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The Iron Curtain

Aside from Germany, the area that came to symbolize the onset of the Cold War was East-Central Europe. For many in the West, the Communist takeovers in this region between 1944 and 1948 were easily seen as a frightening and gradually escalating sign of Stalin's true intentions. In October 1944, for example, Winston Churchill had been willing to divide East-Central Europe into British and Soviet spheres of influence, with the so-called percentage agreement. A year and a half later, however, Churchill—who had been defeated in late July 1945 in the British general election—had changed his mind. In March 1946 the former prime minister declared in a speech in Fulton, Missouri, that an Iron Curtain had descended from the Baltic to the Adriatic. Calling for the Anglo-Americans to resist the expansion of Soviet-Communist power, Churchill not only sounded the alarm about Soviet intentions but also expressed the public rationale for much of Western policy that was to follow.

While Churchill gave a straightforward (and widely accepted) explanation for the events in East-Central Europe, Soviet policies were, in all likelihood, driven by a complex set of motives. Ideology, security, and historical memory each played a role. Similarly, it would be naïve to assume that Soviet leadership was not affected by Western rhetoric and policy. An additional point to stress is that the imposition of Soviet and/or Communist hegemony in Eastern Europe did not take place overnight. Much depended on local conditions in the various East European countries; the strength of its local Communist party, the presence or lack thereof of the Red Army, the strength of the anti-Russian sentiments, the presence (or lack thereof) of an Allied Control Commission (ACC). In addition, geographic location made a difference—while Poland, given its location between Germany and the USSR, was central in the post-war Soviet quest for security and had little chance of escaping Soviet hegemony in the post-war years, Finland, which shared a long border with the USSR but lacked Poland's strategic significance, managed to avoid the fate of East-Central European nations.

The importance of local conditions was highlighted by the first two East European Communist takeovers. In Yugoslavia and Albania the local Communists established their rule in 1944–5 as patriots who had, often heroically, fought

against the German invaders. In Albania, Enver Hoxha's National Liberation Movement faced little resistance when it deposed King Zog in May 1944 and established its rule firmly after the Germans left the country in the fall of 1944. Perhaps ironically, in the years to come the major threat to Hoxha's rule would come from neighbouring Yugoslavia, where Tito manoeuvred himself and his partisans into a powerful position at the end of the war. After a brief coalition with the royalists, Tito's Popular Front quickly organized an election in November 1945 and proclaimed the creation of the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia on 31 January 1946. To the increasing fury of Stalin and the growing concern of his neighbours, however, Tito harboured dreams of creating a larger Balkan Federation, which would include the neighbouring countries to the south and east.

While Tito's independent actions would later spark the first serious internal post-war crisis of the Communist movement, his path to power was in many ways an exception. In Poland, for example, the Communists' takeover was prompted by much greater Soviet involvement. The Soviets recognized the Polish Workers Party's (PWP) major political organization, the Lublin Committee, in late 1944 as the provisional government. As a precondition to British and American recognition, however, the Lublin government was enlarged in the spring of 1945 to include some token representatives of other parties, most significantly from the Polish Peasants Party (PPS). In the next two years, bolstered by Soviet support and headed by Wladislaw Gomulka and Boleslaw Bierut, the Communists gradually marginalized other political parties.

The priority accorded to securing socialist control in Poland affected Soviet policy in other countries. In Hungary, for example, Stalin felt compelled to hold back the local Communists from seizing power immediately after the war. It was only after the conclusion of the Hungarian Peace Treaty and the exit of the Allied Control Commission from Hungary in 1947 that the Communists moved to establish complete supremacy. Elections in April 1949 were held without opposing candidates, and were followed by the adoption of a new Soviet-style constitution. By this time Bulgaria and Romania had also become socialist republics. In Bulgaria, the local Communist leaders had, in fact, been a respectable party prior to World War II and were included in a coalition government that was formed in September 1944. Still, as in Hungary, the takeover was gradual, in part due to the presence of the ACC and the anticipation of a peace treaty. In September 1946 Bulgaria formally became a republic (11-year-old King Simeon II was sent into exile). In the following month the Bulgarian Communist Party's (BCP) leader Gheorghji Dimitrov—who had spent the war in Moscow—became the head of a coalition government. From there on the BCP moved quickly: in the summer and fall of 1947 it removed major opposition figures and destroyed their organizations; in December 1947 it introduced a new constitution.

