

Good essay on george f. kennans role in the policy of containment

[War](#), [Cold War](#)



Policy of Containment

In the United States of America, the term 'containment' referred to a policy aimed at preventing the spread of communism in other countries. This policy was essentially a response move against the Soviet Union trying to spread communist philosophies in China, Eastern Europe, Korea, Vietnam, and Africa. It was a mid-ground policy between rollback and appeasement.

The doctrine of 'containment' was conceptualized in 1946, by George F. Kennan, a U. S. diplomat. The word first appeared 1947, in a report with a description of U. S. A.'s foreign policy, submitted by Kennan to the Defense Secretary. This report was also used in a magazine article later.

George Frost Kennan is well known as the 'father of containment'. He was primarily a U. S. diplomat who was also an American adviser, historian, and political scientist. He was considered a key figure in taking forward the Cold War that emerged after the Second World War. He was a core member of 'The Wise Men', which was a community of foreign policy elders. Kennan's written work on the history of relations between the Western powers and the Soviet Union is popular even today.

Kennan preserved as well as spread his ideas through his writings that inspired many leaders that were to come. For instance, the Truman Doctrine and the policy of containment adopted by U. S. A. were a direct consequence of his work. This almost forced him to stay a leading authority and adviser on the Cold War.

George F. Kennan's Role

Kennan started his program on history, culture, politics and the Russian language in 1929. With this, he followed the footsteps of George Kennan, the explorer, and his grandfather's younger cousin. During his stint as a diplomat, Kennan mastered a number of languages including Czech, Polish, French, Norwegian, German, and Portuguese.

After numerous other positions, Kennan was sent as an ambassador to Moscow, post Second World War. While in Moscow, he felt that his views were not taken seriously by Truman and other policy makers back in Washington. He repeatedly told everyone that cooperation with the Soviet had to be abandoned. He was in favor of reducing the Soviet's Unions sphere of influence and power in Europe. These views of his slowly paved the way for the concept of 'containment'.

When the Second World War drew to a close, the U. S. State department personnel became very suspicious of the Soviet Union and its policies. Averall Harriman had been a confirmed optimist with respect to the relation between U. S. A. and the Soviet Union. When he was appointed as the ambassador of U. S. A. in Moscow, he was not happy with what he saw as a violation of the Yalta Agreement signed in 1945 that concerned Poland. He also saw the 1944 Warsaw Upspring as Soviet Union's betrayal. Harriman and like-minded people like George Kennan were instrumental in formulating U. S. A. policies and strategies for the Cold War, which influenced Truman's administration.

In 1946, when the Department of State asked Kennan to explain why the Soviet Union was against the idea of creating the International Monetary

Fund, and the World Bank, his reply, now known as the ' Long Telegram' analyzed Russian policy as follows:

- The Soviet Union considered itself to be in a perennial state of war with Capitalism.
- The aggression seen in the Soviet Union's policies were due to Russia's historic paranoia and xenophobia, and had nothing to do with the people's views or with the economy.
- The Soviet Union considered controllable Marxists as allies in the capitalist world.
- The Soviet administration was closed and structured to prevent a detailed and accurate analysis of its reality.

This analysis in Kennan's cable was applauded as a key understanding of the situation in the Soviet Union, by the Department of State. Kennan himself seemed to think that the appreciation of this understanding was a consequence of perfect timing. He said that if it had been earlier, his views would have been received with disapproval and uncertainty, and that if it had been any later, the information would have just been redundant.

George Elsey and Clark Clifford submitted a report analyzing the ' Long Telegram', along with proposals and suggestions for policy making, based on the analysis. This was probably the turning point in the conceptualization and enforcement of the idea of ' confinement' that Truman later stuck with for a long time.

' The Sources of Soviet Conduct' is a famous article that was drafted by Kennan in 1947. He wrote that " In these circumstances it is clear that the main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be

that of long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies”.

Kennan later explained that by his ideas of ‘containment’, he meant being a political threat by ensuring political containment, and not by containing the Soviet Union by using military threats. He admitted that his article and views failed to specify the scope of ‘containment’ from a geographical perspective. This explanation came too late though, and U. S. A had already taken to a policy of military containment. When Kennan could no longer persuade the administration, he openly went against the containment policy and the U. S. A.’s foreign strategies.

Kennan’s ‘Long Telegram’ in 1946 and the article ‘The Sources of Soviet Conduct’ in 1947, presented arguments to show that the Soviet regime was primarily expansionist. Further, they also warned that the Soviet Union’s influence was growing and suggested ‘containing’ it in places of strategic importance to the U. S. These two texts laid the foundation for the anti-Soviet Union policy followed by Truman’s administration, and for the Cold War. Also, programs like the ‘Marshall War’ that aimed to improve U. S. A.’s position in the Cold War were led by Kennan.

As mentioned earlier, ironically, Kennan was one of those who later went against the policy of containment and the strategies used in the Cold War. By the end of 1948, Kennan had changed his opinions and truly believed that that was the time to get to an amicable relation with the Soviet Union. However, the Truman administration did not like his suggestions or advice, and his authority over U. S. A.’s foreign policies were reduced, especially after Dean Acheson took over as the secretary of state, sometime in 1949.

The U. S. continued playing the Cold War with more militaristic and assertive strategies as foreign policies. Though Kennan truly regretted his previous assessments and ideas, which he believed were the cause for U. S.'s stands then, it was too late to make any change.

Helpless and tormented by his own judgments, Kennan left the Department of State in 1950. For a brief period, he acted as the ambassador of U. S. A. in Yugoslavia and Moscow. Later he joined realist critics of the United States' foreign policy, and soon emerged a leader with his new ideas and perspectives. He remained a thinker and a political scientist throughout his lifetime, contributing valuable opinions to international affairs, while working as a faculty in the Institute for Advanced study.

George F. Kennan: An American Life

John Lewis Gaddis has recently written a book on Kennan, his life, ideologies and power. In the book, Gaddis says that Kennan must have been happy to see his ideas being incorporated. It presents the irony of how the founder of the concept of containment went to be become its critic. By the end of two and half years' service under Marshall, Kennan was against almost every policy of the United States of America. It is indeed tragic that Kennan's idea of 'containment' was misused greatly in the H-bomb decision, NATO, and the military build-up during the Korean War. In 1957, Kennan delivered the Reith lectures on BBC, seeking disengagement from U. S. A., Soviet Union, England and France from Europe.

On the subject of how 'containment' grew, the book explains the following: In the West, misery engulfed many and they were left with two choices; to

either fight a Third World War against a mammoth sized country that dictated its power over Europe or sign a truce. Before George Orwell's theory about democracy seized the mood of many, George Kennan's fought to do away with Orwell's vision. And how did Kennan approach this problem? Well, Kennan's vision after the Second World War was to lay a third path which was entirely against war and agreement. This was clearly depicted in his writing - ' Long Telegram'. In it, he portrays Stalin as an entirely different person from Hitler. Though Stalin was determined to capture the entire world including the Europe he was not in a hurry. When Kennan explained how this could be taken advantage of, and how ' containment' would lead to the curbing of the Soviet Union's power, U. S. A. did not have a better plan. The author also mentions that Kennan was greatly influenced by the ideas of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Chekhov.