

The Origins of George F. Kennan's Theory of Containment: Stalin's Russia and the Failure of
U.S. Foreign Policy

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Introduction

Kennan's Containment Reconsidered: A New Context for Containment

On a train headed to Moscow in 1933, a young, slightly naïve U.S. diplomat sat up all night, restless as he traveled through the once forbidden lands of the U.S.S.R. On the other side of the compartment, a Russian from the Soviet official news agency felt no such giddiness. Instead, he made himself at home in their tight quarters, stretching “himself out in his underwear” and sleeping “the sleep of the innocent.” George F. Kennan cared little though; he remained too excited at the prospect of setting up the new U.S. embassy in Moscow and living in the country he had learned to admire so much from afar. Reflecting back on the ride not long after, however, Kennan could only speak of it cynically. His compartment companion had almost certainly since that time “gone the way of most Soviet citizens who had contacts with foreigners in those days, and either...lost his head entirely or [was] laying it on a less comfortable pillow.” Years later, he would avoid conversation with everyday Russians he met while walking through Moscow, resigned to save them the trouble of explaining their actions to the Soviet secret police, who followed him everywhere.¹

In time, the weight and ever present shadow of the Soviet regime in Stalin's Russia, hardened Kennan as it had hardened the Soviet people. In exchange for this acquired cynicism, he gained extensive insights into the Soviet machine unpossessed by almost any other Washington policymaker. His knowledge of the Russian mind, culture, and communist institutions accumulated from working in the Soviet Union and Europe from 1927 to 1946 later served as the foundation for his strategy to contain the political power of the U.S.S.R. In trying to relate this understanding to his colleagues, Kennan achieved fame in Washington through his

¹ George F. Kennan, *Memoirs, 1925-1950*, (New York: Pantheon Books), 1967:190.

Long Telegram in February of 1946 and his “Sources of Soviet Conduct,” or X-Article, in July 1947, which outlined a strategy of political containment to combat rising Soviet political hegemony. However, His desire to formulate a coherent strategy by means short of war fell into a spiral of unintended consequences, as both his colleagues in Washington and the historians of his time period misconstrued his thinking of the Soviet Union.

While historians have extensively examined Kennan’s containment theory, its interpretation, and its application in the Cold War, they fail to address the direct connection of his almost twenty years of experience with Central and Eastern Europe to his outlining of containment in his X-Article. Instead, they mainly focus on the effects of such writings as his Long Telegram and X-Article on U.S. foreign policy or on his development as a young diplomat in the 1930s and the early 1940s before he arrived on the policymaking scene. Their area of study remains either too narrow or too broad in perspective, preventing them from linking together his experiences in the 1930s with the containment strategy outlined in his X-Article. They fall into the customary pattern in historiography of separating World War II from the postwar era at the start of the Cold War. Consequently, they ignore the prehistory of Kennan’s containment strategy, losing the full story of how and why it came into being. When Kennan’s earlier life does come under scrutiny it largely occurs as a psychoanalysis. No discussion occurs of his actual, physical experiences during his time in the Soviet Union and the influence of his observations on his thinking towards U.S.-Soviet Policy.

The literature mostly passes over major factors in the development of Kennan’s rationale such as the state of the Soviet Union’s economy, people, and political system under Stalin’s rule. By failing to provide these considerations proper scrutiny, they lose such important nuances as

the difference between Soviet Communism and Marxism, his characterization of Stalin's Russia, and the expression of the Russian tradition in the Soviet system.

Furthermore, the depiction of Kennan by some, such as Walter Hixson, as an idealist, unable to accept the reality of Soviet ascension acknowledged by others such as Roosevelt and Bohlen, ignores the importance of Kennan's analysis of the role of culture and politics in Soviet international relations.² Cultural norms and tendencies change slowly, and largely determine how people interact with their foreign counterparts. While the Soviet regime existed as a much different apparatus than its tsarist predecessor, it still ruled over the same Pushkin worshipping, vodka drinking, superstitious Russian people. Lack of attention to this experience largely accounts for why literature tends to skip around addressing how Washington misconceived Kennan's containment strategy. Most government officials, with the notable exception of Charles Bohlen, had little to no experience dealing with the Soviet Union. His government colleagues therefore had trouble conceptualizing this completely new and foreign political threat and wielding a new and foreign political strategy instead of their standard military one.

Some historians of U.S. Cold War foreign policy also criticize Kennan as acting as an "amateur historian" in connecting his experiences in Stalin's Russia to Russian cultural practices in his analysis for the State Department, especially in his Long Telegram and X-Article.³ However, the fact remains that Kennan received the education of a Russian elite as part of his State Department training, studying all the traditional Russian classics, including Chekov, Pushkin, and Tolstoy, at a university in Berlin. From one of his earliest assignments in Germany in 1925 through his time in the Baltics, he remained a student of Russian history and culture, and

² See Walter L. Hixson, *George F. Kennan: Cold War Iconoclast*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 44.

³ See Hixson's *George F. Kennan*, 44.

hired native Russian speakers to improve his language skills. By the time he arrived in the Soviet Union in 1933, not even Soviet citizens recognized him as an American when he spoke. From 1927 to 1947, Kennan spent ten years in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe compared to approximately five years in the U.S. over a span of twenty period.⁴ The State Department paid him to provide this explanatory analysis of Soviet behavior, and as a lover of history, Kennan largely saw patterns along cultural and historical lines, and therefore presented his observations as such.⁵

Kennan's diaries, his personal papers in his archive at Princeton, his multiple memoirs, and his articles on the Soviet Union paint a picture of not only this Soviet menace, but of the strategy he had in mind for containing the spread of Soviet political power. They demonstrate his deep understanding and admiration of the Russian culture and people, as well as the development of his wary and realist approach to the Kremlin. State Department, military, and National Security Council (NSC) memorandums, reports, and speeches provide insight into the differences in perception and strategy of other policymakers towards this Soviet threat, as influences on their thinking over time.

From these sources, Kennan's true designs of containment as a political strategy meant to combat the new, unique political Soviet threat come to fruition in light of his extensive experience with the Soviets. Traditional U.S. diplomatic and military methods could not hope to combat the dynamism and fluidity presented in the highly sophisticated political machine of the U.S.S.R. However, Washington policymakers' misunderstanding of the Soviet Union and

⁴ For the best comprehensive account of Kennan's State Department training see his "Training For Russia" in *Memoirs, 1925-1950*, 24-57 and John Lewis Gaddis's biography of Kennan, *George F. Kennan: An American Life*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2011). For an example of a Soviet not recognizing Kennan as an American, see *The Kennan Diaries, 1904 -2005*, ed. Frank Costigoila, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company: 2014) undated entry, 1936 entitled "Bookkeeper on a Collective Farm," 115-116.

⁵ See Daniel Harrington's "Kennan, Bohlen, and the Riga Axioms," in *Diplomatic History* 2 (4) (1978), and Kennan's *Memoirs, 1925-1950* for more on the historical patterns Kennan applied in his analysis.

militarization of containment turned a U.S.-Soviet policy into a U.S. foreign policy that could no longer achieve its original hope of creating a peaceful global order for the U.S. and the West.

A sophisticated machine, the Party and by extension the Soviet regime wielded a great amount of political power through propaganda, subversive activities, historical conceptions, and a superficially attractive ideology. They utilized a multidimensional approach to influence other countries. Direct control did not remain their main objective, only subservience. The military and police served as a stick to threaten, prod, and occasionally beat into line those the Kremlin considered under their umbrella. Political power manifested itself as the ability to exert the will of the government through multiple indirect methods.⁶ A political threat existed when a country exercised their political power to either alter the current societal and governmental order in another country to their favor or strove to reduce the political power of another country.

The Soviet government, masters of exerting this political power, used their adopted Marxist ideology's call for revolution as a cloak to extend their global influence. As Kennan so aptly pointed out in one of his dispatches, "there is nothing that the Russians fear and detest more than a rival in the use of the slogans of social progress." Under the dogma of Soviet Communism, subservience remained the primary goal, with the form of that subservience standing largely as a secondary concern. The Marxist call for a proletariat revolution stood as a convenient tool and excuse for their interference in the affairs of other countries and people. The Soviets' desires for a centralized government power conflicted with the Orthodox Communist vision presented by Marx of a proletariat run society, free of exploitative ruling elites – such as

⁶ For examples of Soviet subversive practices in Germany and China read Kennan's "Germany and the Founding of the Comintern" and "Stalin and China," in his *Russia and the West: Under Lenin and Stalin*, (New York: Mentor Book, 1960).

authoritarian leaders.⁷ This distinction remained important in Kennan's argument for containment, as it meant that not every communist party in other countries would fall in line behind the Kremlin willingly.

Such insights into the Russian mindset, culture, and communist institutions through his extensive experience within Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union working on U.S.-Soviet policy served as the foundation for Kennan's design of containment. While he began his study of the Russian language and the Soviet regime with excited enthusiasm, his time living in Moscow and interacting with the Kremlin darkened his attitude towards the regime, even if it failed to diminish his love for the Russian people. The Soviet Union's distrust of foreigners and the West due to their own insecurity, the regime's subversive behavior in other countries through the communist party, and Stalin's ascension to a traditional tsarist autocracy, made him realize that the Soviet Union existed as a very real political threat to the U.S. and West. While most officials in the U.S. government considered the U.S.S.R. as allies both during and immediately after World War II, Kennan understood the need to draw a line in the sand for collaboration. He knew Russia's long history of invasions made them not only distrustful of the outside world, but hungry for a buffer zone of "friendly nations" to secure their border. However, his firsthand knowledge of Soviet economic and military capability in war torn Europe, enabled him to identify the Soviet threat as political in nature, not military. The U.S.S.R. then presented a different kind of enemy than the U.S. had faced before, one against who traditional military strategy and past U.S. diplomacy would not remain enough to overcome.

⁷ Comments on the "Dialectical Materialism and Russian Objectives," undated, George F. Kennan Papers; 1861-2014 (mostly 1950-2000), Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library, Box 140, folder 4.

From these experiences, Kennan developed a new political strategy of containment to combat the new political danger he saw in Stalin's Russia, a type of threat which the U.S. had never faced before. His renowned Long Telegram served as the first noted draft for his strategy of containment, later laid out in full in his equally famous X-Article, "Sources of Soviet Conduct." In these initiatives, he argued for a coming to reality in Washington regarding U.S.-Soviet relations. Only an adaptable, morally sound, and firm political strategy could compete with this sophisticated Soviet political apparatus. He based his new strategy off the lessons he learned while working in the U.S.S.R., on the conditions of the traditions of Russia and Soviet Communist foreign policy, a Soviet led communist movement, and an ultimately unsustainable Soviet system. As World War II came to a close and Cold War tensions increased, Kennan's ideas gained traction in Washington. He found recovery plans such as the Marshall Plan in Europe and the Reverse Course in Japan as steps in the right direction for economic recovery and subsequent resistance to Soviet influence in the key regions of Europe and the Far East. He believed that such economic and political development would reestablish stability and contain further advances of Soviet political influence.

Kennan, however, would eventually lose control of his strategy of containment. Policymakers developed a misconstrued view of the Soviet threat, causing them to adopt a U.S. foreign policy of militaristic containment in response to a changing global political order. Kennan strove for the administration to recognize the danger the Soviet Union posed, but in trying to change their opinions he swung the pendulum to much the other way. Washington strategists adopted an over exaggerated view of Soviet power. They held little experience combatting threats to U.S. security through political methods rather than military ones. Consequently, Kennan's theory of containment began to evolve away from its original

conception as a political strategy, as these policymakers fell back on their more familiar military analysis. They did not possess a detailed enough knowledge of the Soviets to understand the nuances to their global influence or Kennan's plan. The formation of communist states incorrectly turned into the perceived goal of Soviet foreign policy, oversimplifying the Soviet system to communism. By likening the two different concepts, every communist sympathizing state turned into an enemy, and therefore a threat to the West. As a danger to Western interests, containment no longer applied only to dealing with the Soviet Union, but to defending the "free world" from despotism.

This perception combined with the rise of atomic power in the late 1940s, led to the misconception of Kennan's containment as a militaristic strategy not only by the policymakers at the time, but by historians as well. History tends to examine Kennan's ideology under the lens of international tensions at the beginning of the late 1950s, instead of its original foundation of the 1930s and World War II. By placing Kennan's thinking in this wrong context, it has mischaracterized containment. Only through examining the original roots of Kennan's thinking back in Stalin's Russia do his true intentions for his strategy of containment in U.S.-Soviet relations come through.

Chapter One

Discovering Kennan's Containment: A Loss of Innocence to Stalin's Russia

The early life of George F. Kennan, one of the first U.S. diplomats to set foot in the Soviet Union and the man who would shape the United States' opinion of the U.S.S.R., has received minimal attention. Of the little written on this crucial time in Kennan's life in the 1930s, most falls under the category of background information, something to simply characterize his thinking and provide light context of his life. Apologists such as John Lewis Gaddis, paint a romantic picture of Kennan, brushing aside his prejudices as common thought for his time.⁸ Others such as David Mayers and Walter Hixson, examine the development of his realism, and in some cases, remain more critical.⁹ They largely look at the ideas presented in his writings as a whole, where Kennan often drifted off into romantic whims about imperial Russian society and the societal benefits of serfdom.¹⁰ None however make a direct connection between the events in his life while abroad and the development of his thinking, especially in regards to the imperial Russian tradition in the Soviet Union. They ignore the role a person's living space plays in the development of their world perspective. Only Gaddis and Mayers provide any real analysis between Kennan's early days and his subsequent theory of containment, even if minimal. Both of them though focus on understanding Kennan as a man through his personal writings. Until now, none have ventured to look at the development of his thinking towards U.S.-Soviet relations as one of the first U.S. diplomats to both study and live in the U.S.S.R.

⁸ See John Lewis Gaddis's *George F. Kennan: An American Life*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2011),

⁹ See David Mayers "Young Kennan's Criticisms and Recommendations," *Biography* 8 (Summer 1945), 227-247 and Walter Hixson's *George F. Kennan: Cold War Iconoclast*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

¹⁰ Kennan wondered "If Chekhov could describe Russian small town folk with an appeal so universal that even the American reader gasps and says: 'How perfectly true,' why cannot the Moscow diplomatic folk be written up the same way?" George F. Kennan, *The Kennan Diaries, 1904 -2005*, ed. Frank Costigoila, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company: 2014), entry from Moscow on April 5, 1934, 92.

Kennan's diplomatic experiences first in the Baltics in the 1920s and then later in the Soviet Union and Central Europe in the 1930s, shaped his views of the Soviet Union and international politics. The lessons he learned from this time not only set him apart, but put him in direct conflict with his government counterparts from the onset of World War II until the end of his career at the State Department. These experiences taught him to separate a people and a culture from its government, and that diplomacy and militarism did not exist as separate entities. They ruined the romanticism of authoritarianism, and made him instead start to see the realism in granting independence to those people of smaller European national movements. Through the 1930s, the events he witnessed forced Kennan to grow up to the reality of authoritarianism and the game of international politics.

As a young man working for the State Department, Kennan held a certain Western elitism that provided him with a romantic realism that allowed him to admire the Russian experience. His belief in *noblesse oblige* made him a sympathizer with both the authoritarian and the peasant. Society's elites, whether the nobility or the bourgeoisie, bore the responsibility of looking after society's peasants. In Estonia for instance, "the rise of national consciousness and the desire for independence" came from "the stagnation and weakening of the ruling castes, the Russian and German nobility." Realistically, in his opinion, the "phlegmatic, hardy peasant folk" that made up the majority in such regions as the Baltics had "a long way to go toward the achievement of [an] honest and efficient government."¹¹ The tsarist era, consequently, of Russian history had a great romantic appeal to Kennan. It idealized his opinion at an early age that the elite should help care for those incapable of caring for themselves. This connection with an

¹¹ Kennan to his father, Kossuth Kent Kennan, from Tallinn, December 16, 1928, George F. Kennan Papers; 1861-2014 (mostly 1950-2000), Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library, Box 328, folder 10.

idealized Russian past fostered admiration for the Russian experience and tradition, helping motivate his study of the language and culture. Dostoyevsky and Chekhov served as favorite references of his in his writings, and he went to great pains to get permission to visit the estate of Tolstoy and travel through the Russian countryside.¹² This rusophilic attitude however put him at odds with an American system that glorified the voice of the common man, and he lamented for a great part of his tenure with the State Department the ability of public opinion to sway foreign policy decisions. Despite his romantic views though, his analysis, even as a young man, of Russian international influence remained logical. His admiration of the Russian experience enabled him to continue to study, recognize, and accept the reality of the Russian tradition, especially in relation to the outside world.

The Long Soviet Shadow

When Kennan first began his career in Tallinn and Riga in the late 1920s and early 1930s, he learned of the Russian expansionist tendencies in Eastern Europe, and that the smaller states located there, usually run down by invasion from warring countries to their east and west, had little chance of resisting Russian or Soviet imperialism. Kennan understood overtime that Tallinn, and Estonia at large, “naturally Russia’s ‘window on the Baltic,’” could never break free from the Russian influence of their past. “The national foreign policy of every Russian government, Tsarist or Bolshevik, look[ed] westward to the ice free port of Tallinn as the end of the Russian railway system,”¹³ and he postulated that Latvia and Estonia at the very least would

¹² John Lewis Gaddis, *George F. Kennan*, 95.

¹³ Kennan in Tallinn to his father, December 16, 1928, GFK Papers, Box 328, folders 10.

eventually return to the Russian economic system.¹⁴ At the time, he waved off the Estonian nationalist movement, sympathetic to their cause but seeing it as futile.

A change of scenery with a new posting in Riga in the beginning of 1929 began to change Kennan's patronizing attitude. In a letter home to his family, he described the horrors of the Soviet capture of Riga during World War I as something Americans in the U.S. could never fully understand, given their sheltered life from such evil. He admits that "only the fact that" he knew "so many people who went through it enable[d] [him] to visualize to some extent the way it must have looked." In the end, he reconciled that "the day will have to come when Riga will again become the chief port of Russia," and that even if the Soviet Union disintegrated that it remained unlikely to come through peaceful means.¹⁵ Soviet designs in Eastern Europe, as Kennan saw them, stemmed directly from the historical imperialist attitude of the Russian tsars. The geopolitics of the region had not changed with the Revolution: the Soviet Union still remained larger and much more powerful than its smaller Baltic, Finish, and Slavic neighbors. Against such a menacing neighbor, these small states stood little chance.

Communist ideology, therefore, did not serve as the main determinate of Soviet relations with their neighbors in Kennan's mind while in Riga, as argued by Daniel Yergin in his book *Shattered Peace*. As Daniel Harrison correctly refuted, Kennan looked to more traditional, palpable Russian goals of internal security to explain Soviet expansionist desires.¹⁶ Kennan frequently referenced the deep commercial and cultural ties between the U.S.S.R. and her satellite states. His love of the Russian culture allowed him to increasingly see how the Russian

¹⁴ In less than 15 years Estonia would join the U.S.S.R., following Kennan's prediction.