The last European country to fall under Communist rule was Czechoslovakia. Indeed, for quite some time after the return of the pre-war president Eduard Benes in April 1945 Czechoslovakia appeared likely to remain a liberal democracy. To be sure, the Czech Communists, under the leadership of Klement Gottwald, won 38 per cent of the popular vote in the May 1946 elections and occupied key posts—with Gottwald as premier—in the post-war coalition cabinet. But the lack of a Red Army presence after December 1945 and the existence of a friendship treaty with the USSR seemed to make Czechoslovakia a special case, as Czech Communists did not resort to the strong-arm strategies or salami tactics of some of their East European counterparts. In the second half of 1947, however, the picture began to change. Under Soviet pressure the Czech government declined to participate in the Marshall Plan, sending the Czech Communists' already declining popularity into a severe downward spiral. In response, while the Red Army amassed troops on the Czech borders, Gottwald and his party staged a *coup d'état* in February 1948. Between 12 and 22 February President Benes, probably assuming that no Western help was forthcoming, failed to take advantage of obvious popular anti-Communist sentiment and effectively allowed the Communists to take control of the state apparatus. Jan Masaryk, the non-Communist foreign minister, was soon found dead; Benes was forced into permanent house arrest (until his death in September 1948); and Gottwald became president.

The Prague coup of February 1948 was the last addition to what would for four decades be known as the Soviet bloc. Rumours that a similar coup was under way in Finland proved false. Instead of further expansion of the bloc, the Soviet Union moved to press for conformity within Eastern Europe. In practice this meant that the Soviet bloc underwent a series of purges and show trials during which a number of national Communist leaders—accused of Western sympathies or 'national deviation'—were sent to their deaths or removed from office. Between 1948 and 1952 such national Communist leaders as Rajk in Hungary, Kostov in Bulgaria, and Slansky in Czechoslovakia were executed; others, including Gomulka in Poland and Patrascanu in Romania, were 'merely' purged. East European economies were subjugated to the Soviet economy through a series of joint Soviet–East European companies and by the imposition of Soviet-style five-year plans that were to promote the development of heavy industry. All in all, the late 1940s and early 1950s saw a clear move towards conformity inside the Iron Curtain.

Readings

- ← Sheldon Anderson, *A Cold War in the Soviet Bloc: Polish–East German Relations, 1945–1962* (2000). An account of a difficult relationship between two Soviet bloc countries.

Ivo Banac, *With Stalin Against Tito* (1988). An account of the Tito–Stalin split and its impact, with specific focus on Yugoslav politics.

Vojtech Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity* (1996). A balanced account of Stalin's foreign policy after World War II.

Krystyna Kersten, *The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland, 1943–1948* (1991). A well-researched account of the Communist takeover in Poland.

Vladislav Zubok and Constantin Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War* (1996). A highly readable accounting of foreign policy decision-making inside the USSR from Stalin to Khrushchev.

2.1 Churchill on Meeting Stalin, October 1944

One of the most controversial wartime documents is the so-called percentage agreement between Stalin and Churchill in Moscow on 9 October 1944. While it is clear that the British prime minister thought some sort of deal had been reached, there is much less evidence that Stalin took the incident seriously. Below, Winston Churchill recounts how he and the Soviet leader concluded this agreement during the British prime minister's visit to the Soviet capital.

We alighted at Moscow on the afternoon of October 9, and were received very heartily and with full ceremonial by Molotov and many high Russian personages. This time we were lodged in Moscow itself, with every care and comfort. I had one small, perfectly appointed house, and Anthony [Eden] another near by. We were glad to dine alone together and rest. At ten o'clock that night we held our first important meeting in the Kremlin. There were only Stalin, Molotov, Eden, and I, with Major Birse and Pavlov as interpreters. It was agreed to invite the Polish Prime Minister, M. Romer, the Foreign Minister, and M. Grabski, a grey-bearded and aged academician of much charm and quality, to Moscow at once. I telegraphed accordingly to M. Mikolajczyk that we were expecting him and his friends for discussions with the Soviet Government and ourselves, as well as with the Lublin Polish Committee. I made it clear that refusal to come to take part in the conversations would amount to a definite rejection of our advice and would relieve us from further responsibility towards the London Polish Government.

