

Us policy of containment of communism



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

After World War II the United States and the Soviet Union emerged as the two global superpowers, with each trying to influence their control on the world. This led to a bipolar world in which countries were aligned to two different camps. The capitalists led by the US and the communists led by the USSR. The United States feared of an expanding Soviet power so it instituted the policy of containment. Containment is the “ the policy, process or result of preventing the expansion of a hostile power or ideology.” (Dictionary n. d.)

During following 40 years the United States became preoccupied with curbing communist expansion. For example by intervening in countries with rising communist opposition, like in Greece, Korea, Cuba, Vietnam, and Afghanistan. It would also support democratic and anti-communists movements within those respective countries, as said in the Truman Doctrine “ the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.” (Kissinger May 1994, p118) This statement began the change of the isolationist policy of the United States of old and the new policy of soviet containment. Even if it means using military force in a conflict that does not necessarily endangers the US but just to make sure that Soviet power is curbed.

The Greek Civil War (1946-1949) was a conflict between the conservative government and the communist party. The United States supported the conservative government against the communist opposition because of fear of USSR influence in the region. “ Due to the strategic significance of Greece in the Balkans and the Mediterranean, the United States made the decision to intervene to contain the spread of communism in the Balkan Peninsula.

President Harry Truman outlined American policy in a speech to Congress on 12 March 1947: the United States would not allow democratic regimes to suffer from internal subversion or external aggression; he also asked for funds to underwrite this initiative. With the Athens government accepting American support, the Truman Doctrine brought Greece under the American wing. The Doctrine affected the foreign policy orientation of Greece, as it became part of the Western alliance; moreover, interest in the Greek Civil War led the United States to support the Conservative government in Athens and become actively involved in Greek domestic politics to ensure that power would not fall into communist hands.” (Kassimeris December 2009, p679-680) After the conflict Greece had its first elections. Although the US wanted to promote democracy as a deterrent to communism it could not fully implement democracy as to bring the communist part to power. “ Papagos was the beneficiary of American policy as the government in Washington expressed a clear preference to provide support to single-party strong governments, since its main aim remained the containment of communism. Papagos, a former Field Marshal, not only was strongly opposed to communism, but also enjoyed the support of the military. This means that Centrist and Leftist parties could not succeed to power, since they could not attain the desired number of votes to form a stable government, neither were they committed to NATO and the King. Papagos’ speech before the new parliament, on 17 December 1952, confirmed his pro-American position, as it was a clear indication that the interests of the West would be adequately served.” (Kassimeris December 2009, p684) This victory for the US ensured that the Soviets would not have access to the Mediterranean Sea and thereby becoming a major player in that vital area.

The next example in which the United States implemented its policy of containment is in the Korean War. The US came to help South Korea from being invaded by communist North Korea. The US believed that a rollback would coerce the communists from invading, so the United Nations sent a force to cross the 38th parallel. This caused the Chinese to intervene and helped the North Koreans to repel the UN force back to the 38th parallel border. This led to a cease-fire and the creation of the de-militarized zone. The United States feared that if Korea became communist then it would threaten its interests in the region (i. e. Japan, the Philippines, Taiwan etc.). “ The success of Stalin’s rollback in Korea would make the Soviet Union seem to be invincible in the Far East. Korea falling under the Soviet sphere of influence would have a negative psychological impact on Japan. Stalin explained one of his rollback objectives in terms of the disruption of the consolidation of Japan as a US ally in Asia. The creation of the unbroken arc of cordon sovietaire encircling Japan from Soviet power positions in Sakhalin in the northeast and in the Korean peninsula in the southwest would exert significant psychological pressure on Japan to stay neutral in the Cold War.” (Kim March 1999, p199)

