige, the President could now not allow himself to be seen as bending to Soviet pressure on West Berlin without huge backlash domestically.\textsuperscript{55} Kennedy argued that West Berlin had ‘become – as never before – the great testing place of Western courage and will, a focal point, where our solemn commitments stretching back over the years since 1945, and the Soviet ambitions now meet in basic confrontation’.\textsuperscript{56} By

\textsuperscript{50} Richard Lebow, \textit{Between Peace and War}, p.85.

\textsuperscript{51} ibid.

\textsuperscript{52} Nicholas Labinski, \textit{Evolution of a President}, p.69; Frederick Kempe, \textit{Berlin 1961}, p.55.

\textsuperscript{53} John F. Kennedy Speeches: Radio and Television Report to The American People on The Berlin Crisis, July 25 1961”.

\textsuperscript{54} Nicholas Labinski, \textit{Evolution of a President}, p.69; Frederick Kempe, \textit{Berlin 1961}, p.55.

\textsuperscript{55} Nicholas Labinski, \textit{Evolution of a President}, p.123.

\textsuperscript{56} “John F. Kennedy Speeches: Radio and Television Report to The American People on The Berlin Crisis, July 25 1961”.
declaring this belief publicly, Kennedy raised the stakes not only for the Soviets, but for the U.S. as well. Concessions made on West Berlin’s freedom would come at great cost to Kennedy’s presidential prestige, both domestically and internationally. Kennedy deliberately backed himself into a corner, making it clear to Khrushchev that he had no room to move on West Berlin, and thus making it credible that he would indeed retaliate with force if Khrushchev decided to challenge him on this. Elli Lieberman coined the phrase ‘audience cost’, to describe when leaders generate credibility for deterrence. He asserts that leaders, especially in democracies, will be punished at home if they renge on a commitment. Furthermore, Shelling asserts that ‘staking your reputation on a commitment is a means of convincing a challenger of the seriousness and irreversibility of your pledge’. Kennedy was making it clear to Khrushchev that he (Kennedy) could not walk away without facing repercussions, not only from his country, but also from the other Western nations.

Eisenhower’s response to Khrushchev’s 1958 Berlin ultimatum simultaneously talked down the dangers in order to avoid creating public alarm, whilst reaffirming the U.S. position on Berlin. This indicates a sense of confidence that Khrushchev would avoid the ultimate risk. Richardson points out that Western interests were articulated more precisely by Kennedy, military preparations were broadcasted, the risks were confronted more candidly, and the

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58 ibid.
59 ibid.
60 ibid.
62 ibid.
64 The Ultimate risk refers to Nuclear War wit the United States; Alexander George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence*, p.426.
level of public concern was greatly increased. Kennedy's *Flexible Response* policy was so overt that it could not be easily dismissed.

Kennedy's deterrence strategy also differed dramatically from the Eisenhower administration in regards to how they presented negotiations. In Kennedy's *Flexible Response* deterrence policy, negotiations were considered a viable avenue to pursue. This was unprecedented in U.S. foreign policy. Previous administrations shied away from flexibility, as they believed negotiations conflicted with deterrence. The fear of showing willingness to negotiate and being flexible originated from the Munich Conference, September 1938, where the West learnt that appeasing dictators was futile and dangerous. This went to the extent that even suggesting negotiations was considered unwise, as it was believed to give an impression of weakness. As a result, throughout the Eisenhower administration the U.S. was reluctant to pursue negotiations with the U.S.S.R. for fear of encouraging 'another Munich'.

Kennedy had always placed significant importance on negotiations. In his inaugural address in January 1961, he famously stated, 'let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate'. As a result, Kennedy's attitude towards negotiations was optimistic but realistic. In presenting his strategic deterrence

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66 ibid.
67 Patrick Morgan, “Saving Face For the Sake of Deterrence”, pp.138-139.
68 ibid.
69 ibid.
70 ibid.
71 Patrick Morgan, “Saving Face For the Sake of Deterrence”, pp.138-140.
72 ibid, pp.138-139.
73 ibid.
75 See also his comments later in 1961: ‘We have nothing to fear from negotiations...and nothing to gain by refusing to take part in them’, in “Address at University of Washington Centennial, Seattle, Washington, 16 November 1961”. *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum*, 1961.
policy of *Flexible Response* to the world on July 25, Kennedy made negotiation a part of his new adaptable type of deterrence posture.76

From this point onward, the U.S. was open to negotiations to settle any tensions, but the freedom and the longevity of the West Berlin commitment was not negotiable. The President made this clear on July 25 when he said:

> We cannot negotiate with those who say ‘what’s mine is mine and what’s yours is negotiable’...the source of world trouble and tension is Moscow, not Berlin. And if war begins, it will have begun in Moscow and not Berlin.77

Thus, although negotiations would play a central role in Kennedy’s foreign policy, it was not simply a list of concessions he was prepared to make.78

It is important in these types of deterrence for the deterred to make explicitly clear what is and what is not negotiable.79 A policy that stated that all U.S. foreign policy positions were fixed is unlikely to be perceived as credible as it is difficult to assert that all commitments everywhere are all equally vital. States do distinguish between and prioritise their commitments and aims. Therefore, the key goal for the U.S. administration was to make Khrushchev understand that a Soviet policy that threatened the U.S. over Berlin was doomed to failure.80 Kennedy’s July Address made clear what was not negotiable including undisturbed access to Berlin by both via land and air, Western military presence in the Western sectors, and the preservation of the necessary conditions for West Berlin’s survival, safety and self-determination, stating, ‘the freedom of that city is not negotiable’.81

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77 "John F. Kennedy Speeches: Radio and Television Report to The American People on The Berlin Crisis, July 25 1961".
78 ibid.
80 ibid, pp.86-87, 88.
81 "John F. Kennedy Speeches: Radio and Television Report to The American People on The Berlin Crisis, July 25 1961".
Khrushchev’s reaction to the President’s July Address was not wholly surprising. At a meeting with Kennedy’s special adviser on disarmament, John J. McCloy, he declared that the Address, ‘had declared preliminary war on the Soviet Union’.\textsuperscript{82} The Soviet leader was so taken back by the firmness in Kennedy’s tone, and the directness of his words, that during a meeting with British ambassador Sir Frank Roberts, he attempted to indirectly pressure Kennedy by provoking the Western allies.\textsuperscript{83} Khrushchev reminded the British ambassador about Soviet military superiority suggesting that, ‘six bombs would do Britain and nine for France’.\textsuperscript{84} The intimidating nature of Khrushchev’s tone suggests he felt threatened by Kennedy’s overt declaration of his commitment and that he was aware that he might have misjudged the young president’s resolve.\textsuperscript{85}

Charles Lockhart has noted that in some circumstances both flexibility and firmness can not only coexist simultaneously, but can also be complimentary.\textsuperscript{86} He argues that flexibility within a deterrence policy can help a statesman maneuver around extremely dangerous contingencies, such as nuclear war.\textsuperscript{87} Furthermore, Bruce Russett and Paul Huth assert that, ‘firm but fair strategies are more likely to succeed, as they are open to accommodations so that issues can be settled and consequently stop resurfacing’.\textsuperscript{88} Robert Jervis asserts that legitimate grievances can be addressed and resolved, without conveying weakness of resolve.\textsuperscript{89} This was true for Kennedy’s Flexible Response deterrence policy. By including both a military strategy and a negotiating strategy, President Kennedy was keeping all

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{83} William Taubman, \textit{Khrushchev}, p.501.
\item \textsuperscript{84} ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{85} ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{86} William Taubman, \textit{Khrushchev}, p.547.
\item \textsuperscript{87} ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{88} Paul Huth and Bruce Russet, "Deterrence Failure and Crisis Escalation", p.29.
\item \textsuperscript{89} Robert Jervis, \textit{Perception and Misperception}, p.58.
\end{itemize}
feasible avenues of action open, putting together a very firm, yet adaptive deterrent policy. This attitude is evident in his July Address statement:

We will at all times be ready to talk, if talk will help. But we must also be ready to resist with force, if force is used upon us. Either alone would fail. Together, they can serve the cause of freedom and peace.

