**Cold War Lesson Readings**

**The Crumbling Alliance**

Amid the rubble of war, a new power structure emerged that would shape events in the postwar world. In Europe, Germany was defeated. France and Britain were drained and exhausted. Two other powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, had brought about the final victory. Before long, these two nations would become superpowers with the economic resources and military might to dominate the globe. They would also become tense rivals in an increasingly divided world. Growing differences.

During the war, the Soviet Union and the nations of the West had cooperated to defeat Nazi Germany. By 1945, however, the wartime alliance was crumbling. Conflicting ideologies and mutual distrust divided the former Allies and soon led to the conflict known as the Cold War. The Cold War was a state of tension and hostility among nations without armed conflict between the major rivals. At first, the focus of the Cold War was Eastern Europe, where Stalin and the western powers had very different goals. Stalin was deeply suspicious of other powers Russia had been invaded by Napoleon's armies and by Germans in World Wars I and II. Also, the United States and Britain had both sent troops into Russia during World War I.

**Origins of the Cold War**

Stalin had two goals in Eastern Europe. First, he wanted to spread communism into the area. And second, he wanted to create a buffer zone of friendly governments as a defense against Germany, which had invaded Russia during World War I and again in 1941. As the Red Army had pushed German forces out of Eastern Europe, it left behind occupying forces. At wartime conferences, Stalin tried to get the West to accept Soviet influence in the region. The Soviet dictator pointed out that the United States was not consulting the Soviet Union about peace terms for Italy or Japan, defeated and occupied by American and British troops. In the same way, Russia would determine the fate of the Eastern European lands overrun by the Red Army on its way to Berlin.

Roosevelt and Churchill rejected Stalin's view, making him promise "free elections" in Eastern Europe. Stalin ignored that pledge. Backed by the Red Army, local communists in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and elsewhere destroyed rival political parties and even assassinated democratic leaders. By 1948, Stalin had installed pro-Soviet communist governments throughout Eastern Europe. "An iron curtain." Churchill had long distrusted Stalin. As early as 1946, on a visit to the United States, he warned of the new danger facing the war-weary world. In the West, Churchill's "iron curtain" became a symbol of the Cold War. It expressed the growing fear of communism. More important, it described the division of Europe into an "eastern" and "western" bloc. In the East were the Soviet-dominated, communist countries of Eastern Europe. In the West were the western democracies, led by the United States.

**Containing Communism**

Like Churchill, President Truman saw communism as an evil force creeping across Europe and threatening countries around the world, including China. To deal with that threat, the United States abandoned its traditional isolationism. Unlike after World War I, when it withdrew from global affairs, it took a leading role on the world stage after World War II. When Stalin began to put pressure on Greece and Turkey, Truman took action. In Greece, Stalin backed communist rebels who were fighting to topple a right-wing monarchy supported by Britain. By 1947, however, Britain could no longer afford to defend Greece. Stalin was also menacing Turkey in the Dardanelles, the straits linking the Black Sea and the Mediterranean.

Both sides campaigned in a propaganda war. The United States spoke of defending capitalism and democracy against communism and totalitarianism. The Soviet Union claimed the moral high ground in the struggle against western imperialism. Yet linked to those stands, both sides sought world power.

**Truman Doctrine**

On March 12, 1947, Truman outlined a new policy to Congress:

*“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 .... The free peoples of the world look to us for support in maintaining their freedoms.”*

This policy, known as the Truman Doctrine, would guide the United States for decades. It made clear that Americans would resist Soviet expansion in Europe or elsewhere in the world. Truman soon sent military an economic aid and advisers to Greece and Turkey so that they could withstand the communist threat. The Truman Doctrine was rooted in the idea of containment, limiting communism to the areas already under Soviet control. George Kennan, the American statesman who first proposed this approach, believed that communism would eventually destroy itself. With "patient but firm and vigilant containment," he said, the United States could stop Soviet expansion. Stalin, however, saw containment as "encirclement" by the capitalist world that wanted to isolate the Soviet Union.

**The Marshall Plan**

Postwar hunger and poverty made Western European lands fertile ground for communist ideas. To strengthen democratic governments, the United States offered a massive aid package, called the Marshall Plan. Under it, the United States funneled food and economic assistance to Europe to help countries rebuild. Billions in American aid helped war-shattered Europe recover rapidly and reduced communist influence there. President Truman also offered aid to the Soviet Union and its satellites in Eastern Europe. Stalin, however, saw the plan as a trick to knock Eastern Europe out of the Soviet orbit. He forbade Eastern European countries to accept American aid, promising that the Soviet Union would help them instead.