

University of Luxembourg

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THE IRON CURTAIN - AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW



THE IRON CURTAIN - A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

ORATOR WORKSHOP, LUXEMBOURG 21st OCTOBER 2019



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1. Definition

Iron curtains were metal barriers in German theaters designed to stop the spread of fire from the stage to the rest of the building while an orderly evacuation took place.

The 'Iron Curtain' was a term used to describe the physical, ideological and military division of Europe between the western and southern capitalist states and the eastern, Soviet-dominated communist nations during the **Cold War (1945-1991)**.

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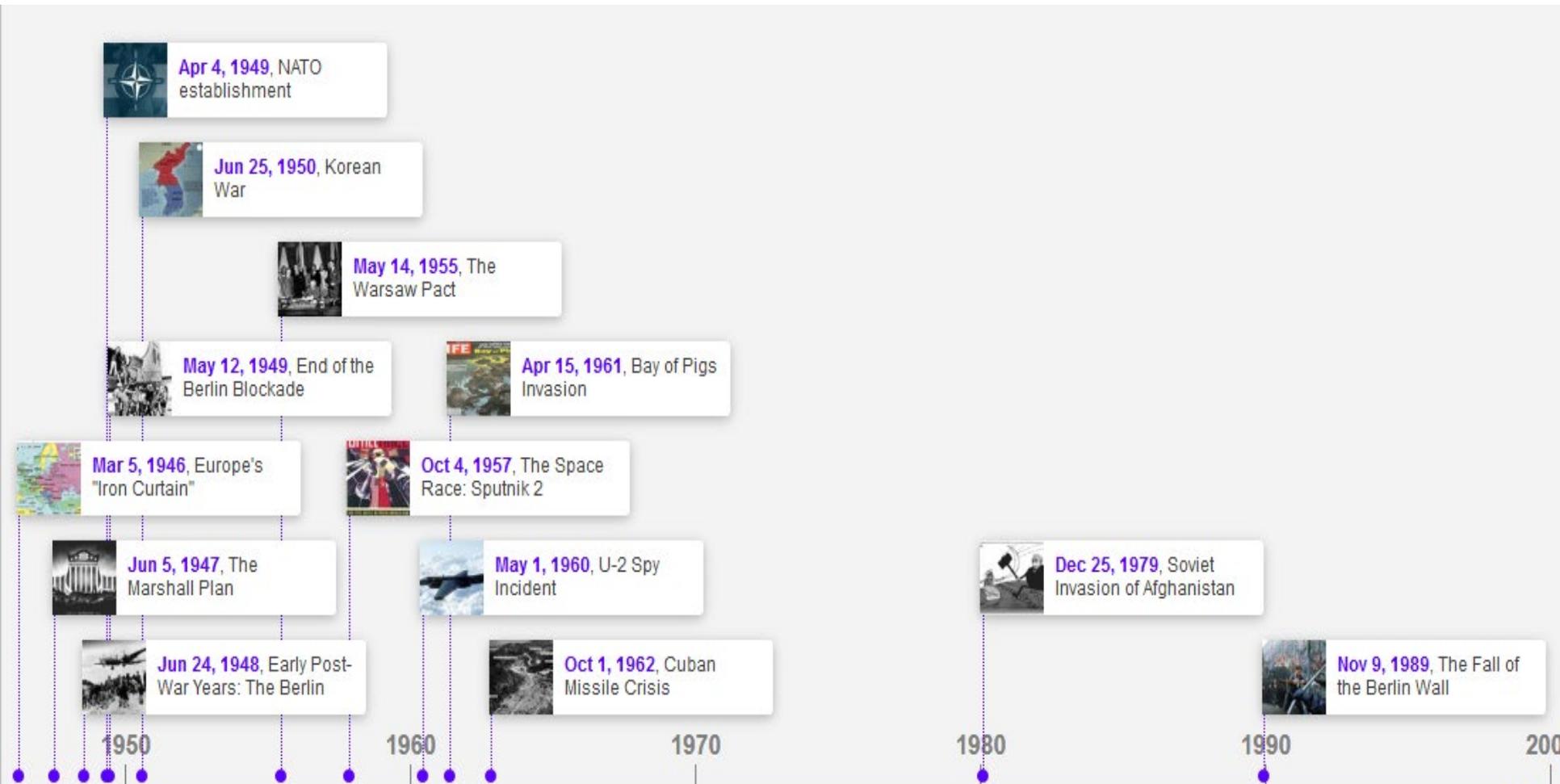
The western democracies and the Soviet Union had fought as allies during the Second World War, but even before peace had been achieved, they were circling each other warily and suspiciously.