The moment was apt for business, so I said, 'Let us settle about our affair in the Balkans. Your armies are in Roumania and Bulgaria. We have interests, missions, and agents there. Don't let us get at cross-purposes in small ways. So far as Britain and Russia are concerned, how would it do for you to have ninety per cent. predominance in Roumania, for us to have ninety per cent. of the say in Greece, and go fifty-fifty about Yugoslavia?' While this was being translated I wrote out on a half-sheet of paper:

Roumania

Russia 90%
The others 10%

Greece

Great Britain 90% (in accord with U.S.A.)
Russia 10%

Yugoslavia 50–50%

Hungary 50–50%

Bulgaria

Russia 75%
The others 25%

I pushed this across to Stalin, who had by then heard the translation. There was a slight pause. Then he took his blue pencil and made a large tick upon it, and passed it back to us. It was all settled in no more time than it takes to set down.

Of course we had long and anxiously considered our point, and were only dealing with immediate war-time arrangements. All larger questions were reserved on both sides for what we then hoped would be a peace table when the war was won.

After this there was a long silence. The pencilled paper lay in the centre of the table. At length I said, 'Might it not be thought rather cynical if it seemed we had disposed of these issues, so fateful to millions of people, in such an offhand manner? Let us burn the paper.' 'No, you keep it,' said Stalin.

2.2 The Issue of Poland, 1944–1945

For much of 1944–1945 Poland was the country that preoccupied the minds of Soviet, American, and British leaders. One of the key issues was over which Polish government—the Soviet-supported 'Lublin Poles' or the British-backed 'London Poles'—should be recognized as the legitimate Polish post-war cabinet. US President Roosevelt ended up pressing for a coalition that was, in the end, heavily in favour of the 'Lublin Poles'. The three excerpts below include Stalin's letter to Roosevelt in late 1944, the Churchill–Stalin–Roosevelt discussion about Poland at the Yalta Conference in February 1945, and Roosevelt's letter to Stalin, written soon after the tripartite meeting.

A. Stalin to Roosevelt, 27 December 1944

(...) proves that the negotiations of Mr. Mikolajczyk with the Polish National Committee served as a screen for those elements who conducted from behind Mikolajczyk's back criminal terrorist work against Soviet officers and soldiers on

the territory of Poland. We cannot reconcile with such a situation when terrorists instigated by Polish emigrants kill in Poland soldiers and officers of the Red Army, lead a criminal fight against Soviet troops which are liberating Poland, and directly aid our enemies, whose allies they in fact are (...)

Meanwhile the Polish National Committee has made serious achievements in the strengthening of the Polish state and the apparatus of governmental power on the territory of Poland, in the expansion and strengthening of the Polish army, in carrying into practice of a number of important governmental measures and, in the first place, of the agrarian reform in favor of the peasants. All this has led to consolidation of democratic powers of Poland and to powerful strengthening of authority of the National Committee among the wide masses in Poland and among wide social Polish circles abroad.

It seems to me that now we should be interested in the support of the Polish National Committee and all those who want and are capable to work together with it and that is especially important for the Allies and for the solution of our common task—the speeding of the defeat of Hitlerite Germany (...)

