

The us containment policy history essay



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Power extension has always been a subject that fascinated me. There are countless ways in which groups of individuals can maintain interests of their communities and protect them from possible threats. This phenomenon has been known to the humanity ever since the first human got off the tree and straightened up. The more sophisticated tools we started using, the more dangerous the threat has become. First armies were created, followed up by intelligence services and counter-intelligence services investigating threats both foreign and domestic. By means of diplomacy, diversion, espionage, and violence mighty rulers were trying to guarantee national security by influencing the circumstances on different levels - think of Vatican's interference in French politics via Cardinal Richelieu or Charlemagne's orders to execute thousands and convert the others forcefully into Christianity during the Saxon Wars.

This concept remained unchanged for centuries and reached its peak in the 20th century, materializing in three terrifying wars of which one is also known as the Cold War. For me as a person interested in power extension is the latter an episode that cannot be overemphasized. For this reason I decided to devote my PWS to it. However, originally intending to write as much as possible about the Cold War and the mutual American and Russian relations precisely, I had to delimit the subject in order to comply with the quantitative requirements laid upon me. By means of a selection I chose the aspect of the Cold War which I found by far the most interesting, namely the basic assumptions of the post-war American politicians of how to prevent the communism from spreading, also known as the containment policy (derived from contain - to keep something under control), and the political and

military actions of the American Administration in which these communism-countering ideas can be recognized.

In my paper, being as a matter of fact a written work of reference based on numerous sources, I will try to answer the question of how successful the containment policy invented and applied by the American policymakers in the years 1945-1949 turned out to be and to what degree it prevented the communism from spreading.

Despite the subject concerns a short period of five years there is much to be written. It is never easy when it comes to explaining political decisions and therefore it is highly necessary to mention the underlying grounds, of which the gradual development led to the measures in question. So will my paper begin with the description of the primary reasons resulting in the introduction of the containment policy.

Having described the latter I will focus on what I personally consider as the core of my work - a summary of deductions concerning the Soviet post-war point of view written down by a high-rank diplomat working in the American Embassy in Moscow. The summary to be found in chapter 3 depicts concisely the direction that was to be given to the American foreign policy in response to the Soviet spreading ambitions.

Theory and planning, however, are often not sufficient to bring the expected change. Real action is also required and so it must be addressed to in my paper in order to make the story complete. Chapter 4 will outline the efforts the US policymakers made as far as the application of the containment policy on the European political arena is considered. A careful and critical

reader will find amongst lines the answer on how successful the containment proved to be. The chapter also leaves an open path for those who will attempt to imagine what the current world would look like if there were no communism-counteracting measures or individuals ready to devote their life to protection of democratic values.

I find it necessary to mention that I wanted this PWS to be a challenge and some sort of test of my language skills since I am not a native speaker of English and my level of it is far from proficiency. I didn't choose the easiest way out which was writing this paper in Dutch - a language I am much more familiar with. Instead I decided to use the opportunity to learn English vocabulary and grammatical constructions which I might not have memorized if I hadn't written it in the way I had.

Before you continue reading I truly want you to know that it is not my intention to lay any idealistic beliefs upon you. On the contrary, I hope my paper will help you understand the past, which is after all necessary in order to live consciously in the present and create a future not based on ignorance of not knowing what the events taking place are caused by. Enjoy your journey back in time!

Chapter 2: What were the primary reasons for the mutual distrust resulting in the introduction of the containment policy?

The first section of this paper will throw some light on the background of the containment policy and, as a matter of fact, The Cold War itself. A proper comprehension of this part is necessary in order to answer the main question.

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After the very last tanks ceased firing and the Second World War ended, many realized how terribly destructive the war had been. It had materialized in thousands of destroyed cities and generations of young men who lost their lives in combat, not to mention civilians and their continuous fear for their lives. Many of the survivors were looking brightly at the future which was expected to bring about precious peace and prosperity. Unfortunately, only a few were aware of the threat that was about to arise.