The US, the UK, and allied forces had freed large areas of Europe and were determined to turn these back into democracies, but while the USSR had also freed large areas of Eastern Europe, they had not freed them at all but merely occupied them and determined to create Soviet puppet states to create a buffer zone, and not a democracy at all..

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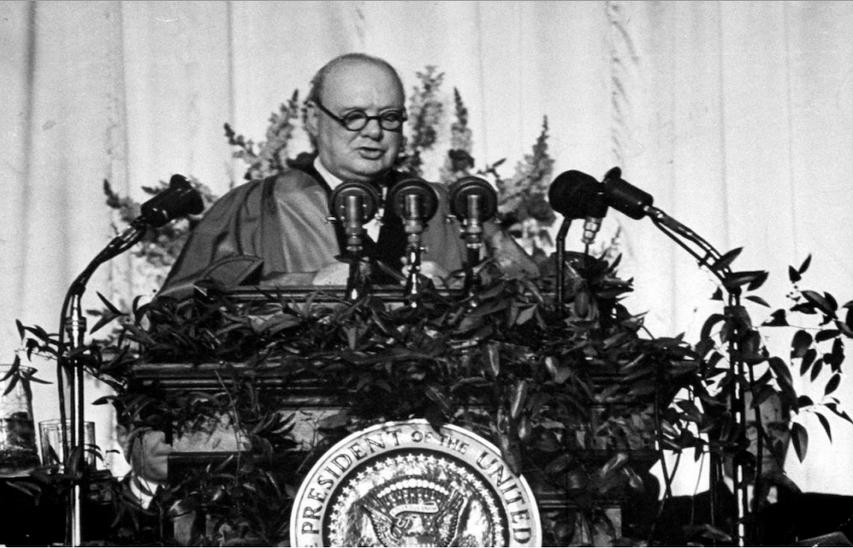
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2. Timeline



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3. Terminology

Sir Winston Churchill (1974-1965)

Speech of March 5, 1946

Westminster College (Fulton, Missouri)

*'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.'*

Russian historians date the beginning of the **Cold War** from this speech.

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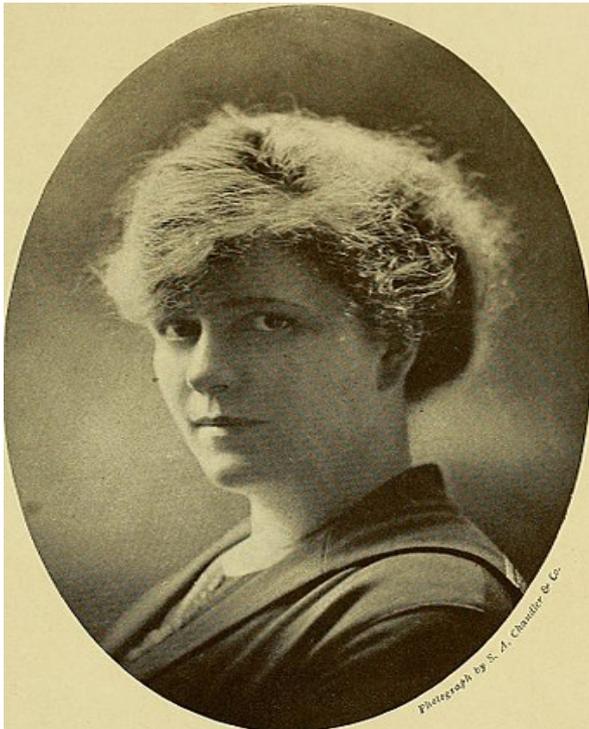
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The term “Iron Curtain” is Older Than We Thought

The term was first used in regard to Russia by Vassily Rozanov (1856-1919) in 1918 when he wrote:

“an iron curtain is descending on Russian history.”



It was also used by:

- Ethel Snowden (1881-1951) in 1920 in a book called **“Through Bolshevik Russia”**
- Joseph Goebbels and German Lutz Schwerin von Krosigk, both in propaganda. during the Second World War.

