

The Early Cold War

Focus Question: Who was primarily responsible for the Cold War – the United States or the Soviet Union?



Historical Context: The ideological differences between capitalism, that emerged in the 16th and 17th centuries in northwestern Europe, and communism, that were developed by Karl Marx as a response to the excesses of the Industrial Revolution in the mid-19th century, represented the primary distinction between the United States and the Soviet Union in the post war era. With Europe in ruins and former colonial empires crumbling, the stage was set for increased competition between the two superpowers. While the two global powers had been allies during World War II, the lack of a common enemy caused both to revert back to this ideological opposition in the mid-1900s. The Soviet Red Army remained in Eastern Europe after the war, which led to the creation of the Soviet Bloc, communist nations closely allied with and largely dependent on the Soviet Union, who aimed to create a geographic buffer in eastern Europe. At the same time, the United States developed policies of containment – in particular, the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan – that hoped to rebuild Europe, deter the spread of communism, and strengthen an American global alliance. Over the past decades historians have disagreed over the question of *Who started the Cold War, the United*

States or the Soviet Union? In this lesson you are going to look closely at some of the early Cold War rhetoric and thinking to address the question for yourself. Review the timeline to better understand the historical context around the source material.

Timeline of the Early Cold War

- 1945: February 4-11 - [Yalta Conference](#)
- 1945: August 6 - United States first used [atomic bomb](#) in war
- 1945: August 8 - Russia enters war against Japan
- 1945: August 14 - Japanese surrenders, ending World War II
- 1946: February – American Ambassador George F. Kennan advocates for containment policy in his “Long Telegram,” later published anonymously as the “X Article” in *Foreign Affairs Magazine* in July 1947
- 1946: March - Winston Churchill delivers ["Iron Curtain" speech](#) (DOC. A)
- 1946: July - Secretary of Commerce Henry Wallace urges Truman to take a more conciliatory policies towards the Soviet Union (DOC. D)
- 1947: March - Truman announces [Truman Doctrine](#) (DOC. B)
- 1946: September - Soviet Ambassador Nikolai Novikov drafts telegram stressing the danger of possible U.S. economic and military domination (DOC. D)
- 1947: June - [Marshall Plan](#) is announced
- 1948: February - Communist takeover in Czechoslovakia
- 1948: June 24 - [Berlin blockade](#) begins
- 1949: July - [NATO](#) treaty ratified
- 1949: May 12 - Berlin Blockade ends
- 1949: September - Mao Zedong, a [communist, takes control of China](#)
- 1949: September - Soviets explode first atomic bomb
- 1955: May – [Warsaw Pact](#)

Document A: The Iron Curtain Speech (Modified)

Source: Excerpt from the "Iron Curtain Speech" delivered by Winston Churchill, March 1946 in Fulton, Missouri.

It is my duty, however, to place before you certain facts about the present position in Europe.

From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an iron curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia; all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject, in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and in some cases increasing measure of control from Moscow.

In a great number of countries, far from the Russian frontiers and throughout the world, Communist fifth columns are established and work in complete unity and absolute obedience to the directions they receive from the Communist center.

I do not believe that Soviet Russia desires war. What they desire is the fruits of war and the indefinite expansion of their power and doctrines.



Figure 1: Winston Churchill with President Truman just before the Iron Curtain Speech



Figure 2: Map of the symbolic "Iron Curtain" across eastern Europe

But what we have to consider here today while time remains, is the permanent prevention of war and the establishment of conditions of freedom and democracy as rapidly as possible in all countries.

Iron Curtain Speech: Guiding Questions

1. (Sourcing) Who was Winston Churchill? Why would Americans trust what he has to say about the Soviet Union?
2. (Close reading) What does Churchill claim that the Soviet Union wanted?

Document B: The Truman Doctrine (Modified)

Source: Excerpt from the "Truman Doctrine Speech," delivered by President Truman to Congress on March 12, 1947.

The United States has received from the Greek Government an urgent appeal for financial and economic assistance...Greece is in desperate need of financial and economic assistance to enable it to resume purchases of food, clothing, fuel, and seeds.

The very existence of the Greek state is today threatened by the terrorist activities of several thousand armed men, led by Communists, who defy the government's authority. . . . Greece must have assistance if it is to become a self-supporting and self-respecting democracy. The United States must supply this assistance. . . . No other nation is willing and able to provide the necessary support for a democratic Greek government.

One of the primary objectives of the foreign policy of the United States is the creation of conditions in which we and other nations will be able to work out a way of life free from coercion.

It is necessary only to glance at a map to realize that the survival and integrity of the Greek nation are of grave importance in a much wider situation. If Greece should fall under the control of an armed minority, the effect upon its neighbor, Turkey, would be immediate and serious. Confusion and disorder might well spread throughout the entire Middle East. . . . Should we fail to aid Greece and Turkey in this fateful hour, the effect will be far reaching to the West as well as to the East.

The free peoples of the world look to us for support in maintaining their freedoms. If we falter in our leadership, we may endanger the peace of the world. And we shall surely endanger the welfare of this nation.

Great responsibilities have been placed upon us by the swift movement of events.