The Teheran Conference

To be fully able to give a constructive answer to the question in the title we have to go back in time to 1943, from November 28 up to December 1 to be precise. The Teheran Summit was the first of the conferences held between all the members of the 'Big Three', giving shape to those that were about to be held within the next years. Allied leaders representing the United States, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union pulled together in the Capital of their ally, Iran, to discuss measures that were necessary to overpower the common enemy.

Apart from setting up a strategy that included synchronized operations to be undertaken from multiple directions, the Big Three agreed that they 'shall seek the cooperation and active participation of all nations, large and small, whose peoples in heart and mind are dedicated, as are our own peoples, to the elimination of tyranny and slavery, oppression and intolerance[1]'. This encouraging press release was definitely an important sign of taking a step forward into creating some kind of an international organization that would avoid imperfections of its predecessor, The League of Nations.

Preventing aggressive tendencies of any sort would be its major goal. Next to the certainty of participation of the Soviet Union, the United States and the United Kingdom in the project the question of any role that China and France should play came up. Odds enough the Chinese politicians had not been informed about the proposed understanding at that point of time as result of their disability to form a stable government. Thanks to the Churchill's telegram sent to Roosevelt we can surely as shooting state that the British Head of State was more than willing to ignore his early reluctance concerning China if the American president kept pushing on their engagement. As regard to France, it is believed that Roosevelt's strong antipathy towards De Gaulle might have been a factor why France's involvement was not taken seriously at that point of negotiations.

After all, the maintenance of peace by controlling, disarming, preventing from rearming in secret and, if necessary, a blockage against a country and its bombardment seemed to be accepted by each of the Heads of State. A press release saying 'We await the day, when all nations of the world will live peacefully, free of tyranny, according to their national needs and conscience' [1] gave a deceptive impression of a complete cooperation. The question of resetting Polish boundaries, brought up by the Russian delegation (consisting of Joseph Stalin and the Soviet Defence Minister Klimentii Voroshilov), wasn't solved so easily. It was to become one of the most difficult discussion points which would dominate the Yalta Conference and caused first dents in the mutual trust between the Soviet Union and the other two allies.

The Yalta Conference

The second meeting of all three members of the Great Alliance was announced in January 1945. It became quite obvious that the issue of boundaries couldn't remain unresolved any longer after the Russian forces had entered on Polish soil nearly a year before on January, 2. The necessary solution was hoped to be found, as stated by Churchill, 'in the worst place in the world' [2] - Crimean Yalta. It must be mentioned that each of the participants of the summit held between February 4 and 11 was in the first place, quite logically, trying to maintain the interests of their own country.

For the sake of this thesis the main bottlenecks connected to prospective mutual relations will be worked out in detail. These three completely different approaches can be summarized as follows:

- Winston Churchill - mainly interested in the European arena and the French role in the occupation of Germany
- Franklin Delano Roosevelt - agreement on the Far East and setting up a sort of organization of united nations
- Marshall Stalin - the Polish question being a matter of great importance for the Soviet Union. Furthermore an interest in becoming a sphere of influence where the Soviet superiority would be accepted.

The compromise about the United Nations came more easily than Roosevelt had ever expected. The deadlock on the voting procedure of the United Nations, about the right of veto to be precise, had been overcome and the

number of Soviet republics, which were to participate, had been decreased from sixteen to at least two.

Stalin's postulates narrowed down to the issue of setting the Polish eastern frontiers at the Curzon Line - a demarcation line that was proposed at the Paris Peace Conference as the eastern boundary of Poland excluding the city of Lvov with its huge percentage of Polish citizens.