The Iron Curtain

The militarised border that divided Europe from 1952 to 1989



COMMUNIST BLOC

Warsaw Pact country

Socialist but non-aligned

WESTERN BLOC

Military pact with US, including NATO

* Marshall Plan beneficiary, OEEC member



Iron Curtain: concrete, trenches, barbed wire, alarms, watchtowers



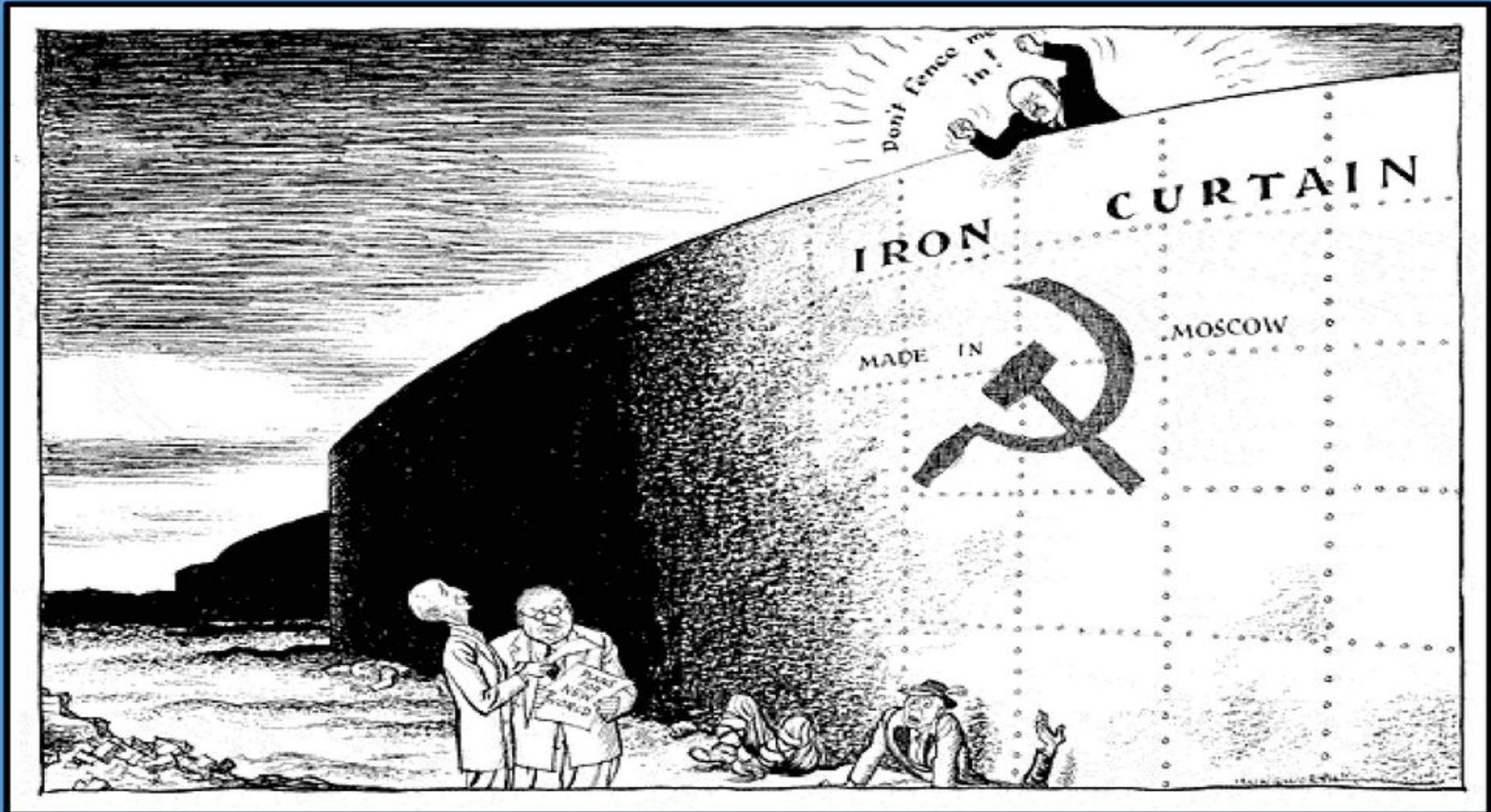
Berlin: occupied by 4 powers
Wall built in 1961



Militarily non-aligned

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5. Key Milestones



JUN 5, 1947

The Marshall Plan

Also known as the European Recovery Program, this plan was designed to finance the economic recovery of Europe between 1948 and 1951. It successfully met its objective of restoring the confidence of the European people in the economic future of their own countries and of Europe as a whole. This is named after George C. Marshall, Secretary of State, whom on June 5, 1947, announced this Program in a speech at Harvard University.



JUN 24, 1948

Early Post-War Years: The Berlin Blockade

The Soviets were thrown into an economic chaos after America and Britain proposed to establish a new currency into West Berlin. Due to this event, Soviets decided to shut down all railroads, roads and passages of travel on land and water between West Berlin and West Germany. This started the "Berlin Blockade", forcing the city to essentially be abandoned. Although forms of travel and communication on land and water were cut off, air was not. Thus the "Berlin Airlift" began.

