

The Cold War Heats Up

By 1946—less than a year after the end of World War II—the Soviet Union established a political order in Eastern Europe which completely cut off that region from the Western world. Communist governments were forced on nation after nation.

Former prime minister Winston Churchill, while visiting Truman's home state of Missouri in the spring of 1946, spoke of the threat of Soviet-backed communism, calling it "an Iron Curtain" which "has descended across the continent" of Europe.

Angered by the speech, Joseph Stalin responded, calling Churchill's sentiment a "call to war with the Soviet Union." But no war of armed soldiers broke out in the war-torn nations of Europe. The new conflict—this Cold War—was generally played out in other ways. For no one wanted war—not even the Western powers, led by President Truman.

Truman met the Soviet challenge through other means. In the fall of 1946, the pro-British Greek government came under challenge by Greek communist forces supported by the Soviet Union. Neighboring Turkey seemed headed down the same road. Britain was unable to supply the Greeks with adequate monetary support to fight the communists.

Truman decided to meet the challenge by announcing in March of 1947 that the U.S. would help any free country fight communist aggression.

This policy was soon known as the Truman Doctrine. The primary goal of this policy was known as *containment*, an attempt to keep communism out of vulnerable states. Almost immediately, the U.S. Congress appropriated \$400 million to aid the Greeks and the Turks in their struggle. In time, communist influences were defeated in both nations.

To halt the threat of communist influence in other European nations and to help rebuild their shattered economies, the United States helped rebuild Europe. Proposed by U.S. Secretary of State George Marshall, the European Recovery Plan (popularly, it was known as the Marshall Plan) offered economic aid to any European country, even the Soviet Union. When Czechoslovakia and Poland attempted to participate in the program, the Soviet Union refused to allow them to receive American aid. In time, the Marshall Plan funneled \$13 billion to help reestablish economic order in Western Europe.

In 1948, Truman made another decisive move in response to Stalin's aggressive policies in Eastern Europe. In June, the U.S., Britain, and France—each of whom controlled a sector of Germany—announced their plan to unite their sectors into the West German Federal Republic (West Germany).

Stalin immediately responded with a desperate plan to close off the city of Berlin from the Western Allies. (Berlin was divided into four sectors, just as Germany was. The city was located over one hundred miles inside the Russian sector.) Organizing a Berlin blockade, Stalin ordered all rail, highway, and river traffic to Berlin closed to the West. But Truman answered Stalin's blockade with an airlift. For nearly a year, every day, Britain, France, and the U.S. sent planes over West Berlin, dropping millions of tons of supplies (the Americans spoke of it as "Operation Vittles"), thus breaking Stalin's plan to occupy all of Berlin.

Review and Write

1. What steps did Truman take to help meet Soviet communist aggression in Europe?
2. What was the Marshall Plan and what were its aims?
3. Describe the Berlin blockade and the Berlin airlift.