[3]

The extremely complicated negotiations between the three Heads of State and both Polish governments (one in-exile and the second set up by the Russians) led to the adoption of the controversial Curzon Line. Stalin's spreading intentions, except for the plausible argument of necessity to possess one more ice-free harbour, were perfectly described by Marshall Stalin himself to Ernest Evin, the British Foreign Secretary, saying:

'The United Kingdom had India and the Indian Ocean in her sphere of interest; the United States China and Japan; the USSR had nothing'

To guarantee the freedom of elections and establishment of democracy according to Western terms, the Big Three ratified the Joint Declaration on Liberated Europe that promised 'peoples liberated from the domination of Nazi Germany and the peoples of the former Axis satellite states of Europe to solve by democratic means their pressing political and economic problems'[4]. Nevertheless, the declaration above mentioned turned out to be completely meaningless as history has shown. Due to its conditional implementation and lack of binding commitments there was no legal force

upon signatories to maintain the agreement. However, no violations of the Yalta agreements by Stalin were suspected at this point of time, as stated by Churchill.

'The impression I brought back from the Crimea, and from all my other contacts, is that Marshal Stalin and the Soviet leaders wish to live in honourable friendship and equality with the Western democracies. I feel also that their word is their bond. I know of no government which stands to its obligations, even in its own despite, more solidly than the Russian Soviet Government. I decline absolutely to embark here on a discussion about Russian good faith. It is quite evident that these matters touch the whole future of the world'. [5]

According to Professor Arthur Schlesinger signing the declaration by Stalin was a diplomatic blunder which became obvious just a month after the Big Three gathered in Yalta. The meetings, which were supposed to determine the best Polish democratic leader, eventually proved to be an excellent way for Soviet secret police to reach the prominent members of the former Polish resistance and make them disappear, despite the promised Soviet guarantee of immunity. It didn't take a long time before Churchill's initially credulous account of the agreement transformed into the opposite conviction. By 13 March he sent a telegraph to Roosevelt with a statement that the Heads of State 'were in the presence of a great failure and an utter breakdown of what was settled at Yalta' [6]. Twelve days later the British prime minister described the situation on the West-East border as an iron curtain, which is slowly descending. The following quotation illustrates just how dramatically the developments in the European arena were becoming.

'If the German people lay down their weapons, the Soviets, according to the agreement between Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin, would occupy all of East and Southeast Europe along with the greater part of the Reich. An iron curtain would fall over this enormous territory controlled by the Soviet Union, behind which nations would be slaughtered.' [7]

In the meanwhile the messages exchanged between Stalin and Roosevelt, who were increasingly becoming the two bigger players in the Big Three, were full of mutual accusations of jeopardizing the vulnerable accord.

The Potsdam Conference

The Polish matter reached a dead end. How things developed couldn't be witnessed by Roosevelt, who died on 12 April 1945. His successor, Harry Truman, once vice-president under Roosevelt, was expected to continue the policy towards the Soviet Union initialized by Roosevelt. However, it became obvious from the beginning that the mild approach, continuously applied by his predecessor, wasn't Truman's favourite style of work. The Potsdam Conference, lasting from July 17 to August 2, aside of being a permanent confirmation of previously made agreements, became Truman's first significant opportunity to influence the US-USSR relationship, mainly because of its nuclear undertone. The US president's decision not to fully inform Stalin about the rapid progress concerning the construction of an atomic weapon correctly delineates the prospective Truman's policy of hostility and inscrutability towards The Soviet Union. A mentioning of 'a new weapon of unusual destructive force' [8] did not specially bother Stalin, who was already in 1943 informed about an atomic weapon allegedly built in the West. Russian atomic project did not accelerate until Japan was bombed

twice in September 1945. The order, given by Marshal Stalin to Igor Kurchatov, a leading Russian physicist, sounded more or less 'The balance has been destroyed. Provide the bomb' (* No firm evidence of this record has remained until now but the sense of the message is kept unchanged).

Chapter 3: What was the containment policy based on?

In this paragraph I will briefly describe the major political events that gave shape to what is now understood as the containment policy.

President Harry Truman, despite being known of his unyielding personality, lacked experience in foreign affairs and could hardly do without a number of political analysts. These happened to be influenced by the opinions of George F. Kennan (to be seen on the right hand), the prominent USSR specialist in the State Department and the charge d'affaires at the American Embassy in Moscow, whose role in the process of the containment policy coming into life can't be over-emphasized. On February 22, 1946 he sent a long analysis of Soviet post-war outlook to his colleagues in the Capitol in Washington. <https://blogs.princeton.edu/mudd/files/mt/images/kennan.jpg>

The so-called Long Telegram, of which the most relevant points are summarized below, became one of the major documents that the containment policy was based on.