Kennedy saw that in order to reach some level of resolution with the Soviets, he had to convince Khrushchev that any challenge to the U.S. position in West Berlin would bring war. Michael O’Brien asserts that Kennedy ‘wished to negotiate, to talk, to listen, but only about reasonable proposals’. Consequently, the construction of the Berlin Wall can be considered as an acceptable accommodation in Kennedy’s Flexible Response Policy. The Wall did not challenge the primary conditions of the commitment, only easing Soviet tensions.

Kennedy understood the importance of communicating commitments explicitly and overtly, and used his July 25 address as a way to define his stance on the U.S. position in Berlin. As the events of the 1961 crisis unfolded, it became clear that Khrushchev knew where the line was and acted to stay within its bounds. The Flexible Response policy, introduced during the 25 July 25 Address, gained credibility as its limits and range were effectively communicated, making any action outside of its parameters a provocation of war.

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90 The policy also allowed for accommodations that did not threaten the primary status of the commitment whilst also discouraging Khrushchev’s perception of weakness Michael O’Brien, *Rethinking Kennedy*, p.131.
91 "John F. Kennedy Speeches: Radio and Television Report to The American People on The Berlin Crisis, July 25 1961”.
95 ibid.
Chapter 3
The Delicate Balance of Terror: Commitments Must be Supported

Kennedy's address conveyed a sense of mission, confidence and determination to stand by his West Berlin Commitment. It became essential to reinforce his words with realistic and tangible defence structures.\(^1\) It has been suggested by some deterrence theorists that it is necessary to back up intentions with concrete capabilities.\(^2\) In other words, it is necessary to be seen clearly carrying out the necessary preparations to be able to defend a commitment if required.\(^3\) Failure to do so may lead adversaries to question resolve to defend commitments.\(^4\) These defence capabilities announce to adversaries that challenges will be met, and give the deterrence policy credibility as a formidable barrier to any aggressor's ambition.\(^5\) It is vital that these defence capabilities be perceived as realistic. If any potential aggressor perceives threats of reprisal as a bluff, in terms of the deterriers' will to follow through on the threat, it may lead to the commitment being challenged and the deterrence strategy failing.\(^6\) Lebow asserts, 'credible commitments are defensible commitments'.\(^7\) This is especially relevant in the case of the 1961 Berlin Crisis. Kennedy's resolve over Berlin being challenged in the first place was due to his opposition to the use nuclear weapons in Europe.

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\(^1\) Defence structures being the arrangement and configuration of protection, or a potential retaliatory force used to defend a commitment, Alexander George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence*, p.64.
\(^7\) Richard Lebow, *Between Peace and War*, p.88.
In these circumstances, it was important for the President to design an effective and formidable defence structure, which allowed for gradual escalation starting with conventional measures below the nuclear threshold. Kennedy wanted to prove that he was willing to meet the Soviet leader’s challenge without risking ‘the lives of millions of Americans over a dispute about highway access [to Berlin] … or because the Germans want to reunite Germany’. Flexible Response was designed to increase the U.S. capacity to provide a wider range of potential responses to varying levels of challenges in order to enhance deterrent credibility.

A significant element of deterrence theory is the assumption of rationality. It is vital to communicate to the potential aggressor that the costs of challenging a commitment outweigh the benefits. To make clear what the result will be as the aggressor makes an assumed rational calculation about the risks and benefits of an aggressive action. In other words, having defence structures in place that will tip the balance making the risks too high to pursue for the aggressor. Kennedy achieved this in his July Address, demonstrating that his defence structures would work as ‘trip-wires’ to further escalation.

Kennedy’s early political writings suggest that he had an understanding of the importance of tailoring capabilities to commitments in order for a deterrence policy to function effectively. In Why England Slept (1940), Kennedy used the failure of appeasement policies in the late 1930s as an example of the necessity of a formidable defence structure.

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10 Joseph Siracusa and David Coleman, Scaling the Nuclear Ladder, p.285.
12 Thomas Schelling, Arms and Influence, p.99.
As Kennedy asserted:

We must always keep our armaments equal to our commitments. Munich should teach us that, we must realize that any bluffs will be called. We cannot tell anyone to keep out of our hemisphere unless our armaments and the people behind these armaments are prepared to back up the command, even to the ultimate point of going to war.\footnote{14}{John F. Kennedy, \textit{Why England Slept}, p.229.}

Consequently, Kennedy's reaction to the 1961 Berlin Crisis was to increase the defence structure in Berlin, via a build-up of conventional forces, demonstrating the high level of importance he placed on the U.S. presence in West Berlin.

In his transition meeting with outgoing President Dwight Eisenhower, Kennedy was shocked to learn the extent of U.S. deterrence policy limitations, either nuclear annihilation of political humiliation.\footnote{15}{To Kennedy, the former administrations’ defence structures only offered two options, the grim reality of nuclear war or the humiliation of conceding, Nicholas Labinski, \textit{Evolution of a President}, p.69.} He was also critical of the arguments behind the \textit{Massive Retaliation} defence structure that the former deterrence policy in Berlin offered.\footnote{16}{The inflexibility of M.A.D. was problematic for Kennedy as he saw both option had unacceptable costs, Nicholas Labinski, \textit{Evolution of a President}, p.69.} Kennedy had always considered a flexible position as vital to diplomatic success.\footnote{17}{ibid.} This attitude is apparent in his precursor policy, \textit{Strategy of Peace}, where he argued, 'we need to increase the flexibility and range of weapons in our arsenal in order to increase our flexibility and range of diplomatic possibilities'.\footnote{18}{John F. Kennedy, \textit{The Strategy of Peace}, p.20.}

This reflects Kennedy's reluctance to use nuclear weapons as a usable form of defence.\footnote{19}{Nicholas Labinski, \textit{Evolution of a President}, p.69.} As President, Kennedy believed that the Cold War needed to be placed back into the conventional arena and removed from the nuclear one.\footnote{20}{John F. Kennedy, \textit{The Strategy of Peace}, p.20; Nicholas Labinski, \textit{Evolution of a President}, p.69.} The \textit{Flexible Response} doctrine raised the nuclear threshold through preparedness to
mount a substantial conventional defence. By choosing a slow build up of conventional military forces in Berlin, Kennedy allowed himself flexibility in response to crisis. Moreover, he showed that the U.S. was not bound to ‘humiliation or holocaust’. In the thesis, Why England Slept, Kennedy argued that democracies should only show flexibility once they have established their determination to stand by commitments and a willingness to defend them. For a deterrence policy to be effective, there needs to be realistic reprisals for the threat to be perceived as credible. As renowned political scientist and diplomat, Henry Kissinger wrote, ‘the intent to defend commitments must be backed-up with realistic and believable threats, otherwise the declaration to defend commitments will be perceived as a bluff’. Furthermore, Harkabi argues that the credibility of a commitment’s security depends on the perception of the aggressor. In other words, if the aggressor concludes that the deterrer will hesitate or be unable to carry out a threat to protect a commitment, credibility of the deterrence policy will be severely impaired. The Massive Retaliation deterrence policy, which Kennedy inherited when he came to power, was considered ineffective as a credible deterrent option to his administration. This policy worked well with Eisenhower

22 ibid.
23 The President opened up new possibilities in foreign policy, enabling him to face Khrushchev’s challenge from a position of strength, Nicholas Labinski, Evolution of a President, p.99.
26 ibid.
27 Yehoshafat Harkabi, Nuclear War, p.10.
28 ibid.
29 This is because nuclear retaliation from a Soviet challenge on Berlin was perceived as unlikely under Kennedy's leadership. The Eisenhower M.A.D. defence structure was premised on the idea that although there would be attempts to rattle U.S. decision makers, the U.S. position in Berlin would not be provoked to the point of war. This would avoid the mutually assured destruction that would occur by way of nuclear reprisals, Alexander George and Richard Smoke, Deterrence, p.426,428.
as he believed in U.S. missile superiority and remained calm in the knowledge that
the Soviets, although reluctant to admit it, knew this too.\textsuperscript{30}