¹⁵ Kennan in Riga to his family, January 27, 1929, GFK Papers, Box 328, folder 10.

¹⁶ Daniel F. Harrington, "Kennan, Bohlen, and the Riga Axioms," *Diplomatic History* 2 (4) (1978), 424-426.

imperial tradition played a strong role in Soviet attitudes towards and perception of the rest of the world.

On the eve of U.S. recognition of the Soviet Union in 1933, Kennan sent a dispatch to Washington from Riga that exhibited an increasingly cautious attitude toward the Soviet Union and foreshadowed future issues of U.S.-Soviet collaboration. He spoke as a businessman evaluating a potential investment when he discussed the value, or lack thereof, of diplomatic relations on U.S. foreign trade with Russia. His analysis remained cautious and wary, detached and relatively unemotional. He took special note of the fundamental difficulties in trade between a country with a communist system and a country with a capitalist one. "One must constantly bear in mind the implications of the trade monopoly" of the Soviet regime, the government's "liberty to buy foreign goods where and when they find it advantageous," and the inability of a "single firm or individual...to make a foreign purchase."¹⁷ A consul in the U.S.S.R. could do little to help a U.S. business he argued. Censorship would prevent them from gaining any accurate internal economic data to inform businesses. Promoting trade within the country to individual people or businesses remained pointless; they made no direct economic decisions, only the government did. No oversight existed to make the Soviets uphold their end of any agreement. Trade, he predicted, would turn into a political weapon for the Soviet government and allow them to extend their political influence into the U.S. by holding substantial bargaining power with businesses and individuals.

As the United States considered recognition of the U.S.S.R., Kennan started to step away from his largely romantic view of Russia and to consider the Soviet regime more realistically. As he found himself forced to think of the Soviets as international partners, he began to

¹⁷ George F. Kennan to the State Department from Riga, "Russian Recognition and Foreign Trade," 1933, GFK Papers, Box 240, folder 1, 12-13.

acknowledge their short falls as a society, later demonstrating his skill at applying the Russian tradition to predict Soviet international maneuvering. Before he had only to consider Soviet oppression in relation to their Baltic neighbors, now he started to recognize that the Soviet regime's oppressive nature domestically and internationally would complicate U.S. diplomacy. His attitudes towards addressing these problems remained thoughtful, nuanced, and detached. The Soviet Union existed as a much different political entity than other countries with whom the U.S. had previously negotiated.¹⁸ While Kennan did not indicate an opinion on recognition in his dispatch, but he did draw attention to the need to deal with the Soviets differently than with past countries.

Stalin's Russia Unveiled

A year later in 1934, Kennan found himself walking the streets of Moscow, observing the soul of Russia and the backbone of the Soviet regime: the common Soviet citizen. At first, the "primitiveness and sloppiness of the population" made him "sympathize with the Soviet Government in their internal problems."¹⁹ Soon, however, he came to see these dirty, poor, uneducated peasants and workers as the elite of the Soviet system. Their poverty made them stronger, more capable than the average man, and they fit comfortably into his romantic view of the Russian experience. He found

something unmistakably healthy in it all: not the health we strive for by the elimination of microbes and danger and physical hardship, but the health bred of the experience and survival of all these ills. Revolution, like nature, is lavish and careless. Its victims are no more to it than the thousands of seeds which are cast to the wind, in order that one tree may grow. But in its blind masterfulness, it has at least given new scope for the survival of the fittest, the nervously and physically fittest, who are by no means the most intelligent, or the freest from dirt and disease.

¹⁸ See Kennan to the State Department from Riga, "Russian Recognition and Foreign Trade," 1933, GFK Papers, Box 240, folder 1.

¹⁹ Kennan to his cousin Charlie from Kristiansand, July 12, 1934, GFK Papers, Box 53, folder 10.

The principle of natural selection, deprived of its beneficial operation by vaccinations and nursing homes and birth control, has been allowed to come into its own in its full ruthlessness. This is the answer to the question: how do the Russians stand it? Many of them didn't stand it. And these whom you see on the street: they are the elite, not the elite of wealth or of power or of the spiritual virtues, but nature's own elite, the elite of the living, as opposed to the hoi polloi of the dead!²⁰

They embodied the source of Soviet strength. Their perseverance and adaptability in the wake of invasion after invasion, of brutal regime after brutal regime, had created a people used to hardship, used to suffering, unbreakable in the face of turmoil. To them turmoil existed as a part of life, and survival was second nature.

Kennan came to find this acceptance of hardship, while making them formidable opponents, also led to their easy exploitation by the Soviet regime. A people used to adversity and historical isolation, took in stride strict Soviet restrictions on movement, further isolating themselves from the outside world. A people used to fighting, found little need to question a Western threat that required national sacrifice for security, especially when their history of invasion from the French, Germans, and Asiatic Hordes supported their fears.

Inside these hard exteriors, Kennan discovered individually goodhearted, curious people, willing to rise to the national moral cause of combating the evil imperialist of capitalism. Their isolation however made them ignorant and susceptible to this sophisticated Soviet propaganda machine.²¹ They only knew the extreme polarized world of the Party and the Soviet regime. A strong, adaptable, unaware people, the Russians, Kennan sadly realized, accepted formidable oppression as a simple fact of life. From his time spent "in Moscow in the mid-Thirties, [he]

²⁰ George F. Kennan, entry on September 3, 1934, *The Kennan Diaries*, 93.

²¹ For examples, see *The Kennan Diaries*, undated entry in 1936 on a Bookkeeper on a Collective Farm, 115-116, and his letters home about his visit to Tolstoy's estate, Yasnaya Polyana. These include his letter to Jeanette on December 25, 1935, GFK Papers, Box 23, folder 10 and a Letter to his Charles James on December 16, 1935, GFK Papers, Box 24, folder 4.

believed that what [he] most gained from them was a feeling for the country – for the new Russia...getting a fair grounding in the nature of Stalinism.” Such experiences with the underbelly of the Soviet Union meant that he “came without false hopes or illusions, in the mid-1930s, to a more intimate acquaintance with the phenomenon of Stalinism at the apogee of its horror.”²²

From his time working in the embassy, he saw Stalin and the Party justify their exploitation of the Soviet citizen by drawing Soviet nationalism from their communist ideology and traditional Russian culture. When national elections came suddenly over a month in advance on January 1, 1937, the Party’s propaganda machine’s strict hammer showed its full force, catching Kennan and his fellow diplomats all by surprise. Party bosses put up giant portraits of Stalin and assembled in a tribune. They then proceeded to elect the one candidate nominated from each district, making sure to fanatically cheer at each mention of Stalin’s name.²³ When presented with ballots, Soviet citizens made sure to show conspicuously that they had voted for all the Party candidates, the only people on the ballot, and then in Kennan’s opinion probably “went out and crossed themselves and gave thanks to Divine Providence that they were safely out of that.”²⁴ It almost seemed comical to Kennan, if the obvious fear and overzealous fanfare for the Party in the name of Soviet nationalism did not appear so horrifying.

The Party and Stalin then took on a nationalistic, almost religious fervor that made it dangerous to oppose. Those who did not appear to fall in line faced denunciation as imperialist spies for the cause of capitalist oppression. However, Kennan felt the Party did not have to work hard to foster loyalty to a dictator or the practice falling in line behind his government. More

²² George F. Kennan, *Memoirs, 1925-1950*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967), 68-70.

²³ George F. Kennan, *Measures Short of War: The George F. Kennan Lectures at the National War College 1946-47*, ed. Giles D. Harlow and George C. Maerz (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1991), 25.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 26.

than once in his writings and speeches he quoted the first ambassador to Russia from the Austrian court of Emperor Maximilian, who said he knew “not whether this pitiless people require[d] such a tyrant for its ruler or whether... through tyranny of the ruler that the people have become so unmild and cruel.” The Soviet people, used to powerful rule from above, almost preferred a strongman’s approach. Given their history with totalitarian violence, their general practice to blame misfortune on the failure of lower level bureaucrats, and their idealization of their leaders, Stalin found it easy to pass off his methods. A people accustomed to rule through fear and hardened by strife remained much less likely to resist when they have no other reality with which to compare their own circumstances.²⁵

The traditional Russian culture and mindset had merged violently with Marxism to produce a Soviet regime that ruled through fear, deceit, and coercion. Taught by history and reinforced through their ideology, they felt insecure to an ever-present threat along their borders. Stalin, a product of the “savage underworld of the Transcaucasus”²⁶ and one of the most dangerous and tumultuous times for the Bolshevik cause before Lenin’s revolution, served as microcosm of these worst Soviet attributes. As an insecure, distrustful, and violent man, in an insecure, distrustful, and violent society, he only heightened the totalitarian nature of Soviet Communism, justifying it through his ideology’s idealistic cause. He was a brutal man leading a party built for the militant purpose of spreading Communism and Soviet power, a habit left over from the tsarist era’s expansive tendencies for security. Stalin “was, in his own eyes, the enemy of all the world.”²⁷ As the lone Communist power in a hostile world, Stalin and his regime had to maintain tight internal control to secure the regime and to fight against outside threats.²⁸

²⁵ Kennan, *Measures Short of War*, 37.

²⁶ George F. Kennan, *Russia and the West: Under Lenin and Stalin*, (New York: Mentor Book, 1960), 231.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 240.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 228-245.

Stalin's purges in the 1930s and the subsequent show trials afterwards only further reinforced Kennan's impression of a Soviet culture accepting of violence and oppression. In February 1937, he watched in disgust the trial of Yuri Pyatakov, Karl Radek, Grigory Sokolnikov, and other Trotskyists accused of an international conspiracy "based on a very shaky foundation" that "cannot be regarded as in any sense proved by the evidence given at the trial." Most of the "vague and unconvincing" evidence came from the defendants themselves, and undoubtedly represented "neither entirely true nor entirely false" information. Most likely, Pyatakov, Radek, and Sokolnikov had submitted to trying to play the Soviet government's game and only served as "mouthpieces...of its political propaganda" to spare their own lives and the lives of their loved ones – Rumor had it that the police had arrested Pyatakov's wife.²⁹

Since Sergei Kirov's assassination in 1934, Stalin's friend and political rival, Stalin had engaged in a purge of his main political dissidents and had increasingly sought to weed out espionage amongst the population. Kennan casually remarked that "plenty of this sort get shot in Russia every year," in reference to the large number of spies found by the Soviets since then, mainly in the military industries. Such needs for large public demonstrations of propaganda and the acceptance of it by all parties involved made Kennan wonder

whether the western mind could ever fathom the question of guilt and innocence, of truth and fiction. The Russian mind, as Dostoevski has shown, knows no moderation; and it sometimes carries both truth and falsehood to such infinite extremes that they eventually meet in space, like parallel lines, and it is no longer possible to distinguish between them.³⁰

²⁹ George F. Kennan to State Department, from Moscow, February 13, 1937, *Foreign Relations of the United States: The Soviet Union, 1933-1939*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952), 362-369. Accessed Volumes of *Foreign Relations of the United States* through University of Wisconsin-Madison Digital Collections.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 369.

This complicated Soviet relationship with reality, the acceptance of partial truths for the sake of convenience, allowed for the continual promulgation of the State's political propaganda. It meant that Stalin and the Soviet government remained willing to manipulate their own people in extreme ways to consolidate their own power. It furthermore demonstrated the insecurity that Stalin and the government felt towards their own legitimacy that they had to resort to such overt, violent methods of propaganda to maintain power.³¹

History played a very important role in Kennan's mind towards the regime's manipulation of its people and its insecurity in its rule. The Russian enthusiast knew the Soviets' suspicion came from a history of violent invasions that left them distrustful of the outside world. During the time of the tsars, Russians had lived through brutal wars and invasions from the Mongol's Golden Horde, the Poles, and Napoleon. From the onset of its creation the Soviet regime had further faced the consequences of World War I, with the German advance, the Brest-Litvok Treaty, and repeated skirmishes with Allied forces after their withdrawal from the war.³² These destructive invasions and the traditional Western contempt for a backward Russian culture, meant that the Soviets found little reason to welcome, let alone trust outsiders. Kennan found this suspicion towards the outside world had led to an isolationist, self-centered mentality that rejected not only foreign people, but their ideas and governments. Their past vulnerabilities made both Stalin and the Soviet regime feel insecure in their control over their people and of their borders, manifesting in general hostility towards outsiders as a form of self-preservation. As a student of Russian history, while saddened, disappointed, and increasingly frustrated by their

³¹ Kennan to State Department, from Moscow, February 13, 1937, *FRUS: The Soviet Union, 1933-1939*, 362-369.

³² Kennan, *Russia and the West*, 102-116.

behavior, Kennan came to realize that not even the idealistic dream of Marx and Lenin could break Russia from its insecure, violent, authoritarian past.³³

This suspicious atmosphere created by propaganda and the purges trickled over into embassy life, and Kennan increasingly found himself frustrated by a Soviet insecurity that manifested itself as decidedly distrustful of foreigners. “Soviet textbooks on international law...refer[ed] to the ‘espionage work of diplomats,’” and a Soviet article described many spies that “came in comfortable sleeping cars and carried diplomatic passports.”³⁴ These attitudes towards foreign officials made life in Moscow for Kennan and his colleagues increasingly oppressive. Since 1934, many of the Soviets who had worked at the embassy, served as important contacts, or even worked in the Soviet Foreign Office had encountered some misfortune or other of intimidation, disgrace, arrest, exile, or death. The regime’s propaganda in Kennan’s mind had sent a clear message to the Soviet people by 1937: stay away from foreigners. While Kennan still held great admiration then for the Soviet people, his disgust with and distrust of the Soviet government only grew. The obvious suspicion and rejection of the outside world made life oppressive for any foreigner to the point where most had left the country.³⁵ Insecurity in their own rule had made all domestic and foreign opposition unacceptable. The Soviet Union, Kennan had come to realize, was not his original romantic, idealized vision of tsarist Russia he had studied in his early career.

Even after the State Department transferred Kennan to a desk in Washington in the Division of European Affairs in late 1937, he continued to describe a frustratingly suspicious regime. From the start of his posting in D.C. to its end in late 1938, Kennan protested to the State

³³ Gaddis, *George F. Kennan*, 97.

³⁴ Kennan to State Department, November 24, 1937, *FRUS: The Soviet Union, 1933-1939*, 399.

³⁵ Gaddis, *George F. Kennan*, 95.

Department that Soviet officials were trying to undermine U.S. businesses. He described customs officials as unjustifiably charging businessmen duties, seizing their diagrams for inspection, and then holding them for a length of time only obviously needed to copy them. Later, the stolen technology would appear in Soviet factories that then made products to sell on the international market.³⁶ Receiving information of an economic or social nature of any value remained impossible he complained, and the difficulty of receiving a Soviet visa remained atrocious.³⁷ The regime did everything in its power

to isolate foreign diplomatic officials from the native population and to discourage natives, both officials and private citizens, from divulging any information whatsoever to the official representatives of foreign countries. People who have had personal dealings with foreigners have been persecuted...employees of the Embassy Chancery as well as a number of servants, chauffeurs, and gardeners employed by members of the Embassy staff have been arrested. Many others have suffered inconveniences through their connections with the Embassy. Practically every Soviet official who has ever had any personal connection with any member of the Embassy has disappeared from the scene in circumstances which indicated exile, imprisonment, or disgrace, if not execution.³⁸

Despite this persecution, he said that U.S. officials had not faced any discrimination and shows sympathy for the Soviet's Foreign Office officials as having to deal with much of the blow back from the government policies. The Soviet regime, he argued, held the blame for indoctrinating government officials with an attitude of foreign suspicion that rendered the Foreign Office helpless in assisting foreign governments with their complaints.³⁹

Kennan's *noblesse oblige* beliefs put the blame of such Soviet anti-foreign attitudes squarely on the shoulders of the regime, as he saw society's elites – in this case the Soviet and Party leaders – as bearing the responsibility for guiding the people's views. He then forgave and

³⁶ See George F. Kennan, undated, 1937, *FRUS: The Soviet Union, 1933-1939*, 449-51 and Kennan and Edward Page to State Department, July 19, 1938, *FRUS: The Soviet Union, 1933-1939*, 657-60.

³⁷ Kennan and Page to State Department, July 19, 1938, *FRUS: The Soviet Union, 1933-1939*, 657.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 658.

³⁹ Kennan to State Department, 1937, *Ibid.*, 451.

even sympathized with the officials, and Soviet people at large, as victims of an inefficient, hostile system. Despite these inconveniences, throughout 1937 and 1938 he still acknowledged that U.S. recognition of the Soviet state had brought stability to trade, and that the United States should strive to preserve the highly favorable and friendly commercial developments it had achieved. While the Soviet government remained frustratingly anti-foreign and oppressive, Kennan had no reservations about the U.S. relationship with the U.S.S.R. He had though, after nearly eight years of recognition, lost all illusion regarding the attractiveness of the Soviet's Marxist system, and largely repudiated those naïve Western liberals infatuated with it. This repulsion however did not mean that the U.S. should not continue their current course of relations with the U.S.S.R. After all, despite his initial prediction of the uselessness of diplomats, he had found, that U.S. foreign officials had helped further the cause of U.S. businesses and overall relations.⁴⁰

As early as 1935, Kennan complained of an embassy staff riddled with spies, and of fear preventing most Russian doctors from treating staff members.⁴¹ He then watched as two thirds of the governing class destroyed itself in the great purges, as denouncers one day turned into prisoners the next in people's mad attempt to either protect themselves or improve their own standing.⁴² From 1936 to 1938, Stalin had 1108 of the 1966 members of the seventeenth Party Congress of 1934 killed and 98 of the 139 members of the Central Committee elected by that Congress. To Kennan, the purges he witnessed and fear of the outside world served as "the

⁴⁰ Kennan to State Department, 1937, *FRUS: The Soviet Union, 1933-1939*, 449; Kennan and Page to State Department, August 4, 1938, *Ibid.*, 604.

⁴¹ Kennan to his sister Jeannette, November 17, 1935, GFK Papers, Box 23, folder 10.

⁴² Kennan, *Russia and the West*, 90.

revenge of the Revolution upon itself,” and increasingly served to define the Soviet regime and Stalin’s Russia.⁴³

Kennan viewed the regime’s structure, ideology, and operation as all involved in maintaining tight control over the people to meet the goals for an unbiased society of the proletariat. However, these same absolutist principles combined with the distrusting, insecure nature of the Soviet regime, led to enforcement through political denunciations and arrests, and limitations to people’s individual liberties. To maintain this tight control and overt violence without inciting popular unrest, the regime and Stalin constantly needed an enemy even more violent and terrifying to unite the people against and to justify their severity. This threat manifested itself against the treacherous foreigner, the so-called capitalist, imperialist West bent on the U.S.S.R.’s destruction. In maintaining tight control, the regime created an enemy out of the West, and in having an enemy in the West, they maintained their tight control.

