Overview:

The year of 1945 proved to be a turning point in global history and international relations. This was the year in which Joseph Stalin, Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt, better known as the **Big Three**, met at the cusp of the end of **World War II** to discuss what a post-war world would look like. This meeting is what set the stage for what would become the **Berlin Blockade**.

The image shown above, which you may be familiar with, was drawn by American Cartoonist D. R. Fitzpatrick in 1948. The Cartoon is titled “How to close the Gap?” and depicts the Russian attempt to drive Western powers from Berlin by every means possible. This cartoon was published following the Berlin blockade, an event in which the **Soviet Union** closed off access of West Berlin to the **United States, the United Kingdom and France** better known as the Western Allies, each of whom assumed a portion of Germany and Berlin, the German capital following the ending of World War II in Europe in 1945.
**Historical Background**

On February 4th, 1945 British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, United States President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and Soviet Leader Joseph Stalin met for what would be known as the Yalta Conference. From the conference spurred the foundation of what a post-war world would look like. At the time, World War II was drawing close to an end, a war that had been raging since September 1939, when Germany violated the Paris Peace Conference by invading Poland. The division of Germany was one of the most significant outcomes from the seven day conference. It was decided that Great Britain, France, the United States and the Soviet Union would each be provided a portion of Germany and thus responsible for the redevelopment of said portion.

Other issues discussed during the conference included the status of Poland which was under Soviet Control at the time. New borders were drawn to the east following the Cursor Line, and it was agreed that the Provisionary Polish Government set up by the Soviets would be reorganized and allow for free and fair democratic elections. This meeting also secured Soviet participation in the United Nations and a permanent position on the Security Council.

For detailed information relating to the results of the Yalta Conference, please see: https://www.britannica.com/event/Yalta-Conference

World War II came to an end in Europe with VE Day, when Germany surrendered to the Russian army on May 8th 1945. Occupancy immediately began following the Potsdam Conference which brought the **Big Three** world leaders together again, although this time President FDR was replaced with President Harry Truman following his death. The Conference resulted in the affirmation of the four Allied occupation zones as determined by the Yalta Conference. It also established the Allied Control Council which was to oversee the democratization, decentralization, deindustrialization, denazification and demilitarization of Germany and Austria. From this, the dismantlement of all aspects of German industry which could be used for military purposes, the repealing of discriminatory laws put in place from the Nazi-era and also the active prosecution of German “war criminals”. More controversial topics addressed dealt with the revision of the German-Soviet-Polish borders. In addition to having its border with the Soviet Union redrawn, the Polish also assumed territory from Germany and deported German residents from said territory. Another controversial matter discussed at Potsdam was the division of Berlin, the German Caption stationed 110 miles inside of the confirmed Soviet occupied East Germany.
On February 9th, 1946 Stalin delivers the “Election” Speech where he boasts the strength of the Soviet Union, the multinational Soviet state it has created and also that capitalism and communism are incompatible. Tides amongst the Allies who took occupation in Germany began to turn immediately as less than a month later on March 5th, Winston Churchill deliverers the “Sinews of Peace” Speech in which he openly addresses the growing tension between the Soviet Union and the other Occupying nations as well as between Eastern and Western European nations. He states the following

“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 many cases, increasing measure of control from Moscow”

Since its delivery, the speech has become more commonly known as the “Iron Curtain” Speech for the famous line which details the division of Eastern and Western Europe. For more on the “Iron Curtain” Speech, see:


A favorable response was received by leaders of the United States and the United Kingdom, counties that Churchill praises and deems leaders of the post-war world but not by the Soviets. Almost immediately following Churchill's speech, an interview with Stalin is published on March 14th, 1946 with a focus on Stalin's response.

Q. What is your appraisal of Mr. Churchill’s recent speech in the United States of America?
A. I appraise it as a dangerous act, calculated to sow the seeds of discord among the allied states and to cause difficulty to their collaboration.

Q. May one consider that Mr. Churchill’s speech has caused harm to the cause of peace and security?
A. Certainly. The essence of the affair is that Mr. Churchill now assumes the position of a warmonger. And Mr. Churchill is not alone in this; he has friends not only in England but also in the United States of America.

