

US Foreign Policy (USFP) and the Policy of Containment: U.S. Grand Strategy, 1947-1991



George F. Kennan (b. 1904; d. 2005)
The Architect of Containment Policy



U.S. Emerges Really as The Only Superpower in 1945

- Consequences of World War II:
- Britain, France, Japan, Germany reduced to second-rate powers.
- USSR victorious, and a direct challenger to US power, but badly wounded: over 20 million dead, devastated infrastructure, GDP down by some 30%.
- U.S.: overwhelming military presence in Asia, Western Europe; monopoly of the atomic bomb (1945-49); doubles its GDP during the war
- U.S. as leader of international organizations: UN, IMF, World Bank

Imagining the threat

- Realism predicts former allies would collide over spoils;
- Soviet moves during 1945-48 seen as threats against the U.S.: Iranian crisis, communist takeover in Eastern Europe, the first Berlin crisis, threats against Turkey, the beginning of the civil war in Greece;
- Controversy: post 1980`s authors claim that these were defensive moves; M. Evangelista argues that Stalin was designing a defensive conventional posture in Europe;



Devising the Strategy

- Grand Strategy: body of thought and policies combining existing and predicted means for use in diplomatic and military actions to achieve long-term goals regarding the distribution of power in the international system;
- Main work: George F. Kennan`s July 1947 “Foreign Affairs” article “The Sources of Soviet Conduct”:
 - Soviet expansionism is a product of both Russian imperialism and Marxist-Leninist thought and is inevitable;
 - Soviet expansionism is a natural tendency of the Communist elite seeking security by conquering the world;
 - Only resistance to the establishment of other Communist regimes by “containing” USSR is an appropriate policy;
 - Through patience and firm resistance, the Soviet power will erode and decay from within.

The Diplomatic features of Containment



- Enrolling Allies:
 - Truman Doctrine (1947): commitment to defend Turkey and Greece against a Communist takeover; U.S. assumes Britain`s role in the Eastern Mediterranean;
 - NATO (April 1949) – enrollment of all former Western great powers through the form of a democratic and liberal coalition against Soviet totalitarianism;
 - CENTO former METO (Baghdad Pact), (1955-79) comprising Britain, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Iraq (to 1959); after the Suez Crisis (1956) and the British withdrawal “east of Suez” (1967-71) assumes Britain`s role in the Middle East; the heaviest pressured zone, but not by the Soviets;
 - South Korea (after June 1950) and Japan after WWII;

Engaging the Soviet Union

- War against Soviet and Chinese backed North Korea (1950-53);
- Firm position on both Berlin crises (1947-48; 1957-62);
- Castigation of the imposed communist regimes in Eastern Europe;
- Tough stance on Cuba (1962); threat of war
- Tough stance on Israel-Arab wars 1967 and 1973 (preventing the arrival of Soviet ground and air forces in the Middle East);
- War against Communists in Indochina (1965-75)
- Combining sticks with carrots at nuclear negotiations (NPT 1968), ABM Treaty (1972-2001/2), SALT, Geneva negotiations (1983-85), INF (1987)
- Help to Afghan insurgents (1979-88); the Carter Doctrine;

Attacking From Within

- Undermining Communist countries by propaganda (Radio Free Europe, the Voice of America);
- Threatening with war or grave consequences (Romania 1968, Poland 1980-81);
- Active involvement in the Polish crisis of the 1980`s;
- Most important diplomatic action: the triangular diplomacy of Kissinger and Nixon – rallying Communist China in the anti-Soviet camp (1969-71);
- Rewarding dissident (Yugoslavia) or pseudo-dissident communist nations (Romania) through diplomatic and economic means;

Military Preparations

- Nuclear buildup: from the “Little Boy” of Hiroshima to the 14000 warheads of the middle 80` s;
 - Devising the MAD: massive retaliation, flexible response and the balance of terror;
 - Tough policy on both Western Allies and the Soviet Union on the issue of medium-range ballistic missiles and cruise missiles (early 1980`s);
 - The Strategic Defense Initiative (1983)
- Up, nuclear blast; down, USS Los Angeles



Conventional Buildup

- After Korea the U.S. commences to build a strong conventional deterrent in order to prevent the Soviet Union takeover of the entire Europe or military adventures in the Middle East or Asia;
- Numbered armies in Germany and Japan, numbered fleets in the Mediterranean, the Atlantic Ocean, the Indian Ocean and the Chinese Seas; almost 2 million military personnel.

- A F-4 Phantom II, USS Saratoga and a M60 Patton



Conclusion

- The Strategy, also highly criticized throughout the war, WORKED.
- Main problem: Was containment applied as such, or was the argument a post hoc ergo propter hoc thinking?