Kennan determined that this insecurity regarding the outside world reflected the Soviet’s insecurity over their own rule, leading to their use of ideological extremism to consolidate their own power. The regime’s isolation of its people from the outside rendered them able to control their citizens psychologically. The Party’s use of indoctrination through control of their news outlets such as *Pravda* enabled them to manipulate the people’s opinions. With this propaganda, however, the Bolsheviks brought up generation after generation who took the Party line not as misrepresentation, but as fact. When they grew up, Soviet citizens believed in the truth of Soviet Communism and its mission to create a fair society for all in the face of the evil capitalism of the imperialist West as much as Americans believed in the truth of democracy, capitalism, and individual liberty. With this American conviction carried throughout his extensive travels,

⁴³ Gaddis, *George F. Kennan*, 95.

Kennan only saw the “loss of all civil rights, to ignominy, persecution, and ‘liquidation as a class’ entire great bodies of people” simply born to the wrong stations of the bourgeois, serfs, or Jews. To Kennan, “these savage class distinctions seemed...only a mirror image of the feudal institutions Russia had so recently rejected.”⁴⁴

Failure to Compete in an Ever More Hostile World

Yet in 1938, Kennan remained more concerned with the shortcomings he saw in the U.S. government’s approach to foreign policy rather than with the brutal authoritarianism of the Soviet regime. As a Foreign Officer, Kennan could not have continuously advocated for the U.S. abroad if he did not have faith that he represented a just, worthy, decent, and sound people and government.⁴⁵ He saw the American people and consequently the U.S. government as rejecting professionalism in the State Department from their false perception of them cozying up to foreign governments. In defense of his fellow diplomats, he argued “that you have to learn to talk something like the Britisher in order to be effectively rude to him, in the accepted British fashion; until you have reached this stage, you can often do nothing with him at all.”⁴⁶ One could not hope to get his way, unless he understood the mind of his opponent, nor could he effectively negotiate with him until he understood how to do so without causing offense. This desire for unprofessionalism he saw as the result of a gun ho, individualist American society. “Nine – tenths of American life...had thus come to be built on a set of romantic false values, on surrogates and shams,” often further perpetuated by a sensationalist press that did not accurately represent the facts, only sought monetary gain.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Kennan, *Memoirs*, 68-69.

⁴⁵ George F. Kennan, *Memoirs, 1937-1938*, GFK Papers, Box 240, folder 3, 1-2.

⁴⁶ Kennan, “Memoirs: 1937-1938,” GFK Papers, Box 240, folder 3, Ibid, 6.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 22-24.

The U.S. government, based off the democratic will of the individual, remained ill-conceived to run an effective foreign policy. “No passionless democracy...no state which is only the accumulation of millions of individual philistinisms, can have much in the way of a foreign policy.”⁴⁸ The state inherently found itself at the whims of what he saw as ignorant people, so that instead of formulating a foreign policy on merit, it formed one on the misguided ideals of the American public, who did not possess enough knowledge of foreign nations to possibly direct foreign policy. He felt the abysmal weight domestic politics played on conducting foreign affairs. Kennan bemoaned ambassadors, such as Joseph Davies, who served as political appointments. He “did not see the usefulness of civilian secretaries of War and Navy,” the same he believed applied to the Foreign Service as well.⁴⁹ Such appointees limited the ability of the U.S. to effectively execute foreign policy abroad. Ambassadors without knowledge of the country or without language skills, possessed little ability to accomplish anything of value. To someone who saw history as the most reliable guide to making foreign policy, as a means to help predict the future actions of nations and their leaders, uninformed appointees remained detrimental to the U.S.’s mission abroad.⁵⁰

Kennan’s frustration with the U.S.’s and Roosevelt’s approach to foreign policy showed that he felt a large disconnect with his homeland and out of place. Despite a romantic longing for his boyhood countryside home in Wisconsin, he saw all too clearly the faults in the democratic system of governing, with administrations held captive by large popular outcries or business interests. As a Midwesterner, he did not feel as if he belonged to the Washington or New England political elite. As a Princeton educated, well-traveled, Russian expert however, he

⁴⁸ Kennan, entry on May 17, 1937, *The Kennan Diaries*, 117.

⁴⁹ Kennan, “Memoirs 1937-1938,” GFK Papers, Box 240, folder 3, 12-13.

⁵⁰ Gaddis, *George F. Kennan*, 169.

certainly did not belong amongst the poor echelons of society. He saw himself as belonging to the intellectual class, not concerned with money, but with a greater truth. Another kind of elitist, he believed his knowledge gained from years of experience and study of the Soviet Union and Russian culture, served as the best path for all diplomats, and that political appointees got in the way of the Embassy's work.⁵¹

Kennan's experiences abroad had taught him that the Foreign Service could no longer exist as a political dumping ground if the U.S. wanted to compete in an increasingly hostile world. "If death, torture and misery [were] not laughing matters, then neither [was] political life...for death, torture and misery [had] become the penalties for political failure."⁵² Political missteps in this increasingly volatile world led to irreparable physical harm. Their foreign government counterparts, had international politics down to an art. The Soviets, followed by the Nazis, had already engaged in subversive activities in the United States, using their political parties and their citizens or foreign agents who freely came into the country as instruments of power abroad. The U.S. on the other hand, had no real substantial clandestine or counterintelligence organization to combat these encroachments. They did not even keep track of their citizens in other countries in case they needed to withdraw them in an emergency. Drawing from his belief in the efficiency of more centralized – in some cases authoritarian – governments, Kennan wanted – ironically enough in the age of Franklin Roosevelt, who he remained a staunch critic of – increased powers in the federal government. He particularly felt federal government required more power to properly advocate for the United States abroad and defend its borders

⁵¹ See Kennan, "Memoirs, 1937-1938," 8-32, GFK Papers, Box 240, folder 3.

⁵² Kennan, "Memoirs, 1937-1938," GFK Papers, Box 240, folder 3, 12.

and people. The U.S. could not afford to maintain the shackles of public opinion in either forming policy or taking action.⁵³

As the German shadow began to fall over Central Europe and the continent marched closer to war, Kennan's views of the healthiness of authoritarianism in the face of independence turned increasingly wary. In 1938, the State Department stationed Kennan to Prague just as the Munich agreement came to fruition. While there, he found sympathy for the Czechs' nationalist cause that he had not possessed in Estonia and Latvia. He watched as the Germans bribed their way into winning over the Czech people. The Germans had "played small peoples off against each other" with false promises, created instability, and then came in under the pretext of welcome conquerors.⁵⁴ With Munich and the German invasion, the "tragic-comedy of central European minorities had come to an abrupt and relatively final conclusion."⁵⁵ He found the Nazis subversive diplomacy distasteful, and unlike when he spoke of Russian expansion in the Baltics just ten years earlier, did not give credence to German advancement into Czechoslovakia.⁵⁶ Their historical and cultural claims did not justify their actions. He, however, did not advocate for any major U.S. response, and instead looked on objectionably. Though he did not approve of the Nazis, the Czechs "lacked courage, they lacked imagination, and they lacked self-confidence," and when a Jewish friend came to his apartment contemplating suicide, Kennan worried more on the effect on his household of such an act.⁵⁷ He failed to take into consideration the disadvantage of the Czech geopolitical position in defending their

⁵³ Kennan, "Memoirs, 1937-1938," GFK Papers, Box 240, folder 3, 13-14.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

independence compared to such other countries as Andorra or Belgium, who either did not have such a hostile neighbor or had other countries willing to come to their defense.

Much like the Russian people he admired, Kennan found himself increasingly hardened and made grim by his experiences with totalitarian regimes. As the world deteriorated into its second war in half a century, their brutality and lack of regard for the independence and sovereignty of other peoples stamped out much of their romantic appeal, particularly regarding Stalin and the Soviet Union. While his time spent in the U.S.S.R. had by no means created any illusions concerning the nature of Stalin's regime, World War II would solidify his image of the Soviet threat to the U.S. Their attacks on the Baltic States, the independence of Finland, Poland, Romania, and religion throughout Eastern Europe during the next five years would make him question how the United States could align itself with such a country. He would find it "no exaggeration to say that in every border country concerned, from Scandinavia – including Norway and Sweden – to the Black Sea, Russia is generally more feared than Germany."⁵⁸ This reality of the Eastern European people made Kennan wary of the alliance he saw the U.S. and Britain engaging in with the Soviet Union, uneasy that these countries' leaders did not fully understand the beast they were getting in bed with. No longer innocent in the game of international politics, Kennan had begun to see the threat these authoritarian regimes posed to everything both he and Western society held dear.

⁵⁸ Kennan, *Memoirs*, 133.

Chapter 2

The Threat in Kennan's Containment: Lessons from the Second World War

As much as historians focus on Kennan's psychology in the 1930s though, they completely overlook his experiences during World War II. Only Gaddis devotes any serious time to it in the scope of his biography, and he mainly focuses on characterizing a bolder Kennan, one growing in confidence and coming into his own in the State Department. He fails though to look at how Kennan's experiences in war torn Europe came to shape his ideals and opinions. Others such as Hixson or Harper, simply brush over it in their analysis of Kennan. Yet, the events of World War II did much to shape and solidify Kennan's views, as he took a front row seat to the destruction and reorganization of Europe. After the German occupation of Prague, the State Department sent Kennan to work in Berlin, where the Nazis eventually interned him and his colleagues after declaring war on the United States. Upon his release, he found himself first in Lisbon in September of 1942, working with the Portuguese for Allied naval access to the Azores, and then in the beginning of 1944 in London, negotiating the border for postwar Europe with the European Advisory Commission, before finally returning to Moscow only a couple of months later upon the request of Ambassador Harriman.⁵⁹

Kennan's exposure to Hitler and Nazi Germany soured his belief in authoritarian regimes, if not necessarily ridding him of his elitist ideals. His diplomatic work made him believe the United States needed to act more boldly and assert itself in the reshaping of global affairs. His return to the Soviet Union, not only solidified his previous ideas regarding Soviet society and Stalin, but also revealed an emboldened and decimated Soviet people. Increasingly, he found himself frustrated by the Wilsonian idealism of U.S international cooperation in the face of a realistic

⁵⁹ John Lewis Gaddis, *George F. Kennan: An American Life*, (New York: The Penguin Group, 2011), 172-174.

acknowledgment of Soviet hegemony. Frustrated with the response of the Roosevelt and later Truman administrations to this apparent Soviet threat, Kennan began increasingly to advocate for a more internationally involved United States in global affairs. By the end of the war, Kennan not only distrusted the Soviets under Stalin as long-term allies, but thought they stood as a serious political threat to the western world. Inside himself, he felt a growing obligation to alter U.S. opinion to properly address this threat.

Hitler's Futility and Stalin's Hope

Kennan, while initially surprised by the Hitler-Stalin Non-Aggression Pact in August of 1938 that set off World War II with the German and Soviet coordinated invasion of Poland, did not find the notion particularly astonishing. He knew that when push came to shove, the Soviets and Stalin would always take their security over their ideology. The West had shown no backbone in dealing with Hitler, as demonstrated in the Munich Agreement when they allowed Germany to annex the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet's had the Japanese to worry about. Sandwiched between these two hostile forces, Stalin felt highly exposed.⁶⁰ If Britain and France could not stand up to Germany, then the Soviet Union "would be confronted at last by that war for which she was so ill-prepared." All the better if the West decided to go to war over Poland and kept Germany occupied for a while.⁶¹

Striking a deal with Hitler not only bought the Soviets time, but enabled them to create a buffer zone in Eastern Europe against the Nazi's eventual turn eastward. The Soviets followed the tsarist tradition of establishing power through political and territorial expansion into Eastern

⁶⁰ George F. Kennan, *Russia and the West: Under Lenin and Stalin*, (New York: Mentor Book, 1960), 302.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 309.

Europe, and momentarily working with Hitler enabled them to seize this land.⁶² History had taught both Kennan and the Soviets the danger of doing otherwise. As Kennan had first realized in Tallinn and Riga, communist ideology did not unseat hundreds of years of established geopolitical relationships between Russia, the Baltics, Germany, and Poland.

In 1940, while stationed in Berlin, Kennan especially felt the tenuous nature of the Soviet-Nazi alliance. Ironically, Berlin seemed to provide “all the glowing references” to the relationship, whereas he found “the Russian expressions of opinion...marked by a very obvious dryness, and...interspersed with occasional sharp cracks of the Russian ruler over the German knuckles.”⁶³ Kennan perceived then Stalin’s union with Hitler as a momentary alliance of convenience, prone to breakdown as soon as their interests diverged.⁶⁴ Both the West and Germany remained repugnant in Stalin’s eyes, and Hitler at the time stood as the greater threat and more advantageous partner.⁶⁵ Stalin and the Soviets, mistrustful of all outsiders and insecure in their own positions of power, did not seek to establish friendships with other governments under the western conception. They only sought convenient and temporary alliances for strategic security purposes.

Of course, when Germany later turned on the Soviet Union in 1941, and the West forgave the U.S.S.R. in the name of moving forward towards the mutual, altruistic goal of defeating Germany and liberating the continent. However, Kennan did not see the Soviets as suitable long-term allies to the West’s cause. The Soviets hated the West on principal, something much harder to overcome. Soviet methods moreover did little to support the West’s claim to moral superiority

⁶² George F. Kennan, “Russia – Seven Years Later,” George F. Kennan Papers; 1861-2014 (mostly 1950-2000), Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library, Box 251, folder 2, 15.

⁶³ Kennan to Jacob D. Beam, dated October 17, 1940, GFK Papers, Box 140, folder 9.

⁶⁴ Kennan, *Russia and the West*, 328.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 182

over Germany. The Bolshevik movement early on adopted the Dostoyevskian dilemma of the few accepting the guilt and burden of the revolution for the sake of a pristine society. From their predecessors, the Soviet government and people increasingly believed that pure goals, justified violent means. “Only through a ruthless callousness toward *individual* human life could the way be found to the elimination of such things as ruthlessness and callousness in the relation to the *people in the mass* – that there was even a certain superior virtue and self-sacrifice involved.”⁶⁶ Kennan doubted that it remained possible to reconcile forever with these Soviet means with society. The choice of one evil over the other now superseded the fight of democracy versus totalitarianism.

Kennan’s experience in Nazi Germany and other parts of Europe had changed his views of authoritarianism, and subsequently of the Soviet Union. Whereas in 1938 he had largely viewed the establishment of relations positively, and spoke with hope of the future for relations, just two years later he spoke only warily of cordial relations. As one of the few U.S. diplomats to visit Nazi occupied Europe, one of the only ones to travel extensively in the U.S.S.R., and probably one of a few if any to experience both, he largely felt disillusioned with such dictatorial expansionist governments.⁶⁷ While before the war, he had mused about the possibility of a more centralized, stronger Federal Government. Now, he viewed a homegrown dictatorship as the single greatest threat to the U.S.⁶⁸

The Nazi’s authoritarianism, expansionism, war economy, and oppression all spelled the end for the German war effort. Kennan believed they did not possess that the resources, the

⁶⁶ Kennan, *Russia and the West*, 228-9.

⁶⁷ John Lamberton Harper, *American Visions of Europe: Franklin D. Roosevelt, George F. Kennan, and Dean G. Acheson*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 179.

⁶⁸ Gaddis, *George F. Kennan*, 161. President Roosevelt most likely also contributed towards these negative feelings. Kennan staunch criticism of FDR and Roosevelt’s top down approach to policy and politics forever increased the power of the president and the federal government in the United States.

money, the man power, and the ideology to unify the continent needed to attain political success in Europe. By 1941, “Germany still [had] much to gain but very little that it [could] afford to lose.” It remained impossible for the Germans to capture the much-needed Soviet resources to quickly utilize them in the war and reconstruct Europe. He questioned whether they could keep borrowing such large sums from their neighbors and maintain the rationing of the war economy with no private investment. Much of the – forced – labor had little incentive to work at their highest efficiency, and morale, even amongst the free Germans, could only last so long.⁶⁹ Even if they managed to achieve total victory, Kennan doubted they could establish political control and organization over the continent as they had nothing to offer anyone else except the glory of the German race and subjugation, which appealed to no one except them.⁷⁰ Extremism never reconciled itself with the middle, not when it sought to eliminate all “who are inclined to doubt the soundness of inspiration or...validity of the principles on which the regime operates.” The masses could not always suppress the individual. No chance existed of the German machine continuing indefinitely, unless it defied all logic and operated to perfection without a single misstep.⁷¹ Military expansion only served as a short-term answer to extending a country’s power and not a long-term solution. Upholding such war conditions remained too taxing on the finances and on the morale of the nation.

Kennan’s predictions of course came true. The Nazis failed to shatter Britain with the Blitz in 1941. The German army, unable to break through the vicious Russian winter and the vast front of the Red Army, found themselves back on their heels by 1942. In 1943, the Allies invaded Italy, and began planning for Operation Overlord to establish the second front in 1944.

⁶⁹ Kennan letter to James Riddleberger, November 20, 1941, GFK Papers, Box 140, folder 8.

⁷⁰ Gaddis, *George F. Kennan*, 129.

⁷¹ Kennan letter to James Riddleberger, November 20, 1941, GFK Papers Box 140, folder 8.

With his regime in decline, Hitler found his empire replaced by the ascension of the United States and the Soviet Union. The Allies no longer talked about if they would win the war, but when and where, and who would hold what when the dust settled.

Second Round in Moscow:

When Kennan returned to Moscow in the summer of 1944, he sensed that the Soviet Union felt itself on the cusp of greatness. As an old Soviet acquaintance forewarned Kennan, with the Soviet Union's rising global status the United States should expect a much more aggressive foreign policy from Stalin. The Soviet people, his friend said, "must not be allowed to forget...that a friend may be a friend today and an enemy tomorrow." The Party could not let their citizens confuse themselves with what Westerners "consider to be a happier life" and "weaken their loyalty to their own system." He warned Kennan that the "more successful we are, the less we care about foreign opinion...It is only when we are having hard sledding that we are meek and mild and conciliatory. When we are successful, keep out of our way."⁷²

The war largely benefited the Kremlin by keeping the peace domestically and further consolidating its power through nationalist appeals. World War II "pulled the regime and people together" and "clarified many riddles of the revolution." Not just the government, but the people felt empowered. For the first time, they felt confident, excited, and hopeful for the future, believing that their time had finally come. The war had left them

once more impoverished (but hardened to poverty), once more decimated (but accustomed to decimation), brutalized by intimacy with brutality, united under fire and ruthless leaders hip, master of its own territories and its own philosophy, beholden to no one, thirsting for prosperity, power, and glory, looking into the future as far as its weariness permits, with pride, confidence, and now a new sense of solidarity.

