

27 THE COLD WAR WORLD: GLOBAL POLITICS, ECONOMIC RECOVERY, AND CULTURAL CHANGE

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the European great powers dominated the world, both materially and—at least in the opinion of Europeans—culturally. Even after the First World War, European power seemed only slightly diminished, especially when the newest contender for world power status, the United States, chose to retreat again into isolationism after the war.

After the Second World War, the world was a dramatically different place. A second great cataclysm had left much of Europe in ruins, and the former great powers found themselves confronted with the enormous task of reconstructing what they themselves had destroyed. The new bipolar balance of world power, pitting the United States against the Soviet Union, decreased the global power and prestige of individual European nations, drawing them into the orbits of the two competing superpowers. Europe was divided in two by an “Iron Curtain,” and the cultures, economies, and political systems of the two Europes were deeply marked by the new realities of the Cold War.

European dominance had ended, but the Western European nations soon rallied, achieving general levels of prosperity, technological sophistication, and democratic participation never before experienced in their histories. American economic aid reinvigorated Western European economies, greatly increasing the material well-being of ordinary people. Cradle-to-grave social welfare programs provided education, medical care, and guarantees that no citizen would be deprived of the minimum necessities of life. The apertenances of consumer culture—radios, cars, televisions, dishwashers, seaside vacations—became available to the majority of Western Europeans.

The economic “miracle” did not come to Eastern Europe, always underdeveloped by Western standards. Eastern Europe’s poverty and technological backwardness were only reinforced by the domination of the powerful Soviet Union. Communist regimes throughout Eastern Europe retained their hold on power not through popular support but through the threat of Soviet invasion. Communist heads of state were forced to follow the dictates of economic and military planners in Moscow, often to the detriment of their own citizens. The death of Stalin in 1953 brought some easing of repression, and standards of living did improve, if more gradually and less opulently than in the West. But Stalin’s successors continued to rule Eastern Europe with a firm hand, stifling dissent and emphasizing heavy industrial and military production at the expense of consumer goods. When the Soviet bloc collapsed in the late 1980s, bringing a surprisingly sudden end to the Cold War, Eastern Europe remained burdened with the bitter legacy of economic underdevelopment and political immaturity.

In both the East and the West, postwar culture was unsettled and complex. The war had demonstrated the moral bankruptcy of fascism (even if nostalgia for militarism, nationalism, and racial cleansing lingered in the hearts of many), but no other alternative ideologies won unqualified support. For many, the simple joys of life were enough. After the hardships of the war, consumerism and leisure culture offered a welcome respite from ideology. On the other hand, intellectuals struggled to come to terms with the implications of wartime genocide, economic and political globalization, and the Americanization of European culture. Although the Cold War left many feeling powerless in the face of impersonal forces such as superpower politics and the threat of nuclear annihilation, others drew renewed hope from the anticolonial struggles of Third World peoples and the protests of civil rights activists around the world.

WINSTON CHURCHILL

FROM “The Sinews of Peace”

During the Second World War, long-standing tensions between the Soviet Union and the other Allied states were set aside in favor of a unified war effort. However, even before the war had ended, mutual suspicions were revived, especially as Allied leaders began to negotiate postwar territorial settlements. The United States and Great Britain promoted the creation of capitalist democracies throughout Europe, whereas Stalin sought to establish communist satellite states in the East.

One of the defining moments of the emerging Cold War came on March 5, 1946, when Winston Churchill (1874–1965), who had been voted out of office as prime minister by war-weary Britons that year, gave a speech at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, attended by the U.S. president Harry S. Truman. In this speech, entitled “The Sinews of Peace,” Churchill called on Americans and Western Europeans to maintain a unified front against the Soviet threat.

From The Sinews of Peace, vol. 7, edited by R. R. James (New York: Chelsea House, 1946).

