

unarmed cargo aircraft filled with humanitarian aid was not an easy decision. On 1 July, the US and Britain organised a massive airlift to supply the population with necessary supplies.

There were other alternatives discussed to solve the crisis. One was to respond with military means, which could of course provoke a major clash. Others suggested taking the issue to the UN. Truman chose to take direct action with the airlift, which probably surprised Stalin. It was a very problematic operation taking into account adverse weather conditions and that the two airports were surrounded by apartment buildings. The very scale of the operation was so extensive that the Soviets thought it was impossible. Planes landed every three minutes during a 10-month period and provided the city with 2,326,406 tonnes of supplies on 278,228 flights. During 323 days this 'Operation Vittles' supplied Berlin with goods until the blockade was lifted in May 1949.

B. Impact and significance

1. To the US it was a propaganda triumph. They had been prepared to protect the population in West Berlin against brute force and inhumanity from the Soviets. Communism had been contained.
2. After this conflict it was impossible to cooperate over Germany. It led to the creation of the **Federal Republic of Germany** (FRG) on 23 May 1949. Konrad Adenauer was elected West Germany's first Chancellor. As a response the **German Democratic Republic** (GDR) was formed in October of the same year. It can be argued that this development most likely would have taken place without the Berlin crisis, but the crisis made it absolutely inevitable. West Germany was proclaimed the same month as the airlift ended. Both states were organised according to the blocs to which they belonged.
3. In March 1948, the UK, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg had signed the Treaty of Brussels. The aim was to prevent the spread of communism. In September, after the blockade had started, it was expanded with a mutual defence agreement. This would lead to the establishment, in April 1949, of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). It was a full military alliance, i.e., an attack on one was to be considered as an attack on all. West Germany should be protected. An alliance between the Western powers would "keep the Russians out, the Germans down and the Americans in."²³ NATO was a major commitment to the Americans. It was the first treaty signed with a European state since 1778, when they had signed an alliance with France. The significance of the Truman Doctrine, or the new world role played by the Americans was now obvious. Twelve states joined the organisation when it was founded: United States, Canada, Britain, France, Belgium, Netherlands, Luxemburg, Italy, Portugal, Denmark, Norway and Iceland. West Germany was not a formal member but the territory would be protected by the alliance. Greece and Turkey were added in 1951. It was a full military alliance and according to article 5, "an armed attack against one or more ... be considered an attack on them all"²⁴ and would be met by armed force. A joint NATO command to co-ordinate the defence of the territories was also formed.
4. With the crisis it was clear that the USSR had to accept the special status of **West Berlin as a part of the West**. The special status of Berlin, as the only place where armed soldiers from the two superpowers stood face to face, would remain.
5. The most significant result of the crisis was that it resulted in a definite establishment of two blocs in Europe. Some have argued that it 'drew the line' in the Cold War in Europe. As a consequence of this a **substantial military build-up** followed and that the US was more committed than ever to make their contribution.

The historian Bell concludes: "The significance of the Berlin crisis 1948–49 cannot be overstated [...] it was a turning point in international affairs [...] The psychological foundations of a western alliance were laid in this time..."²⁵

²³ Edwards, O., *The USA and the Cold War 1945–63* (London: Hodder & Stoughton Educational, 1992) p. 50.

²⁴ Edwards, O., *The USA and the Cold War 1945–63*, p. 50.

²⁵ Bell, P. M. H. and Gilbert, M., *The World Since 1945: An International History* (London: Arnold, 2001) p. 94.