⁷² Gaddis, *George F. Kennan*, 195-197.

Kennan believed them the strongest force in Europe and it was a “folly to underestimate their potential – for either good or evil.”⁷³

During his second posting in Moscow, Kennan began a more outspoken campaign to re-characterize the Soviet Union in the eyes of the U.S. In winning the war, the Soviets achieved all their geopolitical goals from the Non-Aggression Pact with Hitler. They obtained their security buffer zone in Eastern Europe and emerged as the victorious party at German expense. Stalin won the day by exploiting the worst aspects of the Russian experience and now planned to play the West to his advantage. Understanding this duplicity, Kennan realized that victory did not solve the complications of the West’s missteps in Soviet diplomacy during the war. Worried the West would continue to mistake Stalin’s convenient alliance as real friendship, he increasingly began to advocate for a harder line against the Soviets.⁷⁴

Kennan thought Poland served as the best indicator of Soviet intentions for Eastern Europe in the post war era. In 1943, the Nazis had exposed to the world a mass grave of 12,000 Polish officers in the formerly Soviet occupied section of Poland. Stalin never admitted to Soviet involvement in the Katyn Forest Massacre and dismissed calls for an investigation by the Polish government in London. Kennan recognized this as a point of no return for Stalin and the Polish-government-in-exile. Any government established in Poland, not friendly to the U.S.S.R., including the Polish government in London, would undoubtedly investigate Soviet police action in Poland during 1939 and

⁷³ George F. Kennan, “Russia – Seven Year Later,” GFK Papers, Box 251, folder 2, 2-4.

⁷⁴ See Gaddis’s *George F. Kennan*, 180-196 for an overview of Kennan’s time in Moscow under Ambassador Harriman during World War II.

1940.⁷⁵ Whether Stalin would have entertained the idea of an independent Poland did not matter anymore. The international political fallout of such an investigation made a Soviet friendly Polish government after the war a must.

Stalin's disregard for the Poles in London and for the Polish people further showed itself during the Warsaw Uprising in the fall of 1944. When the Red Army liberated half of Warsaw, the Polish underground organized an uprising in the other half of the city still controlled by Germany. The Red Army however did not continue their advance across the Vistula River dividing Warsaw. Kennan had never seen Ambassador Harriman look as defeated as when he came back from trying to convince Stalin to help aid the Poles. Stalin though refused to permit the U.S. and Britain to use the Ukraine as a refueling point for their planes, preventing them from even dropping supplies down to the fighting and starving Poles. From that point on, Kennan believed the Allies should have abandoned the Soviet Union. They had already established a Western Front in Europe, now he saw the independence of Eastern Europe at stake. Poland served as an example of Soviet intentions for the rest of Eastern Europe. The U.S.'s and Britain's failure to adopt a hard line against the Soviet Union at this time demonstrated their lack of understanding of the Soviets and their designs for the East.⁷⁶

Meetings between the Prime Minister of the Polish government-in-exile, Stanislaw Mikolajczyk, Stalin, and the Soviet Foreign Minister, Vyacheslav Molotov, only confirmed Kennan's fears that any neighbors of the Soviets only existed as "vassals" or "enemies." The Soviet people did not even know that Mikolajczyk and his envoy had arrived in Moscow, but when the Soviet established Lublin Committee for Poland visited

⁷⁵ George F. Kennan, *Memoirs, 1925-1950*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967), 202-203.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 211.

earlier, they received a statesmen's welcome. Kennan conceded that if they reached a reasonable agreement the Polish Government might let "bygones be bygones" over Soviet atrocities during World War II, but later sarcastically remarked that such an agreement remained unlikely as people in the Soviet government wanted to "liquidate" all evidence of their "mistakes" in Poland, most notably of course at Katyn.⁷⁷ Stalin's advice during his meeting with Mikolajczyk to refer all his information on the Polish underground to the Lublin Committee only confirmed that Stalin had already written off him and the London Poles as participants in a future Polish government.⁷⁸ While the Katyn Massacre and the Warsaw Uprising created diplomatic tension, the heart of the problem remained what a Polish Government that included Mikolajczyk and his people represented. The Soviets "felt the contradiction of the grant to Poland of rights which were not yet given in Russia."⁷⁹

To Kennan, Poland illustrated how Stalin and the Soviets planned on manipulating occupied countries' politics to form puppet regimes in Eastern Europe. World War II served as another instance in Russian history of a hostile outside world, particularly in the West. The war gave Stalin the opportunity to create a buffer zone of "friendly" states to protect Soviet borders. Allowing the establishment of a government with people who had once expressed great criticism of the Soviet Union, suggested a level of independence, a level of freedom of thought that Soviet society and ideological thinking did not permit. Subservience to Moscow remained the only possibility for all governments in Soviet occupied Europe, just as the Soviet people only existed as subservient to the Party and the Kremlin. Poland and the other governments to be established

⁷⁷ Kennan, entry from Tehran, June 28, 1944, *The Kennan Diaries*, 165.

⁷⁸ Kennan, entry on August 6, 1944, *Ibid.*, 171-172.

⁷⁹ Kennan, *Memoirs*, 208.

only had the option of being a vassal under Moscow's control or an enemy. Soviet demand for security, reinforced by their ideology's belief in their superiority, mandated it. Kennan believed that the Western Allies needed to proceed with caution and maybe even consider abandoning collaboration with Stalin. Eastern Europe almost surely remained lost to the Soviets. If the Polish, over whom the West had gone to war and whom Churchill and Roosevelt advocated the most for, fell under a Soviet puppet regime, no real hope existed for the other Soviet occupied areas.⁸⁰

From Stalin's perspective, these satellite states remained particularly important for exploitation and German reparations to help the Soviet economy. Through Kennan's experiences in Europe during World War II, he had seen the failure of Germany to properly administer their occupied areas as a long-term burden to their war economy.⁸¹ It seemed questionable whether the Soviets, a no less despised government and with a much less efficient governing system, could succeed where the Germans failed. Similar to Nazism, Soviet Communism and Soviet society did not appear as attractive options for most of Eastern Europe, and Kennan did not believe the Soviets – or arguably anyone for that matter – possessed the military, political, and economic ability to suppress people who held them in disdain. The Soviets had nothing of value to offer a majority of these populations, and did not possess the economic strength to lead their recoveries.⁸² By 1944 alone, the war destroyed roughly twenty-five percent of the Soviet Union's fixed capital, reduced the labor supply by some three million people, and decreased the standard of living by some twenty-five to thirty percent of its 1940 level.⁸³

⁸⁰ Kennan, *Memoirs*, 205-215.

⁸¹ Kennan to James W. Riddleberger, from Berlin, November 20, 1941, GFK Papers, Box 140, folder 8.

⁸² Kennan to the State Department, "Russia's International Position at the End of the War With Germany," from Moscow, undated, in *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1945*, Vol. V, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1945), 853-868. Accessed book through University of Wisconsin-Madison Digital Collections.

⁸³ Kennan, "Russia – Seven Years Later," September 24, 1944, GFK Papers, Box 251, folder 2, 4-7.

The West however had not learned its lesson from Munich, and kept trying to appease the Soviets' demands. Of all his diplomatic colleagues, Kennan advocated for the hardest line against the Soviets. In reality, he simply wanted the West to draw an actual line in the sand for their concessions to the Soviets. Germany and all the satellite states remained lost to Soviet domination unless the West mustered up "the political manliness to deny to Russia either moral and material support" for their political expansionist goals. If "contrary to all normal expectations" they weathered this storm, "Moscow would have played its last real card" and would "have no further means with which to assail the western world." The Soviets may possess the dominate Red Army, but unlike Germany and Japan they lacked any real naval or air force capable of challenging Britain and the U.S.⁸⁴

Less than two years later, on the eve of the Yalta Conference in February 1945, Kennan held a dramatically less optimistic view of collaboration with the U.S.S.R. The U.S. lacked a clear, constructive, and substantiate plan for the U.S.S.R, he lamented to his friend, and fellow Russianist, Charles Bohlen. They had allowed the Soviets to believe that the western Allies "were proposing a cleverly disguised statue for the collaboration of the strong in the brow-beating of the weak." As unpopular as the idea for spheres of influence in Europe was at the time, Kennan thought it at least allowed the West to salvage something territorially by placing a limit to Soviet expansion. He argued that eastern and southern Europe already lay in Soviet hands, and that the U.S. needed to accept their losses, "gather together at once into...hand all the cards" they held, "and begin to play them for their full value." Letting them "lie scattered all over the table, for anyone to look at, for anyone to steal," enabled the continuance of Soviet political subversion in the area. By this time, the West had already lost Eastern Europe to Soviet

⁸⁴ Kennan to State Department, from Moscow, undated, *FRUS: 1945*, V, 856-60.

“political penetration” and the advance of the Red Army during the war. The West had missed their chance to stymie Soviet power, and now the only thing left to do was to move forward and stop the bleeding of Europe and Asia to Soviet imperialism.⁸⁵

Yalta did little to inspire Kennan’s confidence however in the West. He remained bitter over the United States’ and Britain’s failure to support an independent Poland. Every other territorial occupation the Soviets had achieved through military means, and already rested in Soviet hands by February of 1945. Roosevelt and Churchill, he believed retained no excuse by this time for not understanding Stalin’s intentions.⁸⁶ Unlike many of his American intellectual counterparts, Kennan understood, like Stalin and Churchill, “that the question was not Communism or Democracy; that was but a consequence of whose armies would stand where.” As later supported by his friend John Lukacs, the Red Army’s positioning in Eastern Europe already established Europe’s division. The U.S. had fallen short in its understanding of Stalin’s intentions and failed in achieving a completely independent Europe. While Roosevelt and Washington policymakers only thought of the division as temporary, “so much that is temporary tends to become permanent.”⁸⁷

Much of Kennan’s disapproval though of U.S. diplomacy during Yalta came from his own misgivings about the Roosevelt Administration’s approach to foreign policy. Since the 1930s, Kennan spoke with disdain about the government’s treatment of the State Department and the Office of Eastern European Affairs. However, John Harper misrepresents Kennan’s grievances with the government as a personal lack of respect. Harper identifies the cut in foreign officers pay in 1933 and the dissolution of the Eastern European office in the late 1930s as the

⁸⁵ Kennan to Bohlen, Moscow January 26, 1945, GFK Papers, Box 140, folder 5.

⁸⁶ Kennan, *Russia and the West*, 339.

⁸⁷ John Lukacs, “What Happened at Yalta,” *The Hungarian Quarterly* 46 (Autumn 2005), 113.

main source of his disdain.⁸⁸ Certainly these added to Kennan's derision, but he also disapproved of other diplomatic actions taken by the Administration, such as the political move of letting Jews into the U.S., instead of negotiating for the release of Kennan and his fellow U.S. diplomats interned in Germany. To Kennan, not only did Roosevelt not seem to respect the State Department, but his approach to foreign policy seemed incoherent. Kennan believed that professionals, not the politicians and generals Roosevelt tended to listen to, served as the best administrators of foreign policy.⁸⁹

While Kennan did not approve of much of Roosevelt's conduct, he also fundamentally did not understand Roosevelt as a person. Kennan exasperatedly described F.D.R. as thinking of Stalin only as a "difficult customer" but overall a normal person, and that the U.S. in the past "had never really had anyone with the proper personality and proper qualities of sympathy and imagination" to reason with him.⁹⁰ Kennan failed to see though "the useful deceit" Roosevelt liked to implement. Roosevelt remained willing to "be entirely inconsistent, and...mislead and tell untruths" to win the war.⁹¹ As a deceitful Wilsonian, F.D.R. presented war interests as the idealist achievement of international peace and cooperation,⁹² yet remained accepting of "an 'open sphere of influence,'" an independent Eastern Europe that showed diplomatic deference to the U.S.S.R. as a regional power.⁹³ Focused on domestic politics, Roosevelt worried about keeping U.S. troops in Europe and the more traditional U.S. isolationist sentiment held amongst Americans.⁹⁴ Kennan raved that the U.S. did not understand that the Soviets mistrusted the

⁸⁸ Harper, *American Visions of Europe*, 173.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 231.

⁹⁰ Kennan, *Russia and the West*, 333.

⁹¹ Harper, *American Visions of Europe*, 85-7.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 126-7.

⁹³ Wilson D. Miscamble, "The Foreign Policy of the Truman Administration: A Post Cold War Appraisal," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 24 Conduct of Foreign Policy (Summer, 1994), 480.

⁹⁴ Lukacs, "What Happened at Yalta," 113.

U.S.'s good intentions, but he did not recognize Roosevelt's manipulation out of self-perceived national political interests as just what the Soviets expected.

Since recognition, the United States had tried to act cordially and establish friendly relations with the Soviets, and in return the Soviets had only acted with "suspicion, discourtesy and rebuff," a fact that Kennan did not envisage changing in the future.⁹⁵ He advised that the Secretary of State James Byrnes "must remember that broad generalities such as 'collaboration' and 'democracy,' have different meaning for the Russians." They "must not expect them to enter into forms of detailed collaboration which run counter to their traditional conceptions of Russian state security."⁹⁶ He recognized the fluidity of Stalin's support for the West as momentary allies of convenience. The Soviets proved his point when they invaded Romania in their eastward advance during World War II and took off with the moveable parts of American oilfields after the U.S. specifically asked them not to.⁹⁷ Little difference existed for them between Hitler and the West. In Kennan's opinion, the Soviet Union would never abide by international law. Their ideology schooled them in the inevitable fall of capitalism and the subsequent revolution for the Marxist cause. They only cared about the end morality of their ideals and not the individual effects of their actions. As a result, the Soviet Union may have

herself became inadvertently...involved in this war, lost some twenty millions of her people, and her economic process set back by roughly a decade. But what are people, in the philosophy of those who do not recognize the existence of the soul? And what is a decade, in view of a movement which feels that it has discovered the secret utopia which had unaccountably eluded countless previous generations? In the mathematics of a materialistic ideology, there is no suffering, however vast, which would not be justified if the historical equation of which it was a part ended with the slightest demonstrable balance to the advantage of the dictatorship by which – and by which alone – such an ideology finds its political expression.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Kennan to State Department, from Moscow, undated, *FRUS: 1945, V*, 857.

⁹⁶ Kennan, entry on September 18, 1944, *The Kennan Diaries*, 174.

⁹⁷ Kennan, *Memoirs*, 235.

⁹⁸ Kennan, *Russia and the West*, 275-276.

They, therefore, could afford to remain patient and operate deceitfully in diplomatic affairs with an air of moral superiority.

As Kennan continually tried to explain to the State Department and those in power, Stalin and the Soviets cared little about what these Western diplomats thought. Their diplomacy revolved only around their traditional goal of securing their own borders and power, no matter what the cost. In their hostile diplomacy, Kennan discovered that “behind Russia’s stubborn expansion lies only the age-old sense of insecurity of a sedentary people reared on an exposed plain in the neighborhood of fierce nomadic peoples.” The more people and land they absorbed under their own power, the less likely these people remained to challenge them. Now though, their ideology provided them with a way of controlling these lands without strict military occupation. Kennan thought of the Soviet Union “as a nation of stage managers” with the deepest conviction “that things are not what they are, but only what they seem.” They set up the regimes in Eastern Europe, like in Poland, to pose as independent leaders, willingly choosing to follow Moscow, when in reality, the Kremlin put them in place because they followed their lead and did not dare oppose Soviet dominance.⁹⁹ “Extreme secretiveness and slyness” with “pervasive disingenuousness” and “territorial and political greediness,” served as the best description of Soviet diplomacy. They possessed an “addiction to...stubborn reiteration of preconceived conditions and demands,” and refused “anything resembling a reasonable and flexible” dialogue.¹⁰⁰

When the Germans surrendered in May of 1945, Kennan decided to get an up-close look at this Soviet machine to determine its real capabilities. In a trip largely disregarded by

⁹⁹ Kennan to the State Department, from Moscow, undated, *FRUS: 1945*, V, 854-5.

¹⁰⁰ Kennan, *Russia and the West*, 326.

historians, Kennan received permission to travel out to Siberia, part of the Soviet Union so far removed it had rarely been seen by any foreigner. After spending four days on the Trans-Siberian Railroad “passing through a poor forest country,” Kennan arrived at his first stop out on the Siberian Plain on June 13, 1945.¹⁰¹ The city of Novosibirsk with only one paved road, left a “decidedly unfinished impression” on Kennan.¹⁰² While his Soviet hosts rolled out the red carpet, taking him to factories, operas, and sporting matches and stuffing him with food and vodka, he still found it “a remote and struggling community.” “The streets around” the Opera House Kennan admitted were “still those of a Siberian village,” and “log cabins and tumbledown fences” still stood “in the shadow of the building at the rear.” While he conceded that the war had obviously held back development, “the grandiose conception of the Novosibirsk Opera House” only represented “an incongruous dream, out of relation to its own surroundings.”¹⁰³

On Saturday, June 16, a week after setting out on his journey, Kennan left Novosibirsk for the much smaller city of Stalinsk. The city’s “development was obviously arrested by the war” as well and much had “been left unfinished...or deteriorated from its original state.”¹⁰⁴ Upon touring a metallurgical plant there, he had no doubt that “a great deal had been sacrificed in terms of personal comfort, health and happiness” to build it, but “it was clear that it had cost far greater effort to build the plant and was costing far greater effort to operate it, than would be the case in” the U.S.¹⁰⁵ The union officials who exuberantly showed off this and other factories’ facilities to Kennan, still remained “coy about production statistics,” suggesting that these apparently highly developed plants were not as modern and efficient as they seemed.¹⁰⁶ Only

¹⁰¹ Kennan, “Trip to Novosibirsk and Stalinsk,” June 1945, GFK Papers, Box 231, folder 13, 2.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

after visiting one of the union's museums did Kennan to his "amusement and to the acute discomfort of [his] hosts," discover the real numbers displayed on "beautiful large scale charts" which had until then "been so carefully concealed."¹⁰⁷

A visit to a collective and state farm solidified Kennan's image of a largely underdeveloped Soviet economy and society. The peasants working on the land seemed no better off than the serfs of the tsarist era. Kennan found "no evidence" that the Soviet Communist system had "raised the standard of living of those who perform the agricultural labor over what it was when the land was in large private ownership." He did not feel "this form of organization [had] effectively improved the lot of the Russian agricultural population," and saw the peasants "as effectively bound to their place of work and residence as were the Russian serfs of the period before emancipation."¹⁰⁸

In large part, Kennan found that while the factories and farms he visited seemed to produce a similar number of products as their Western counterparts and utilized similar technology, they remained woefully inefficient in comparison, requiring much more effort to build and operate. Most of what the Soviets showed him he acknowledged seemed exceptional, but he doubted its productivity and universality. Kennan knew he had seen the most "advanced and favored" workers and doubted "if the benefits received by members of less spectacular" endeavors held comparison. He remained skeptical then of the real capability of the Soviet economy, so obviously stymied by the war and the failures of their own systematic deficiencies.¹⁰⁹ He found it "annoying" to hear "the unceasing insistence on the part of the Soviet official that" they presented "an advanced and highly democratic form of union organization

¹⁰⁷ Kennan, "Trip to Novosibirsk and Stalinsk," June 1945, GFK Papers, Box 231, folder 13, 21.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

obviously superior to anything that exists in western countries.” Any “open-eyed foreign observer” would “view with skepticism and some irritation...the glaring inadequacies with which their system – judged by western standards – still” possessed.¹¹⁰

Upon his return to Moscow, Kennan reported his travels only confirmed a largely inefficient Soviet economy in shambles, draining away at the resilient spirit of its people. The war, Stalin’s Five Year Plans, and collectivization had all taken its toll. Aid to these people, while desperately needed, remained pointless. Kennan reasoned that the Soviet government would just portray it as an example of their power over the imperialists and none of the peasants and workers would receive the supplies, only the Party. They could not help the Soviet people without helping the regime, and any blows to the regime they would simply deflect to the people.¹¹¹ Besides, despite all of its hardship, the Soviet Union still remained largely economically independent of the West with its large reservoirs of natural resources. The U.S. needed to refrain from tying themselves to the Soviet’s financial prosperity.¹¹² The United States then should establish a neutral stance towards the Soviet Union, seeking to neither help nor harm it. Soviet rapid industrialization, shock economics, and political repression took their toll on the Soviet people not just physically, but in their spirit to move forward. He did not believe that even the strength of the Soviet people could survive this strain into better times, and that the effects would cripple the Soviet economy for years to come. Like an old, overworked factory with bad foundations and shoddy repairs, in time the core would collapse from wear and tear, bring the entire Soviet system down with it.

