

The Allied Withdrawal from Berlin

Conditions – Process – Consequences

Berlin, July 10–12, 2024

The year 2024 marks the thirtieth anniversary of the withdrawal from Berlin and the Federal Republic of Germany of the victorious Allies of World War II. For forty-nine years, their presence shaped the former imperial capital in ways still being felt today. During this period, the city was divided into four sectors. Initially, it was administered jointly by the four powers, and from the late 1940s it increasingly became a focal point of the Cold War, in which the city acquired a special geopolitical and legal status.

The presence of the Soviets in the East and the Americans, British and French in the West meant that the city's structures were shaped by the victorious powers, so that it makes sense to ask which areas of urban life were *not* influenced by them. The fall of the Wall on November 9, 1989 initiated a process that culminated in German unification, the end of the Cold War, and the withdrawal of the Allies in 1994—a dramatic turning point for the former “front-line city.”

The conference will begin by taking stock of the period up to 1994, in which the four Allies were present in Berlin (1). Then the focus will shift to the conditions of the military withdrawal and its implementation (2). Finally, we will analyze the consequences of the withdrawal for the city of Berlin from various standpoints (3). These include the military history of the stationing of the Bundeswehr, and the social, cultural and economic history of the consequences for the further development of the city and its population. Then we will explore memories of the Allied military presence in Berlin since 1994, along with the many traces left behind. Walking through today's Berlin reveals the topographical effects of the Allied presence. At the same time, Berlin's districts, and with them the former sites of the occupying powers, have undergone fundamental changes over the past thirty years.

The use of the term “military presence” refers here not just to soldiers, but also to their families and to everyday relations between civilians and the Allied armed forces. As a consequence, we seek to look beyond the military arena and include a whole range of sites of interaction: Schools, businesses, cultural centers and other social or economic points of contact between the soldiers and their families and the people of Berlin. Processes of exchange presumably also existed

between the Allied “communities,” which, we would propose, did not necessarily follow the lines of the “Iron Curtain.”

Another emphasis will be on the social structure of Berlin and the relationships between soldiers and the civilian population, which in turn poses the question of the complex processes of transformation after 1994: How did the withdrawal of the occupying forces affect the composition of the population? Can we speak of “Allied communities” before 1994? Or were soldiers’ and their families’ “Berlin years” a formative life experience that persisted after the withdrawal, for both those who returned home and those who decided, for professional or personal reasons, to stay in Berlin after their service ended? A comparison with other German cities may prove instructive here.

Finally, we would like to analyze how the concept of the Allies changed: How did relations between the former victorious powers, who had become Cold War adversaries or even enemies but now had to reinvent their network of relationships, evolve after 1989/90? How did the end of the USSR affect memories of the “Soviet” presence in Berlin? What did this mean for the various states that emerged from the division of the Soviet empire? This aspect has gained new relevance against the background of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, which raises the question of how we can appropriately remember the Soviet presence in Berlin after 1945 in future.

The aim of this interdisciplinary conference is therefore to bring together scholars from the fields of history, political science, sociology, demography, urban planning and art history to discuss these questions. This call for papers is particularly directed at younger colleagues. We plan to publish a conference volume. The conference languages are German and English. Travel costs will be covered according to the Federal Travel Expenses Act.

Suggestions should be submitted by September 15, 2023 to Ulrich Pfeil (ulrich.pfeil@univ-lorraine.fr). Please send a suggested title, an 1,800-character summary in German or English, and a biobibliographical note.

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