Truman Doctrine: Guiding Questions

1. (Close reading) Why did Truman believe Greece needed American aid in 1947?
2. (Context) What does Truman mean when he claims, "Should we fail to aid Greece and Turkey in this fateful hour, the effect will be far reaching to the West as well as to the East"?
3. (Close reading) Does Truman present American policy as offensive or defensive? What words or phrases does Truman use to present policy this way?
4. **After reading the first two sources, record your first hypothesis: Who was primarily responsible for the Cold War - the United States or the Soviet Union? (THIS IS YOUR PRELIMINARY THOUGHT, REVISIT AFTER READING ADDITIONAL SOURCE MATERIAL)**



Figure 3: President Truman outlined the Truman Doctrine to a joint session of Congress in March of 1947

Document C: Soviet Ambassador Telegram (Modified)

Source: Excerpt from a telegram sent by Soviet Ambassador Nikolai Novikov to Soviet Leadership in September 1946. In his telegram, Novikov attempted to interpret U.S. foreign policy for his superiors, much in the same way George F. Kennan had done in his "Long Telegram" to the U.S. State Department earlier that year.

The foreign policy of the United States, which reflects the imperialist tendencies of American monopolistic capital, is characterized in the postwar period by a striving for world supremacy. This is the real meaning of the many statements by President Truman and other representatives of American ruling circles; that the United States has the right to lead the world. All the forces of American diplomacy -- the army, the air force, the navy, industry, and science -- are enlisted in the service of this foreign policy. For this purpose broad plans for expansion have been developed and are being implemented through diplomacy and the establishment of a system of naval and air bases stretching far beyond the boundaries of the United States, through the arms race, and through the creation of ever newer types of weapons. . . .

During the Second World War . . . [American leaders] calculated that the United States of America, if it could avoid direct participation in the war, would enter it only at the last minute, when it could easily affect the outcome of the war, completely ensuring its interests.

In this regard, it was thought that the main competitors of the United States would be crushed or greatly weakened in the war, and the United States by virtue of this circumstance would assume the role of the most powerful factor in resolving the fundamental questions of the postwar world.

Soviet Ambassador Telegram: Guiding Questions

1. (Sourcing) Who was Nicholas Novikov? When did he write this telegram?

2. (Close reading) How does Novikov describe the United States? What evidence does he use to support his description?

3. (Context) What does Novikov claim the United States planned during the Second World War?



Figure 4: The Marshall Plan - map shows nations that had received Marshall Plan aid by 1950

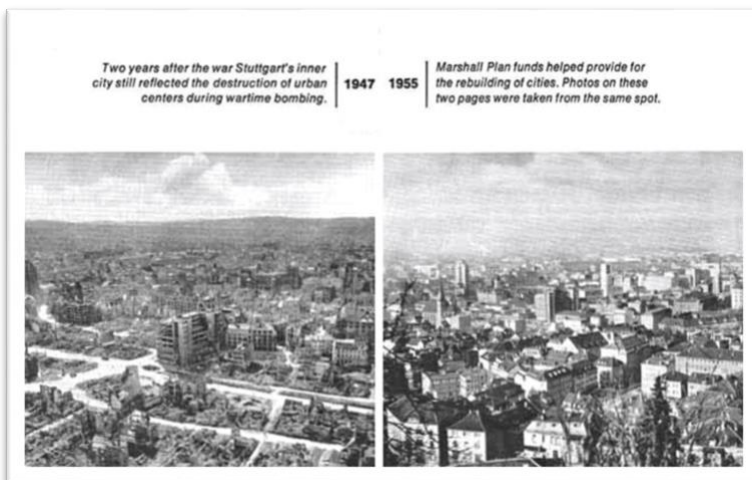


Figure 5: Stuttgart, Germany before and after Marshall Plan aid

Document D: Henry Wallace (Modified)

Source: Secretary of Commerce and former Vice President Henry A. Wallace letter to President Harry S. Truman, July 23, 1946. Truman asked Wallace to resign shortly after this letter.

I have been increasingly disturbed about the trend of international affairs since the end of the war.

How do American actions appear to other nations? I mean actions [like] the Bikini tests of the atomic bomb and continued production of bombs, the plan to arm Latin America with our weapons, and the effort to secure air bases spread over half the globe from which the other half of the globe can be bombed. I cannot but feel that these actions must make it look to the rest of the world as if we were only paying lip service to peace at the conference table.

These facts rather make it appear either (1) that we are preparing ourselves to win the war which we regard as inevitable or (2) that we are trying to build up a predominance [largest amount] of force to intimidate the rest of mankind.

Our interest in establishing democracy in Eastern Europe, where democracy by and large has never existed, seems to [the Soviets] an attempt to reestablish the encirclement of unfriendly neighbors which might serve as a springboard of still another effort to destroy [them].

Henry Wallace Letter: Guiding Questions

1. (Sourcing) Who was Henry Wallace? When did he write this letter?
2. (Close Reading) What is Wallace's main argument?
3. (Corroboration) How does Wallace's description of American foreign policy compare to Truman's and Novikov's?



Figure 6: NATO Treaty, 1949. Warsaw Pact, 1945.

4. After reading the second set of sources, record your second hypothesis: Who was primarily responsible for the Cold War - the United States or the Soviet Union? (POST YOUR ARGUMENT TO DISCUSSION BOARD ON GOOGLE CLASSROOM)