¹¹⁰ Kennan, “Trip to Novosibirsk and Stalinsk,” June 1945, GFK Papers, Box 231, folder 13, 22.

¹¹¹ Kennan, entry from Kuznetsk, June 20, 1945, *The Kennan Diaries*, 184.

¹¹² Kennan, “Russia – Seven Years Later,” GFK Papers, Box 251, folder 2, 4-7.

With no real economic backbone and a crippled society, the Soviet Union's power from World War II mainly came from exploitation of her neighbors. Russia stood "for the first time in her history, without a single great power rival on the Eurasian land-mass." Kennan reported to the State Department that she now had the opportunity to extend her power farther than ever before, "although the exact frontiers [were] deliberately kept vague."¹¹³ Keeping these boundaries ambiguous allowed the Soviets to utilize their newfound geopolitical strength and expand even further. World War I and II had destabilized her neighbors from German and Japanese invasions and created a large power vacuum that needed filling in Eastern Europe and Asia.¹¹⁴ The sheer size of the Red Army, like the Soviet Union, made it formidable. It had won the war for the Soviet Union and kept the peace in Soviet occupied areas. While powerful, it also faced no real opposition from its war weary, decimated occupied people. Moscow held very little political appeal to these people.¹¹⁵ Soviet power resulted largely from the fact that their size allowed them to still have resources left at the end of the war.

Victory had not led to the peace most had imagined, and people in Washington disagreed largely on how to address this new global order they found themselves presiding over. Stalin had achieved his original goal in partnering with Hitler, and now had most of Eastern Europe under his control. After the death of F.D.R., Truman remained determined to confront the Soviets on establishing both "free" and "friendly" governments in the occupied nations as outlined at Yalta, but with the Soviets these two terms only existed together as an oxymoron.¹¹⁶ The U.S. had always viewed collaboration with the U.S.S.R. as the only road to a lasting peace,¹¹⁷ and few in

¹¹³ Kennan, from Moscow, undated, *FRUS: 1945*, V, 853.

¹¹⁴ Kennan, *Russia and the West*, 260.

¹¹⁵ Kennan, from Moscow, undated, *FRUS: 1945*, V, 854.

¹¹⁶ Walter Isaacson and Evan Thompson, *The Wise Men: Six Friends and the World They Made*, (New York : Simon & Schuster, 2012), 264.

¹¹⁷ Kennan, *Memoirs*, 249.

Washington besides Kennan imagined yet a Europe split between East and West. Those such as Secretary of War Henry Stimson who did only did so with the idea of mutual spheres of influence, relying still on the idea of the United States and Soviet Union working together in Europe.¹¹⁸ The U.S., to Kennan's chagrin, still held on to the hope of a collaborative future with the Soviet Union, one in which they worked together to rebuild Europe and create a new world order founded on peace. At this point, Kennan doubted the feasibility of a balanced security and peace from any kind of international settlement.¹¹⁹ Soviet political encroachment during the war had meant that half of Europe already stood lost and imperiled to subjugation.

Kennan believed the United States stood in a much stronger economic and political position than the U.S.S.R, but failed to use it to their advantage in the name of misguided collaboration. The U.S. still had little experience though playing the international game. Too often they allowed the public and their odd whims to influence foreign policy decisions, leading to incoherent strategy in Europe with conflicting demands.¹²⁰ The military did not help either, with Eisenhower having advised Truman against Churchill's plea to march further east to Berlin, as it broke their agreement with the Soviets and seemed militarily unbeneficial.¹²¹ Kennan saw such conceptions as gravely misguided. The U.S. needed to coordinate its political and military strategies to have an effective foreign policy, especially for dealing with the Soviet Union. By not pushing forward, the West practically gave the all-important Berlin to the Soviets and pushed the Red Army's occupation further west. The U.S. could not continue to maintain the status quo in international politics. The previous world order had not worked in keeping peace.¹²² They had

¹¹⁸ Isaacson and Thompson, *The Wise Men: Six Friends and the World They Made*, 264.

¹¹⁹ Kennan to Bohlen, Moscow January 26, 1945, GFK Papers, Box 140, folder 5.

¹²⁰ Kennan, entry on August 4, 1944, *The Kennan Diaries*, 168-170.

¹²¹ Isaacson and Thompson, *The Wise Men: Six Friends and the World They Made*, 270.

¹²² Kennan on Lend Lease Aid to Russia, 1945, GFK Papers, Box 240, folder 8.

their “heads in the clouds of Wilsonian idealism and universalistic conceptions of world collaboration.” By continuing forward “on the assumption of a community of aims with Russia for which there is no real evidence except in...wishful thinking” the U.S. ran “the risk of losing even the bare minimum of security” they had sought to create. The United States had the responsibility now to step into the game and off from the sidelines in international scene, and needed a much more sophisticated political approach for supporting their allies and dealing with their adversaries. He held the “conviction about Russian cooperation” that “a lot like a number of other things in life...only those should take it who are able to leave it alone and do without it.”

¹²³ National interests now required the U.S. to step up and shape the world, not just discover it.¹²⁴

Seeing the U.S. falling short, Kennan developed a new sense of responsibility to U.S. national interests. He came to feel it his obligation to not just act within the general duties assigned to him, but to work at the level of grand strategy needed for the U.S. to succeed in the new global order. Changing Washington policymakers’ and the American public’s opinion of the Soviet Union, to properly address the ever-advancing sphere of Soviet influence, stood as his first task. In the upcoming years, he increasingly took bolder action, in some cases risking his career. He did so believing that the U.S. remained largely unprepared to step into their new found international power and face Stalin and the Soviet Union.¹²⁵

¹²³ Kennan to Bohlen, from Moscow, January 26, 1945, GFK Papers, Box 140, folder 5.

¹²⁴ Gaddis, *George F. Kennan*, 163.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

Chapter 3

Creating Kennan's Containment: A New Policymaker Arrives in Washington

With his newfound determination to right U.S. foreign policy towards the Soviet Union, Kennan over the next two years from 1946 and 1947 took bold action from the seats of the East-West divide in Moscow and Washington. The second stage of Kennan's development as a foreign policy strategist now began. During the 1930s he largely established his image of the U.S.S.R. under Stalin, and during World War II he had come to realize the weaknesses of the U.S.'s foreign policy practice. His first twenty years in the Foreign Service had involved studying Soviet culture, defining their society, and learning their strengths and weaknesses. Kennan now turned towards learning how to practically apply these lessons to the United States and strategically developing a U.S. response. Over the next two years, Kennan transformed from a simple Soviet analyst into a full-fledged policymaker, who would come to influence foreign policy at the highest level. His experiences with Stalin's Russia, his understanding of traditional Russian and Soviet Marxist attitudes towards foreign policy, and his belief in Soviet communism as a political weapon led him to surmise the fallibility of the Soviet regime. No longer a passive observer, Kennan sought to wake up Washington to this Soviet political threat, coming up with a strategy to contain the Soviet political advance through means short of war.

How a Telegram Changed Washington

Late one night in February in Mokhovaya, the U.S. Embassy to the Soviet Union, Kennan finally made his voice heard about the threat of the Soviet Union. Breaking the State Department's word limit, he wrote his soon infamous Long Telegram on the nature of the Soviet Union, predicting its future actions, and concluding with advice on how the United States should proceed forward with this new threat. Historians disagree somewhat on what prompted this

outburst.¹²⁶ Kennan himself attributed it to a dispatch from the Treasury Department asking for an explanation as to why the Soviet Union had failed to come to accept the terms of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.¹²⁷ Those who have examined his work later argue that disputes in the Middle East and Stalin's speech earlier that month eviscerating the West led to his exasperated response. In actuality, it probably came from a combination of the three on top of years of frustration over U.S. policy towards the Soviet Union. The Treasury Department's dispatch just served as the tipping point. Kennan devoted little analysis in his memoirs to the actual thinking behind the Long Telegram, except to say that it came from a place of frustration and annoyance, and that without its perfect timing, his career would not have shot off like it did. Later historical analysis supports his assertion, however the extent to its actual impact of Washington remains debated.¹²⁸

While it reflected many other dispatches written by Kennan and swayed policymakers opinions, some argue that it did nothing to help the "floundering in American policy formation."¹²⁹ Its disillusionment of Washington to the idea of a friendly Soviet Union and its amplifying of Kennan's career enabled Kennan to later formulate a coherent strategy for foreign

¹²⁶ Both John Lewis Gaddis and Ben Wright depict the Long Telegram as a response to a fiery election speech given by Stalin two weeks earlier calling for a rejuvenation of Soviet strength. See Gaddis's *George F. Kennan: An American Life*, p.216 and Wright's "Mr. 'X' and Containment," p.7. Conversely, Nicholas Thompson and David Mayers describe the Treasury Department's request as the opportunity Kennan needed to in full address the misconceptions of Washington's Soviet policy. See Thompson's *The Hawk and the Dove*, p.58 and Mayers's "Soviet War Aim and the Grant Alliance," p.73. Walter Hixson however credits both Stalin's speech and the Treasury Department's request. See Hixson's *George F. Kennan*, p.37. Wilson Miscamble attributes it to general department requests on recent Soviet behavior seen in Stalin's speech and in disputes over Iran. See Miscamble's *George F. Kennan and the Making of American Foreign Policy*, p.25. John Harper on the other hand claims that Secretary of State James Byrnes continual conciliatory attitude towards Moscow put Kennan over the edge. See Harper's *American Visions of Europe*, p.190. To read a text of Stalin's speech, see *Vital Speeches of the Day* 12 (March 1, 1946), 300-304.

¹²⁷ George F. Kennan, *Memoirs, 1925 – 1950*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967), 292 - 293. As Kennan so dryly puts it, "nowhere in Washington had the hopes entertained for postwar collaboration with Russia been more elaborate, more naïve, or more tenaciously (one might also say ferociously) pursued than in the Treasury Department."

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 294 – 295.

¹²⁹ See Wilson D. Miscamble's *George F. Kennan and the Making of American Foreign Policy, 1947-1950*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 25-28.

policy. Others question how a “both supremely canny and hopelessly deluded... government that had the power to undermine the West in dozens of tricky ways was incapable of receiving or processing objective information about the world.”¹³⁰ Yet part of the foundation of Kennan’s argument remained that Stalin and the Soviet Union thought and acted illogically. For Washington’s purposes, Kennan’s Long Telegram served as a reeducation on Soviet culture and ideology and a rallying cry to stand up to this menace. It filled a conceptual gap in policymakers’ understanding of the Soviets and why the Soviets did not trust them as allies.¹³¹ Policymakers acknowledged the duplicity of the regime, its manipulation of ideology, its menacing nature, and the need for the U.S. to reeducate itself. They failed however to see the connection of all these components that led Kennan to his largely positive outlook. In characterizing the Soviet Union, he did not just point to their ideology as a tool, but as a continuation of an established Russian tradition. A tradition upheld by an abstraction of truth that allowed a two-faced government to thrive. Kennan in his Long Telegram drew from his experiences during the 1930s and World War II to determine that as long as the U.S. and the West kept its morality and stood strong it would overcome the current Soviet threat.

Kennan’s argument for the Soviet world outlook centered on the Party’s creation of a hostile “other” to maintain power. Marxism only existed as a convenient tool for Stalin and other Soviet leaders. Its denunciation of capitalism in favor of communism allowed them to turn the West into a capitalist menace bent on the destruction of the Soviet people. Even moderate socialists they characterized as “false friends of the people,” misleading Westerners into the inequality, chaos, and moral degradation of capitalism. The capitalist world, they propagated,

¹³⁰ See Nicholas Thompson’s *The Hawk and the Dove: Paul Nitze, George Kennan, and the History of the Cold War*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2009), 58-64.

¹³¹ David Mayers, “Soviet War Aims and the Grant Alliance: George Kennan’s Views, 1944-1946,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 21 (January, 1986), 75.

remained beset with conflict from its need for competition, creating war and suffering. They used this fear of “capitalist encirclement” to spark a nationalist response amongst the people. Under this patriotic umbrella, the Soviets believed they had to do everything possible to advance their strength by exploiting capitalist weaknesses. Kennan saw that Soviet prestige hinged on the appearance of a weak capitalist world. This greatness and prestige did not however come from a higher standard of living or economic force, but from physical, military strength.¹³²

In the Long Telegram, Kennan described Soviet international actions as instinctively coming from their culture’s tradition of border insecurity, authoritarianism, and domination of neighboring countries. The “Kremlin’s neurotic view of world affairs” came from a “traditional and instinctive Russian sense of insecurity,” from centuries of outside invasions from the hordes of the Mongols, the armies of Napoleon, and the German machine. The Soviets had learned to fear the more “competent, more powerful, more highly organized societies” of the outside world, particularly the West. More recent history however “afflicted rather Russian rulers than Russian people; for Russian rulers have invariably sensed their rule was relatively archaic in form fragile and artificial in its psychological foundation.” Stalin and other party leaders worried that if allowed to walk freely in the U.S.S.R., Westerners would expose the truth to their citizens. The Party, Kennan stressed, did not represent the Soviet people. His travels through the country had shown him a kind, curious, tough people, from whom only a massive force of ideological, anti-western propaganda could suppress the truth.¹³³ As a police state, “reared in the dim half world of Tsarist police intrigue, accustomed to think primarily in terms of police power,” such strategies remained nothing new. Stalin and the party knew on “instinct” only “negative and

¹³² George F. Kennan to the State Department, February 22, 1946, in *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1946*, Vol. VI, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Printing Office, 1946), 697-698. Accessed books on *Foreign Relations of the United States* through University of Wisconsin-Madison Digital Collections.

¹³³ Kennan to the State Department, *FRUS: 1946*, VI, 699.

destructive” stances to opposition. In their minds, Russia and the Soviet Union had never known a friendly neighbor, and therefore only saw those near them as potential enemies until under their subjugation. They desired to teach those under their puppet states in Eastern Europe, including Germany, to abhor the West under their ideology as well.¹³⁴

Kennan characterized the Soviets as propagating these beliefs through an abstract, fluid truth. He saw the Soviet’s “very disrespect...for the objective truth – indeed their disbelief in its existence” leading “them to view all stated facts as instruments for furtherance of one ulterior purpose or another.” He even questioned whether Stalin heard the objective truth, given his general isolation and the delusion and self-interest of his advisors. No Party leader saw any reason to change this system as it helped fuel the propaganda machine that kept them in power. It allowed them to portray multiple faces to multiple people, and to switch to whatever line stood as most convenient to them. This deceitfulness meant the US could not trust the Soviets to keep their word in such matters as the UN or in trade agreements. Stalin or Molotov might promise one thing today and then tell their people another tomorrow.¹³⁵

The telegram depicted a two-faced regime: the official and the subterranean. The official one operated as seen by the U.S.; a country demoralized from war, trying to work within the international framework for peace. The subterranean face though sought to destabilize the U.S. and the West through subversion. The Soviets used public organizations as a cloak to advance their own power. They utilized the Comintern,¹³⁶ the international branches of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Pan-Slav movement, and activist organizations, such as women’s groups and labor unions, to undermine the stability and power of western governments. Stalin would

¹³⁴ Kennan to the State Department, *FRUS: 1946, VI*, 706-707.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 701.

¹³⁶ Short for the Communist International, an international organization advocating for the adoption of global communism.

continue to adhere to the United Nations as well, as long as it remained convenient. The Soviets openly attempted to undermine colonial holdings, hoping to create a power vacuum similar to Eastern Europe during World War II, which they could move in to establish themselves. With these infiltrations into the international political system, they wanted to play the interests of Western countries against each other to instigate competitive infighting and to weaken their resistance to Soviet authority. The Soviet regime existed as “a political force...born along by deep and powerful currents of Russian nationalism,” committed to the destabilization of U.S. ideals and society as the only means to further Soviet power.¹³⁷

Despite the Soviet's determination to make an enemy out of the U.S. and the West, Kennan argued the United States still held the advantage. The Soviets still built their premises on falsities. Their party line did not come from “any objective analysis of situation beyond Russia's borders.” It arose “mainly from basic inner-Russian necessities which existed before recent war and exist today.”¹³⁸ The regime only stood as “a great and...highly successful apparatus of dictatorial administration, but ha[d] ceased to be a source of emotional inspiration.” Stalin and the Party lacked real internal legitimacy, and Kennan felt they had more political bark than bite. Outside of their sphere of influence, Soviet propaganda remained largely ineffective. Stalin and his cohorts also remained “highly sensitive to logic of force.” Kennan stipulated that an adversary with “sufficient force” that “makes clear his readiness to use it...rarely has to do so,” as the Soviet would not take the risk. The Soviet Union stood weak compared to the entire capabilities of the western world. He told the State Department that he held the “conviction that [the] problem is within our power to solve—and that without recourse to any general military conflict.” The only stake the U.S. lost in cutting ties with the Soviets, stood in what they had

¹³⁷ Kennan to the State Department, *FRUS: 1946, VI*, 703-705.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 699.

hoped to gain rather than in what they currently held. The U.S. had every capability to weather this storm without war. The government just needed to teach the public about the realities of the Soviet system, take the moral high ground, and get their house in order. The United States projected “a much more positive and constructive picture” of the world than the Soviets, and Kennan believed that the world wanted and would respond to this more optimistic faith.¹³⁹

This analysis of the Soviet Union traveled through much of Washington, reaching the higher ups in the State Department, the military, and the White House. Written at the perfect moment in history, it caught fire as groundbreaking, even though Kennan saw it as nothing new. Undoubtedly, it received such great attention partially because he put the blame for the international discord squarely on Moscow’s shoulders, not Washington’s.¹⁴⁰ The most important aspect though of Kennan’s thesis regarding the Soviet Union came from his advocating that the Soviets posed a political threat, and therefore the U.S. need only respond with strong political resolve. Many who read his telegram at the time and later noted his fiery tone, but those familiar with his diction should recognize his characteristic cool analysis and find surprise in his uncharacteristically hopeful outlook. The United States only had to stand strong in the face of a strong adversary, something that it had done before.