I have to say frankly that if the Polish Committee of National Liberation will transform itself into a Provisional Polish Government then (...) the Soviet Government will not have any serious ground for postponement of the question of its recognition. It is necessary to bear in mind that in the strengthening of a pro-Allied and democratic Poland the Soviet Union is interested more than any other power not only because the Soviet Union is bearing the main brunt of the battle for liberation of Poland but also because Poland is a border state with the Soviet Union and the problem of Poland is inseparable from the problem of security of the Soviet Union. To this we have to add that the successes of the Red Army in Poland in the fight against the Germans are to a great degree dependent on the presence of peaceful and trustworthy rear in Poland, and the Polish National Committee fully takes into account this circumstance while the émigré government and its underground agents by their terroristic actions are creating a threat of civil war in the rear of the Red Army and counteract the success of the latter. On the other hand, under the conditions which exist in Poland at the present time there are no reasons for the continuation of the policy of support of the émigré government, which has lost all confidence of the Polish population in the country and besides creates a threat of civil war in the rear of the Red Army, violating thus our common interests of a successful fight against the Germans. I think that it would be natural, just and profitable for our common cause if the governments of the Allied countries as the first step have agreed on an immediate exchange of representatives with the Polish National Committee so that after a certain time it would be recognized as the lawful government of Poland after the transformation of the National Committee into a provisional government of Poland. Otherwise I am afraid that the confidence of the Polish People in the

Allied powers may weaken. I think that we cannot allow the Polish people to say that we are sacrificing the interests of Poland in favor of the interests of a handful of Polish emigrants in London.

B. Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin at Yalta, 6 February 1945

PRESIDENT: I should like to bring up Poland. I come from a great distance and therefore have the advantage of a more distant point of view of the problem. There are six or seven million Poles in the United States. As I said in Tehran, in general I am in favor of the Curzon line. Most Poles, like the Chinese, want to save face.

STALIN: Who will save face, the Poles in Poland or the émigré Poles?

PRESIDENT: The Poles would like East Prussia and part of Germany. It would make it easier for me at home if the Soviet Government could give something to Poland. I raised the question of giving them Lvov at Tehran. It has now been suggested that the oil lands in the southwest of Lvov might be given them. I am not making a definite statement but I hope that Marshal Stalin can make a gesture in this direction.

But the most important matter is that of a permanent government for Poland. Opinion in the United States is against recognition of the Lublin government on the ground that it represents a small portion of the Polish people. What people want is the creation of a government of national unity to settle their internal differences (...)

The main suggestion I want to make is that there be created an ad interim government which will have the support of the majority of the Polish people. There are many ways of creating such a government. One of the many suggestions is the possibility of creating a presidency council made up of a small number of men who would be the controlling force ad interim to set up a more permanent government. I make this suggestion as from the distance of three thousand miles. Sometimes distance is an advantage. We want a Poland that will be thoroughly friendly to the Soviet for years to come. This is essential.

STALIN: Friendly not only to the Soviet but all three allies.

PRESIDENT: This is my only suggestion. If we can work out some solution of this problem it will make peace much easier.

PRIME MINISTER: I have made repeated declarations in Parliament in support of the Soviet claims to the Curzon line, that is to say, leaving Lvov with Soviet Russia. I have been much criticized and so has Mr Eden especially by the party which I represent. But I have always considered that after all Russia has suffered in fighting Germany and after all her efforts in liberating Poland her claim is one founded not on force but on right. In that position I abide. But of course if the mighty power, the Soviet Union, made a gesture of magnanimity to a much

weaker power and made the gesture suggested by the President we would heartily acclaim such action.

However, I am more interested in the question of Poland's sovereign independence and freedom than in particular frontier lines. I want the Poles to have a home in Europe and to be free to live their own life there (...) Never could I be content with any solution that would not leave Poland as a free and independent state. However, I have one qualification: I do not think that the freedom of Poland could be made to cover hostile designs by any Polish government, perhaps by intrigue with Germany, against the Soviet (...) At the present time there are two governments about which we differ (...) Can we not make a government here in Poland? A provisional or interim government, as the President said, pending free elections so that all three of us can extend recognition as well as the other United Nations. Can we not pave the way for a free future on the future constitution and administration of Poland? If we could do that we should leave the table with one great step accomplished toward future peace and the prosperity of Central Europe (...)