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5. Key Milestones



MAY 12, 1949

End of the Berlin Blockade

Unable to cause such a disastrous event such as shooting down the planes bringing in food, supplies and other goods (Berlin Airlift), Stalin was forced to end the blockade; U.S. coming out on top.



APR 4, 1949

NATO establishment

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization was created to prevent the "iron curtain", or communism, from spreading to other nations. The United Kingdom and United States, along with 10 other nations became apart of this organization.

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5 Key Milestones



JUN 25, 1950

Korean War

The Korean War was very important for the Cold War because it signifies that the Cold War's focus was moving into Asia. North Korea was set up as a communist state, and South Korea was set up as a client of the U.S.; in other words an anti-communist state. Due to these differences, North Korean troops came across the border and attacked South Korea. In an attempt to stop the spread of communism and protect the South Koreans being attacked, Harry Truman allowed the U.S. troops to step in.



MAY 14, 1955

The Warsaw Pact

On this day, the Warsaw Pact was established and signed. This treaty, a mutual defense organization, put the Soviets in charge of the armed forces of the member states, including Soviet Union, Albania, Poland, Romania, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria.

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As the Cold War began to fade across the eastern side of Europe, there was an announcement of a change in its relations with the West. Citizens were free to cross the border. From East and West, the people of Berlin went to the wall yelling "open the gate"! People began using picks, hammers and such, to knock down the wall, as well as bulldozers and cranes. The wall was soon gone, and for the first time since 1945, Berlin was united again.



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The Cold War (The End) *(The dissolution of the Soviet Union...)*



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Post Cold War



EUROPEAN UNION

EUROPEAN
COMMUNITIES

I

COMMON
FOREIGN &
SECURITY
POLICY

II

POLICE &
JUDICIAL
COOP.

III

1. European Economic Community: Economic unity – reduced tariffs, free movement of labor and investments
2. 1993 – Becomes **European Union** (EU)
3. 2002 – Eurozone -Euro Dollar introduced.

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Radio Luxembourg was an expression of freedom and liberty for a whole generation in Western as well as Eastern Europe, and therefore had a major impact on society, especially in the 1950s and 1960s.



Although it was clearly apolitical, some even claim that Radio Luxembourg, the famous 'Two-O-Eight' helped to undermine communism with the rock and pop music it broadcast by triggering a desire for change and liberty among young people behind the Iron Curtain.



RADIO LUXEMBOURG

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* Contrary to what was done for Radio Free Europe and Voice of America, the Communist authorities never resorted to systematically jamming Radio Luxembourg's signal, probably because it was so apolitical.

* With the technology available at the time a radio signal intended for the West would necessarily also go East, South and North.

* Programme directors at the time – even if we are quite sure that at least some of them were perfectly aware of their listeners behind the Iron Curtain – were not deliberately focusing on the Central and Eastern European region.

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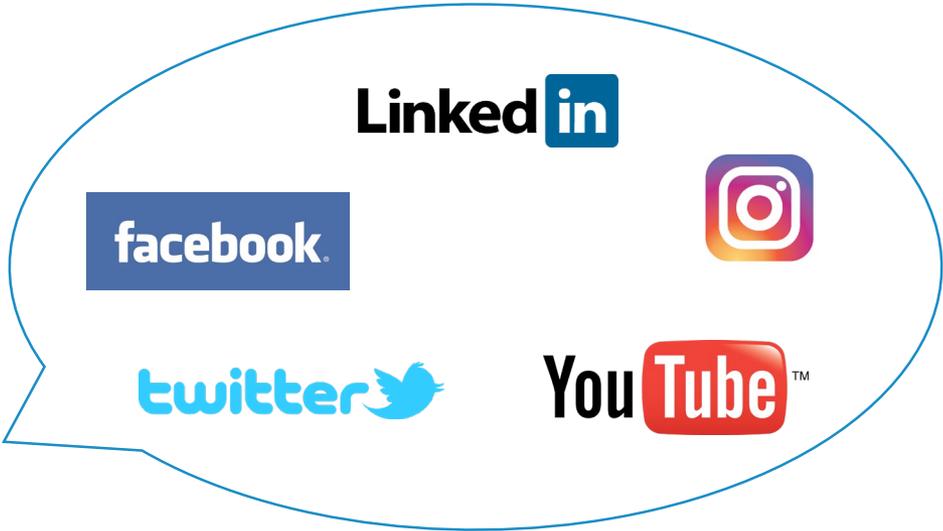


7. Conclusion

"The Iron Curtain did not reach the ground and under it flowed liquid manure from the West."

Alexander Solzhenitsyn, 1994
Nobel Prize in Literature (1970)

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