As a result, Eisenhower’s defence structure was an effective deterrent, as
the Soviets believed that he and John Foster Dulles would be prepared to use
nuclear weapons if provoked sufficiently.\textsuperscript{31} However, with the advent of the
Kennedy administration, this defence structure was no longer perceived as a
credible threat, as the U.S. deterrence posture, under the Kennedy administration,
was no longer perceived as sufficiently convincing. The perception of Kennedy’s
resolve, particularly towards nuclear retaliation, was diametrically opposed to the
Massive Retaliation deterrence policy.\textsuperscript{32} Evidence of this can be found in a C.I.A.
report in which the Soviet defector, Oleg Penkovsky, explained that Khrushchev no
longer believed in the U.S. determination to defend their Berlin Commitment to the
point of retaliating against provocation with a nuclear attack.\textsuperscript{33} Kennedy
understood that although the U.S. had a significant stockpile of nuclear weapons,
this was insignificant so long as Khrushchev doubted his resolve to use them.\textsuperscript{34}

In order for deterrence policies to effectively protect commitments, there
must be sufficient reprisal capabilities in place to give potential challengers
pause.\textsuperscript{35} According to Lebow, failure to develop defence capabilities for
commitments can encourage potential challengers to question your resolve.\textsuperscript{36}
However, if resolve is perceived as low initially, the original defence structure
needs to be reinvigorated for the deterrence policy to be effective.\textsuperscript{37}

It may be necessary to restore and even increase the assured reprisal
forces to compensate for any deficiency in credibility, in order to demonstrate

\textsuperscript{31} ibid.
\textsuperscript{32} Nicholas Labinski, \textit{Evolution of a President}, p.94.
\textsuperscript{33} ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} ibid.
\textsuperscript{35} Richard Lebow, \textit{Between Peace and War}, p.88.
\textsuperscript{36} ibid.
resolve. The Kennedy administration was counting on the deterrent impact that announcing military preparations would provide. As the Acheson report on Berlin in 1961 stated, these military preparations had to be authentic in order to convey the intended message. George and Smoke assert that Kennedy:

Asked [for] and received from Congress additional monies to finance a further build up in conventional forces in Europe, authority to call up reserves or increase draft calls, authority to implement economic sanctions against Warsaw Pact nations and a tax increase to pay for these measures.

Kennedy intentionally set out to strengthen the credibility of his administration’s commitment to West Berlin by calling for a build up of conventional forces in Berlin. The extent of spending was breathtaking. Expenditure on appropriations for the armed forces exceeded $3.2 billion, not including the $1.8 billion to be spent on the procurement of non-nuclear weapons, ammunition and equipment. Army numbers were increased from 875,000 to approximately 1 million while Navy and Air Force personnel numbers increased by 29,000 and 63,000 respectively.

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38 Richard R. Rosecrance, Strategic Deterrence Reconsidered, p.12.
40 Ibid.
41 Alexander George and Richard Smoke, Deterrence, pp.415-16.
42 Michael O’Brien, Rethinking Kennedy, p.130.
44 In addition, draft calls were tripled, reserve units were called to active duty and tours of duty were extended. Moreover, airlift capacity and protection was improved, pre-retirement ships and aircraft were retained and reactivated. American Foreign Policy: Current Documents 1961. Part VI, The Soviet Union, Doc.244. "Joint Resolution to Authorize the President to Order Units and Members in The Ready Reserve to Active Duty For Not More Than Twelve Months, And For Other Purposes: Public Law 87-117, Approved August 1, 1961". Department of State Historical Office Bureau of Public Affairs, New York, Arno Press, 1971, p.612; "John F. Kennedy Speeches: Radio and Television Report to The American People on The Berlin Crisis, July 25 1961".
This was done to demonstrate to the U.S.S.R., and to Khrushchev in particular, that U.S. deterrence policy now included a larger array of options. Kennedy intended that these options should be perceived as realistic possibilities. He worked to regain the loss of credibility his hesitancy towards the use nuclear weapons had incurred.

He aimed for a build up of conventional forces that could match Khrushchev at a ‘manageable level’. Stating,

We need the capability of placing in any critical area at the appropriate time a force which, combined with those of our allies, is large enough to make clear our determination and our ability to defend our rights at all costs - and to meet all levels of aggressor pressure with whatever levels of force are required. We intend to have a wider choice than humiliation or all out nuclear action.

This tactic was so decisive that deterrence theorists George and Smoke argue that it is difficult to imagine what more the incoming administration could have done in 1961 to reinforce deterrence. Hence, the general philosophy of Flexible Response was avoiding reliance on a military response too big to be credible or wise—that is, solely relying upon the nuclear option.

The 1961 Berlin Crisis was not a provocation of nuclear proportion. Although Khrushchev wanted to avoid nuclear war, he was not deterred from

45 Michael O’Brien, Rethinking Kennedy, p.130.
46 Ibid.
47 Nicholas Labinski, Evolution of a President, p.99.
50 Alexander George and Richard Smoke, Deterrence, p.428.
52 Khrushchev was attempting a subtler shift in the balance of power within Berlin. He was cautious not to provoke a nuclear war and as such, targeted the inflexibility of the Massive Retaliation deterrence policy so that Kennedy would have to choose conceding rather than start a nuclear war. This was different to the Cuban Missile Crisis. Soviet actions during the Cuban Missile Crisis directly affected U.S. national security. The installation of ICBM’s in Cuba would make the U.S. early warning system ineffective and as a result Kennedy had all options on the table.
pushing Kennedy on less apparent issues to gain concessions that would indirectly lead to West Berlin falling into Soviet hands. He felt sure that Kennedy would not deploy Massive Retaliation, risking American lives, for the sake of a peace treaty. However, Khrushchev knew that if he pushed too far, ultimately, Kennedy might succumb to pressure from hard-line domestic politicians and retaliate with nuclear force. The aide-memoire challenge was therefore an indirect push, below the nuclear threshold for absolute retaliation, in an attempt to see a shift in the balance of power in Europe towards Soviet advantage. As a result, Khrushchev opted for a ‘sub-limited’ way to change Germany’s status quo. The Soviet brokered German peace treaty, within the aide-memoire, would work to change the accepted political arrangement by incidentally ending U.S. occupation rights in West Berlin, making Soviet invasion redundant. Khrushchev believed pressuring below the threshold of nuclear reprisals would enable him to manipulate Kennedy into agreeing to Soviet demands. This strategy relied on Khrushchev’s perception of the vulnerability of the U.S. deterrence policy.

As Khrushchev was not provoking a nuclear war, a nuclear retaliation was not necessary. Instead, Kennedy needed a myriad of strategies to combat more

55 Michael Beschloss, *The Crisis Years*, p.45.
57 Sub-limited here refers to conflicts at the low end of the violence spectrum.
58 These ‘Sub-limited’ challenges were attacks that were considered below the threshold for nuclear retaliation. With no measures in place to combat these, it was perceived by Khrushchev as a viable avenue of pursuit to gain concessions out of the U.S. foreign policy.
59 Aide-memoire, Soviet Union to the United States, Handed by Premier Khrushchev to President Kennedy at Vienna, 4 Jun 1961”, pp.729-733.
60 Michael Beschloss, *The Crisis Years*, p.45.
61 Khrushchev believed that Kennedy lacked the hawkish nature of the Eisenhower administration and would therefore forego a challenge that was below the threshold for nuclear provocation. This view was strengthened by Kennedy’s apparent empathy for Soviet tensions on the East German mass-exodus into West Berlin and his well-known reluctance to use nuclear weapons. Consequently, Kennedy would need to reinvent the U.S. deterrence policy to compensate for the gap between giving in and nuclear annihilation.
subversive challenges. George and Smoke argue that the Kennedy Administration was committed to introduce polices, ‘that could deter "sub-limited" conflict at the low end of the spectrum of violence’. What's more, two months prior to the July Address Kennedy signaled his belief in the need for these additional conventional forces.