STALIN: The Prime Minister has said that for Great Britain the question of Poland is a question of honor. For Russia it is not only a question of honor but also of security. It is a question of honor for Russia for we shall have to eliminate many things from the books. But it is also a question of security of the state not only because we are on Poland's frontier but also because throughout history Poland has always been a corridor for attack on Russia. It is sufficient that during the last thirty years our German enemy has passed through this corridor twice. This is because Poland was weak. It is in the Russian interest as well as that of Poland that Poland be strong and powerful and in a position in her own and in our interests to shut the corridor by her own forces. The corridor cannot be mechanically shut from outside by Russia. It could be shut from inside only by Poland. It is necessary that Poland be free, independent and powerful (...)

I refer now to our allies' appeal with regard to the Curzon line. The President has suggested modification giving Poland Lvov and Lvov Province. The Prime Minister thinks that we should make a gesture of magnanimity. But I must remind you that the Curzon line was invented not by Russians but by foreigners. The Curzon line (...) was made by Curzon, Clemenceau and the Americans in 1918-1919. Russia was not invited and did not participate. This line was accepted against the will of the Russians on the basis of ethnological data. Lenin opposed it. He did not want to give Bialystok and Bialystok Provinces to Poland but the Curzon line gives them to Poland. We have retreated from Lenin's position. Some want us to be less Russian than Curzon and Clemenceau. What will the Russians say at Moscow and the Ukrainians? They will say that Stalin and Molotov are far less defenders of Russia than Curzon and Clemenceau. I cannot take such a position and return to Moscow. I prefer that the war continue a little

longer and give Poland compensation in the west at the expense of Germany. I asked Mikolajczyk what frontier he wanted. Mikolajczyk was delighted to hear of a western frontier to the river Neisse. I must say that I will maintain this line and ask this conference to support it. There are two Neisse rivers. The east and the west. I favor the west.

Now about the government. The Prime Minister has said that he wants to create a Polish government here. I am afraid that was a slip of the tongue. Without the participation of Poles we can create no Polish government. They all say that I am a dictator but I have enough democratic feeling not to set up a Polish government without Poles. It must be with participation of Poles. We had the opportunity in Moscow to create a Polish government with Poles. Both London and Lublin groups met in Moscow and certain points of agreement were reached. Mikolajczyk returned to London and was kicked out of the government. The present London government (...) called the Lublin government 'bandits' and 'traitors.' Naturally the Lublin government paid the same coin to the London government. It is difficult to bring them together (...) I am prepared to call the Warsaw Poles here or better to see them in Moscow. But frankly, the Warsaw government has as great a democratic basis in Poland as de Gaulle has in France.

Now as a military man I must say what I demand of a country liberated by the Red Army. First there should be peace and quiet in the wake of the army. The men of the Red Army are indifferent as to what kind of government there is in Poland but they do want one that will maintain order behind the lines (...) When I compare the agents of both governments I find that the Lublin ones are useful and the others the contrary. The military must have peace and quiet. The military will support such a government and I cannot do otherwise. Such is the situation (...)

PRIME MINISTER: I must put on record that both the British and Soviet governments have different sources of information in Poland and get different facts. Perhaps we are mistaken but I do not feel that the Lublin government represents even one third of the Polish people. This is my honest opinion and I may be wrong. Still, I have felt that the underground might have collisions with the Lublin government. I have feared bloodshed, arrests, deportation, and I fear the effect on the whole Polish question. Anyone who attacks the Red Army should be punished but I cannot feel that the Lublin government has any right to represent the Polish nation.

C. Roosevelt to Stalin, 6 February 1945

I have been giving a great deal of thought to our meeting this afternoon, and I want to tell you in all frankness what is on my mind.

In so far as the Polish Government is concerned, I am greatly disturbed that the three great powers do not have a meeting of minds about the political setup in

Poland. It seems to me that it puts all of us in a bad light throughout the world to have you recognizing one government while we and the British are recognizing another in London. I am sure this state of affairs should not continue and that if it does it can only lead our people to think there is a breach between us, which is not the case. I am determined that there shall be no breach between ourselves and the Soviet Union. Surely there is a way to reconcile our differences (...)

I was very much impressed with some of the things you said today, particularly your determination that your rear must be safeguarded as your army moves into Berlin. You cannot, and we must not, tolerate any temporary government which will give your armed forces any trouble of this sort. I want you to know that I am fully mindful of this.

