

COLD WAR - Churchill and the Iron Curtain speech

Source 1

A shadow has fallen upon the scenes so lately lighted by the Allied victory. Nobody knows what Soviet Russia and its Communist international organization intends to do in the immediate future, or what are the limits if any to their expansive and proselytizing tendencies. I have a strong admiration and regard for the valiant Russian people and for my wartime comrade, Marshal Stalin. There is 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 from all renewal of German aggression. We welcome her to her rightful place among the leading nations of the world. 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, to place before you certain facts about the present position in Europe.

Extracts from Churchill's Iron curtain speech given in the USA in March 1946

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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 the Soviet sphere and all are subject in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and increasing measure of control from Moscow. Athens alone, with its immortal glories, is free

control. Police governments are prevailing in nearly every case, and so far, except in Czechoslovakia, there is no true democracy. Turkey and Persia are both profoundly alarmed and disturbed at the claims which are made upon them and at the pressure being exerted by the Moscow Government. An attempt is being made by the Russians in Berlin to build up a quasi-Communist party in their zone of Occupied Germany by showing special favors to groups of left-wing German leaders. At the end of the fighting last June, the American and British Armies withdrew Westwards, in accordance with an earlier agreement, to a depth at some points of 150 miles on a front of nearly 400 miles to allow the Russians to occupy this vast expanse of territory which the Western Democracies had conquered. If now the Soviet Government tries, by separate action, to build up a pro-Communist Germany in their areas, this will cause new serious difficulties in the British and American zones, and will give the defeated Germans the power of putting themselves up to auction between the Soviets and the Western Democracies. 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.

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All my public life I have worked for a strong France and I never lost faith in her destiny, even in the darkest hours. I will not lose faith now. However, 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 centre. Except in the British Commonwealth and in the United States, where Communism is in its infancy, the Communist parties or fifth columns constitute a growing challenge and peril to Christian civilization. These are sombre facts for anyone

I have felt bound to portray the shadow which, alike in the west and in the east, falls upon the world. I was a Minister at the time of the Versailles Treaty and a close friend of Mr. Lloyd George. I did not myself agree with many things that were done, but I have a very strong impression in my mind of that situation, and I find it painful to contrast it with that which prevails now. In those days there were high hopes and unbounded confidence that the war was over, and that the League of Nations would become all-powerful. I do not see or feel the same confidence or even the same hopes in the haggard world at this time.

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 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 these 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.

Last time I saw it all coming and cried aloud to my own fellow-countrymen and to the world, but no one paid any attention. Up till the year 1933 or even 1935, Germany might have been saved from the awful fate which has overtaken her and we might all have been spared the miseries Hitler let loose upon mankind. There never was a war in all history easier to prevent by timely action than the one which has just desolated such great areas of the globe. It could have been prevented without the firing of a single shot, and Germany might be powerful, prosperous and honored to-day, but no one would listen and one by one we were all sucked into the awful whirlpool. No surely must not let that happen again.

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Source 2

[CYPHER]

GENERAL DISTRIBUTION

FROM WASHINGTON TO FOREIGN OFFICE

Earl of Halifax
No. 1552

D. 6.50 p.m. 10th March, 1946

10th March, 1946

R. 12.20 a.m. 11th March, 1946

F F F F

IMPORTANT

WEEKLY POLITICAL SUMMARY.

1. The troubled debate about the Soviet Union's intentions and United States foreign policy continues. The Soviet's disregard of Allied agreements about Persia and alarming first-hand accounts from American journalists of conditions in Manchuria have heightened the feeling of concern. Mr. Churchill's dramatically blunt review of the world situation in his speech at Fulton, Missouri, has made a very profound impact on the country and is being widely and heatedly discussed. In this atmosphere

Extract from a Foreign Office report on the effects of Churchill's Iron Curtain speech in the USA

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2. Reactions to this situation vary. Tough-minded Conservatives in the War and Navy Departments talk about the inevitability of a showdown with the Soviet Union and hint that it may be better now than later.

