**The Sinews of Peace ("Iron Curtain Speech")**

March 5, 1946.

In one of the most famous orations of the Cold War period, former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill condemns the Soviet Union’s policies in Europe and declares, “From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the continent.” Churchill’s speech is considered one of the opening volleys announcing the beginning of the Cold War.

Churchill, who had been defeated for re-election as prime minister in 1945, was invited to Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri where he gave this speech. President Harry S. Truman joined Churchill on the platform and listened intently to his speech. Churchill began by praising the United States, which he declared stood “at the pinnacle of world power.” It soon became clear that a primary purpose of his talk was to argue for an even closer “special relationship” between the United States and Great Britain—the great powers of the “English-speaking world”—in organising and policing the post-war world. In particular, he warned against the expansionistic policies of the Soviet Union. In addition to the “iron curtain” that had descended across Eastern Europe, Churchill spoke of “communist fifth columns” that were operating throughout western and southern Europe. Drawing parallels with the disastrous appeasement of Hitler prior to World War II, Churchill advised that in dealing with the Soviets there was “nothing which they admire so much as strength, and there is nothing for which they have less respect than for military weakness.”

Truman and many other U.S. officials warmly received the speech. Already they had decided that the Soviet Union was bent on expansion and only a tough stance would deter the Russians. Churchill’s “iron curtain” phrase immediately entered the official vocabulary of the Cold War. U.S. officials were less enthusiastic about Churchill’s call for a “special relationship” between the United States and Great Britain. While they viewed the English as valuable allies in the Cold War, they were also well aware that Britain’s power was on the wane and had no intention of being used as pawns to help support the crumbling British Empire. In the Soviet Union, Russian leader Joseph Stalin denounced the speech as “war mongering,” and referred to Churchill’s comments about the “English-speaking world” as imperialist “racism.” The British, Americans, and Russians-allies against Hitler less than a year before the speech—were drawing the battle lines of the Cold War.

(An extract)

“It is my duty however, for I am sure you would wish me to state the facts as I see them to you, 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.”

“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 favours 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 upon a front of nearly four hundred miles, in order to allow our Russian allies 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.”  
  
“On the other hand, ladies and gentlemen, I repulse the idea that a new war is inevitable; still more that it is imminent. It is because I am sure that our fortunes are still in our own hands, in our own hands, and that we hold the power to save the future, that I feel the duty to speak out now that I have the occasion and the opportunity to do so. 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. Our difficulties and dangers will not be removed by closing our eyes to them. They will not be removed by mere waiting to see what happens; nor will they be removed by a policy of appeasement. What is needed is a settlement, and the longer this is delayed, the more difficult it will be and the greater our dangers will become.”  
  
“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 in my belief without the firing of a single shot, and Germany might be powerful, prosperous and honoured to-day; but no one would listen and one by one we were all sucked into the awful whirlpool. We surely, ladies and gentlemen, I put it to you, surely we must not let that happen again. This can only be achieved by reaching now, in 1946, a good understanding on all points with Russia under the general authority of the United Nations Organisation and by the maintenance of that good understanding through many peaceful years, by the world instrument, supported by the whole strength of the English-speaking world and all its connections. There is the solution which I respectfully offer to you in this Address to which I have given the title "The Sinews of Peace."  
  
“Neither the sure prevention of war, nor the continuous rise of world organisation will be gained without what I have called the fraternal association of the English-speaking peoples.”