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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