Kennedy’s Flexible Response deterrence policy changed from the basic calculation: it was no longer a matter of whether the threat of nuclear reprisals was credible, but whether there was a real likelihood of the U.S. deploying conventional forces. Nonetheless, a crucial component of the Flexible Response deterrence policy was the maintenance of nuclear capabilities in order to maintain the balance of assured destruction.

The rationale behind Kennedy’s flexible approach was set out in a letter to Lauris Norstad, the Supreme Commander of Allied Powers in Europe, on 20 October 1961. In the letter, Kennedy states:

At this juncture I place as much importance on developing our capacity and readiness to fight with significant non-nuclear forces as on measures designed primarily to make our nuclear deterrent more credible. In saying this, I am not in any sense depreciating the need for realization by the

63 ibid.
64 In a speech on Urgent National Needs to Congress on May 25, 1961, Kennedy stated that the U.S. needed: ‘A further reinforcement of our own capacity to deter or resist non-nuclear aggression…I am directing the Secretary of Defense to undertake a reorganization and modernization of the Army’s divisional structure, to increase its non-nuclear firepower, to improve its tactical mobility in any environment, to insure its flexibility to meet any direct or indirect threat…to expand rapidly and substantially, in cooperation with our Allies, the orientation of existing forces for the conduct of non-nuclear war, paramilitary operations and sub-limited or unconventional wars’. "John F. Kennedy Speeches: President Kennedy's Special Message to the Congress on Urgent National Needs, May 25, 1961", John F. Kennedy Library Presidential Library Museum, 1961.
U.S.S.R. of the tremendous power of our nuclear forces and our will to use them, if necessary, in support of our objectives. Indeed, I think the two aspects are interrelated. It seems evident to me that our nuclear deterrent will not be credible to the Soviets unless they are convinced of NATO's readiness to become engaged on a lesser level of violence and are thereby made to realize the great risks of escalation to nuclear war.68

Kennedy could now meet Khrushchev's aide-memoire challenge with choices beyond either backing down or overreacting with nuclear reprisals.69 As early as spring 1961, Kennedy spoke of the need to be able to proportion any military response to its provocation.70 He advocated 'graduated deterrence' meaning a sequence of threatened responses to aggression rather than a commitment to leap into all out war.71

Furthermore, at the National Security Council meeting on the 19 July 1961, it was agreed that the changes to the N.A.T.O. ground forces in Berlin would give the U.S. 'the ability to fight conventional war for several weeks against any increased escalation of Soviet aggression'.72

Kennedy often referred to Churchill's strategy of 'arming to parley'.73 Kennedy believed it was vital to negotiate from a position of strength in order to achieve diplomatic success.74 Acheson convinced Kennedy not to negotiate with

69 Nicholas Labinski, Evolution of a President, p.99.
71 'What I want is a sequence of graduated responses to Soviet/GDR actions in denial of our rights of access. The purpose is to maintain our rights and preserve our alliance', Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Vol. XIV, Berlin Crisis, 1961-1962, Doc.185; Thomas Schelling, “Controlled Response and Strategic Warfare,” pp.73-74.
74 Nicholas Labinski, Evolution of a President, p.92, 96.
the Soviets until they understood U.S. determination to defend their commitment to West Berlin.\textsuperscript{75} Acheson believed that it is 'only by winning the test of will (that) we can change the Soviet purpose'.\textsuperscript{76}

The deterrer can enhance credibility by deploying military force on their ally's territory.\textsuperscript{77} This form of physical commitment is more difficult to reverse and connects these initial forces to the other military resources of the deterring state.\textsuperscript{78} This strategy may persuade an adversary that a state intends to act on what they have promised and enhances overall credibility.\textsuperscript{79} In the 1961 Berlin Crisis, it is clear that the balance of military ground power heavily favoured the Soviets.\textsuperscript{80} The geographic location of Berlin gave the U.S.S.R. a huge strategic advantage and the Kennedy administration was aware that the Soviets could quickly overrun the U.S. sector.\textsuperscript{81}

To encourage his forces to believe that they had the ability to successfully defend commitments in an uneven situation and to demonstrate to Khrushchev that there was willingness to do so, Kennedy alluded to historical precedent:

\begin{center}
I hear it said that West Berlin is military untenable. And so was Bastogne. And so, in fact, was Stalingrad. Any dangerous spot is tenable if men – brave men – will make it so.\textsuperscript{82}
\end{center}

Kennedy's allusion to the battles of Bastogne and Stalingrad served as the justification for the U.S. deterrence policy in West Berlin.\textsuperscript{83} Both battles were

\begin{thebibliography}{83}
\bibitem{75} Nicholas Labinski, \textit{Evolution of a President}, p.92, 96.
\bibitem{77} If conventional forces are relatively outnumbered it is still possible to bolster conventional forces to work as 'tripwires', to set off further retaliation, possibly even nuclear. Terrence Roehrig, \textit{From Deterrence to Engagement}, p.20.
\bibitem{78} Thomas Schelling, \textit{Arms and Influence}, p.99.
\bibitem{79} Terrence Roehrig, \textit{From Deterrence to Engagement}, p.20.
\bibitem{80} Nicholas Labinski, \textit{Evolution of a President}, p.94.
\bibitem{81} ibid.
\bibitem{82} "Radio and Television Reports to the American People on the Berlin Crisis, 25 July 1961".
\end{thebibliography}
defensive, won by strong will and tough attitude.84 West Berlin would be safeguarded by a similarly unrelenting commitment.85 By harking back to a time when the U.S.S.R. and the U.S. were allies, Kennedy was suggesting that the two superpowers could again work towards collective prosperity.86

Lebow argues that when policy makers receive new information they are expected to reformulate their perceptions of the risks and make ‘more complex and sophisticated judgments about the implications of the various policy alternatives they considered’.87 Kennedy believed that he had to bolster the conventional defence component of his deterrence policy to sway Khrushchev into concluding that the benefits of challenging West Berlin no longer added up to success.88

Kennedy worked to connect the new levels of conventional defence that were being deployed in the U.S. sector of Berlin to new heightened risks Khrushchev faced if he continued to insists on challenging U.S. rights of access.89 By doing so, he fulfilled Schelling’s notion that if commitments are ‘manifestly connected to the machinery of war it should work like a physical barrier’.90 Moreover, reflecting on the events from 1961 in a North Atlantic Council ministerial meeting on 5 May 1962, Robert McNamara stated,

83 Nicholas Labinski, *Evolution of a President*, p.100.
84 The Battle of Bastogne, or Battle of the Bulge, was a military engagement between US and German forces from 20-27 December 1944 at Bastogne in Belgium. Although heavily outnumbered, U.S. along with Allied forces were victorious over the Germans. The Battle of Stalingrad was similar in that the Soviet forces was surrounded and heavily outnumbered by German forces. It took place on August 1942 to 2 February 1943 and like Bastogne the Soviets were able to hold out and eventual stage a counter-offensive, leading to the Soviet invasion of Germany, Nicholas Labinski, *Evolution of a President*, p.100.
85 By citing the Battle of Bastogne, Kennedy was implying that although a numerically superior enemy, like in 1944, surrounded Berlin the U.S. would again prevail through their strong willed determination, Nicholas Labinski, *Evolution of a President*, p.101.
86 ibid.
88 ibid.
90 Ibid.
It was not simply the substantial increase in NATO manpower and the addition of the equivalent of four combat-ready divisions, 88 more ships and 19 more air squadrons, but the meaning which their addition conveyed of our determination that may have given the Soviets second thoughts.91

Consequently, this approach complimented Kennedy’s ideals of flexibility and determination, and worked to reshape Khrushchev’s perception of West Berlin as a credible commitment.