It should be noted that Mr. Churchill and his friends strikingly recall in this respect Hitler and his friends. Hitler began the task of unleashing war by proclaiming the racial theory, declaring that only people who spoke the German language constituted a full-fledged nation. Mr. Churchill, too, has begun the task of unleashing war with a racial theory, stating that only nations that speak the English language are full-fledged nations that are called upon to rule the destinies of the whole world. The German racial theory led Hitler and his friends to the point where the Germans, as the only full-fledged nation, were supposed to dominate other nations. The English racial theory leads Mr. Churchill and his friends to the conclusion that the English-speaking nations, as the only full-fledged ones, should dominate the rest of the nations of the world.
In essence Mr. Churchill and his friends in England and the USA have presented the non-English-speaking nations with something like an ultimatum: recognize our dominance voluntarily and then all will be in order; in the contrary case, war is inevitable. But nations have shed their blood in the course of five years of cruel war for the freedom and independence of their countries and not to exchange domination by Hitler for domination by Churchill. It is wholly probable, therefore, that the non-English-speaking nations, which include the great majority of the population of the world, will not agree to accept a new slavery. Mr. Churchill’s tragedy is that he, as an inveterate Tory, does not understand this simple and obvious truth. There is no doubt that Mr. Churchill’s posture is the posture of war, an appeal to war with the USSR …

Less than one year following the ending of the Second World War, rifts among members occupying Germany became quite clear. Relations were not pleasant on either side. For more on Stalin’s perception of the Iron Curtain Speech, see: [http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1947-2/cold-war/cold-war-texts/stalin-on-churchills-iron-curtain-speech/](http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1947-2/cold-war/cold-war-texts/stalin-on-churchills-iron-curtain-speech/).

The year 1947 saw a rise in tensions amongst members occupying Germany. In the beginning of the year, the United States and the United Kingdom unified their occupation zones and formed Bizonia on January 1st. Escalating the tensions between Eastern and Western Europe, was the releasing of the Truman Doctrine by U.S. President Harry Truman. The Doctrine came as a result of the Greek Civil War, in which political instability led to the communist party of Greece declaring war on the Greek nationals who won the election. As the United States did with Greece, the Truman Doctrine declares U.S. support to countries who are at risk of or face being overthrown by Communist members or countries. Reinforcing the Truman Doctrine was the Marshall Plan which would distribute thirteen billion dollars over the course of four years providing economic stability and the ability to regrow industries destroyed by the war. Although accepted by most countries in Europe, the Marshall Plan was rejected by the Soviet Union and countries under their military occupation. Denying assistant subsequently denied economic assistance for Eastern Berlin as well. It was at this time, on April 1st that the Soviets began placing restrictions on Western military traffic into the city of Berlin.

Sources: [https://www.britannica.com/event/Potsdam-Conference](https://www.britannica.com/event/Potsdam-Conference)
[https://history.state.gov/milestones/1937-1945/potsdam-conf](https://history.state.gov/milestones/1937-1945/potsdam-conf)

Current Situation

In efforts to further its impending influence on Germany and the rebuilding of the state, Western Allies began working together to unify Bizonia, the joined occupation of the United States and the United Kingdom, with the French occupation zone to create a new German state. This plan was discovered by the Soviet Union in June of 1948 as well as the issuance of new
currency in Bizonia and the French occupation zone. On June 20th the Deutsche Mark was officially introduced as the currency of the Western Allied zones. Previously, negotiations for a unified currency between all four sectors of Germany were unsuccessful, and further strained relations between the occupying powers. The Deutsch Mark replaced the Reichsmark, the highly inflated German currency. The change was successful for West Berlin as it boosted their economy however this positive change was not mirrored in East Berlin who continued to struggle as did the rest of Soviet occupied Germany.

