



U.S. President Harry Truman (left) with Winston Churchill on a visit to Fulton, Missouri, in March 1946, the same visit when Churchill gave his well-known “Iron Curtain” speech (also known as “The Sinews of Peace” speech.)

after Kennan sent his telegram to Truman, a Soviet diplomat in Washington, named Nikolai Novikov, wrote back to Stalin that recent developments in the U.S. government and its policies all pointed toward an “America bent on ‘world domination.’”⁴ Public expressions of anticommunist sentiment, such as Churchill’s March 1946 [“Iron Curtain” speech](#), and the ouster of comparatively sympathetic politicians from Truman’s administration seemed to confirm the sense of inevitable conflict conveyed by Novikov’s allegations that an insatiable spirit of imperialism dominated the capitalist West. The governments of the U.S. and U.S.S.R. each became increasingly convinced that their opponent was attacking—literally and symbolically—their values and way of life.

Truman left little doubt of his opposition to communist expansion when he told Congress on March 12, 1947, that “it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.”⁵ Echoing the Monroe Doctrine, a nineteenth-century warning against European interference in the Western Hemisphere, this position soon became known as the Truman Doctrine. It was transformed into actual policy over the course of the next three years, perhaps most significantly in the National Security Council Resolution 68 (NSC-68) of 1950. This policy proposed a massive military buildup as a deterrent against Soviet aggression and bolstered Truman’s claims concerning the U.S.’s moral obligation to oppose communism. The institution of the Marshall Plan in 1948 and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949 provided economic aid and military



U.S. President Harry Truman signs the document implementing the North Atlantic Treaty in August 1949.

protection, respectively, to the nations of Europe on the Western side of the Iron Curtain.

Correspondingly, the Soviets consolidated their power in Eastern European countries by installing or supporting ideologically sympathetic governments. They also established communist parallels to the Marshall Plan and NATO in the form of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) in 1949 and the Warsaw Pact in 1955.

The first decade of the Cold War ratcheted up both the real and the perceived opposition between the superpowers:

The conflict between East and West was no longer understood simply as a power-political struggle for spheres of influence and security requirements, but increasingly in terms of a battle for survival between two opposing social orders and life-styles.... [E]ach crisis of mutual relations...led to an intensification of this polarization.⁶

The challenge of maintaining the delicate balance brought about by this division was complicated by the steady increase in both countries’ nuclear stockpiles. In order to justify the vast expenditures on weaponry, foreign aid, and global propaganda, both the U.S. and U.S.S.R. needed to maintain the belief that they were protecting themselves and their national values. However, each nation also understood the inherent danger of letting such a defense develop into direct