You must believe me when I tell you that our people at home look with a critical eye on what they consider a disagreement between us at this vital stage of the war. They, in effect, say that if we cannot get a meeting of minds now when our armies are converging on the common enemy, how can we get an understanding on even more vital things in the future (...) You said today that you would be prepared to support any suggestions for the solution of this problem which offered a fair chance of success, and you also mentioned the possibility of bringing some members of the Lublin government here.

Realizing that we all have the same anxiety in getting the matter settled, I would like to develop your proposal a little and suggest that we invite here to Yalta at once Mr. Beirut [Bierut] and Mr. Osobka [Osóbka] Morawski from the Lublin government and also two or three from the following list of Poles, which according to our information would be desirable as representatives of the other elements of the Polish people in development of a new temporary government which all three of us could recognize and support: Bishop Sapieha of Cracow, Vincente [Wincenty] Witos, Mr. Zurlowski [Zulawski], Professor Buyak [Bujak], and Professor Kutzeva [Kutzeba]. If, as a result of the presence of these Polish leaders from abroad such as Mr. Mikolajczyk, Mr. Grabski, and Mr. Romer, the United States Government, and I feel sure the British government as well, would be prepared to examine with you conditions in which they would dissociate themselves from the London government and transfer their recognition to the new provisional government.

I hope that I do not have to assure you that the United States will never lend its support in any way to any provisional government in Poland that would be inimical to your interest.

It goes without saying that any interim government could be formed as a result of our conference with the Poles here would be pledged to the holding of free elections in Poland at the earliest possible date. I know this is completely consistent with your desire to see a new free and democratic Poland emerge from the welter of this war.

2.3 Stalin on the Situation in Poland, 14 November 1945

By November 1945 Soviet control over Poland had by and large been established. In the excerpts below Stalin himself describes a meeting with two Polish leaders, W. Gomulka and G. Mintz, that indicate a heavy dose of subservience to the Soviet leader as well as a heavy degree of co-ordination in moves against remaining opposition.

(...) The discussion was not being transcribed (the Poles deemed it unnecessary to make a record of conversation), thus I am sending you the contents of the discussion in the form of questions and answers.

QUESTION FROM POLES. Has there been a change in the Soviet leaders' attitude toward Poland and, in particular, toward [the] Polish Communists?

ANSWER FROM COM. STALIN. It has not changed and could not change. Our attitude toward Poles and Polish Communists is as friendly as before.

QUESTION. Should we adopt a law for nationalizing large industry and banks?

ANSWER. Following [Czechoslovak President Eduard] Benes's adoption of such a law, the time has come when such a law should be adopted in Poland as well (...)

QUESTION. Would I object if the Poles accepted a loan from the Americans or the English, and would I allow this loan to be accepted under the conditions that would more or less limit Poland's utilization of the loan?

ANSWER. The loan can be accepted, but without any types of conditions that would limit Poland's rights in the utilization of the loan.

QUESTION. Can we conclude a pact of mutual assistance with France?

ANSWER. You can, but it must fully conform to the spirit of the mutual assistance pact concluded between Poland and the USSR.

QUESTION. Should we pursue further the question of Teshin [Cieszyn] and can the USSR support Poland in the negotiations on Teshin with Czechoslovakia?

ANSWER. I don't advise you to pursue this question further, since, after receiving Silesian coking coal, Poland no longer has an argument for the transfer of Teshin to the Poles, in light of which the USSR cannot support the Poles in this matter. It would be better to eliminate quickly this contentious issue with Czechoslovakia, limit the matter to the resettlement of Teshin Poles in Poland, and re-establish good relations with Czechoslovakia. On the question of resettling Teshin Poles in Poland, the USSR can support the Poles in the negotiations with Czechoslovakia (...)

QUESTION. Can we announce at the PPR Congress that the PPR is a successor of the line and tradition of the Polish Communist Party, which had been liquidated even prior to the war?

ANSWER. This should not be done because the Polish Communist Party has in actuality become [the] agents of Pilsudchiks (...) It would be better to announce

at the PPR Congress that the PPR is a new party and that it is not tied to the line and traditions of the Polish Communist Party.