The adoption of the new currency led to Soviets protesting the Allied Control Council. Attempts to maintain peace between the occupying powers diminished greatly and the scales were unbalanced with the United States, the United Kingdom and France working as one unit while the Soviet Union remained independent. June 24th saw the peak of the strained relationship between the Allied powers when the Soviet Union with the enforcement of the Berlin Blockade. The blockade essentially closed all rail and road routes from the Western Zones to the Western Sector of Berlin. The blockade has not only stranded the population of West Berlin but it has also left them destitute and surrounded by Soviet lead East Germany. The population of West Berlin exceeds two million residents who relied on imports from their occupying nations to maintain daily life. This blockade left persons of West Berlin without food and the materials necessary to maintain the industries which it built since the end of the war. In response to the Soviet attempt to drive the Western Allies out of Berlin, the United States and the United Kingdom joined forces to provide the city with food and other vital supplies though the air. Despite this shortages of fuel and electricity remained.

Sources: [https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/berlin-airlift](https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/berlin-airlift)  
[https://www.britannica.com/place/Germany/The-era-of-partition#ref297738](https://www.britannica.com/place/Germany/The-era-of-partition#ref297738)  

**Involved Actors**

United Nations
Western Allies have submitted a claim to the Security Council detailing Russian harassments blockading access to the city of West Berlin. The claim was that Russian treatment was a threat to the peace within the meaning of Chapter VII of the charter. However, the Security Council consists of four out of the five permanent members of the Security Council. To this date, no resolution has been passed. Chapter VII is known as the section which reviews ‘action with respect to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression’.

*Click here for more information on Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter:*

**International Community**

The world remained divided following the delivery of the Iron Curtain Speech. Two sides emerged; those who were Communist and those who were Capitalist. Members of the Eastern Bloc include:

- The Soviet Union
- Poland
- East Germany
- Czechoslovakia
- Romania
- Bulgaria
- Yugoslavia
- Hungary

These members are loyal to the Soviet Union and followed all decisions, agreements and demands as set by the Soviet government. Internationally, there is a growing fear of the spread of Communism as seen with U.S. issuing the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan. Although the initiatives are put in place to assist countries in need of social and economic support, they are more so political moves by the United States to counteract the possible spread of Communism in Europe. Countries that are western aligned include:

- Greece
- Norway
- Iceland
- United Kingdom
- Denmark
- West Germany
- Italy
- Turkey
- Netherlands
- Belgium
- Luxembourg

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What is your country’s relationship with the Soviet Union, or Soviet aligned countries? What about the countries aligned with the West?
2. What position did your country play during World War II?
3. What can the UN do to assist people living in West Berlin? Is the Soviet Union in any violation to UN Charter VII or any other portion of the Charter? How can the Security Council best address this issue considering four of the five permanent members are heavily involved in the matter at hand.

4. Stalin stated in the “Elections” speech on February 9, 1946 that he [Stalin] blamed the last war on 'capitalist monopolies' and warning that, since the same forces still operated, the USSR must treble the basic materials of national defense such as iron and steel, double coal and oil production, and to delay the manufacture of consumer goods until rearmament was complete.” He also introduces the idea that Capitalism and Communism cannot coexist. Do you think that with this sentiment there could have been any peaceful occupation in Germany?

**Further Sources:**

For information on World War II and visuals of Post WWII Europe, see:
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/02/berlin-blockade-russians-cold-war-archive-1948

For more information on the blockade, see:
https://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/berlin-blockade
https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/soviets-blockade-west-berlin

For primary accounts, see:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/berlinwall/8231.shtml

**Timeline:**

- February 4th-11th 1945: Yalta Conference
- April 1945: Death of F. D. Roosevelt
- May 8th 1945: V E Day
- July 17th- August 2n 1945: Potsdam Conference
- February 9th, 1946: Stalin delivers the “Election” speech
- March 5th 1946: Churchill’s Iron Curtain Speech
- March 12th, 1947: Truman Doctrine
- June 5th, 1947: Marshall Plan
- June 1948: Unification of French, USA and UK Partitions
- June 26th, 1948: Introduction of the Deutsche Mark
- June 20th, 1948: Berlin Blockade
- June 24th, 1948: Berlin Airlift.