A shadow has fallen upon the scenes so lately lighted by the Allied victory. Nobody knows what Soviet Russia and its Communist international organisation intends to do in the immediate future, or what are the limits, if any, to their expansive and proselytising tendencies. I have a strong admiration and regard for the valiant Russian people and for my wartime comrade, Marshal Stalin. There is deep sympathy and goodwill in Britain—and I doubt not here also—towards the peoples of all the Russias and a resolve to persevere through many differences and rebuffs in establishing lasting friendships. We understand the Russian need to be secure on her western frontiers by the removal of all possibility of German aggression. We welcome Russia to her rightful place among the leading nations of the world. We welcome her flag upon the seas. Above all, we welcome constant, frequent and growing contacts between the Russian people and our own people on both sides of the Atlantic. It is my duty however, for I am sure you would wish me to state the facts as I see them to you, 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 many cases, increasing measure of control from Moscow. Athens alone—Greece with its immortal glories—is free to decide its future at an election under British, American and French observation. The Russian-dominated Polish Government has been encouraged to make enormous and wrongful inroads upon Germany, and mass expulsions of millions of Germans on a scale grievous and undreamed-of are now taking place. The Communist parties, which were very small in all these Eastern States of Europe, have been raised to pre-eminence and power far beyond their numbers and are seeking everywhere to obtain totalitarian control. Police governments are prevailing in nearly every case, and so far, except in Czechoslovakia, there is no true democracy.

The safety of the world requires a new unity in Europe, from which no nation should be permanently outcast. It is from the quarrels of the strong parent races in Europe that the world wars we have witnessed, or which occurred in former times, have sprung. Twice in our own lifetime we have seen the United States, against their wishes and their traditions, against arguments, drawn by irresistible forces, into these wars in time to secure the victory of the good cause, but only after frightful slaughter and devastation had occurred. Twice the United States has had to send several millions of its young men across the Atlantic to find the war; but now war can find any nation, wherever it may dwell between dusk and dawn. Surely we should work with conscious purpose for a grand pacification of

Europe, within the structure of the United Nations and in accordance with its Charter. That I feel is an open cause of policy of very great importance.

From what I have seen of our Russian friends and Allies during the war, I am convinced that there is nothing they admire so much as strength, and there is nothing for which they have less respect than for weakness, especially military weakness. For that reason the old doctrine of a balance of power is unsound. We cannot afford, if we can help it, to work on narrow margins, offering temptations to a trial of strength. If the Western Democracies stand together in strict adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter, their influence for furthering those principles will be immense and no one is likely to molest them. If

however they become divided or falter in their duty and if these all-important years are allowed to slip away then indeed catastrophe may overwhelm us all.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was the Iron Curtain? Where was it?
2. What policies was Churchill promoting in this speech?
3. What specific response do you think he hoped to elicit from his U.S. audience?
4. To what extent were his remarks shaped by the existence of nuclear weapons? By the U.S. tradition of isolationism?

NIKITA KHRUSHCHEV

FROM “On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences”

Stalin's death in 1953 was followed by an intense struggle for power within the Soviet leadership. At midnight on the night of February 25, 1956, the victor of this contest, first secretary Nikita Khrushchev (1894–1971), gave a “secret speech” to the twentieth congress of the Communist Party. In blunt language, Khrushchev denounced Stalin's authoritarianism as a deviation from the Marxist-Leninist principles of the Bolshevik revolution. Later that year, Khrushchev reestablished friendly relations with Yugoslavia's independent communist leader, Josip Broz Tito, demonstrating a new willingness on the part of the Soviet state to tolerate “different roads to Socialism.” When he became premier in 1958, Khrushchev rejected the inevitability of war with noncommunist states, cultivating a foreign policy based on “peaceful coexistence.”

As a loyal communist, Khrushchev remained committed to single-party rule, the planned economy, and state censorship, but his de-Stalinization campaign produced a notable thaw within the Soviet Union. Many political prisoners were released, and many of those who had died or been imprisoned during Stalin's reign of terror were exonerated of any crimes. Greater intellectual freedom was granted to artists, while ordinary Soviet citizens, who had long suffered as a result of Stalin's single-minded