

Soviet-American Confrontation

Interpreting Primary Sources

From Stettin on the Baltic to Trieste on 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 the Soviet sphere and all are subject, in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and increasing measure of control from Moscow....Police governments are prevailing in nearly every case, and so far, except in Czechoslovakia, there is no true democracy.

– *Winston S. Churchill, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (1940-1945, 1951-1955)*

One cannot forget the following fact: the Germans carried out an invasion of the U.S.S.R. through Finland, Poland, Rumania, Bulgaria, and Hungary....One can ask, therefore, what can be surprising in the fact that the Soviet Union, in a desire to ensure its security for the future, tries to achieve that these countries should have governments whose relations to the Soviet Union are loyal?

– *Joseph Stalin, Leader of the Soviet Union (mid-1920s-1953)*

How do American actions since V-J Day appear to other nations? I mean by actions the concrete things like \$13 billion for the War and Navy Departments, the Bikini tests of the atomic bomb and continued production of bombs, the plan to arm Latin America with out weapons, production of B-29's and planned production of B-36's, and the effort to secure air bases spread over half the globe....

How would it look to us if Russia had the atomic bomb and we did not, if Russia had 10,000 bombers and air bases within a thousand miles of our coast lines and we did not?....Most of us are firmly convinced of the soundness of our position when we suggest the internationalization and defortification of the Danube or of the Dardanelles, but we would be horrified and angered by any Russian counter-proposal that would involve the internationalizing and disarming of Suez or Panama. We must recognize that to the Russians these seem to be identical situations.

– *Henry A. Wallace, Vice President of the United States (1941-1945)*

Today the ruling circles of the U.S.A. and Great Britain head one international grouping, which has as its aim the consolidation of capitalism and the achievement of the dominations of these countries over other peoples. The countries are headed by imperialist and anti-democratic forces in international affairs, with the active participation of certain Socialist leaders in several European states.

– *V.M. Molotov, Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs (1939-1949, 1953-1956)*

Whether it be the control of atomic energy, aggression against small nations, the German or the Austrian peace settlements, or any of the other questions, the majority of nations concerned have found a common basis for action. But in every case the majority agreement has been rejected, denounced, and openly attacked by the Soviet Union and her satellites whose policy she controls....What the world needs in order to regain a sense of security is an end to Soviet obstruction and aggression.

– *Harry Truman, President of the United States (1945-1953)*

Questions To Think About

1. What were the post-war goals of the United States and Soviet Union?
2. Was post-war conflict between the United States and Soviet Union inevitable?
3. What was the underlying source of international tension--an aggressive and intransigent Soviet Union or an overwhelmingly strong and uncompromising America?

The Containment Policy

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Soviet power...bears within itself the seeds of its own decay, and the sprouting of these seeds is well advanced...[If] anything were ever to disrupt the unity and efficacy of the Party as a political instrument, Soviet Russia might be changed overnight from one of the strongest to one of the weakest and most pitiable of national societies....This would...warrant the United States entering with reasonable confidence upon a policy of firm containment, designed to confront the Russians with unalterable counter-force at every point where they show signs of encroaching upon the interests of a peaceful and stable world.

—George F. Kennan, *American Diplomat and Historian*

At the present moment in world history nearly every nation must choose between alternative ways of life. The choice is too often not a free one. One way of life is based upon the will of the majority, and is distinguished by free institutions, representative government, free elections, guarantees of individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from political oppression. The second way of life is based upon the will of a minority forcibly imposed upon the majority. It relies upon terror and oppression, a controlled press and radio, fixed elections, and the suppression of personal freedoms.

I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.

—Truman Doctrine, 1947

The truth of the matter is that Europe's requirements for the next three or four years of foreign food and other essential products--principally from America--are so much greater than her present ability to pay that she must have substantial additional help or face economic, social, and political deterioration of a very grave character....

Our policy is directed not against any country or doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation, and chaos. Its purpose should be the revival of a working economy in the world so as to permit the emergence of political and social conditions in which free institutions can exist.

—The Marshall Plan, 1947

Article 5 The parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all; and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them...[will take] such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.

—The North Atlantic Treaty, 1949

Why, by inter-weaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe, entangle our peace and property in the toils of European ambition, rivalry, interest, humour, or caprice? It is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world.

—George Washington, 1796

The security of the United States would again be seriously endangered if the entire European continent were once more to come under the domination of a power or an association of powers antagonistic to the United States....Today, the weakened condition in which the nations of Europe find themselves as a result of the destruction and privation of war has afforded a golden opportunity for a new aggressor....It is believed essential to the security of the United States, therefore, that it consolidate the friendship and support which it now enjoys from free and friendly nations.

-State Department

The pact destroys the chances of European recovery. A permanently militarized Europe is doomed to living on an American dole. The pact is not an instrument of defense but a military alliance designed for aggression. It bypasses the United Nations and violates its Charter in a most flagrant manner. It divides the world permanently into two armed camps. And it provocatively establishes military bases on the borders of the Soviet Union.

-Henry Wallace, Vice President of the United States (1941-1945)

Questions To Think About

- 1. Describe the containment policy. What was its goal?**
- 2. Why did the United States decide to broaden its overseas commitments? Did the Soviet threat justify this expansion of America's commitments?**
- 3. Was the containment policy essentially offensive or defensive?**