

The Origins of the Cold War (developed by Lawrence Frohman for AP European History)

Task: Examine primary source documents and historians accounts to explain the origins of the Cold War from the formation of the wartime alliance between Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union.

Historical Background: To insure smooth cooperation in their joint effort to defeat Nazi Germany, Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union eschewed all discussion of the broader political aims until the very last stages of the war, when the developing military situation forced the allies to consider the principles of the postwar order. However, between 1944 and the end of 1947 their efforts to solve the major problems caused by the war led to the breakup of the alliance and the hardening of ideological divisions. Discuss the key stages or events in this process, analyze the motivations of the main actors, and explain how they led to that ideological and military polarization which we have come to know as the Cold War.

A. Historians View the Cold War:

1. Samuel Flagg Bemis, "The Creation of the Soviet Satellites" (1965): The Yalta Conference was one of the most dramatic personal parleys in modern history. At Yalta, on the eve of certain victory, Roosevelt made concessions to Stalin at the expense of China which unhinged the balance of power in both Asia and Europe. Yet it is difficult to see how, short of turning on the ally Russia in actual war, either the United States or Great Britain could have prevented the flow of Russian power into the vacuums that were being created by the defeat of Germany and Japan. Trustful Americans hoped that the minor peace treaties [with the east European allies of Germany] would be the forerunner of a general peace. This hope crumbled slowly in the following months and years. Soviet Russia carried forward her revolutionary program, first in contiguous states, next in remoter regions, finally through fifth columns of communists all over the world. Thus the Iron Curtain closed down between the West and one Soviet Satellite after another in Europe and Asia. Next might come Greece, where a communist revolt had been smoldering since the end of the war.

2. Gar Alperovitz, "Why We Dropped the Bomb," (1965): Were Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombed primarily to impress the world with the need to accept America's plan for a stable and lasting peace--that is, primarily, America's plan for Europe? The evidence strongly suggests that the view which the President's personal representative offered to one of the atomic scientists in May 1945 was an accurate statement of policy: "Mr. Byrnes did not argue that it was necessary to use the bomb against the cities of Japan in order to win the war...Mr. Byrnes' view was that our possessing and demonstrating the bomb would make Russia more manageable in Europe."

3. Gar Alperovitz on the origins of the Cold War (1967): The demand for more influence in Soviet-controlled areas [of Central and Eastern Europe] was almost certainly doomed from the start. This basic miscalculation stemmed, finally, from an attempt to overextend American diplomatic sway. The other error was the failure of US policy makers to turn their energies to an early solution of the crucial German problem. Bolstered by the atomic bomb, which eliminated the threat that had been Roosevelt's central concern, American leaders dallied over Germany. By refusing to hold to Roosevelt's agreement that a specific target for German reparations would be set (July 1945), by permitting France to hamstring the German Control Commission (fall 1945), and by halting German reparations shipments (spring 1946), US policy suggested the very prospect that Russia feared most: the abandonment of economic and political controls and the possibility that a new and powerful Germany would rise from the ashes of Nazism to become the bastion of Western capitalist aggression in Europe. The US had no such aggressive intent. The Russians, who had no nuclear weapons, were far less casual about the question of security; their grip seemed to tighten in the buffer area month by month, as their worst fears about Germany seemed to come true.

4. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., "The Origins of the Cold War" (1967): The Cold War was not the product of a decision but of a dilemma. Each side felt compelled to adopt policies which the other could not but regard as a threat to the principles of peace. Each then felt compelled to undertake defensive measures. Thus the Russians saw no choice but to consolidate their security in Eastern Europe. The Americans responded by asserting their interest in the zone the Russians deemed vital to their security. The Russians concluded that the West was resuming its old course of capitalist encirclement...Very soon the process began to acquire a cumulative momentum. A revisionist fallacy has been to treat Stalin as just another Realpolitik statesman. An analysis of the origins of the cold War which leaves out these factors--the intransigence of Leninist ideology, the sinister dynamics of a totalitarian society, and the madness

of Stalin--is obviously incomplete. It was these factors which made it hard for the West to accept the thesis that Russia was moved only by a desire to protect its security and would be satisfied by the control of Eastern Europe. It was these factors which charged the debate [over the principles of the postwar international order] with apocalyptic potentiality. Leninism and totalitarianism created a structure of thought and action which made postwar collaboration between Russia and America inherently impossible.

B. Documenting the Cold War:

1. Roosevelt and Churchill, "Principles of the Atlantic Charter" (August 21, 1941): First, their countries seek no aggrandizement, territorial or other; Second, they desire to seek no territorial changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned; Third, they respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them; Fourth, they will endeavor, with due respect for their existing obligations, to further the enjoyment by all states, great or small, victor or vanquished, of access, on equal terms to the trade and to the raw materials of the world which are needed for their economic prosperity.

2. Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin, "[Yalta] Declaration on Liberated Europe" (February 11, 1945): The establishment of order in Europe and the rebuilding of national economic life must be achieved by processes which will enable the liberated peoples to destroy the last vestiges of Nazism and Fascism and to create democratic institutions of their own choice. This is a principle of the Atlantic Charter....To foster the conditions in which the liberated peoples may exercise these rights, the three governments will jointly assist the people in any European liberated state or former Axis satellite state in Europe where in their judgment conditions require (a)to establish conditions of internal peace; (b)to carry out emergency measures for the relief of distressed peoples; (c)to form interim governmental authorities broadly representative of all democratic elements in the population and pledged to the earliest possible establishment through free elections of governments responsive to the will of the people; and (d)to facilitate where necessary the holding of such elections.

