

Cold War Lesson Plan

Central Historical Question:

Who was primarily responsible for the Cold War – the United States or the Soviet Union?

Materials:

- Cold War PowerPoint
- Copies of Cold War Timeline
- Copies of Cold War Documents A-D
- Copies of Guiding Questions

Plan of Instruction:

1. Do Now: *What do you remember about the Cold War from previous history classes?*
Elicit student answers.
2. Review:
 - *Differences between communism and capitalism.*
 - *US and Soviet Union were allies in WWII.*
 - *After WWII, Europe was in ruins, and former colonial empires were crumbling. This set the scene for increased competition between the two superpowers, the U.S. and the U.S.S.R.*
 - *The Soviet Red Army remained in Eastern Europe after the war, which led to the Soviet Bloc. At the same time, the United States developed policies of containment – in particular, the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan.*
2. Timeline and PowerPoint Lecture. Hand out Cold War Timeline and lead students through it using PowerPoint slides to draw attention to key events:
 - Slide 1: The Iron Curtain Speech
 - Slide 2: The Truman Doctrine
 - Slide 3: The Marshall Plan
 - Slide 4: NATO and Warsaw Pact
 - Slide 5: Introduce today's Central Historical Question:
Who was started the Cold War, the United States or the Soviet Union?

Over the past decades historians have disagreed over this question. Today, we are going to look closely at some Cold War documents in order to address the question for ourselves.
3. Pass out Documents A and B along with Guiding Questions. Students read documents, answer questions, and record their initial hypothesis regarding the Central Historical Question.
4. Share out answers and discuss.

5. Pass out Documents C and D. Students read documents, answer questions, and record their second hypothesis.
 6. Share out answers and discuss.
 7. Whole class discussion:
 - Who was primarily responsible for the start of the Cold War? What evidence do you have to support your claim?
 - Which of these documents do you believe is most trustworthy? Why?
 - Did anyone's hypothesis change? How and why?
 - What other evidence would you need to strengthen your claim?
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Citations:

Document A

"Iron Curtain Speech" Winston Churchill, March 1946, Fulton, Missouri.

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/churchill-iron.html>

Document B

"Truman Doctrine Speech," President Truman to Congress, March 12, 1947.

<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/harrystrumantrumandoctrine.html>

Document C

Nikolai Novikov, telegram to Soviet Leadership, September 1946.

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=904>

Document D

Secretary of Commerce and former Vice President Henry A. Wallace letter to President Harry S. Truman, July 23, 1946, in Papers of Harry S. Truman, President's Secretary's Files, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Missouri.

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Timeline of the Early Cold War

1945: February 4-11 - Yalta Conference

1945: August 6 - United States first used atomic bomb in war

1945: August 8 - Russia enters war against Japan

1945: August 14 - Japanese surrenders, ending World War II

1946: March - Winston Churchill delivers "Iron Curtain" speech

1947: March - Truman announces Truman Doctrine

1947: June - Marshall Plan is announced

1948: February - Communist takeover in Czechoslovakia

1948: June 24 - Berlin blockade begins

1949: July - NATO treaty ratified

1949: May 12 - Berlin Blockade ends

1949: September - Mao Zedong, a communist, takes control of China

1949: September - Soviets explode first atomic bomb

1955: May – Warsaw Pact

Document A: The Iron Curtain Speech (Modified)

It is my duty, however, 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 some cases increasing measure of control from Moscow.

In a great number of countries, far from the Russian frontiers and throughout the world, Communist fifth columns are established and work in complete unity and absolute obedience to the directions they receive from the Communist center.

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.

Source: *Excerpt from the “Iron Curtain Speech” delivered by Winston Churchill, March 1946 in Fulton, Missouri.*

Document B: The Truman Doctrine (Modified)

The United States has received from the Greek Government an urgent appeal for financial and economic assistance...Greece is in desperate need of financial and economic assistance to enable it to resume purchases of food, clothing, fuel, and seeds.

The very existence of the Greek state is today threatened by the terrorist activities of several thousand armed men, led by Communists, who defy the government's authority. . . . Greece must have assistance if it is to become a self-supporting and self-respecting democracy. The United States must supply this assistance. . . . No other nation is willing and able to provide the necessary support for a democratic Greek government.