Chapter 4

The Great Testing Place of Western Courage and Will:
The Need to Demonstrate Resolve

Khrushchev worried that he had misjudged Kennedy at Vienna, although
he still remained unconvinced of the Kennedy administration resolve. Petr Lunák
argues that by August 1961, Khrushchev began to doubt his original assertion
about Kennedy’s willingness to defend the U.S. position in Berlin.¹ The final major
requirement for a deterrence policy to be considered successful is the
demonstration of resolve to carry out defensive measures when challenged.²
Terrence Roehrig asserts that this requirement is the most difficult, as
communicating an explicit commitment and backing it up with sufficient defence
capabilities does not necessarily ensure acceptance of the deterrence threat in the
adversary’s mind.³ A state must demonstrate resolve to defend its commitment
against all challenges in order to gain definitive credibility.⁴ Under Soviet
direction, the East German state embarked upon a campaign of harassment as a
means to test whether the U.S. would defend their rights in Berlin.⁵ Utilising the
Flexible Response policy, the U.S. resisted Soviet pressure, effectively deterring

¹ Petr Lunák, “Khrushchev and the Berlin Crisis”, p.74.
² Richard Lebow, Between Peace and War, p.97.
³ Terrence Roehrig, From Deterrence to Engagement, pp.18-19.
⁴ Robert Jervis has found that deterrence crises ‘arise if an aggressor believes that
the status quo powers are weak in capability or resolve. This belief will lead the
former to test opponents, usually starting with small and apparently unimportant
issues. The state must display the ability and willingness to wage war’. The status-
quo power, in this case the U.S., can not afford to ignore minor conflicts as ‘Issues
of little intrinsic value become highly significant as indices of resolve’ within
deterrence crises, Robert Jervis, Perception and Misperception, p.58.
⁵ The nature of the harassment was pure intimidation. Under Khrushchev’s order
Soviet and East German forces began harassing the U.S. and the Allies just below
provocation. For example in the airspace corridors, Soviet military aircrafts would
fly within metres of U.S. military aircrafts in an attempt to intimidate the pilots
into landing and disrupting their activities. However it was very clear that the
pilots should try everything to disrupt the U.S. access rights without provoking
conflict, Curtis Cate, The Ides of August, p.459, 486.
Khrushchev from further challenges to the status quo in West Berlin. Arnold Horelick and Myron Rush conclude that during the course of the Berlin Crisis the Soviet leadership 'became sufficiently convinced of the quality of U.S. will to resist' due to the strong deterrence policy of the Kennedy administration.

Kennedy understood the importance of demonstrating resolve in Berlin in order for commitments to be credible. In *The Strategy of Peace* (1960), Kennedy stated, 'I think you must demonstrate your determination to fight, otherwise you're holding a very tenuous position in Berlin'.

One of the most significant challenges Kennedy faced was the Soviet decision to resume nuclear testing. His administration’s response to this and other challenges would set the U.S. Berlin position in stone.

On Monday afternoon, 28 August 1961, President Kennedy was informed that an American listening post had reported a possible announcement of the Soviet government’s plan to start a new series of nuclear tests. This move by the U.S.S.R. was in defiance of the voluntary moratorium on nuclear testing that the two superpowers had observed since 1958. Kennedy confided in his brother, Robert, that Khrushchev was obviously attempting to intimidate the West. The official announcement came from Khrushchev on 30 August 1961. Over the next three months the Soviet Union conducted thirty-one nuclear tests. The most politically provocative test involved detonating a fifty-eight megaton bomb. This bomb, the largest ever to be exploded, was four thousand times more powerful

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7 ibid.
9 ibid.
11 By demonstrating his resolve, Kennedy showed a pattern for following through on his determination not to be intimidated, setting the precedence for future challenges, Michael Beschloss, *The Crisis Years*, pp.291-293.
12 ibid, p.291.
13 ibid.
14 ibid, p.293.
than the one dropped on Hiroshima.\textsuperscript{15} Although the nuclear testing was not a
direct challenge to the U.S. commitment to West Berlin, it was part of a long
running campaign of intimidation in which Berlin played an integral role.\textsuperscript{16} As
such, Khrushchev's actions can be perceived as a test of Kennedy's resolve to stand
fast. This is evident in a report by U.S. nuclear scientists to Kennedy that stated
resumption of tests would have had to be planned prior to the Vienna summit.\textsuperscript{17}
The implication was clearly that the decision to restart nuclear tests was aligned
with Khrushchev's prejudgment of Kennedy's character based on his past
performances.\textsuperscript{18} He hoped a show of nuclear force would scare Kennedy into
submission.\textsuperscript{19}

On 31 August, in the wake of Khrushchev's announcement, Kennedy met
with his National Security Council to discuss the motivation behind the
announcement. Vice President Lyndon Johnson asserted that Khrushchev's move
'might be a reaction to their failure to intimidate the West in the Berlin situation'.\textsuperscript{20}
Kennedy considered this and concluded that this new provocation would have to
be tackled in order to demonstrate the U.S. determination not to be intimidated
out of Berlin.\textsuperscript{21} Michael Beschloss argues that Khrushchev's resumption of nuclear
testing satisfied his growing perception of a need to intimidate the West with a
strong show of Soviet power.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{15} "Nuclear Test Ban Treaty", \textit{John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum},
1962.
\textsuperscript{16} Other main areas of harassment and intimidation were the airspace corridor
access right and the access rights into East Berlin.
\textsuperscript{17} Michael Beschloss, \textit{The Crisis Years}, p.293.
\textsuperscript{18} ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} ibid, p.295.
\textsuperscript{21} ibid.
\textsuperscript{22} Andrei Sakharov, a Soviet nuclear physicist involved in the crisis, in an interview
on Cold War tensions, asserted that Khrushchev's decision to resume nuclear
testing was purely motivated by political strategy rather than a need to further
Soviet understanding of nuclear weapons, Michael Beschloss, \textit{The Crisis Years},
p.294.
The power of the Soviets to invoke, for political purposes, the idea of a thermonuclear war against the West gave the Soviet leader an influential tool for foreign policy.\textsuperscript{23} Although Kennedy was not convinced that the threat of pre-emptive nuclear weapons strikes was entirely credible, he recognised the need to act to deal with Khrushchev’s intimidation of the Western allies.\textsuperscript{24} Khrushchev’s action in allowing the resumption of nuclear testing was a clear threat to the safety of U.S. allies including France and Britain. Khrushchev was well aware of the possibility that, under threat of nuclear attack, U.S. allies might pressure Kennedy into accepting Soviet demands.\textsuperscript{25} Horelick and Rush argue that the Soviets had conducted a ‘deliberate, systematic, and sustained strategic deception against the West in order to increase the effectiveness of this tactic’.\textsuperscript{26} Consequently, under Kennedy’s direction, U.S. government officials began publicly denying the credibility of the Soviet missile claims.\textsuperscript{27} They also spoke with a new confidence about American strategic nuclear superiority.\textsuperscript{28} This was designed to convince U.S. public opinion that Soviet nuclear superiority was nothing more than a myth.\textsuperscript{29}

The public relations offensive involved several press reports and public interviews demonstrating a resolve not to be intimidated out of Berlin.\textsuperscript{30} On 21 October 1961 Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric publicly dispelled the missile gap myth that the U.S. was trailing behind the U.S.S.R. in terms of nuclear

\textsuperscript{23} Arnold L. Horelick and Myron Rush, \textit{Strategic Power}, p.15.
\textsuperscript{25} William Taubman, \textit{Khrushchev}, p.501.
\textsuperscript{26} Khrushchev’s understood that within a democratic society, the President was at call to the whims and fear of the people. His tactic, therefore, of being overtly belligerent and provoking fear of the Soviets fearless attitude towards nuclear annihilation was his major propaganda objective during his time in power, believing that the fear of the U.S. people would force Kennedy’s hand, Arnold L. Horelick and Myron Rush, \textit{Strategic Power}, p.14.
\textsuperscript{27} ibid, p.125.
\textsuperscript{28} Arnold L. Horelick and Myron Rush, \textit{Strategic Power}, p.125.
\textsuperscript{29} Michael Beschloss, \textit{The Crisis Years}, p.331; Arnold L. Horelick and Myron Rush, \textit{Strategic Power}, p.125.
\textsuperscript{30} Arnold L. Horelick and Myron Rush, \textit{Strategic Power}, p.125.
strategic power. Secretary of State Dean Rusk gave an interview the following morning saying:

Mr Khrushchev must know that we are strong. When we talk about exploratory talks or about contact with the Soviet government on one or another point, there is no problem that turns on whether we are weak or not. We are not weak.

