

Name: _____

Klasse: _____

Role play: The Berlin Crisis 1948/49

[Die Klasse wird in zwei Gruppen geteilt. In jeder Gruppe sind vier Hauptrollen vorgesehen, die doppelt besetzt werden können. Die anderen Schüler fungieren als Mitarbeiter der jeweiligen Presseämter; sie fertigen während der Sitzung Notizen an, mit deren Hilfe sie gemeinsam mit den Pressesprechern ein entsprechendes Kommuniqué erstellen und veröffentlichen. Außer der Karte werden folgende sprachliche Hilfen angeboten:]

As the Russians decided to act (see Worksheet 11) both sides called urgent crisis meetings. In the following role play you will practise how the process of political decision making might work.

The following phrases might be useful for your discussions:

To agree

I favour the following idea ...
 I'd like to support X's suggestions that ...
 In my opinion, your concept has the advantage that ...
 I share your view that ...
 I do approve of your plan ...
 That's a very sensible point of view as/because ...

To disagree

I cannot put up with the idea that ...
 I'm afraid this idea/plan will simply not work because ...
 That sounds plausible; but may I remind you of the fact that ...
 We should keep in mind that ...
 We cannot allow (the other side) to go ahead with ...
 I protest very strongly against such a plan as it ...

A.

The situation: crisis meeting on 21 June 1948, immediately after the introduction of the new West German currency, the Deutschmark.

Cue cards:

You are a Russian diplomat

basic attitude: no military conflict
aims: - economic unity (cf Potsdam) → one currency
 - minimum of cooperation necessary in order to protect Russian interest in western zones (e.g. Ruhr valley)
means to achieve these aims: - suspend cooperation for some time in UN Security Council and in all 4-power institutions;
 - more Russian troops in our zone, esp. near border

You are a Communist party member

basic attitude: keep up principles of socialism
aims: - state-directed economy not to be corrupted by capitalist currency;
 - prevent extension of US imperialism in Germany
means to achieve these aims: - reject the American interference by all possible means
 - if necessary, introduce a new currency ourselves

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You are a General of the victorious Red Army

basic attitude: we did not fight Nazi Germany in order to be kicked around by Americans now; USSR now one of the great powers

aims:

- teach the Americans a lesson;
- they must recognize us as equal partners in decisions concerning Germany and as partners also in military terms

means to achieve these aims:

- West Berlin's survival depends on our good will (supply of coal, electricity, food etc.): we can starve them into submission;
- a military conflict is one of possible options (good chances because of bigger numbers of ground troops in Germany)

You are a Russian press officer

basic attitude: must show unanimous Soviet position in public; make it clear the Soviet Union reacts to western provocation

aims:

- strong reactions required, but must not damage our role as a peace-loving nation;
- should be cautious not to weaken our role as the leading power of the Soviet bloc.

means to achieve these aims: make it clear to media in east and west that our reactions are morally justified

B.

The situation: crisis meeting on 24th June at dawn. Shortly before midnight the power supply to West Berlin was cut off. An announcement followed:

"The transport division of the Soviet Military Administration is compelled to halt all the passenger and freight traffic to and from Berlin at 6.00 hours because of technical difficulties."

Cue cards:

You are a US diplomat

basic attitude: no panic, no over-reaction → negotiations

aims:

- make Russians lift blockade;
- make them accept the new currency

means to achieve these aims: immediate crisis summit: offers to the Soviets, such as

- economic aid without any restrictions
- recognition of newly formed communist regimes in Eastern Europe

You are a member of the US administration

basic attitude: if Berlin falls, West Germany will be next we have to defend the idea of liberty.

aims: secure access to West Berlin by all means safe of war

means to achieve these aims:

- if land routes are blocked, air corridors should be used
- demonstration of military strength (military exercise, deployment of more troops)
- strengthen morale of the citizens of Berlin

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You are a US army generalbasic attitude:

Russians must be forced to back down

aims:

open access to Berlin by military force; remind the Soviet Union of our superior military and nuclear power

means to achieve these aims:

- tank units to Berlin on the Autobahn to test Soviet reactions (might involve heavy losses)
- air strikes against Eastern European targets (B 29 bombers could be based in Britain)
- an airlift supply would be difficult but possible: a Soviet blocking of air corridors would make war unavoidable

You are a US press officerBasic attitude:

The allies defend the ideas of freedom, democracy and peace

Aims:

- we must not let down citizens of W. Berlin (symbol of the Free World)
- no military solution; even local conflicts in central Europe might trigger off a third World War

means to achieve these aims:

By informing the media all over the world it must become clear that

- the US will not give in to any kind of blackmail
- they will not tolerate that 2 million people are taken hostages

C.

”The [British] government decided on a middle course: not to provoke war by sending troops towards Berlin but to keep the city supplied by aircraft. (...)

Eventually Stalin had to admit that his attempt to starve out West Berlin had failed. In May 1949 the Soviet authorities called off the blockade. The airlift was a triumph for the American and British air forces. During the airlift British and US planes flew nearly 200,000 missions to Berlin. At the end of the blockade the airport in West Berlin was handling an enormous 1,000 arrivals and departures every day. Over 1.5 million tons of food, fuel and equipment was sent in to Berlin. This achievement clearly proved how determined the USA was to resist Stalin. (...)

The Blockade accelerated moves towards a powerful, pro-Western state in much of Germany. As the airlift began, the military authorities in the western zones also organised meetings to work out a constitution for West Germany. The new state was called the Federal Republic of Germany and it was formally founded in May 1949. The Soviet Union responded to this by setting up a new constitution for East Germany. In October 1949 the eastern state was officially established and it was known as the German Democratic Republic.

(From a British history reader)

Compare the press statements of each group to the extract taken from an English history reader.