A New Policymaker in Washington

After Kennan arrived back in the United States in the summer of 1946, he soon found himself working with the Truman Administration to design a European recovery plan. The Truman Doctrine, despite Kennan’s limited involvement, showed the first signs of Kennan’s outline in the Long Telegram. The assistance it planned to give to Greece and Turkey sought to

¹³⁹ Kennan to the State Department, *FRUS: 1946, VI*, 707-709.

¹⁴⁰ Thompson, *The Hawk and the Dove*, 58-64.

combat Soviet political advancement by using economic and military aid to create stability. In a speech given at the Capitol on March 12, 1947, President Truman called on Congress “to support free people who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities” and “by outside pressures,” to allow “free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way.” Asking largely for financial and military aid, Truman argued it made “common sense” for the U.S. to “safeguard” its large economic investment during World War II “and make sure that it was not in vain.” Providing this assistance to Greece and Turkey would enable their economic and political stability by giving them the necessary tools to combat Soviet led, communist subversion – if not so directly stated.¹⁴¹ Kennan’s argument in the Long Telegram that the Soviet posed a political threat to its neighbors and that the U.S. needed to respond by bolstering the economies and enabling stability, appeared to have left its mark on the Truman Administration. Truman unlike Roosevelt at least seemed to take the Kremlin more seriously and to see them as a threat that warranted U.S. attention and response.

Despite the apparent similarities, Kennan largely scorned the Truman Doctrine. Ironically, as “the mastermind of the policy of containment” he objected “to what, on the surface at least, appeared a manifestation of such a policy.”¹⁴² Kennan, while not viewing a communist takeover of Greece as a catastrophe, considered aid to them a smart move. Providing aid to Greece also provided aid to Turkey, as it stopped the Turks from facing a greater communist front. Unlike Greece however, Kennan strongly believed Turkey did not require U.S. assistance in fighting communism. He blamed the Pentagon for this unnecessary Turkish aid, seeing it as a

¹⁴¹ President Truman’s speech given before Congress on March 12, 1947, the Truman Library Online, accessed on September 22, 2016, doi: https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/doctrine/large/documents/index.php?documentdate=1947-03-12&documentid=5-9&pagenumber=1.

¹⁴² Miscamble, *George F. Kennan and the Making of US Foreign Policy*, 32-33.

way for the military to receive more funding. Against a Soviet threat that remained “primarily a political one and not a threat of military attack,” he believed it counter intuitive. He doubted that the communists would hold Greece long before losing control, and stipulated that communism would have difficulty dominating the Muslim world as its doctrinal atheism ran counter to their Islamic ideology.¹⁴³ His primary concern with the statement came from its broad, sweeping language that he argued committed the U.S. to supporting more countries than within its capabilities and which might lead to aid for people who do not actually deserve it. Kennan despised this particular habit of Americans seen in the Truman Doctrine to work in the broad theory of solving “human want and misery” and “political chaos.”¹⁴⁴ He worried about the long run repercussions of setting a precedent of U.S. intervention economically and militarily as a preemptive measure anywhere in the world. Such a conception, he believed made aid to other countries look as a defensive U.S. reaction against communist instead of out of the country’s interest, and seemed to provide “a blank check” for economic and military aid anywhere communism appeared on the rise.¹⁴⁵

General George C. Marshall, the Secretary of State at the time, shared some of Kennan’s reservations, but Truman ignored both of their advice. Truman needed the funding for the Truman Doctrine to pass through Congress, and for that he needed to portray U.S. aid as serving a higher, altruistic purpose.¹⁴⁶ A disconnect existed between Kennan and the audience to whom Truman would have to justify this aid. Congress and the U.S. populace only had the image of the

¹⁴³ Kennan, *Memoirs*, 315-325.

¹⁴⁴ Truman speech given before Congress on March 12, 1947.

¹⁴⁵ PPS/1, “Policy with Respect to American Aid to Western Europe,” May 23, 1947, in *The State Department Policy Planning Staff Papers 1947*, vol. 1 in *The State Department Policy Planning Staff Papers, 1947-1949*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1983), 11.

¹⁴⁶ Miscamble, *George F. Kennan and the Making of US Foreign Policy*, 33.

domineering Red Army to characterize Soviet strength.¹⁴⁷ Kennan however cared more about principles and patterns than the abstractions of idealism, “the importance of freedom or any other vague cause.” Kennan, while a man of God, with a strong sense of right and wrong, did not believe such constructs led to concrete results. He held “no patience for people who preached, or assumed, American infallibility.”¹⁴⁸

Kennan only provided advice regarding potential government responses to the Greece crisis in the preliminary drafts of Truman’s speech, before he turned his focus back to his new job in Washington D.C. lecturing at the National War College. Not long after, General Marshall recruited Kennan to lead a new advisory committee, the Policy Planning Staff – or PPS as it came to be known.¹⁴⁹ This “new ‘brain trust’ on foreign policy,” would serve to create strategy for the United States’ foreign policy, advising General Marshall on proper approaches to different world events and countries.¹⁵⁰

Kennan received an adjoining office with Marshall’s, large amounts of autonomy in running his staff, and almost always the final say in all decisions on recommendations made by the staff. Their recommendations then made their way to the National Security Council (NSC), who took them under consideration.¹⁵¹ For the first time in his career then, Kennan had the opportunity to formulate U.S. foreign policy. His time at the War College had further developed his strategic thinking with his study of such theorist as Carl von Clausewitz, and the experts he surrounded himself with only further sharpened it.¹⁵² Faced with the challenge of addressing a situation on a

¹⁴⁷ John Lambertson Harper, *American Visions of Europe: Franklin D. Roosevelt, George F. Kennan, and Dean G. Acheson*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 199.

¹⁴⁸ Thompson, *The Hawk and the Dove*, 72.

¹⁴⁹ Kennan, *Memoirs*, 320-325.

¹⁵⁰ Walter L. Hixson, *George F. Kennan: Cold War Iconoclast*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 52.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 51-2.

¹⁵² For more on his time at the War College see Gaddis’s *George F. Kennan*, p. 250 -270, and for the lectures he gave while teaching there see *Measures Short of War*

much larger scale, he geared U.S. foreign policy more towards his views of combating the rising global power of the Soviet Union and communism through means short of war. Despite having the ears of some of the most powerful decision makers in Washington, the PPS remained completely advisory however and could not issue their own directives.¹⁵³ Kennan's and his staff's views of the world mattered little in comparison to the impressions they left on their superiors, who had the final say in the strategy the U.S. chose.

In their first assignment for Marshall though, the Policy Staff worked hard to make their voice heard amongst the other policy gurus in Washington. On June 5, 1947, Marshall gave a speech at Harvard's commencement ceremony, drawing heavy influence from Kennan's staff's first two papers, PPS/1 and PPS/2.¹⁵⁴ Marshall, with Kennan's advice, did not so much provide a strategy for rebuilding Europe, but defined the problem and provided a plan on how to create a strategy.¹⁵⁵ The Policy Planning Staff had presented European aid as solving the long-term issue of the continent's recovery and the short-term one of bolstering confidence both in the U.S. and abroad. Addressing Europe's economic woes remained the most important concern. Kennan and his staff did not see communism as the root of Europe's difficulties, and believed that bringing economic stability would mitigate any fear of communist or totalitarian encroachment.¹⁵⁶ The United States needed "to assist in the return of normal economic health in the world, without which...no political stability and no assured peace" could come. Following Kennan's lead that aid should remain open to all Europe, Marshall stressed a policy "not against...any county or doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation and chaos."¹⁵⁷ The government needed to

¹⁵³ Hixson, *George F. Kennan*, 52.

¹⁵⁴ See PPS/1, "Policy with Respect to American Aid to Western Europe," May 23, 1947, 3-11 and PPS/2, "Increase of European Coal Production," June 2, 1947, 12-19 in *PPS Papers, I*.

¹⁵⁵ Miscamble, *George F. Kennan and the Making of American Foreign Policy*, 51.

¹⁵⁶ PPS/1, May 23, 1947, in *PPS Papers, I*, 3-11.

¹⁵⁷ Secretary of State George C. Marshall's speech at Harvard University on June 5, 1947, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1947*, Vol. III, 238. Accessed book through University of Wisconsin-Madison Digital Collections.

address the misconceptions created by the Truman Doctrine that the U.S. only handed out aid as a defensive reaction to communism and not out of other country's interests. They could not leave the impression that they would provide a "blank check" for economic and military assistance wherever communism existed.¹⁵⁸

Only a European designed plan, inclusive of all of Europe, even the Soviet Union and their satellite states had any chance of working. Kennan and subsequently Marshall saw it as "the business of the Europeans. The initiative" had to "come from Europe." The U.S.'s help "should consist of friendly aid in drafting of European program...Political passion and prejudice should have no part." As Kennan insisted, and Marshall stated, "any assistance that this Government may render in the future should provide a cure rather than a mere palliative."¹⁵⁹ A pragmatist, Kennan did not want to provide something temporary, he wanted to build something that would last. There remained a level of personal responsibility amongst the nations of Europe in deciding their own recovery.¹⁶⁰ Despite Kennan's distaste for international organizations, such as the UN, he still saw international collaboration and cooperation as a must, the U.S. – or any country for that matter – could not save Europe alone.

A proper economic recovery plan could not exist then without Germany and the claim presented by Gimbel that the Marshall Plan served as a means of forcing Europe to politically accept a German rehabilitation, has merit and does not deserve such criticism as presented by Miscamble.¹⁶¹ While the Staff advocated for a total, all-inclusive plan for Europe, Kennan at least saw the inclusion of Germany as crucial, something Kennan remained worried that their

¹⁵⁸ PPS/1, May 23, 1947, in *PPS Papers*, I, 11.

¹⁵⁹ Secretary of State George C. Marshall's speech at Harvard University on June 5, 1947, *The British Commonwealth; Europe*, vol. III in the *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1947* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1947), 239.

¹⁶⁰ PPS/1, May 23, 1947, in *PPS Papers*, I, 3-11.

¹⁶¹ Miscamble, *George F. Kennan and the Making of American Foreign Policy*, 58-59. For Gimbel's argument see his *Origins of the Marshall Plan*, p.4 and p.203.

European allies would have trouble swallowing. Europe especially needed the combined production of British, French, Polish, and German coal if it hoped to survive.¹⁶² As historian Michael Hogan so aptly points out, Kennan understood “economic integration...as a way to reconcile Germany’s revival with the security and economic needs of its neighbors,” and by the time of Marshall’s speech most policymakers in Washington adopted Kennan’s thinking as well.¹⁶³ Kennan undoubtedly remembered the lessons of German reparations from the First World War, the consequences of which he had witnessed firsthand in the twenties, thirties, and forties.¹⁶⁴

Kennan saw the Marshall Plan as a turning point in U.S. foreign policy. With this program, the U.S. no longer considered the Soviets an ally of the future, and now had taken concrete steps towards containing their power in Western Europe. The Soviet Union nor the communist parties in the West could afford to sabotage such an economic recovery plan without losing the favor of the populace, allowing the U.S. to keep the moral high ground. At the same time, the Soviets could not accept the Marshall Plan and the integration of Europe economically either as it would undermine their power in eastern and central Europe.¹⁶⁵ The blame therefore for dividing Europe would rest squarely on their shoulders. The Marshall Plan stymied Soviet hopes of an unstable Europe, and as historian Miscamble sardonically notes, incited an “intense response from Stalin, who presumably considered a politically and economically healthy Western Europe a threat to his security.”¹⁶⁶ At some level, of course, it did. A stronger, more

¹⁶² PPS/2, “Increase of European Coal Production,” June 2, 1947 in *The State Department Policy Planning Staff Papers*, I, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1983), 12-19.

¹⁶³ Michael J. Hogan, *The Marshall Plan: America, Britain, and the reconstruction of Western Europe, 1947-1952*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 41-44.

¹⁶⁴ Thompson, *The Dove and the Hawk*, 74.

¹⁶⁵ Kennan, *Memoirs*, 335-343.

¹⁶⁶ Wilson D. Miscamble, “The Foreign Policy of the Truman Administration,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 24 Conduct of Foreign Policy (Summer, 1994), 483-484. Miscamble cites Voytech Mastny’s “Stalin and the

democratic, capitalist Europe, contained any advancement of Soviet influence, and if highly successful could even roll it back. Kennan viewed the East-West divide on the continent as temporary, as he did not believe the Soviet system would long survive their system's fundamental flaws.¹⁶⁷

Mr. X's Idea for Containment

In July of 1947, Kennan and U.S. foreign policy forever found themselves changed by an article published in *Foreign Affairs* authored by a mysterious Mr. X. Unsurprisingly, people quickly unmasked Kennan's prose. Suddenly, his article originally written to inform Secretary of Defense James Forrestal on the Soviets garnered widespread press,¹⁶⁸ and had large excerpts printed in *Life* and the *Reader's Digest*.¹⁶⁹ Similar to his Long Telegram, the timing turned out perfectly.¹⁷⁰ Anyone who had read Kennan previous dispatches or listened to his lectures at the National War College, found nothing new. Maybe because of this reason, historians rarely devote any attention to actually analyzing his text, choosing instead to avidly look at its application and compare it to the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan. Strangely, while they choose to psychoanalyze all his writing in the thirties, and most even up to this point in the forties, they instead focus on the X-Article's application. So many policymakers, journalists, and historians draw from his text in "Sources of Soviet Conduct" to determine both their and his views, and compare it to his other writings, leaving a need to focus more thoroughly on the

Militarization of the Cold War," *International Security*, 9 (Winter, 1984-85), 102-29, as his source for Stalin's response to the Marshall Plan.

¹⁶⁷ Harper, *American Visions of Europe*, 200.

¹⁶⁸ See Arthur Krock's "A Guide to Official Thinking About Russia," *New York Times*, July 8, 1947, Ernest Lindley's "Article by 'X,'" *Washington Post*, July 11, 1947, "The Story Behind Our Russia Policy," *Newsweek* 20 (July 21, 1947), 15-17, Walter Lippmann's series of columns published in the *New York Herald* entitled *The Cold War*.

¹⁶⁹ Kennan, *Memoirs*, 356.

¹⁷⁰ John Lewis Gaddis, *George F. Kennan: An American Life*, (New York: The Penguin Group, 2011), 258-260.

actual text. Such examination remains especially needed given the contentious nature of the X-Article's thesis of containing the Soviet Union, which has gone through various interpretations.

Kennan did not mean for the containment strategy laid out in "Sources of Soviet Conduct" to lead to global war on communism. Assertions, such as those presented by Walter Hixson, that Kennan with his X-Article sought "to forge a consensus for containment of the Soviet Union and world communism," ignore the fact that places such as Latin America, Africa, and the Pacific Region hardly existed in the periphery of his thinking.¹⁷¹ While it remains possible to draw militarism from Kennan's words, Kennan himself did not believe in an arms buildup. Anyone who had listened to his lectures at the War College on measures short of war, read his other articles and dispatches on the Soviet Union, or knew of his displeasure with military considerations in diplomacy during World War II and in the Truman Doctrine would recognize this truth. In his X-Article, Kennan presented his most refined version of the lessons he learned during his time in the Soviet Union and in U.S. diplomacy. It demonstrated the evolution of Kennan from a simple analyst to a policymaker, thinking in terms of U.S. strategy. If his Long Telegram made him known in the State Department, then his article in *Foreign Affairs* made him known to the wider policymaking circles of Washington and beyond. Whereas he had largely written the Long Telegram to inform the State Department on the culture of the Soviet regime, he wrote "Sources of Soviet Conduct" to explain their political approach to foreign policy and the best strategy for U.S. response. He presented a twofold argument: first, that the Soviet version of Marxism made them a political threat to the West, and second, that in response, the U.S. need only to contain the Soviet Union by standing up to them and taking the moral high ground, believing in the fallibility of the Soviet regime.

¹⁷¹ Hixson, *George F. Kennan*, 44-45.