The Gettysburg Times reacted to Rusk’s comments reporting that he had backed the Pentagon’s official declaration that the U.S. has the retaliatory power to crush any aggressor. The editorial confirmed Rusk’s assertion that the U.S. approach to negotiation with the Soviet Union would be ‘from a position of strength’. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara continued the news offensive in an article on 13 November 1961, writing, ‘I believe we have nuclear power several times that of the Soviet Union’. A few days later, the New York Times published figures from ‘a recent intelligence study’ comparing the operative missiles of the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. which seemed to confirm U.S. superiority. There was now a consensus among U.S. policy makers that concerns surrounding a missile gap were passé. The Kennedy administration’s response to Khrushchev’s decision to resume nuclear testing neutralised the Soviet leader’s strategy of intimidation.

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34 ibid.
37 ibid.
38 Arnold L. Horelick and Myron Rush, Strategic Power, p.125; Michael Beschloss, The Crisis Years, p.331.
Kennedy made it clear to Khrushchev that diplomacy by coercion was not going to be an effective strategy.\(^{39}\)

Beschloss asserts that President Kennedy did not directly dismiss the missile gap himself, as he believed it could be perceived as belligerent.\(^{40}\) On 25 September 1961 Kennedy addressed the General Assembly at the United Nations. He used the opportunity to reject Khrushchev’s strategy of using nuclear testing to push the U.S. into abandoning its commitments saying:

Terror is not a new weapon. Throughout history those who could not prevail, either by persuasion or example have used it. But inevitably they fail, either because men are not afraid to die for a life worth living, or because the terrorists themselves came to realize that free men cannot be frightened by threats, and that aggression would meet its own response. And it is in the light of that history that every nation today should know, be he friend or foe, that the United States has both the will and the weapons to join free men in standing up to their responsibilities.\(^{41}\)

Following Kennedy’s public relations offensive, subsequent Soviet statements regarding nuclear strategic power were less provocative.\(^{42}\) In an official statement on the nuclear balance, in July 1962, Khrushchev insisted that the real military balance of power could only be determined during an actual war; this was far less provocative than his previous assertions of total Soviet supremacy.\(^{43}\) Cimbala suggests that from this point on, the Soviets’ ‘acknowledgment and acceptance of parity was the basis for political relations between the two superpowers’.\(^{44}\)

In addition, Horelick and Rush argue that ‘Soviet strategic pronouncements sought primarily to minimize the loss to Soviet political influence


\(^{40}\) Michael Beschloss, *The Crisis Years*, p.331.


\(^{43}\) Ibid.

\(^{44}\) Ibid.
and military stature caused by the collapse of the missile gap myth’. Moreover, by the end of 1961, Khrushchev had recognized that the old claim of strategic superiority based exclusively on the Soviet ICBM force was no longer credible.

While Kennedy did not compromise his position, Khrushchev certainly had to compromise his. To stop the loss of East Germany’s best and brightest to the West, Khrushchev had to resort to a crude alternative to maintain control over the population. Kennedy was well aware of the problem Khrushchev faced. The President confided in Walt Rostow saying:

Khrushchev is losing East Germany. He cannot let this happen. If East Germany goes, so will Poland and all of Eastern Europe. He will have to do something to stop the flow of refugees. Perhaps a wall. And we won’t be able to prevent it. I can hold the alliance together to defend West Berlin, but I cannot act to keep East Berlin open.

Between midnight and 2am on 13 August 1961, East German soldiers started to physically divide the city into East and West Berlin. Initially, this was achieved with the construction of a barbed wire and concrete barricade that bordered the Allied sectors of the city. This barrier was built exclusively on East German territory and the Soviet sector of the city, and was later reinforced with a more permanent structure. Khrushchev’s Foreign Policy assistant, Troyanovsky said that the Wall ‘saved Khrushchev face’ and that it was ‘a silent recognition that he had not achieved his basic aim’. Andreas Wenger argues that the construction of the Wall signaled Soviet acceptance of a divided Europe, not just the most

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46 Ibid, p.98.
48 This crude alternative was the construction of the Wall that psychologically stopped emigration, Michael Beschloss, *The Crisis Years*, p.265.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
efficient way to stop the mass exodus of refugees from the Soviet sector.\textsuperscript{54} The
collection of the Berlin Wall was an early indication that the U.S. \textit{Flexible}
Response policy had effectively deterred Khrushchev from pushing the German
peace treaty deadline, and thus maintained West Berlin's freedom.\textsuperscript{55}

In the tense days following the construction of the Wall there was
significant debate over whether or not the Wall was an isolated move or the start
of a new push on West Berlin.\textsuperscript{56} The Wall was seen by Kennedy as a way to defuse
the Berlin Crisis, and as such was deemed as acceptable within the \textit{Flexible}
Response policy.\textsuperscript{57} Secretary of State Dean Rusk believed this to be true and on 13
August 1961 announced:

> Available information indicates that measures taken thus far are aimed at
residents of East Berlin and East Germany and not at the Allied position in
West Berlin or access thereto.\textsuperscript{58}

The Wall was not considered a challenge to U.S. commitments, as U.S.
troops would have to cross the border to remove the structure. It became
apparent that Khrushchev was being cautious, making sure that the Wall was not
blocking U.S. access to East Berlin.\textsuperscript{59} Khrushchev was very clear on this point.\textsuperscript{60}
Before commencing construction of the Wall, two Soviet divisions were positioned
around East Berlin in order to control the operation and to ensure that the East
German Premier Walter Ulbricht did nothing to escalate the crisis.\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{54} Andreas Wenger, \textit{Living with Peril}, p.218.
\textsuperscript{55} ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} U.S. Department of State, Archive. "Berlin Crises".
\textsuperscript{57} While the Wall negatively impacted the lives of many Berliners, its primary
purpose was to stop the flow of East German citizens into the West, U.S.
Department of State, Archive. "Berlin Crises".
\textsuperscript{58} "Statement by Secretary of State Rusk concerning Travel Restrictions in Berlin
Department of State}, 1961, p.776.
\textsuperscript{60} ibid.
\textsuperscript{61} Michael Beschloss, \textit{The Crisis Years}, p.352.
However, to reassure the international community regarding the U.S. commitment to West Berlin, Kennedy ordered reinforcements to the second and third Battle Groups of the Berlin Brigade.\textsuperscript{62} This resulted in an acceptable impasse where the Soviets did not challenge the legality of Western rights and the West did not seek to change the reality of Soviet authority in East Germany.\textsuperscript{63} When it was claimed that his decision was a risk to the U.S. position in West Berlin, Kennedy responded:

Why would Khrushchev put up a wall if he really intended to seize West Berlin? This is his way out of his predicament. It’s not a very nice solution, but a wall is a hell of a lot better than a war.\textsuperscript{64}

Khrushchev further tested U.S. resolve by harassing Western personnel at the Friedrichstrasse crossing point in East Berlin.\textsuperscript{65} The East German Police ‘Vopos’, Volkspolizei, increasingly harassed U.S. personnel by performing unauthorized inspections of Allied vehicles at checkpoints in and out of East Berlin.\textsuperscript{66} This represented the start of a series of tests of U.S. resolve to protect their residual access rights and to free movement in Berlin.\textsuperscript{67}

This harassment heightened concerns within the Kennedy administration that the Friedrichstrasse crossing point might be closed.\textsuperscript{68} Western powers asserted that they had rights of access as a result of the Potsdam settlement; their continuing occupation was not a result of a concession from the U.S.S.R.\textsuperscript{69}