George F. Kennan [9]

A brief characteristic of the Soviet point of view, according to the propaganda machine

-The geographical and political surrounding of the USSR by capitalistic nations will eventually result in a battle for the economical leadership in the world, which will be also crucial for the fate of socialism/communism and capitalism.

-Any actions, activities and happenings abroad which seem to correspond with the Soviet interests to a certain degree should be supported.

- In the long run the differences between capitalist countries will become too powerful to be overcome in a peaceful manner. No opportunity may be missed to turn the internal conflict into a communistic revolution.

The background of the mentality

- The premises do not represent the point of view of an average Russian. The ordinary citizen, on the contrary to what is stated by the officials, is more than willing to contact the outside world and live peacefully. It must be kept in mind that the party is the villain

- The basic assumptions of the Russian propaganda machine pre-date the World War II, which makes it irrelevant and nothing more than incorrect (spoken in terms of 1940's). The premises are as much as necessary for the Russian party in order to deter Soviet citizens coming in contact with technically and economically more advanced West which might prove the fallibility of the communism/socialism.

Steps that will be undertaken on the official (diplomatic) level

- Increasing the outsiders' perception of strength of the Soviet military arsenal and industrial development as much as social cohesion is a significant part of the national policy. On the other hand attempts will be made to conceal imperfections and weaknesses of the system.

- The efforts to extend Soviet political power will materialize themselves into territorial claims on the official level only after finishing unofficial preparations.

- Soviet participation in international organizations (as United Nations) serves only the pragmatic purposes of expanding the Soviet political influence on the international arena and reducing operational ability of others. United Nations are not seen as an instrument for a stable and peaceful world society based on interests of all nations.

- Even on the official level the Soviet Union will attempt to sabotage the relations between Western states and their (former) colonies in order to clear the path for the Soviet participation in policymaking.

- Soviet politicians, while being abroad, will be urged to follow the strict diplomatic protocol with emphasis laid on good manners in order to increase the impression of the Soviet prestige.

Suspected activities on the unofficial level, i. e. on level for which the Soviet administrations do not take responsibility

I feel obliged to remark on the incredible importance of the following section.

The contained statements are these that the Truman Administration (and any other following until the end of 1980's) had mostly to deal with.

Actions on the unofficial level will be first of all directed to foreign organizations, movements, societies and governments that are regarded as susceptible for, what the party asserted, the Russian sense of nationalism and Marx' ideas of equality. The left-wing activists, officially members of Western Labour Parties, were encouraged to work on underground lines and were intensively instructed by politicians in Moscow. A diversity of organizations and associations, such as racial, feministic or religious societies, is highly exposed to penetration. Even the subdivisions of the Orthodox Church located abroad are at risk of being penetrated.

George Kennan states that organizations above mentioned will be solely used in fields of their expertise, e. g. influential orthodox activists would jeopardize any thinkable actions of Protestant politicians. Further explanations follow:

- Increasing industrial and social unrest and stimulation of all possible forms of disunity will result in undermining operational potential of the western states and breaking off the national confidence.
- In countries forced into colonial relationships outstandingly cruel actions will be undertaken to destroy relatively good relations with (former) mother

countries. Simultaneously extreme left-wing parties will be preparing for not necessarily legal taking-over of political power.

-Governments obviously not agreeing with the Soviet foreign policy will be kept under pressure in order to cause their eventual removal from office.

- Every imaginable activity will be undertaken in order to provoke the most powerful Western states against each other.