Also another area in which the US employed its policy of containment of communism is in Cuba. After the fall of the Batista dictatorial regime, Cuba was now led by a communist government led by Fidel Castro. In 1962 Cuba received a number of medium range ballistic missiles carrying nuclear warheads. The United States now have an imminent threat where a belligerent nuclear armed state is a few kilometers away from its territory. The US imposed a naval blockade on Cuba and declared that any missile

launched from Cuba would warrant a full-scale retaliatory attack by the United States against the Soviet Union. Soviet ships carrying the missiles to Cuba returned to the USSR. “ On Tuesday 4 September 1962, the President called various meetings to consider the implications of the report from a U-2 flight on 29 August that there were eight surface-to-air (SAM) missile sites on Cuba. The problem for the Kennedy administration was that, though the build-up of arms on Cuba was, at that time, defensive, would it lead to the installation of offensive weapons and, if so, what should be the American response? Dean Rusk offered blockade as a possible solution. A meeting with congressmen raised the possibilities of an invasion of Cuba, or of a blockade of that island. At the end of the day a statement was issued to the press by the President, which reported the presence of SAMs and defensive aircraft on Cuba. The statement acknowledged that there was no evidence of the build-up of an offensive capability, but observed, “ Were it to be otherwise, the gravest issues would arise.”” (Grattan January 2004, p57)

The Vietnam War (1953-1975) was also example of the policy of containment in which the United States aided the Southern Vietnamese against the communist North Vietnamese. The US believed that their involvement in the war would stop North Vietnam from conquering the South and prevent a communist government in Indochina. The conflict resulted in the communist takeover of Vietnam and also US withdrawal from the country. This led to communist governments taking power in neighboring Cambodia and Laos. “ On April 30, 1975, the assaults of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forced the Saigon government to unconditional surrender. In a period of two months, the North Vietnamese drove Saigon’s troops to a total collapse and

compelled the hasty and complete evacuation of American personnel. The tragic Vietnam War was over. It was the final victory of Hanoi and the Viet Cong, and a great, humiliating failure of American intervention there. In retrospect, it is evident that the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong followed closely Hanoi's three decisions of 1959-1963. They accomplished almost all of the objectives as laid down by Hanoi-i. e., the over-throw of the Saigon government (Diem, Thieu, Huong, and Minh), the departure of all American personnel, and the " liberation" of the South. The final goal that remains to be achieved is the national reunification of the South with the North. As Saigon has been renamed " Ho Chi Minh City," the first cornerstone of reunification has been quietly and cleverly placed. They will accomplish this goal in due course probably through a general election. The completion of the Vietnamese revolution is at hand. With the recent takeover of Cambodia by the Khmer Rouge and the shaky coalition government in Laos, a Communist victory throughout Indochina seems to be only a matter of time." (Chen Summer 1975, p259)

In the Afghanistan War (1979-1989) the United States learned from the Vietnam War that direct military intervention would not always help in containing communist ideology. The Soviet Army entered Afghanistan to aid the communist government there against the anticommunist Mujahedeen. Once there they deposed the radical communist regime and installed another regime more suitable to their interests. The US supported the Afghan Mujahedeen monetarily, by providing money, arms, intelligence etc. The United States saw this conflict as a chance to bleed the USSR into submission as the Soviets tried to do to them in Vietnam. In the end the

Soviet forces retreated from Afghanistan and a few years later the USSR dissolved and the Cold War was over. “ The war in Afghanistan also revealed, and in some respects exacerbated, social problems within the Soviet military machine. The 40th Army’s medical services were poor, and disease was rife. The extensive record of atrocities committed against Afghan civilians testified to the Soviet Army’s disciplinary problems. Alcoholism and drug abuse were endemic, as was the systematic bullying of junior conscripts by senior soldiers, referred to in Russian as dyedovshchina. There were also serious racial tensions between Slavic and Muslim soldiers, similar in nature to the feuds which often occurred between black and white US servicemen during the latter years of the Vietnam War. Combined with corruption within the officer corps (sometimes manifested by weapons sales to the mujahidin), these weaknesses contributed to the collapse of the Soviet armed forces in the late 1980s.” (Hughes November 2008, p340)

In conclusion the policy of containment ended up being a success for the United States. The collapse of communism and the USSR led to the United States being the only global superpower. Although being a success new issues began to surface. As the only superpower, the US became stretched in its commitments to the newly democratic states in Eastern Europe and in other regions. Also its commitment to helping the anti-communists forces in Afghanistan led to the establishment of the Taliban and Al Qaeda, which made the US more involved in international affairs. These new problems made the US more in debt and earning a deficit of more than \$1. 4 trillion. Now, emerging powers such as China and India are taking the place of the US, who is beginning to take a lesser role in international affairs. The US

must now take a different stance and change the old policy of containment into a more open approach in world affairs in order to retain its status as a global superpower.