Internationalists clutch at United Nations Organisation with a new devotion born of desperation, while others turn, half fearfully and half hopefully, to another conference of the three Great Powers as a final attempt to hammer out a new basis of co-operation.

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Mr. Churchill's Speech.

4. It is generally assumed that both President Truman and His Majesty's Government were privy to Mr. Churchill's speech in Missouri, and that fact, in addition to Mr. Churchill's own exceptional appeal to Americans, has resulted in the keenest attention being paid to the speech throughout the country. Although the bulk of the press and of Congress are clearly unwilling to endorse it as an adequate solution to present troubles, it has given the sharpest jolt to American thinking of any utterance since the end of the war.

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7. But Americans really listen to Mr. Churchill' and there is little doubt that the speech will set the pattern of discussion on world affairs for some time to come. While it is now plain that proposals tending towards an Anglo-American alliance can hardly expect approval if they come from British spokesmen, it seems possible that similar opinions if expressed by Americans might find a more positive reception, especially if Soviet expansionist tendencies continue. And if Mr. Churchill's views are not at this stage acceptable to the generality of press and Congressional opinion, President Truman and Admiral Leahy were described as very warm in their compliments to Mr. Churchill after he had spoken.

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Source 3

[This telegram is of particular secrecy and should be retained by the authorised recipient and not passed on].

[CYPHER]

CABINET DISTRIBUTION
FROM MOSCOW TO FOREIGN OFFICE

Mr. Roberts.

No. 987

D. 3.45 p.m. 11th March, 1946

11th March, 1946.

R. 8.35 p.m. 11th March, 1946

Repeated to Washington

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N 3315

IMPORTANT

My telegram No. 938. ✓ 3155 / 140 / 128 MAR 1946

The counter-blast has come, but it is ostensibly directed only against Mr. Churchill personally. For once His Majesty's Government and official British foreign policy are spared although I doubt whether the Soviet public draws the distinction and is much comforted by this.

2. Pravda, only paper appearing today, carried on the back page a two and a half column summary of Mr. Churchill's speech which is on the whole fair and full. His references

Extracts from a Foreign Office report on the reaction to Churchill's speech in the USSR

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4. Most significant omission however was Mr. Churchill's reference to his unavailing warnings before the war. This is replaced by comment that he made "monstrous comparisons". His reference to Russian admiration of strength was also dismissed as a cynical statement designed to support his propaganda for an Anglo-American alliance.

5. On the front page Pravda carries a two and a half column editorial entitled "Churchill rattles the Sabre" bitterly attacking his speech. He is accused of having concealed his true views during the war and now returned to his old prejudices against the Soviet Union and the bogey of Bolshevik expansion dating from the time when he was a leading foreign interventionist. His conception of an Anglo-American military alliance is castigated as a reactionary plot against the Soviet Union, which would mean the end of the Big Three and of the United Nations Organisation. Pravda

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6. The Pravda article has caused a sensation in Moscow. It is being read everywhere with unusual interest and there is considerable disquiet among the general public. Mr. Churchill had been built up here during and after the war as a friend of Stalin and the Soviet Union and he enjoyed the sincere regard and indeed affection of the Soviet public.

Extracts from a Foreign Office report on the reaction to Churchill's speech in the USSR

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7. My own impression is that the Soviet authorities were much taken aback by this frank statement by Mr. Churchill. They seem genuinely alarmed by many recent signs of American rapprochement with Britain in the face of high-handed Soviet actions and to fear however illogically the establishment

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opinion in the Western Democracies. Finally a gigantic red herring of this kind is of the greatest help with the Soviet public and possibly also with outside public opinion in directing attention from Persia, and Manchuria. In effect Churchill's speech is being used to justify the warnings about capitalist encirclement contained in recent Soviet propaganda and more particularly in the election speeches here. The time-lag between Churchill's speech

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