

Strategy and war: cold war analysis assignment

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Kennan's containment theory was the superior anti-Communism strategy to take during the Cold War. At the start of the Cold War, when tension between the US and USSR was beginning to strain, there were many different strategies that could have been taken to fight against the ideological ideas of Communism. Since the fight is about ideals, it will not be waged as a traditional war, in the sense that these two superpowers do not want to engage with each other directly: firstly, because they did not want escalation into WWII and secondly because they were very war fatigued from WWI.

Therefore, Kennan's 'grand strategy' of Containment is the best choice to achieve the political objectives without direct conflict giving the US and her allies' time to rebuild. Kennan first assessed the strengths and weaknesses of the USSR in his article X and to a lesser extent pointed out the US weaknesses as well. This is always the first step before deciding on the strategy to follow. To discover how much of our resources must be mobilized for war, we must first examine our own political aim and that of the enemy.

We must gauge the strength and situation of the opposing state. We must gauge the character and abilities of its government and people, and do the same in regard to our own. Finally, we must evaluate the political sympathies of the other states and the effects war may have on them. (On War, 586) There was a firm belief in the Kremlin that "capitalism contains the seeds of its own destruction" (X article, 852) "Kenton" (X, Kennan) directly by checking off the access to resources and allies.).

Therefore the Soviet Union could wait and not get involved in a large protracted war with the US. The USSR saw the US failing due to its capitalistic nature and that time was on their side. But, due to the mismanagement of resources by the Kremlin, the people of the USSR were starving and it had very little infrastructure, while it continued to produce more guns and armament. Time was not on the Soviet's side as they mistakenly believed. The US on the other hand had a very productive economy that could easily commit 50% plus of its GNP to a rapid buildup if needed.

The US also had popular support and loyalty of its people. The USSR had a starving population. Stalin also did not see internal conflicts as internal matters, but as existential threats to the state. There was cognitive dissonance between what Stalin thought and what actually was. "The Soviet concept of power, which permits no focal points of theory the sole repository of truth. For if truth were to be found elsewhere, there would be justification for its expression in organized activity. But it is precisely that which the Kremlin cannot and will not permit (X article, 859).

This made the Soviet leadership stubborn and set to "move inexorably along a prescribed path, like a persistent toy" (X article, 859). The USSR did have some strengths as well. They were patient, unlike the US, even if they should not have been. Like the Church, it is dealing in ideological concepts which are of long-term validity, and it can afford to be patient" (X article, 859).

They also had a massive conventional military that no one could match and a rapid industrial base for building military equipment. But while the military industrial base is large other areas of the Soviet economic development were

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spotty and uneven. Here is a nation striving to become in a short period one of the great industrial nations of the world while it still has no highway network worthy of the name and only a relatively primitive network of railways” (X article, 864). Communism was also viewed as the future and the US and its allies saw this as a major threat. Because as the Soviets expand “ if it finds unassailable barriers in its path, it accepts these philosophically and accommodates itself to them” (X article, 861). They assimilate everyone in their path because they were patient and cautious.

This basis of understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of both powers leads into the discussion on the possible strategies that apply and on which strategy from which to choose. There were possible five strategies, with containment divided further into two parts. Three of these strategies were outlined in the NSC-68 document. NSC-68 clearly outline the pros and cons of those strategies mentioned: isolationism, preventive war, and Nitze’s containment (Roll-back). Of the other three strategies, relying on the United Nations and our allies, and appeasement were not considered, but are still possible strategies to undertake.

Finally Kennan’s Containment, outlined in his X article, was the first strategy defined and he clearly stated why containment was best with his assessment of the Soviet Union and the ideologically false assumptions they assumed. Containment Theory, both Nitze’s and Kennan’s, gives everyone time to rebuild after the destruction that WWII. Kennan’s theory specifically, is that for Communism to survive, it needs to keep expanding. To stop this “ there should always be pressure, unceasing constant pressure, toward the desired goal” (X article, 861).

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The US, while rebuilding, will protect the key strategic areas from the expansion and let Communism's internal contradictions and inherent weaknesses make the regime collapse under its own weight, as it is starved of the resources it needs. "The quest for absolute power, pursued now for nearly three decades... as again produced internally, as it did externally, its own reaction" (X article, 857). Applying the constant pressure under Kennan's strategy, the US was forcing the Soviets to approach the absolute. As Clausewitz states: Theory... has the duty to give priority to the absolute form of war... and to approximating it when he can or when he must... Without the cautionary examples of the destructive power of war unleashed, theory would preach to deaf ears... would Prussia in 1792 have dared to invade France... if skies? (on war, 581) Because when wars approach the absolute the home front is overly stressed and will wither on the vine" (X article, 857) and since this war is about expansion, stop the expansion to further stress the Soviet home front. Containment is not defined as war for Clausewitz, but it is for Sun-Tzu; attacking the enemy's strategy.

However, since Containment is a more diplomatic and economic strategy, will take a long time to work and cost the US its patience. It is much less risky than the other alternatives and less provocative, but only if it worked. The Soviet Union would have to implode because of the pressure applied. But it also continued to allow the internal buildup with the country even when not expanding. For all of this, it does give the moral high ground to the US, which to the American culture is very important as American's like to think they are always right.