\textsuperscript{63} U.S. Department of State, Archive, "Berlin Crises".
\textsuperscript{64} Seymour Hersh, The Dark Side of Camelot, p.258.
\textsuperscript{65} Curtis Cate, The Ides of August, p.459, 486.
\textsuperscript{66} ibid.
\textsuperscript{67} ibid.
The U.S. insisted that no Soviet approved action could legally remove these rights.\textsuperscript{70} Furthermore, as the West had refused to acknowledge the sovereignty of the East German Republic, American policy was to show identification papers only to Soviet authority and to refuse to show them to the East German police.\textsuperscript{71} To demonstrate their resolve, U.S. personnel gave a defiant response to a series of challenges on the West’s free movement rights, from the military escorts in the airspace corridors to the tank line up at Checkpoint Charlie.\textsuperscript{72}

A series of incidents erupted into a serious standoff, starting with the detention of the senior American diplomat Allan Lightner and his wife on their way to see a Czechoslovakian theatre performance in East Berlin.\textsuperscript{73} The ‘Vopos’ demanded to see identification papers, despite the vehicle having official U.S. number plates.\textsuperscript{74} This act violated verbal agreements made at the 1945 Potsdam Conference.\textsuperscript{75} Lightner immediately enlisted the assistance of General Lucius Clay, Special Advisor in West Berlin, to demonstrate U.S. resolve to defend their rights.\textsuperscript{76} On 23 October 1961, with prior Soviet approval, the East German government announced that only uniformed allied personnel would be able to commute into East Berlin without identification papers.\textsuperscript{77} Clay and Kennedy agreed that the Americans must act or risk the erosion of Western rights.\textsuperscript{78}

During the following days, dozens of civilian vehicles accompanied by military escorts crossed the East Berlin border in direct defiance of the new East

\textsuperscript{70} Hope M. Harrison, \textit{Driving The Soviets Up The Wall}, p.118.
\textsuperscript{71} The U.S. refused to acknowledge the sovereignty of East Germany and thus they did not acknowledge the authority of the East German police in interfering with their occupation rights. Donald A. Carter, ”The U.S. Military Response”, p.7.
\textsuperscript{72} Neil Carmichael, ”A Brief History of the Berlin Crisis of 1961”, \textit{National Declassification Center, National Records and Archives Administration}, 2011, pp.2-5.
\textsuperscript{73} ibid.
\textsuperscript{74} ibid.
\textsuperscript{75} ibid.
\textsuperscript{76} ibid.
\textsuperscript{77} Neil Carmichael, ”A Brief History of the Berlin Crisis of 1961”, pp.2-5.
\textsuperscript{78} Michael Beschloss, \textit{The Crisis Years}, p.333.
German border controls. On 24 October East German police stopped twenty-six Allied vehicles although U.S. military personnel ensured they were escorted across the border.

Beschloss suggests that the U.S. approach represented 'the most important communist setback since the border closing'. On 25 October 1961 in an article entitled 'MP’s Defy Berlin's Red Border Control Police', the Red Bank Register newspaper reported 'in an obvious show of defiance of the communist border control, American jeeps escorted private civilian vehicle across the borders at Friedrichstrasse'. However, by 27 October the ten U.S. tanks used as military escorts faced a similar number of Soviet tanks.

The standoff at Checkpoint Charlie lasted sixteen hours, and remains one of the most significant shows of American resolve during Kennedy’s presidency. Just as the standoff appeared to be reaching a climax, Khrushchev ordered his tanks to withdraw saying:

All right pull back your tanks. The Americans can't pull theirs back for reasons of prestige.

The confrontation boosted the confidence of Berliners in the U.S. resolve not to yield to Soviet pressure in the wake of confrontation. David Brainard

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80 ibid.
81 Michael Beschloss, The Crisis Years, p.334.
83 While Clay was updating Kennedy on the situation a further twenty Soviet tanks rolled up to the border. Clay’s assessment to Kennedy was that, ‘This proves they are good mathematicians...we have thirty tanks in Berlin, so they brought up twenty more tanks so that they will have a tank for every tank we have. Clay concluded that this was evidence that ‘they don't intend to do anything Michael Beschloss, The Crisis Years, p.334; Neil Carmichael, "A Brief History of the Berlin Crisis of 1961", pp.2-5.
84 Curtis Cate, The Ides of August, p.459, 486.
85 ibid.
concludes that the incident subsided with Khrushchev’s decision to accept U.S. deterrence. Khrushchev told reporters at the Kremlin’s 40th anniversary celebration of the Russian Revolution on 7 November 1961, that:

For the time being, it is not good for Russians and the United States to push each other in regards to settling the Berlin issue.

The confrontation has been largely seen as a success for Kennedy, as it confirmed the U.S. would not succumb to any pressure on its occupying rights in Berlin.

Although the Four-Powers failed to negotiate official ground access routes, they were able to establish air access routes. However, as a challenge to Kennedy’s reinvigorated deterrence policy, the Soviets began to dispute the West’s free access airspace corridors around Berlin. The U.S.S.R. attempted to institute new restrictions on Western flights coming into the city, while authorizing Soviet fighters to buzz Allied aircraft flying through approved airspace access corridors. More controversial Soviet harassment of Western airspace access began on 7 February 1962. The Soviet controller at the Berlin Air Safety Centre (BASC) broadcast that Soviet military aircraft were to ‘engage’ the southern airspace corridor from Frankfurt to Berlin at altitudes up to 7000 feet for three and a half hours on the following day. The harassment continued with repeats on 9 and 12

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87 Michael Beschloss, The Crisis Years, p.336.
88 ibid.
89 William R. Smyser, “Tanks at Checkpoint Charlie”.
90 The Four Occupying Powers were the U.S., Britain, France and the Soviet Union. On November 30th 1945, the U.S.S.R. signed a written agreement on the creation of three 20-mile wide air corridors from West Germany, providing free access rights to Berlin for the Western Allies, John Proctor American Resolve and The Art of War, Bloomington, Author House, 2012, p.53.
91 Curtis Cate, The Ides of August, p.459, 486.
92 ibid.
93 ibid.
94 While Soviet military activities in these areas were not unprecedented, the decision was interpreted by the Kennedy administration as a challenge on
February in the northern and central corridors, and on 14 and 15 February in the southern corridor.\textsuperscript{95} The Soviets went on to announce that Western aircraft now required prior Soviet approval to access these corridors.\textsuperscript{96}

By restricting access to the city, the Soviets hoped to force the Western Allies to abandon their strong stand on Berlin.\textsuperscript{97} This new offensive was a last-ditch attempt to test Kennedy's resolve and to salvage a negotiable position in future settlements over Berlin.\textsuperscript{98} This is confirmed by the official reports on the conduct of the Soviet Union, found in \textit{Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume V}, where this engagement of corridors is viewed as an attempt to give the Soviets more gravity in future negotiations.\textsuperscript{99}

The Kennedy administration was concerned about the new offensive on their access rights.\textsuperscript{100} A telegram from Walter Dowling to the Department of State declared that he regarded 'the Soviet actions in pre-empting space, denying guarantees of flight safety in south corridor and buzzing of Allied planes as most serious problem we have faced up to this time in maintaining access to Berlin'.\textsuperscript{101}

Rusk informed the President that, 'we expect to react sharply and immediately so that they have no false conception of our position in the matter'.\textsuperscript{102}

\textsuperscript{96} ibid.
\textsuperscript{97} Therefore the main aims by restricting access was to see the Kennedy administration yield their avowed determination not to relent any rights whilst not aggravating conflict, Charles Sampson, John Joyce, and David Patterson (eds.), "Foreign Relations of the United States, Vol. V, Soviet Union", p.369.
\textsuperscript{98} ibid.
\textsuperscript{99} ibid.
\textsuperscript{101} ibid.
Although Kennedy believed the Soviet leader had accepted the removal of the Western presence in Berlin was not an option, he remained suspicious that Soviet harassment was an attempt to lay the foundation for future negotiations that would favour Soviet ambitions.\(^\text{103}\) In response to the harassment, the U.S. authorised civilian aircraft to fly through the reserved corridors at the pre-empted altitudes with military escorts.\(^\text{104}\) This continued without Soviet approval.\(^\text{105}\)

Although he was not willing to risk provoking actual conflict by engaging with Western aircraft, Khrushchev was seeking to pressurize the Western powers.\(^\text{106}\) By keeping Berlin as a current issue, the new offensive on Western airspace corridors was less an attempt to steer the crisis towards unilateral Soviet gains, but instead an attempt to lay the foundations for future settlement.\(^\text{107}\)

Khrushchev, still not sufficiently convinced of Kennedy’s resolve, embarked on a test of wills to decide how far Kennedy’s resolve went.\(^\text{108}\) The Kennedy administration’s firm and unhesitating response to these challenges helped cement the *Flexible Response* deterrence approach as an effective and successful policy in combating Soviet aggressive ambitions in Berlin.\(^\text{109}\)

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\(^{104}\) Ibid.


