Guided Readings: Origins of the Cold War and Soviet-American Confrontation

READING 1

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. The safety of the world, ladies and gentlemen, requires a unity in Europe, from which no nation should be permanently outcast... Twice the United States has had to send several millions of its young men across the Atlantic to fight the wars. Surely we should work with conscious purpose.. 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.

Winston S. Churchill: "Iron Curtain Speech", March 5, 1946

READING 2

One cannot forget the following fact: the Germans carried out an invasion of the U.S.S.R. through Finland, Poland, Rumania, Bulgaria, and Hungary....One can ask, therefore, what can be surprising in the fact that the Soviet Union, in a desire to ensure its security for the future, tries to achieve that these countries should have governments whose relations to the Soviet Union are loyal?

"Stalin's Reply to Churchill," (interview with Pravda), New York Times, 14 March 1946

READING 3

How do American actions since V-J Day appear to other nations? I mean by actions the concrete things like $13 billion for the War and Navy Departments, the Bikini tests of the atomic bomb and continued production of bombs, the plan to arm Latin America with out weapons, production of B-29's and planned production of B-36's, and the effort to secure air bases spread over half the globe....

How would it look to us if Russia had the atomic bomb and we did not, if Russia had 10,000 bombers and air bases within a thousand miles of our coast lines and we did not?....Most of us are firmly convinced of the soundness of our position when we suggest the internationalization and defortification of the Danube or of the Dardanelles, but we would be horrified and angered by any Russian counter-proposal that would involve the internationalizing and disarming of Suez or Panama. We must recognize that to the Russians these seem to be identical situations.

Secretary of Commerce Henry A. Wallace 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

READING 4

Today the ruling circles of the United States and Great Britain head one international grouping which has as its aim the consolidation of capitalism and the achievement of the domination of these countries over other peoples. . .. Take, for example, the German question. If in the post war period America and Britain had adhered to all the principles—let us say, for example,the democratic principles—of the Yalta and Potsdam conferences on the German question, which made possible and fruitful the collaboration of the great allies against Hitlerite ,Germany, with the aim of liquidating the remnants of fascism, then collaboration between the Soviet Union, the United States, and Britain would also today produce good results. But the United States and Britain have departed from these democratic principles and have violated the decisions jointly taken.

Soviet foreign minister, V. M. Molotov, "The Task of Our Time: Unite Against the Enslavement of the People," broadcast to the Russian people, November 6, 1947

READING 5

Whether it be the control of atomic energy, aggression against small nations, the German or the Austrian peace settlements, or any of the other questions, the majority of nations concerned have found a common basis for action. But in every case the majority agreement has been rejected, denounced, and openly attacked by the Soviet Union and her satellites whose policy she controls....What the world needs in order to regain a sense of security is an end to Soviet obstruction and aggression.

President Harry Truman, Commencement Address at the University of California , June 12, 1948

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Answer in complete sentences.

1. What were the post-war goals of the United States and Soviet Union?
2. Was post-war conflict between the United States and Soviet Union inevitable? Explain.
3. What was the underlying source of international tension--an aggressive and intransigent Soviet Union or an overwhelmingly strong and uncompromising America? Explain.