Conclusions for the US Government

Soviet power, not schematic in character, doesn't work by strict plans and doesn't take unnecessary hazards. It is extremely responsive to logic or force and therefore it can easily pull back - and mostly does when facing a strong opposition. So, quoting Kennan, 'if the adversary has sufficient force and makes clear his readiness to use it, he rarely has to do so'. [9] The next point the author makes has to do with the Western degree of cohesion, firmness and muster. Success of the Soviet Union, as for being the weaker force, depends to some extent on the mentioned factor. Another factor that is relatively easy to deal with is the Soviet propaganda. The destructive and generally negative character of it can be opposed by a sort of intelligent and constructive programmes.

In the conclusion the author states that a calm and unprovoked recognition of the hypothetically dangerous movements must be the government's very first step. Furthermore the public education should play a bigger role. The fear of unknown can be overcome by informing the citizens about the Russian reality. After all it would result in improvement of social cohesion and make the society less vulnerable to threats from both outside and inside.

Finally Kennan brings up the significance of formulating a constructive and positive picture of the sort of world the US policy makers would like to see. 'It is not enough to urge people to develop political processes similar to our own. Many foreign peoples, in Europe at least, are tired and frightened by experiences of past, and are less interested in abstract freedom than in security. They are seeking guidance rather than responsibilities. We should be better able than Russians to give them this. And unless we do, Russians certainly will.' [10]

The reaction of the Russians wasn't immediate. Nearly seven months later, on September the 27, the Soviet Ambassador to United States, Nikolai Novikov, sent a note to the highest officials of the Soviet Union that was nothing but an analysis of the Kennan's Long Telegram and the US post-war foreign policy towards the Soviet Union in general. These became accessible for outsiders after the publication in Foreign Affairs magazine of the so-called 'X Article' in July 1947, being as a matter of fact an adjusted version of the original analysis of Kennan's. Novikov concluded that the American outlook is predominantly characterized by the drift towards the world's supremacy and as well economical as military leadership. Amongst others he stated that the plans of establishing more than 480 naval bases, American mainland signalize intense intentions of hostility towards the Soviet Union.

By the end of 1946 the political situation between the US and the SU reached its lowest point since the end of the Second World War. Western politicians were little by little abandoning their hope for the cooperation with the Russians and the Kennan's prophecy was slowly becoming the reality. How the US officials reacted and what measures they took in order to deter

foreign government representatives from embracing communism will be properly described in the following paragraph.

Chapter 4: What efforts did the US government make to materialize the containment policy and with what result?

The Truman Doctrine

The Truman Administration received multiple signals from its British Ally about the gradually increasing difficulties of His Majesty's Government to provide on-going financial help to Greece and Turkey - the two states the United Kingdom had been supporting for years and which found themselves standing on the edge of a democratic collapse. In an official note dating to February 21, 1947 British informed Washington of their inability to support the mentioned states and requested for a takeover of their economical obligations. Truman's reaction came into history as the Truman Doctrine. In his speech to a joint session of Congress of March 12, he emphasized the moral obligation of the American state to provide assistance to the peoples of Greece and Turkey in order to establish a democracy and restore the authority of the government. In regard to Greece the President stated that the British aid issued in the preceding years wasn't sufficient to supply the weak and not able to operate independently army and fight communist insurgents dislocating the Greek state. Turkey, on the contrary, didn't need financial assistance so desperately at that point of time. Nevertheless due to a historic background of Greece and Turkey being stubborn rivals for decades it was necessary to split the money equally in order to avoid future claims of injustice or, even worse, anti-Western tensions. Truman concluded that the US Government was the only institution in the world able to prevent

Greece and Turkey from becoming what the totalitarian states in the period of the Second World War were - regimes of minorities getting their path clear by means of violence and suppression.

I find it interesting to mention that the presidential Congress speech is also known as the 'Truman's containment speech'. Clark Clifford (Truman's advisor), asked in 1972 about the nickname, said: 'we were concerned about preventing Soviet control of larger areas of the world than they already controlled' [11]. Although the word 'containment' wasn't even said once by Truman in his speech, the measures supposed by him concentrated on opposing the activities mentioned in the fourth point of Kennan's Long Telegram - namely the actions of the Soviet party conducted on unofficial level. Greek communist freedom fighters were not powered by Marx's ideals but by Stalin's money and military arsenal. As result of it the most of the \$338 million sent by the United States to Greece was spent on military equipment.