In his X-Article, Kennan drew upon similar analysis as to that seen in his Long Telegram, defining Soviet Marxism as creating an ill-conceived, antagonistic world from its own insecurity to justify totalitarian practices. As made in the Soviet Union, Marxism not only created the image of a hostile outside world, but provided the Soviets with a moral high ground. With the image of a “nefarious,” exploitative capitalist West that contained “the seeds of its own destruction,” Soviet society could wrap itself in the guise of egalitarianism. Yet, Kennan saw the Soviets as falling into the Marxist trap of focusing on the need for a socialist revolution and not on how to actually administer such a society, especially one where the peasantry stood as its backbone. “Easily persuaded of their own doctrinaire ‘rightness,’” the Soviets believed only the destruction of all other societies brought a just world, but focused little on the practical organization of this just world. Soviet society only managed to run “on the iron discipline of the Party, on the severity and ubiquity of the secret police, and on the uncompromising economic monopolism of the state.” Only by reminding the people of the capitalist menace and of their duty to overthrow the political forces abroad in a global revolution, did Stalin maintain this strict control. Ideology existed as primarily a tool for him and his subordinates to consolidate power and secure their borders and regime. Kennan argued that this dubious perception of reality ignored the fact that the totalitarian regimes of Germany and Japan had in recent history posed the greatest threat to Soviet security. However, by upholding this ideological “concept of Russia as in a state of siege,” Stalin appeased his insecurity in his regime by consolidating his power at home and expanding his political influence abroad.¹⁷²

The Soviet’s political personality, basked in the righteousness of Marxist egalitarianism and unencumbered by conventional morality, helped Stalin expand Soviet political influence and

¹⁷² George F. Kennan, “Sources of Soviet Conduct,” *Foreign Affairs* 25 (July 1947), 852-857.

secure their safety. As the “Socialist Fatherland” and leader of the global revolution, Soviet communism taught and the citizens adhered to the idea of “the infallibility of the Kremlin” as the “sole repository of truth.” Even as the Soviets blindly followed their masters, Stalin and his cohorts manipulated the truth to their purposes. With “nothing absolute and immutable...they represented the logic of history.” Russian history supported their duplicity, with “centuries of obscure battles between nomadic forces” demanding “caution, circumspection, flexibility and deception.” The successful political action of the regime could only come through “a fluid stream which moves constantly, wherever it is permitted to move, towards a given goal.” To weather the capitalist siege and ensure their survival, Kennan argued duplicity must exist as a main stay in Soviet foreign policy. As keen “judges of human psychology,” Soviet leaders conducted foreign relations with a “secretiveness,” a “lack of frankness,” a “duplicity,” a “wary suspiciousness,” and a “basic unfriendliness of purpose” that he did not see changing any time in the foreseeable future. Such attitudes allowed the Kremlin to pass off alliances with the evil capitalist West “as a tactical maneuver permissible in dealing with the enemy (who is without honor).”¹⁷³

Kennan presented Soviet diplomacy in his article as acting on subversive principles and patience to achieve its political power in global affairs. Soviet belief in the inevitability of the capitalist West’s downfall, meant they saw “no hurry” in bringing about its demise. Rather than directly attack their enemies to establish their dominance such as Napoleon or Hitler, the Soviets preferred indirect methods that applied “unceasing constant pressure, toward the desired goal.” They relied on patient subversion, passive behavior, rather than a proactive approach. With their patience, fluidity of policy, and belief in the superiority of their ideology, the Soviets sought to

¹⁷³ Kennan, “Sources of Soviet Conduct,” 858-862.

simply outlast their foes through consistent indirect pressure on the capitalist system. In the face of sporadic acts of resistance by democratic adversaries, this strategy would slowly expand Soviet political power. Kennan postulated however that if met with “intelligent long-range policies,” similar in construction to the Soviets, the Soviet Union may find itself outmaneuvered. He believed that any “policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies.”¹⁷⁴

As a fundamentally flawed system, the Soviet Union carried the seeds of its own destruction, and the U.S. needed only to contain its political expansion to counter it. The Soviet system remained fundamentally flawed and unattractive, and Kennan saw its own fatality as seeded within it. The Soviet Union appeared to Kennan as the mirror image of how the Soviets viewed the West. To accomplish their revolution over capitalism, the U.S.S.R. assumed a perfect amount of “unity, discipline and patience over an infinite period,” and a “complete lack of control by the west over its own economic destiny.” The war though had left the Soviet people “physically and spiritually tired.” With the exception of some notable achievements, Soviet economic development remained “precariously spotty and uneven” at best. The country did not even possess a real highway system, and only remained capable of “exporting its enthusiasm and of radiating the strange charm of its primitive political validity,” but had no way of backing up any of these pursuits with “real evidences of material power and prosperity.” The regime had proved itself capable of maintaining power, but had yet to demonstrate that it could successfully transfer that power to another, younger group of individuals. To Kennan, in the face of a disillusioned population, Soviet ideology remained most attractive to outsiders who did not see the rot of the inside. Once exposed to this decaying system though, few would actually believe it

¹⁷⁴ Kennan, “Sources of Soviet Conduct,” 858-861.

superior. Kennan therefore concluded in his article that the Soviet system remained destined for failure.¹⁷⁵ As he witnessed during his travels in the 1930s and 1940s, the Soviet economy and infrastructure largely remained incomplete, and their political system maintained power only through fear and lies, draining the strength of its people. With such shaky foundations, the Kremlin could not continue indefinitely to challenge the U.S. and keep its own power.

The U.S. only needed to stick to its morals, show solidarity, and contain the expansion of Soviet subversion to beat this political threat. A fundamentally flawed Soviet society in the long run posed little threat to the U.S.'s interests if met by "a policy of firm containment." Kennan imagined this strategy as remaining fluid, looking to rollback Soviet global political influence by applying "counterforce at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points, corresponding to the shifts and maneuvers of Soviet policy." Whenever presented with the opportunity, the U.S. should use subversion to influence "internal developments" within the Soviet Union and weaken their power in the International Communist Movement. On their own side, the U.S. needed to maintain their international image as a beacon of stability and prosperity. "Exhibition of indecision, disunity and internal disintegration" in the U.S. only granted power to "the whole Communist movement." If the U.S. created "the impression of a country which knows what it wants, which is coping successfully with the problems of its internal life and with the responsibilities of a world power, and which has a spiritual vitality capable of holding its own," the Soviet Communist movement would find itself out maneuvered. The Kremlin could not withstand "frustration indefinitely without eventually adjusting itself in one way or another to the logic of the state of affairs." He saw it as a measure of the U.S.'s "overall worth...as a nation among nations." To win the day, "the United States need only measure up to its own best

¹⁷⁵ Kennan, "Sources of Soviet Conduct," 862-866.

traditions and prove itself worthy of preservation as a great nation.” From the Soviet Union’s political advancements then, the U.S. had little to fear. If it stood strong, held to its ideals, and seized moments of opportunity, the United States could contain Soviet power until it achieved its own destruction.¹⁷⁶

Washington Reacts to Mr. X

Kennan’s X-Article combined with the Long Telegram served as the culmination of all his experiences in the past twenty years to characterize how tradition and ideology existed in Stalin’s Russia and interplayed with their interaction with the West. If the Long Telegram had defined the role of Russian tradition, “Sources of Soviet Conduct” had defined the role of Soviet ideology. While describing two different aspects of the Soviet Union, Kennan’s rhetoric sounded noticeably similar in both pieces because of the manipulation of Marxism to fit into the Russian historical experience. In the Long Telegram, Kennan described the role of the hostile other in Russian history and how it had led to a tradition of border insecurity, authoritarianism, domination of neighbors, abstract truth, and ultimately a regime operating on two planes: the official and the subterranean. With his X-Article, he defined Soviet Marxism and its political personality, describing its patient subversion to achieve political power. In both however, Kennan emphasized the futility of the Soviet Marxist experience, and stood uncharacteristically optimistic in his belief that the U.S.’s morality would allow it to win the day. After years of study and personal experience with the Soviets, he had found a way to articulate his knowledge of society in the Soviet Union. The Soviets operated under a mask to conceal the unattractive truth of their regime under Stalin and their internal economic vulnerabilities. From their historical insecurity from invasions came their desire for security through political expansion,

¹⁷⁶ Kennan, “Sources of Soviet Conduct,” 862-868.

making them generally xenophobic and distrustful of the outside world. Marxism, with its portrayal of an antagonistic capitalist world, gained traction in Russia as it fit this Russian view of reality. Faced then with an immoral and flawed opponent, the Soviets only believed in momentary alliances of convenience. Yet Kennan had witnessed firsthand the weak economic development in the U.S.S.R., he had spoken with the spiritually tired citizens, and realized that in the long run the Soviet experience stood destined to fail, with the odds squarely in the West's favor.

Arguably, Kennan only received fame for his X-Article thanks to Walter Lippmann, who scathingly criticized Kennan in a gross mischaracterization of his argument. "The policy of containment or the so called Truman Doctrine,"¹⁷⁷ Lippmann contended indefinitely committed the U.S. to military actions around the Soviet periphery, making other countries "dependencies" of the United States under which "the Marshall proposals would fail."¹⁷⁸ Ironically, he praised the Marshall Plan as treating "the European governments as independent powers, who [the U.S.] must help but cannot presume to govern, or to use as instrument of an American policy."¹⁷⁹ This fundamentally wrong assumption that Kennan designed the Truman Doctrine and not the Marshall Plan, caused Lippmann to mistakenly associate containment with the militaristic elements seen in the proposal for aid to Turkey that Kennan despaired so much over.

Lippmann's misunderstanding of Kennan's role in Washington at the time, led him to create the image of a stagnant, militarized, global containment. By equating it to the Truman Doctrine, Lippmann made Kennan's strategy "in practice mean inexorably an unending

¹⁷⁷ Walter Lippmann, *The Cold War: A Study in U.S. Foreign Policy*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), 29. Originally appeared as a series of articles in the *New York Herald Tribune*

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 54-56.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

intervention in all the countries that are supposed to ‘contain’ the Soviet Union.”¹⁸⁰ He moreover puts words in Mr. X’s mouth by immediately jumping to the military as the tactical means for carrying out “unalterable counterforce” against the Soviet Union.¹⁸¹ Following this pattern of assumption, he characterizes Kennan’s “constantly shifting geographical and political points” of counterforce as a global phenomenon, calling for intervention in places such as “Manchuria, Mongolia, north China, Afghanistan, Iran, Hungary and Rumania.”¹⁸² The Eurocentric Kennan however did not consider such places as the Middle East or Central Asia of special importance to U.S. strategy regarding the Soviet Union.¹⁸³ Lippmann though in focusing on a global containment expressed an aversion to risk seen later in Washington. The reactionary nature of “shifting geographical and political points” made him uneasy, even if such a strategy turned the Kremlin into the unquestionable aggressor.¹⁸⁴

While Kennan’s vague language about the actual practical implementation of his strategy of containment did leave his strategy open for such wide interpretation as seen with Lippmann, he did not expect for his article to receive such widespread scrutiny. As Kennan later admitted in his memoirs, he originally wrote the piece “not for publication but merely for the private edification of Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal.”¹⁸⁵ He probably would have devoted “more careful editing and greater forethought” had he known how “it was to be received.” Kennan mainly at the time hoped to stop the U.S. from making unilateral concessions to the Soviets and

¹⁸⁰ Lippmann, *The Cold War*, 44.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 18-20. In “Sources of Soviet Conduct,” Kennan only mentions the word “military” once, when he asserts that “real facts concerning [the antagonism between communism and capitalism] have been confused by the existence abroad of genuine resentment provoked by Soviet philosophy and tactics and occasionally by the existence of great centers of military power, notably the Nazi regime in Germany and the Japanese Government.”

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 24 -28, 39.

¹⁸³ To see counter examples in Kennan’s thinking to intervention in Central Asia and the Middle East look at his *Memoirs*, 317 and PPS/23. The regions of Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia, outside the Far East, are generally not included in his papers discussing U.S. strategy towards the Soviet Union.

¹⁸⁴ Lippmann, *The Cold War*, 29-30.

¹⁸⁵ Kennan, *Memoirs*, 354.

to stiffen out their backs. He only originally imagined containment as a strategy as lasting to the point of bringing the Soviets to the negotiating table and rolling back the Soviet military presence in Eastern Europe. Unfortunately, Kennan could not make such clarifications publicly to rectify the press's misinterpretations as he was banned from defending his thesis in public and had written the article anonymously.¹⁸⁶ Kennan's X-Article only gave him public notoriety though and did little to change his standing in the State Department, presumably because his thesis remained nothing new to anyone familiar with his thinking.¹⁸⁷ However, there existed a general disconnect between Kennan and even some of his policymaking counterparts, as they misunderstood the second part of his thesis calling for a more political U.S. response, thus ignoring it all together.¹⁸⁸

Instead, to his dismay, Kennan found his unintentional strategy of containment wrapped up in the generalization of American idealisms. In his Long Telegram, layout of the European Recovery Plan, and X-Article, Kennan stressed a Soviet political threat to the West. He sought for U.S. policy to create an autonomous Europe, a Europe West of the Soviet Union's interwar borders, a more liberal Soviet regime, and a self-contained U.S.¹⁸⁹ In his "Sources of Soviet Conduct," Kennan acted as a theoretical realist, not advocating for ideals, but prescribing his view of an ideal realistic U.S. response to the Soviet Union's expansionist political objectives. In contrast to what other historians, such as Walter Hixson, have portrayed and what most of Washington thought, Kennan did not believe these political objectives necessarily included communism.¹⁹⁰ To Kennan in both the Long Telegram and "Sources of Soviet Conduct,"

¹⁸⁶ Kennan, *Memoirs*, 357-365.

¹⁸⁷ Miscamble, *George F. Kennan and the Making of American Foreign Policy*, 68-70.

¹⁸⁸ Harper, *American Visions of Europe*, 199.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 183-185.

¹⁹⁰ Hixson, *George F. Kennan*, 44-45.

communism only served as a tool for the Soviet Union to achieve much more traditional objectives of a buffer zone and global political power.¹⁹¹

Unfortunately for Kennan, his “realist” approach did not match up with the idealist values of the American public, and he held little control, especially with the press, of how they proceeded to interpret his idea of containing the Soviets. Kennan may not have disagreed at the time with what he wrote, but he took issue to its interpretations by those in the media, especially Lippmann’s.¹⁹² While his language was ambiguous and lent itself to interpretation, the press and in some instances historians, spun his X-Article into a militaristic approach to the Soviet Union. If Kennan did not expressly say containment was not militant in nature, he did not directly say it was militant either.¹⁹³ As Harper suggests, speaking in a government context versus a personal one remains different for any person. Kennan could not possibly have always remained consistent in everything he said.¹⁹⁴ Even as people drew the idea of containment from Kennan’s X-Article, they themselves spend little time analyzing its origins and meaning, instead simply taking the idea of containment as given and putting all his other actions into its context. Historians and policymakers have held him so seriously to this idea, but have paid little attention to his actual article. They acknowledge without saying it in the subject of their texts that Kennan’s actions matter more than his words, but remember him mainly because of these two instances of fame. They fail to look at what he attempted to convey and its context. In deciphering his beliefs towards containment and U.S. foreign policy towards the Soviet Union, discovering the themes and therefore the spirit of his arguments remains more important than

¹⁹¹ Kennan, *Memoirs*, 358-359.

¹⁹² Kennan, *Memoirs*, 359-361. Several months after the publication of Lippmann’s articles, Kennan wrote a long “plaintive” and “overdramatic” response to him while sick in bed with ulcers. He never sent the letter and admitted that “it was probably best.” See Kennan’s *Memoirs, 1925-1950*, p.359-362.

¹⁹³ See Hixson’s *George F. Kennan* for counter argument, p.44-48.

¹⁹⁴ Harper, *American Visions of Europe*, 183-185.

scrutinizing his every word under a microscope. When Kennan put his ideas into practice, as seen in the Marshall Plan and in his future work on the Policy Planning Staff, he stuck to his idea of containment. He sought to limit Soviet political advance by implementing policies to bring political and economic stability to a country, and not by building up arms against the Soviet Union.

Chapter 4

Kennan's Containment Reimagined: Kennan and the Beginning of the New Global Order

By the fall of 1947, the romantic in Kennan, while not completely gone, had turned largely into a realist. The Soviet Union of the 1930s had taken his innocence and the Second World War had laid bare the weaknesses of current international relations. Living in the Soviet Union in the 1930s and early 1940s had provided him with a feel for the country and its people, exposing to him the strengths, weaknesses, and intentions of the Communist Party's power. Similar to Nazi Germany, Kennan saw the Soviet Union as having nothing to offer ideologically to the people it occupied, and no cultural advantages to gain meaningful international political traction. The U.S. of course only gave the Soviet threat more credence through multiple administrations' habits of generalization and altruistic terms of fighting for "the free people of the world [who] look to [the United States] for support in maintaining their freedoms."¹⁹⁵ Kennan found such characterizations supercilious and counterproductive, artificially creating an all-powerful enemy.

Yet as director of the Policy Planning Staff, Kennan found himself continuously hampered by his X-Article. Many of his peers and those who came to analyze his actions saw them only in terms of the ideas portrayed in it, unfairly holding him to their perceptions of his words, as previously seen with Walter Lippmann. Meanwhile, Kennan for the first time in his life dealt with trying to direct a global U.S. foreign policy and not just one for the Soviet Union. As he continued to put his ideas into practice in the context of global U.S. foreign policy, people frequently, to his dismay, put them under the consideration of his X-Article.

¹⁹⁵ President Truman speech given before Congress on March 12, 1947. Can be found online on the Truman Library website:
https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/doctrine/large/documents/index.php?documentdate=1947-03-12&documentid=5-9&pagenumber=1.

Historians though have still not come to a consensus on what Kennan's containment meant in practical application. They try to interpret the ambiguity in Kennan's "Sources of Soviet Conduct," and then look at his actions in context of their discerned interpretations, not taking a holistic approach in studying his creation of containment. While Kennan's mindset as a Russianist and his actions as head of the Policy Planning Staff clear the ambiguity in his X-
Article by demonstrating how he imagined the U.S. countering the Soviets on the international stage, they also highlight the failures in his thinking. While Kennan had great insight and predictive analysis in regards to the Soviet Union and their approach to foreign policy, like every theory, his ideas held weak points that later created confusion, especially with international control and buildup of nuclear weapons. To make matters worse, Kennan had the unfortunate task of trying to articulate and implement a new type of strategy to international relations in response to the new political threat he saw in the Soviet Union.

As director of the Policy Planning Staff, he had some success in implementing his vision of containment, but failed to explain a conceivable containment policy without nuclear buildup. From his return to Washington in 1947 to his leaving the Policy Planning Staff in 1950, he lost control of his idea of containment as a diplomatic method to those who applied it to military considerations, dooming his containment policy to militarism as it began the long fall of unintended consequences.

Successful Containment

In March of 1948, Secretary of State George C. Marshall sent Kennan to Japan to deal with General McArthur's refusal to work with the State Department and his administration's threat to their containment strategy. Less than a year earlier, in a report for the Policy Planning Staff in

October of 1947, Kennan had expressed his fears that the U.S.'s role in Japan stood at a crucial turning point. He felt the U.S. had reached a stage of diminishing returns to occupation, but withdrawing from Japan too early, without the proper political and economic stability, exposed them to the risk of communist subversion from Moscow.¹⁹⁶ General McArthur had already implemented a series of rapidly progressive reforms and generally, the Truman Administration felt, needed reeling back into line, moving Japan too quickly for its own good.¹⁹⁷ Kennan agreed with McArthur on the importance of rebuilding Japan, but he found that the general vastly underestimated the threat of communist subversion to the country and the subsequent consequences of allowing too much independence and change to Japanese political society.

The United States needed to achieve the balancing act of not restricting Japanese freedoms but at the same time not leaving so soon as to create political and economic instability for Moscow to exploit. After visiting Japan in February of 1948 and speaking to McArthur, Kennan advised the State Department to restrict McArthur's power and to begin moving towards more normalized relationships with a Japanese national political body. Stabilizing the Japanese economy and political climate and returning towards normal international relations, he reasoned served as the best way of combating the Kremlin's communist hopes of a communist Japan.¹⁹⁸

Both McArthur and Kennan agreed that the need to rebuild an independent Japan surpassed any other political concerns for the country, but they had different understandings of the global responses to such actions. Both determined that further reparations would only remove more vital capital, and that the Japanese economy could only continue to grow through the

¹⁹⁶ PPS/10, "Results of Planning Staff Study of Questions Involved in the Japanese Peace Settlement," October 14, 1947, in *The State Department Policy Planning Staff Papers, 1947*, vol. I in *The State Department Policy Planning Staff Papers, 1947-1949*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1983), 109-112.