It was also important internationally; who is perceived as the one in the wrong is very important to a world that was becoming more and more interconnected through technology. Netze's theory adds additional pressure to the 'pressure cooker' of Containment by rapidly increasing the military and more offensive operations as a deterrent, which Kennan was against. It uses roll-back strategy to make sure the Soviets do not get any new converts. This allows the lines of communication to remain open in the threaten areas and "provides essential aid" (NSC-68, 5) to the US allies to protect their interests.

This is an economic battle with the rapid buildup of arms, but it is also causes frictions when second front theaters open up and flash to hot war in protracted engagements. This is costly, both is the trade-off between military spending verses other programs and the spending for the foreign aid and assistance given. It is also more risky, as the more pressure is added the more likely a direct conflict might erupt between the Superpowers. Another strategy was a preventative war. This is the surprise attack, start a war to prevent a bigger war from happening strategy.

It was meant to destroy the USSR and Communism before they develop nuclear capabilities. This strategy has no good points, as it is wildly unpopular nationally and internationally and would give the moral high ground to the Soviets. This is also repugnant to American morale because it causes the US look like Japan did in WWII. It would also be incredibly destructive and protracted with very little gain, and would not achieve the high ideological and political objectives. The USSR is "more sensitive to contrary force, ore ready to yield... hen that force is felt to be too strong, and <https://assignbuster.com/strategy-and-war-cold-war-analysis-assignment/>

thus more rational. On the other hand it cannot be easily defeated or discouraged by a single victory" (X article, 861). To strike first, would start and escalate into a direct conflict and likely WWII, with the Soviet Union overrunning Europe and the Middle East and then moving on to the Pacific. "Furthermore, our ability to launch effective offensive operations is limited to attack with atomic weapons. It is estimated that this alone would not force the Kremlin to capitulate" (NSC-68, 5) Appeasement is a strategy that is not seen as a strategy at all.

Due to Munich, Americans do not see this as a strategy that will ever work. The theory is to give the USSR its own sphere of influence but the fear is that they will never be appeased and will always be pushing for more and more. Diplomatically this would be a problem for the US allies as they for the slaughter is not seen in a very good light and Communism probably would continue to expand unchecked in any case. The traditional strategy of the US is isolationism. Traditionally the US has stayed out of other countries' conflicts up until this point.

Since we are so far, geographically, our culture is removed from the happenings in Europe and the rest of the world. But this time, being an isolationist is seen as shooting off our own foot. While the US would avoid another war, we would potentially lose all our allies because they just can't recover from WWII without intervention. Communism would overrun Eurasia unchecked because there is no one left to stand up to it, and the Marxian ideology sounds good for a country that has been hit hard by the war.

It threatens American economic interests and it limits US offensive/retaliatory capabilities because with no allies, the US has no bases in Eurasia and can't reach the USSR without difficulty. Isolation would in the end condemn us to capitulate or to fight alone, with drastically limited offensive and retaliatory capabilities" (NSC-68, 5). There are very high diplomatic, economic, and military costs to isolationism and our ally obligations, and the US' socio-political fear of Communism prevented the US from taking this strategy.

Furthermore, relying solely on our allies to contain Communism would not have worked. After WWII, Eurasia was bankrupted and so war fatigued it could support itself without help. The US was the only power that did not have a border being attacked during WWII and still had the capabilities to fight. Due to our geographic distance and our sea power, no one challenged us on our home front during WWII. We took the fight to them and they were decimated on both sides.

And allies " even when both share a major interest, action is clogged with diplomatic reservations, and as a rule the negotiators only pledge a small and limited contingent, so that the rest can be kept in hand for any special ends the shifts of policy may require" (OW, 603). Hoping that they could contain and stop the spread of Communism was not realistic. And the Soviet reaction would be to still expand and absorb the countries as they fell. Out of all the theories, Kennan's containment theory was the best.

It was the least costly, allowed time for the US and her allies to rebuild, and had less of a chance of provoking a hot war directly with the USSR. It was a

Sun-Tzu strategy, in the sense winning without having to fight directly by choking off their access to resources and allies. The only problem was the United States' impatience. The act of holding the reins on the US enthusiasm is a fight in and of itself. This matters both for determining and using Kennan's containment theory and going through the assessment of the countries involved and the various strategies and why they wouldn't have worked using critical analysis.

Kennan's strategy was the best choice out of a lot of no so good choices. There is not really a good strategy for fighting Communism because it is an idea. An ideological theory that was turning into a way of life and then proven not to work the way it was intended. An idea is the hardest thing to fight, unless you have a police state that burns all the books and kills everyone who knows the idea. It is impossible to rid an idea from the world quickly and arguable, at all; because people talk and travel and they take the ideology with them, from one corner of the world to the other.

If the point was to contain the idea, then you can't win that with arms, you have to beat it with a better idea. Or as Sun-Tzu would say, defeat the enemy's References Clausewitz, Carl Von. "On War." Princeton University Press, 1989. Kennan, George F. "The Sources of Soviet Conduct by X." Foreign Affairs, 1947. "Summary of a report of April 7, 1950 A Reexamination of United States objectives and strategic plans (NSC-68)." Eisenhower Library, 1950. Tzu, Sun. "The Art of War." Oxford University Press, 1971.