The concept of supporting European nations economically, drafted in March 1947 and perfectly outlined by the President Truman in his Congress speech, was just a momentary restoration programme, which had to prevent Greece and Turkey from falling into the hands of communism. How this financial aid, meant only for the time being, transformed into a long-term supportive programme will be depicted in the following section.

Marshall Plan

The Marshall Plan, although originally not intended to be a part of the containment policy as stated in the May 23 report of the Policy Planning

Staff, became a significant step forward taken by the American Administration, influence and actions of which were gradually becoming more visible on the international political arena. The Policy Planning Staff (PPS), created by George Kennan at the request of the Secretary of State George C. Marshall, was given the task of, 'taking a long term, strategic view of global trends and framing recommendations for the Secretary of State to advance U. S. interests and American values.' [12] In the context of the European Recovery Program, as the so-called Marshall Plan was officially known, it came down to investigating multiple possibilities of supporting financially the European communities in order to solve their war-caused economical problems and bring them to the level of self-sufficiency. To avoid sceptical publicity criticizing Americans for their interventionism in European affairs, aid would be exclusively launched if the formal initiative came from Europe. Besides it was required that the program would evolve on the Old Continent and that its leaders would take the fundamental responsibility for it, while the US would limit themselves to a supportive program of such an undertaking by financial means.

Knowing the tensions between the US and the Soviet Union, Kennan and the other members of the PPS didn't want the European Recovery Program (ERP) to be a reason for the further isolation of East from West. Although speculating on Soviet reluctance, the inventors of the Marshall Plan included in their project the participation of the Eastern nations in an early stage. By leaving the door open the American policymakers could verify the Soviet attitude towards the plan, which eventually would give proof of their good or bad faith. Kennan and his co-workers were convinced that this offer would

not remain without response, since economical co-operation of Soviet satellite countries with the US would result in weakening of Soviet control in these states.

On June 5 1947 the first signals concerning the Marshall Plan were sent out to the outside world. The Harvard speech of Secretary Marshall, being an announcement of conditions and proposals above mentioned, didn't meet much of approval at the other side of the Iron Curtain. Already after a couple of multipartite conferences the Soviet delegation under wings of Molotov turned down the negotiations. According to the diary notes of Vincent Auriol, the French president at that time, Molotov said amongst other things that 'the project would divide Europe' [13] which testified the bad faith of the Soviet party. The September speech of Soviet deputy foreign minister Andrei Vyshinsky to the United Nations General Assembly was its final confirmation. He stated that the Marshall Plan was a firm violation of the 11 December 1946 resolution of the United Nation, which declared that distribution of economic resources by a state may not be used as an instrument of political pressure. According to Vishinsky the Russian government saw the European Recovery Project as an attempt to put European states in American sphere of influence and to intervene in their internal affairs. In Soviet opinion the plan would result in splitting Europe into two antagonistic blocs, of which the Western one, led by the United States, would develop a certain hostility towards democratically ruled Eastern European countries and the Soviet Union in particular.

The splitting up of the Russians gave the American politicians an opportunity to give the aid programme a hoped-for direction. As stated by Michael J.

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Hogan, an adviser to the US Department of State, the Marshall Plan was about to become a protective measure to counter the Soviet threat and serve as an extension of the containment policy [14].

Unlike Soviet satellite states, which dropped off under pressure of the Soviet Union, the sixteen Western neighbours gathered at a conference in Paris, which lasted from July 12 up to September 22, and was intended to give shape to the financial requests that would be presented to the Americans. Unfortunately due to disunity of the European leaders concerning the final amount that would be asked for and their unwillingness to shift part of political responsibilities to a collectively created international body, which was known as the Committee of European Economic Cooperation (CEEC), Kennan and his Policy Planning Staff did not receive an acceptable report.

There are a huge number of details concerning the Marshall Plan being brought to life, which I would like to work out narrowly. Unfortunately I have to limit