QUESTION. Are we correct in thinking that it would be expedient to postpone general elections in Poland for another year?

ANSWER. I think that it would be better to hold elections no later than spring of 1946, since further postponement of elections would be very difficult both due to internal and international reasons.

QUESTION. Osóbka-Morawski is acting badly. If he does not improve in the near future, we would like to replace him prior to the organization of the elections with Mr. Lange (the current Polish ambassador to the USA, a moderate PPS-ist, and well disposed, in the Poles' opinion, toward Communists). What can you suggest?

ANSWER. If you have no other option and if it is impossible at present to put forth the candidacy of Bierut (the Poles believe this combination to be inexpedient), then you can make an attempt with Lange, with the goal of using Lange to dismantle the PPS. Consult with Wanda Lvovna, who is closely familiar with Lange.

2.4 Churchill's Iron Curtain Speech and Stalin's Reply, March 1946

One of the seminal documents of the early Cold War is undoubtedly Winston Churchill's Iron Curtain speech. At Fulton, Missouri, on 6 March 1946, with President Truman in attendance and aware of the speech's content, Churchill launched into a sharp criticism of Soviet policy in Eastern Europe that helped to galvanize public opinion in the United States (and Great Britain) in favour of a strong anti-Soviet policy. The Soviets were, not unexpectedly, unhappy with Churchill's Iron Curtain speech. Ten days later the Soviet daily Pravda published an interview in which Stalin criticized the former prime minister's tough rhetoric and criticism of the events unfolding in Eastern Europe.

A. Churchill

(...) 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 (...) 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 (...). 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 (...). Whatever conclusions may be drawn from these facts—and facts they are—this is certainly not the Liberated Europe we fought to build up. Nor is it one which contains the essentials of permanent peace.

(...) 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. 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. Our difficulties and dangers will not be removed by closing our eyes to them. They will not be removed by mere waiting to see what happens; nor will they be removed by a policy of appeasement. What is needed is a settlement, and the longer this is delayed, the more difficult it will be and the greater our dangers will become.

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 (...).

B. Stalin

(...) In substance, Mr. Churchill now stands in the position of a firebrand of war. And Mr. Churchill is not alone here. He has friends not only in England but also in the United States of America.

In this respect, one is reminded remarkably of Hitler and his friends. Hitler began to set war loose by announcing his racial theory, declaring that only people

speaking the German language represent a fully valuable nation. Mr. Churchill begins to set war loose, also by a racial theory, maintaining that only nations speaking the English language are fully valuable nations, called upon to decide the destinies of the entire world.

The German racial theory brought Hitler and his friends to the conclusion that the Germans, as the only fully valuable nation, must rule over other nations. The English racial theory brings Mr. Churchill and his friends to the conclusion that nations speaking the English language, being the only fully valuable nations, should rule over the remaining nations of the world (...).

As a result of the German invasion, the Soviet Union has irrevocably lost in battles with the Germans, and also during the German occupation and through the expulsion of Soviet citizens to German slave labor camps, about 7,000,000 people. In other words, the Soviet Union has lost in men several times more than Britain and the United States together.

It may be that some quarters are trying to push into oblivion these sacrifices of the Soviet people which insured the liberation of Europe from the Hitlerite yoke.

But the Soviet Union cannot forget them. 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 of the Soviet Union as 'expansionist tendencies' of our Government?

(...) Mr. Churchill wanders around the truth when he speaks of the growth of the influence of the Communist parties in Eastern Europe (...). The growth of the influence of Communism cannot be considered accidental. It is a normal function. The influence of the Communists 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.

2.5 Co-ordination Among Communist Parties, May 1946

After the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943, the international Communist movement lacked a comprehensive umbrella organization. In the aftermath of World War II, however, the idea of resuscitating the Comintern began to gain ground. In the excerpt below Hungarian Communist Party leader Matyas Rakosi foreshadows the subsequent (September 1947) formation of the Cominform in a speech to a meeting of the Hungarian Communist Party on 17 May 1946.