One of the primary objectives of the foreign policy of the United States is the creation of conditions in which we and other nations will be able to work out a way of life free from coercion.

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. If Greece should fall under the control of an armed minority, the effect upon its neighbor, Turkey, would be immediate and serious. Confusion and disorder might well spread throughout the entire Middle East. . . . Should we fail to aid Greece and Turkey in this fateful hour, the effect will be far reaching to the West as well as to the East.

The free peoples of the world look to us for support in maintaining their freedoms. If we falter in our leadership, we may endanger the peace of the world. And we shall surely endanger the welfare of this nation.

Great responsibilities have been placed upon us by the swift movement of events.

Source: *Excerpt from the "Truman Doctrine Speech," delivered by President Truman to Congress on March 12, 1947.*

Document C: Soviet Ambassador Telegram (Modified)

The foreign policy of the United States, which reflects the imperialist tendencies of American monopolistic capital, is characterized in the postwar period by a striving for world supremacy. This is the real meaning of the many statements by President Truman and other representatives of American ruling circles; that the United States has the right to lead the world. All the forces of American diplomacy -- the army, the air force, the navy, industry, and science -- are enlisted in the service of this foreign policy. For this purpose broad plans for expansion have been developed and are being implemented through diplomacy and the establishment of a system of naval and air bases stretching far beyond the boundaries of the United States, through the arms race, and through the creation of ever newer types of weapons. . . .

During the Second World War . . . [American leaders] calculated that the United States of America, if it could avoid direct participation in the war, would enter it only at the last minute, when it could easily affect the outcome of the war, completely ensuring its interests.

In this regard, it was thought that the main competitors of the United States would be crushed or greatly weakened in the war, and the United States by virtue of this circumstance would assume the role of the most powerful factor in resolving the fundamental questions of the postwar world.

Source: *Excerpt from a telegram sent by Soviet Ambassador Nikolai Novikov to Soviet Leadership in September 1946.*

Document D: Henry Wallace (Modified)

I have been increasingly disturbed about the trend of international affairs since the end of the war.

How do American actions appear to other nations? I mean actions [like] the Bikini tests of the atomic bomb and continued production of bombs, the plan to arm Latin America with our weapons, and the effort to secure air bases spread over half the globe from which the other half of the globe can be bombed. I cannot but feel that these actions must make it look to the rest of the world as if we were only paying lip service to peace at the conference table.

These facts rather make it appear either (1) that we are preparing ourselves to win the war which we regard as inevitable or (2) that we are trying to build up a predominance [largest amount] of force to intimidate the rest of mankind.

Our interest in establishing democracy in Eastern Europe, where democracy by and large has never existed, seems to [the Soviets] an attempt to reestablish the encirclement of unfriendly neighbors which might serve as a springboard of still another effort to destroy [them].

Source: *Secretary of Commerce and former Vice President Henry A. Wallace letter to President Harry S. Truman, July 23, 1946. Truman asked Wallace to resign shortly after this letter.*

Guiding Questions

Iron Curtain Speech

1. *Sourcing*: Who was Winston Churchill? Why would Americans trust what he has to say about the Soviet Union?
2. *Close reading*: What does Churchill claim that the Soviet Union wanted?

Truman Doctrine

1. *Close reading*: Why did Truman believe Greece needed American aid in 1947?
2. *Context*: What does Truman mean when he claims, “Should we fail to aid Greece and Turkey in this fateful hour, the effect will be far reaching to the West as well as to the East”?
3. *Close reading*: Does Truman present American policy as offensive or defensive? What words or phrases does Truman use to present policy this way?

Record your first hypothesis: *Who was primarily responsible for the Cold War - the United States or the Soviet Union?*

Soviet Ambassador Telegram

1. *Sourcing*: Who was Nicholas Novikov? When did he write this telegram?
2. *Close reading*: How does Novikov describe the United States? What evidence does he use to support his description?
3. *Context*: What does Novikov claim the United States planned during the Second World War?

Henry Wallace Letter

1. *Sourcing*: Who was Henry Wallace? When did he write this letter?
2. *Close Reading*: What is Wallace's main argument?
3. *Corroboration*: How does Wallace's description of American foreign policy compare to Truman's and Novikov's?

Record your second hypothesis: *Who was primarily responsible for the Cold War - the United States or the Soviet Union?*