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Statement by the Foreign Ministers of the Western Powers on the Berlin Conference (February 20, 1954)

At Winston Churchill's suggestion, the foreign ministers of the four victorious powers of World War II sat down together in Berlin in January and February 1954 to discuss the German question for the first time since 1949. The conference produced no results. The Western powers insisted that holding free elections throughout Germany was the precondition for further steps and emphasized that a reunified Germany should have the right to decide freely on its membership in alliances. The Soviet Union, however, wanted to begin working out the details of a peace treaty with representatives of the FRG and the GDR and rejected the integration of a unified Germany into Western security structures.

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The major problem facing the Berlin Conference was that of Germany. The three Western delegations urged that the reunification of Germany should be achieved through free elections, leading to the creation of an all-German Government with which a peace treaty could be concluded. They put forward a practical plan to this end. Their proposals were not accepted by the Soviet delegation, even as a basis for discussion, and they were forced to the conclusion that the Soviet Government is not now ready to permit free, all-German elections or to abandon its control over Eastern Germany.

The three Western Governments will continue their efforts to achieve German reunification in freedom and by peaceful means. In the meantime, they have suggested certain measures which could reduce the effect of the present division of Germany and its consequences for Berlin. They have proposed that the three High Commissioners should study these questions with the Soviet High Commissioner. As regards Berlin, the three Governments reaffirm their abiding interest in the security of the city as expressed in the Tripartite declaration of May 27, 1952. They will do all in their power to improve conditions in Berlin and to promote the economic welfare of the city.

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The three Ministers explained and reaffirmed the purely defensive character of Western security arrangements.

Offers were made to discuss how the undertakings which already protect the Soviet Union against aggression could be reinforced. The Soviet delegation made no response to these offers. Their own proposals would have involved the dissolution of the Western security system, while the military power of the Soviet bloc in Europe remained intact. The three Powers do not intend to be deflected from their efforts to develop the system of defense on which their survival depends.

Source: Statement by the Western Foreign Ministers on the Berlin Conference (February 19, 1954); reprinted in *Documents on Germany, 1944-1959: Background Documents on Germany, 1944-1959, and a Chronology of Political Developments affecting Berlin, 1945-1956*. Washington, DC: General Printing Office, 1959, pp. 122-23