\(^{106}\) Berlin remained a ‘bargaining chip’, which could ultimately open Western leaders up to more equal negotiations in future settlements. This notion is confirmed by a large article published in a special edition of *Izvestia* released on February 11th, which suggested that the Soviets were moving away from demanding unilateral solutions on Berlin and towards the lack of a mutually agreeable solution on the West’s part *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1961-1963, Vol. V, Soviet Union, Doc.150. “Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, January 20, 1962”, *Department of State*, Washington, 1962, pp.85-87.


\(^{108}\) Petr Lunák, “Khrushchev and the Berlin Crisis”, p.74.

\(^{109}\) Arnold L. Horelick and Myron Rush *Strategic Power*, p.126.
An assessment of the 22nd Communist Party Congress by U.S. officials on 8 November 1961, concluded that the build up of forces and the demonstration of U.S. firmness played a crucial role in Khrushchev’s announcement on the lifting of the deadline for signing a separate German peace treaty.\textsuperscript{110}

ICH BIN EIN BERLINER: CONCLUSION

The response of the Kennedy administration following the publication of the Soviet aide-memoire after the Vienna summit undermined Khrushchev’s strategy. Kennedy managed the crisis by combining firmness with flexibility. He used superior U.S. nuclear capacity as a diplomatic tool. Moreover, he used conventional means to raise the nuclear threshold and control the speed at which escalation was calculated.

Khrushchev’s challenge was the result of misperception and the psychological relationship between the two-superpower leaders was pivotal to the duration, intensity, and resolution of the 1961 Berlin Crisis. The effective implementation of Flexible Response as a deterrence policy worked to form a credible perception of Kennedy’s resolve and character. Khrushchev backed down from his policy goal of incorporating West Berlin into the GDR, once he realised that he had underestimated Kennedy’s determination not to be pressured out of Berlin.

Deterrence theory implies a psychological relationship and it is important to assess the motivation and perception behind the challengers’ and deterriers’ decision-making processes.1 When deterrence theory is applied to foreign policy, leaders draw on cognitive pathologies to understand an adversary’s perceptions of their resolve.2 This understanding can tailor deterrence policy that responds to the perception behind challengers and fixes them accordingly.3

Kennedy’s understanding of Khrushchev’s challenge to the U.S. position in Berlin was a result of failing to demonstrate a strong resolve for the U.S. position. The former U.S. deterrence policy of Massive Retaliation was not credible under

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1 Robert Jervis, Perception and Misperception, p.113.
2 Patrick Morgan, “Saving Face For the Sake of Deterrence”, p.133.
3 Ibid.
the Kennedy administration as Khrushchev’s no longer believed in the U.S. resolve to carry through on the deterrent threat.

Kennedy’s July Address set out the U.S. commitment in Berlin. The President defined the limitation and extent of the U.S. commitment to emphasise to the Soviets the importance that the U.S. placed on their position and to clarify what was a high value commitment and what was flexible. In addition, by connecting the U.S. position in Berlin to his presidential prestige, Kennedy increased the cost of disengagement to further add credibility to his resolve to maintain the commitment. By removing the ambiguity of the U.S. commitments parameters, Kennedy confronted the Soviet challenge more directly and overtly, giving his position further credibility as he laid out explicit guidelines that removed the possibility of the Soviets claiming a misunderstanding.

President Kennedy understood that nuclear reprisals were not sufficient to combat the Soviet challenge, and began bolstering U.S. conventional forces in Europe to undermine Khrushchev’s pressure tactics. This enabled his administration to enact flexible polices adapted to almost any Soviet challenge below the nuclear threshold. Flexible Response gave Kennedy the option to maintain the U.S. commitment without being forced into a nuclear holocaust, or into humiliation. It enabled Kennedy to control and maintain a steady escalation. Although conventional forces were too small to thwart a direct Soviet attack, they were significant enough to gain credibility as ‘trip-wires’. This tactic targeted Khrushchev’s sense of rationality and necessity to act in self-interest. Such flexibility meant that the risk associated with embarking upon a challenge was connected to U.S. conventional forces and a policy of gradual escalation.

The final criterion for implementing an effective deterrence policy within an immediate deterrence crisis is the ability to demonstrate resolve.\(^4\) Khrushchev

embarked upon a campaign of harassment and intimidation as a test to see how far Kennedy's resolve would go. This was a desperate attempt by Khrushchev to determine if his original perception of Kennedy as a weak opponent was accurate. The confrontations that followed enabled Kennedy to prove Khrushchev wrong by demonstrating his administration’s capacity and willingness to meet any challenge.

However, it is also important to make accommodations within deterrence polices when they interfere with an adversary’s vital interests. Faced with a strong U.S. deterrence policy Khrushchev reassessed his perception and decided to be satisfied with merely halting East German immigration through the Berlin Wall. By remaining defiant throughout the harassment and intimidation, the Kennedy administration effectively demonstrated their resolve to act in the defence of their commitment. The Soviet leadership became convinced of the U.S. resolve to resist and act on any challenge on the freedom of West Berlin and U.S. access rights, allowing Berlin to be settled and removed from the Cold War arena.

Kennedy effectively worked through the necessary criteria in an immediate deterrence situation to gain credibility for a successful and formidable deterrence policy. Horelick and Rush assert that ‘during the course of the Berlin campaign and by the end of 1961, Soviet leadership became sufficiently convinced of the quality of U.S. will to resist’.5

There are limitations to the practicality of deterrence theory. The assumption of rationality by theorists limits the theory as applied to historical cases, as aggressors may not always act in rational, self-interested ways. However in the case of Nikita Khrushchev, it was clear he was pragmatic in the way he calculated risks and benefits against challenging the vital interests of an adversary.

5 Arnold L. Horelick and Myron Rush, Strategic Power, p.126.
Kennedy's deterrence policy was successful as an immediate deterrence policy as it stopped an imminent challenge on Berlin. This does not take into account later developments in the Cold War, as immediate deterrence is focused on stopping discernible imminent challenges rather than future possibilities. By making Berlin the focus, Kennedy's policy was confined to the city and to the challenge of U.S. access rights and West Berlin's freedom. In relation to the Cuban Missile Crisis, Kennedy's actions were not the result of the failure of U.S. deterrence but rather an attempt by the Soviets to balance out general deterrence. In other words, worrying about the U.S. ICBM superiority forced Khrushchev to seek out ways for the U.S.S.R. to achieve a situation where general deterrence for both sides would reach its equilibrium. Installing missiles in Cuba fitted that purpose.

This dissertation applied a theoretical model of deterrence to demonstrate that Kennedy acted in line with the model and that he succeeded in Berlin as a result. Kennedy's deterrence policy effectively met an imminent Soviet challenge; therefore Kennedy's Flexible Response was an effective deterrence policy. Developing the necessary credibility through the effective completion of deterrence criteria, Kennedy's *Flexible Response* deterrence policy successfully deterred Khrushchev from continuing his challenge on the U.S. commitment in West Berlin. Kennedy and Khrushchev drew back from the brink, however the winter was far from over.
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