

A Watchful Eye Behind The Iron Curtain:
The U.S. Military Liaison Mission In East Germany, 1953-61.

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Abstract

Throughout the Cold War Western decision-makers, scholars, and other observers feared the outbreak of a superpower conflict in Europe – particularly in Germany. A ground of fierce superpower competition, disposition of vast Western and Soviet forces, and fault line of an apparently impenetrable Iron Curtain, Germany was perceived by contemporaries as the textbook setting for a shattering war by surprise or miscalculation. This paper demonstrates that at least part of the reason why sparks in the European “tinderbox” never exploded into a real conflict can be attributed to the existence of an important crisis-control mechanism, the bilateral Military Liaison Missions (MLMs) between Western Allied forces and the Soviet army in Germany. I draw upon formerly unavailable documents on the U.S. MLM to detail how this little-known mechanism fostered transparency and mitigated rising conflict in that vital region during the tense period of 1953-61.

Key Abbreviations Used in the Text:

AA	Anti-Aircraft (e.g., equipment)
ACC	Allied Control Council for Germany
ACDA	Arms Control and Disarmament Agency
BOB	CIA's Berlin Operations Base
BRIXMIS	British Military Liaison Mission
CBMs	Confidence-building measures
CBR	Chemical, Biological, and Radiological (e.g., material, warfare)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CINC	Commander in Chief
COMINT	Communications Intelligence
CPX	Command Post Exercise
CUSMLM	Chief of U.S. Military Liaison Mission
DCSI	Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence (e.g., at USAREUR)
EAC	European Advisory Commission
EGA	East German Army
EGAF	East German Air Force
ELINT	Electronic Intelligence
FMLM	French Military Liaison Mission
GSFG	Group of Soviet Forces, Germany
GSOFG	Group of Soviet Occupation Forces, Germany
HQ	Headquarters
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
MLMs	Military Liaison Missions
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OOB	Order of Battle
OSIA	On-Site Inspection Agency
POL	Petroleum, Oil, and Lubricants
PRA	Permanently Restricted Area
SACEUR	Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (Chief of NATO), also USCINCEUR
SAM	Surface-to-air (e.g., missiles)
SERB	Soviet External Relations Bureau
SMLM	Soviet Military Liaison Mission, Frankfurt
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
TRA	Temporary Restricted Area
USAREUR	U.S. Army, Europe
USCINCEUR	See SACEUR
USEUCOM	U.S. European Command (same as EUCOM)
USFET	U.S. Forces, European Theater
USMLM	U.S. Military Liaison Mission, Potsdam
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WTO	Warsaw Treaty Organization (Warsaw Pact)

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