3. Stalin's Declaration of the Cold War (Pravda, February 11, 1946): The war was the inevitable result of the development of world economic and political forces on the basis of modern monopoly capitalism. The capitalist system of world economy harbors elements of general crises and armed conflicts, and hence, the development of world capitalism proceeds not in the path of smooth and even progress, but through crisis and the catastrophes of war.

4. Winston Churchill, "Iron Curtain Speech" (March 5, 1946): From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the continent....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...Far from the Russian frontiers and throughout the world, Communist fifth columns are established and work incomplete unity and absolute obedience to the directions they receive from the Communist centre. Except in the British Commonwealth and the United States, where Communism is in its infancy, the Communist parties or fifth columns constitute a growing challenge and peril to Christian civilization.

5. Stalin, "Interview with Pravda" (March 14, 1946): One cannot forget the following fact: the Germans carried out an invasion of the USSR through Finland, Poland, Rumania, Bulgarian and Hungary. The Germans were able to carry out the invasion through these countries by reason of the fact that these countries had governments inimical to the Soviet Union. As a result of the German invasion, the Soviet Union has irrevocably lost about 7 million people. 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. How can one, without having lost one's reason, qualify these peaceful aspirations as "expansionist tendencies" of our government? [In response to Churchill's ridiculous charges that the Soviet Union is imposing totalitarian rule in Eastern Europe,] it should be noted that the influence of Communist parties grew not only in Eastern Europe, but in almost every country of Europe where fascism has ruled before. The growth of the influence of Communism cannot be considered accidental. It grew because during the hard years of the mastery of fascism in Europe,

Communists showed themselves to be reliable, daring and self-sacrificing fighters against fascist regimes for the liberty of peoples.

6. Nikolai Novikov (Soviet ambassador to Washington) [September 1946]: The countries of Europe and Asia are experiencing a colossal need for consumer goods, industrial and transportation equipment etc. Such a situation provides American monopolistic capital with prospects for enormous shipments of goods and the importation of capital into these countries--a circumstance which would permit it to infiltrate their national economies. Such a development would mean a serious strengthening of the economic position of the US in the whole world and would be a stage on the road to world domination by the US.

7. Harry Truman, "Truman Doctrine" (March 12, 1947): To ensure the peaceful development of nations, free from coercion, the United States has taken a leading part in establishing the United Nations.... We shall not realize our objectives, however, unless we are willing to help free people to maintain their free institutions and their national integrity against aggressive movements that seek to impose upon them totalitarian regimes... I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free people who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures. 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... It would be an unspeakable tragedy if these countries [i.e. Greece and Turkey], which have struggled so long against overwhelming odds, should lose that victory for which they have sacrificed so much..... The seeds of totalitarian regimes are nurtured by misery and want. They spread and grow in the evil soil of poverty and strife. They reach their full growth when the hope of a people for a better life has died. We must keep that hope alive. The free peoples of the world look to us for support in maintaining their freedoms.

8. George Kennan, "The Doctrine of Containment" (July 1947): It is clear that the main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of a long-term, patient, but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies. Soviet pressure against the free institutions of the Western world is something that can be contained by the adroit and vigilant application of counter-force at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points.

9. Andrei Zhdanov, "The Two-Camp Policy" (September 1947): The end of the war confronted the United States with a number of new problems. The capitalist monopolies were anxious to maintain their profits at the former high level and accordingly pressed hard to prevent a reduction of the wartime volume of deliveries. But this meant that the United States must retain the foreign markets which had absorbed American products during the war, and, moreover, acquire new markets... The financial and economic dependence of these countries on the United States had likewise increased. [The influential reactionary circles of American imperialism] advanced a program of utilizing America's military and economic might, not only to retain and consolidate the positions won abroad during the war, but to expand them to the maximum and to replace Germany, Japan and Italy in the world market. But America's aspirations to world supremacy encounter an obstacle in the U.S.S.R., the stronghold of anti-imperialist and antifascist policy, and its growing international influence, in the new democracies, which have escaped from the control of British and American imperialism, and in the workers of all countries, including America itself, who do not want a new war for the supremacy of their oppressors.

10. Andrei Zhdanov, "The Two-Camp Policy" (September 1947): The American imperialists demonstrate their ignorance by laying primary stress on the allegation that the Soviet Union is undemocratic and totalitarian, while the United States and Great Britain and the whole capitalist world are democratic. On this platform of ideological struggle--on this defense of bourgeois pseudodemocracy and condemnation of Communism as totalitarian--are united all the enemies of the working class without exception. The pith and substance of this fraudulent propaganda are the claim that the earmark of true democracy is the existence of a plurality of parties and of an organized opposition minority. The advocates of bourgeois democracy will go to any length to slander the Soviet regime, but at the same time they regard the bloody dictatorship of the fascist minority over the people in Greece and Turkey as perfectly normal, they close their eyes to many crying violations of even formal democracy in bourgeois countries, and say nothing about the national and racial oppression, the corruption and unceremonious abrogation of democratic rights

in the United States of America. The "Truman Doctrine," which provides for the rendering of American assistance to all reactionary regimes which actively oppose the democratic peoples, bears a frankly aggressive character.