¹⁹⁷ John Lewis Gaddis, *George F. Kennan: An American Life*, (New York: The Penguin Group, 2011), 301.

¹⁹⁸ PPS 28/2, "Recommendations with Respect to United States Policy toward Japan (A revision of PPS/28 and PPS/28/1)," March 25, 1948, in *The State Department Policy Planning Staff Papers, 1948*, vol. II in *The State Department Policy Planning Staff Papers, 1947-1949*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1983), 171-174.

normalization of their international trade. They disagreed though on the role of U.S. troops in the country. McArthur saw them as largely symbolic to show a U.S. willing to stand up to communism, and did not believe that communism would ever really achieve a hold on Japanese society. He viewed the presence of U.S. troops as putting further strain on U.S. relations with China and the Soviet Union, rather than giving the U.S. international strength. To Kennan though, the U.S. troops stationed in the region and occupation provided a confirmation of their strength and solidarity against their Soviet adversaries. He did “not trust Russian good faith in the observance of any treaty of demilitarization of Japan.” Staying strong and not backing out of Japan until ready served as the strong-man’s approach and a means short of war to contain the spread of Soviet influence. The time had come he felt to convince the general to move forward without the Soviets in mind.¹⁹⁹ By convincing McArthur of this peril to an independent Japan, Kennan mainly managed to get him to trust, or at least work with, the State Department and the Administration. He, like McArthur, had little illusions about the U.S.’s ability to significantly influence the Pacific Asian region. Kennan did however recognize the importance in establishing a free, democratic, stable system in Japan.

A year and a half after his visit, Washington showed its support for Kennan thinking with the National Security Council’s NSC 49, the “Department of State Comments on Current Strategic Evaluation of U.S. Security Needs in Japan.” Adopting his rhetoric, the report to the President stated that “the denial of Japan to the U.S.S.R. constituted a problem of combatting, not overt attack and invasion, but concealed aggression.” The success of the United States there largely depended on “the attitude of the Japanese,” with the greatest threat to the U.S.’s goals Soviet “agitation, subversion and coup d’etat...a conspiracy inspired by the Kremlin, but conducted by

¹⁹⁹ PPS 28/2, March 25, 1948, in *PPS Papers*, II, 209-210.

the Japanese.” The NSC advised for political, economic, and social health as key strategies for containing Soviet influence, believing Japan had progressed enough socially to develop their own strong police force to keep such extreme political threats in check.²⁰⁰

While Kennan considers his involvement in Japan one of his greatest successes on the Policy Planning Staff, few historians of containment cover it. Most likely, they overlook Japan because of the relatively minimal apparent threat of communism there in their eyes. Communism never gained traction in Japan though partially because of Kennan’s interference in convincing McArthur to slow down his reforms and take the Soviets seriously as a threat. His strategy in Japan served as a classic example of Kennan’s idea of shifting geographic points of focus. With its proximity to the U.S.S.R. and China, Japan possessed great geopolitical significance and afforded the U.S. a foothold in East Asia. In a part of the world that soon turned very red with communism, it represented a place of democratic, capitalist success to ally with the West. By successfully administrating Japan, the U.S. prevented the “possibilities for intrigue, subversion, and seizure of power by the Japanese communists.”²⁰¹ The United States did not use war or violent methods either to contain the communist influence. By focusing on the needs of Japan economically, educationally, politically, and even militarily Kennan and McArthur administered a successful occupation and recovery over time that enabled stability through peaceful measures. Kennan considered Japan “after the Marshall Plan, the most significant constructive contribution [he] was ever able to make in government,” indicating that Japan’s eventual recovery and staving

²⁰⁰ “Department of State Comments on Current Strategic Evaluation of U.S. Security needs in Japan (NSC 49),” September 30, 1949, in *Department of State Policy Planning Staff Papers, 1949*, vol. III in *The State Department Policy Planning Staff Papers, 1947-1949*, (New York: Garland Publishing), 183-186.

²⁰¹ George F. Kennan, *Memoirs, 1925 – 1950*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967), 394.

off of communist influence indicates it served in his mind as a model for containment of Soviet communist global power.²⁰²

Most of the focus for historians, Kennan, and other Washington insiders at the time remained Germany and the potential for a European Union. Similar to Japan, a power vacuum still existed in much of Central and Eastern Europe that left Western Europe ripe for a Soviet political takeover if unattended.²⁰³ Kennan argued “that while ideals existed in people’s minds, capabilities determined what states could do.”²⁰⁴ The United States needed to recognize the limitations of their ability to fight the expansion of Soviet influence. Europe and the Mediterranean remained in their reach, but places such as the Middle East and the Far East diverged too greatly in traditional ideology from the West to be attainable. A universalistic approach would not work to combat the Soviet political threat, but through the European Recovery Program the U.S. might put enough pressure to bring the Soviets to the negotiating table. Already, communism had deteriorated as a threat in Northern Europe, and Kennan hoped to continue this progress into southern regions of the continent.²⁰⁵

Germany therefore stood as the key development for the future of Europe and U.S. global objectives. Kennan feared continued occupation may disgruntle the Germans, but the rest of Europe, particularly France, feared yet another German monster. Armed forces to sooth European fears did not stand as a long term solution either. Once again, as in Japan, he advocated for the continual development and integration of Germany into the growing European Union in the West, hoping to create stability, self-responsibility, and a stake in the new European order.²⁰⁶

²⁰² Kennan, *Memoirs*, 393.

²⁰³ Walter L. Hixson, *George F. Kennan: Cold War Iconoclast*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 50.

²⁰⁴ Gaddis, *George F. Kennan*, 299 - 300.

²⁰⁵ PPS/23, “Review of Current Trends United States Foreign Policy,” February 24, 1948, in *PPS Papers*, II, 96-102.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

The Marshall Plan originally came into conception partially for this very purpose,²⁰⁷ and Kennan and his staff believed they could influence Eastern European states' cooperation with the U.S.S.R. through Western economic development, a task only possible with the inclusion of Germany.²⁰⁸

The consequence of redeveloping Western Europe, particularly Germany, meant leaving behind Eastern Europe. While not originally intended, the Marshall Plan and ERP “cemented the division of Europe” with the accelerated recovery of the West compared to the East.²⁰⁹

Unsurprisingly, such differences in development led to conflict between the West and the Soviet Union on their most closely shared frontier, Berlin. After the introduction of the Deutsche mark into the German western zone in June of 1948, the Soviets decided to blockade the British, French, and American controlled sections of Berlin, as the Soviet zone of occupation completely surrounded the city. The West's response though in airlifting supplies to West Berlin from June of 1948 until May of 1949 demonstrated the strength and noble perseverance advocated by Kennan in his X-Article. It put on display the economic, military, and, to many, ideological superiority of Western democracy and capitalism in comparison to Soviet communism, and Kennan considered it a great success. Even if the U.S. could not indefinitely provide aid for Berlin, the Soviets lost political capital every day the airlift continued.²¹⁰ While he advised for a state of military readiness in the case of war and for strong protest against any Soviet interference in the operation,²¹¹ he perceived the Berlin Blockade as a last-ditch effort—albeit a

²⁰⁷ John Lamberton Harper, *American Visions of Europe: Franklin D. Roosevelt, George F. Kennan, and Dean G. Acheson*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 201.

²⁰⁸ Scott Lucas and Kaeten Mistry, “Illusions of Coherence: George F. Kennan, U.S. Strategy and Political Warfare in the Early Cold War, 1946-1950,” *Diplomatic History* 33 (January 2009), 54.

²⁰⁹ Hixson, *George F. Kennan*, 56.

²¹⁰ PPS/42, “Position of the United States with Respect to Germany Following Breakdown of Moscow Discussions,” November 2, 1948, in *PPS Papers*, II, 477-9.

²¹¹ PPS/40, “Berlin Airlift,” October 1, 1948, in *PPS Papers*, II, 452-454.

poor one—by the Soviets to match Western power, and an acknowledgement of communist East Germany’s failure to keep up with the capitalist West Germany.²¹² In the end the Soviets ended their blockade. The United States won the political victory that Kennan had hoped for, diminishing the aura around the Soviet communist machine, and won over the German people as defenders of their freedom.

To Kennan, the logical next step in the development of the German Question came in the form of talks over reunification. Twice during the blockade in PPS/37 and PPS/37/1, he advocated for the U.S. to put forward a viable plan for a German settlement. In PPS/37/1 Kennan laid out his own plan for German reunification, what came to be known as Program A. He called for an Allied Commission approved “constitutional government for all of Germany...as soon as possible,” with “all political parties at present authorized in any zone...permitted to offer candidates throughout Germany,” and “free elections...under United Nations auspices.” To sell his plan, he emphasized that continual Allied control “of complete disarmament and demilitarization would be maintained” for Germany and that the “military threat involved in the deployment of Soviet forces in eastern Germany would be removed.” He stressed that “freedom and supervision of elections would practically guarantee...a non-communist government.”²¹³

The West needed to think dynamically rather than statically. The “course of action and change is harder than the course of action,” he argued, but the East-West divide would eventually end, and the West had the opportunity to exploit their goodwill amongst the German people and the war weary Soviets to establish a favorable government.²¹⁴ Similar to the case in

²¹² PPS/42, November 2, 1948, in *PPS Papers*, II, 477-479.

²¹³ PPS/37/1, “Position to be Taken by the United States at a CFM Meeting,” November 15, 1948, in *PPS Papers*, II, 349-371.

²¹⁴ PPS/37, “Policy Questions Concerning a Possible German Settlement,” August 12, 1948, in *PPS Papers*, II, 331-333.

Japan, occupation, had reached a point of diminishing returns in terms of what the U.S. could feasibly accomplish under the current circumstances. While Kennan remained unsure if the Germans could govern themselves yet and worried about the cost of potentially redirecting the ERP from just West Germany to the entire country, he saw little to lose from proposing the plan. If the Soviets refused the U.S. still received profitable propaganda and could just move forward with their original plan under a divided Germany.²¹⁵

His peers in Washington however viewed Kennan as wholly naïve to the situation at hand, and found Program A alarming. They felt that the current situation in Germany and the world did not currently lend itself to unification. Kennan remained concerned though over a United States “empire by invitation” in Europe.²¹⁶ No country, not even the U.S. possessed the resources in the long run to properly administer and defend as far off a people as the Germans. Their European allies, especially France, needed to accept greater responsibility for their security and held overstated fears about unification.²¹⁷ The formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO, in the spring of 1949 did not absolve the countries of Western Europe of this responsibility either and did not afford “the main answer to the Russian effort to achieve domination over western Europe, which still appear[ed]...primarily political in nature.”²¹⁸ His views regarding Germany and his fears about NATO received little support amongst his colleagues however, and their rejection began Kennan’s road towards isolation in Washington.²¹⁹

²¹⁵ PPS/37, August 12, 1948, in *PPS Papers*, II, 326-333.

²¹⁶ Wilson D. Miscamble, “Rejected Architect and Master Builder: George Kennan, Dean Acheson and Postwar Europe,” *The Review of Politics* 58 (Summer, 1996), 447.

²¹⁷ PPS/37/1, August 12, 1948, in *PPS Papers*, II, 335-371.

²¹⁸ PPS/43, “Considerations Affecting the Conclusion of a North Atlantic Security Pact,” November 24, 1948, in *PPS Papers*, II, 490-494.

²¹⁹ Michael J. Hogan, *The Marshall Plan: America, Britain, and the Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1947-1952*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 258.

Secretary of State Dean Acheson considered Western unity in Europe more important than a unified Germany, and thought Kennan's program disrupted this harmony, particularly with France and Britain. The Soviets had yet to give any indication that they would even consider it either, leaving Acheson highly doubtful of its success.²²⁰ Most officials in Washington by then had given up on reunification, and some historians such as Gaddis contend that Kennan overestimated West German resentment of the United States and underestimated their fear of the Soviets. The Germans may not have liked living under the U.S., but they certainly did not want the troops to leave either.²²¹ While Kennan largely saw Program A as a draft and the Germanophile in him understood the historical importance of unification, Acheson and others recognized the need for the U.S. to reassure their allies who had just fought two world wars against Germany in forty years.

U.S. Misperceptions of Soviet Communism

The problem Kennan ran into with his dreams of German reunification, came from a larger Western misunderstanding of the power of Soviet Communism. The U.S.S.R.'s geopolitical position situated on the borders of both Western Europe and Alaska combined with its status as the first communist power and the rise of other communist regimes around the world made U.S. politicians and military strategists associate Soviet Communism as the ultimate threat to the free world. The U.S. held similar extensive borders, spanning the Pacific, Atlantic, and the Americas, often putting the two nations in direct conflict over influence over the same regions. Critics of Kennan as well as his apologists have all fallen into the trap of failing to distinguish between what Kennan viewed as largely a Soviet political threat, versus a worldwide communist

²²⁰ Miscamble, "Rejected Architect and Master Builder," 444-447.

²²¹ Gaddis, *George F. Kennan*, 345-351.

“conspiracy” that he felt endangered the West.²²² The communist regimes in both Yugoslavia and China, for example, demonstrated to Kennan that a communist country did not have to equate to Soviet power. Kennan found the over sensationalist, radical response of many in the United States government—which led to the hearings of many of Kennan’s colleagues and friends such as John Paton Davies—absurd.²²³ Such actions as Truman’s “Loyalty Program” in 1947 to root out communist influences and the rise of McCarthyism in the fifties seemed to Kennan “to diminish the chances for defeating communist purposes,”²²⁴ and he strongly believed that “nothing could have pleased [their] enemies more”²²⁵ than this “governmental witch-hunting.”²²⁶

The Soviet Union, while holding much global political clout, still held the same weaknesses of any empire attempting expansionism and facing opposing nationalism. Kennan worried about a Soviet Union “too over-extended – at once too weak and too terrified of their own weakness – to behave rationally in the most elementary questions of power.” Over extension made the Soviets weak, but border insecurity pushed them to expand to create a buffer zone, only further weakening them, with their apprehension keeping them from acting rationally. Moscow wanted to alter the world order for their benefit, but followed the same irrationality of the Nazis, trying to force an ideology that preached subservience to a faraway capital onto foreign peoples. Rather than a communist agenda to rule the world, Soviet objectives looked more similar to traditional Russian imperialism.²²⁷

²²² For the best illustration see Hixson’s *George F. Kennan*, p.51.

²²³ Gaddis, *George F. Kennan*, 387-388.

²²⁴ Kennan to James E. Webb on March 30, 1950, *Foreign Relations of the United States: The Intelligence Community, 1950-1955*, 5-8. Accessed books of *Foreign Relations of the United States* through University of Wisconsin-Madison Digital Collections.

²²⁵ Lecture delivered by Kennan on May 5, 1950 in Milwaukee, George F. Kennan Papers; 1861-2014 (mostly 1950-2000), Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library, Box 2, folder “May 5, 1950.”

²²⁶ Kennan, *Memoirs*, 391.

²²⁷ Kennan to Bohlen, August 20, 1948, GFK Papers, Box 140, folder 2.

This Soviet imperialism Kennan imagined would eventually run into problems against other countries nationalism. “The critical issue was how territory might be used, not how much an enemy might rule” when it came to power vacuums that the Soviets might try and exploit.²²⁸ The split between Tito’s communist regime in Yugoslavia and the Kremlin in the spring of 1948, Kennan believed, demonstrated the ability of economic programs like the ERP to put stress on the Soviet’s relationship with their satellite states and rollback Soviet political power in the region.²²⁹ The United States did not need to incite revolution in Eastern Europe to weaken Moscow’s power. It needed to encourage other communist states to follow Tito’s nationalistic example.²³⁰ Kennan and the Policy Planning Staff did not see themselves as conducting political warfare against communism, but against the expansion of Moscow’s political influence.²³¹ Criticism that the Policy Planning Staff confronted issues in Eastern Europe with an “ad hoc application of nascent political warfare” instead of “a strategic blueprint” holds merit, but fails to acknowledge that Kennan and his colleagues found themselves operating against a new kind of enemy.²³² The United States had never before confronted a political threat like the Soviet Union, nor had any country dealt with one so complex and global without any other supporting world powers. Kennan faced the problem of trying to convey a nuanced containment strategy against Moscow contrived communist subversion, but without committing to a never-ending fight against communism itself. The greatest remaining problem, however, was discerning Kremlin led communist movements from their nationally inspired communist counterparts.

²²⁸ Gaddis, *George F. Kennan*, 297.

²²⁹ Harper, *American Visions of Europe*, 206.

²³⁰ Gaddis, *George F. Kennan*, 354.

²³¹ Lucas and Mistry, “Illusions of Coherence,” 41.

²³² *Ibid.*, 55.

As Kennan predicted in his X-Article, the greatest threat to the Soviet Union came from within and its disregard to other nations' sovereignty. "The Kremlin leaders [were] so inconsiderate, so relentless, so overbearing and so cynical in the discipline they impose on their followers that few can stand their authority for very long."²³³ Tito, he stipulated, provided the perfect example of a communist leader with the requisite "territory, police power, military power, and disciplined followers" to challenge "the myth of Stalin's omniscience and omnipotence" and "split the whole communist movement."²³⁴ Tito served as the U.S.'s "most precious asset" in fighting Soviet imperialism. His own independent, successful rise to power directly challenged the belief that a communist state could only succeed with Moscow's assistance. His defiance of the Kremlin, Kennan argued, had struck a chord in other communist states nationalistic causes. To Kennan, "a Communist state which defie[d] the Kremlin's authority [was] a more horrible prospect in Moscow's eyes than the most incorrigible capitalist state."²³⁵ In the name therefore of rolling back Soviet political influence in the region, he argued the United States needed to establish an economic relationship with Yugoslavia.²³⁶ Through economic means, similar to rebuilding programs in Western Europe and Japan, the United States may reinforce any division in the communist consortium by helping them separate themselves from power of the Kremlin.

With Yugoslavia being the first successful instance of a communist country breaking away from Moscow, Kennan strove to convince Secretary of State Acheson of the importance of Titoism, especially in the Soviet satellite region.²³⁷ As long as Yugoslavia remained free of

²³³ PPS/38, "United States Objectives with Respect to Russia," August 18, 1948, in *The State Department Policy Planning Staff Papers*, II, 390.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 391.

²³⁵ PPS/49, "Economic Relations Between the United States and Yugoslavia," February 10, 1949, in *The State Department Policy Planning Staff Papers*, III, 17-20.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 22-24.

²³⁷ Gaddis, *George F. Kennan*, 352.

influence from outside power—i.e. Soviet influence—“its internal regime is basically its own business” and that the character of the internal regime need not prevent the U.S. from seeking normal relations. Yugoslavia might still remain a communist state hostile to “capitalist imperialism,”²³⁸ but “communism need not be monolithic.” The Soviet Union could not possibly control all ideological allies or maintain them as friends. The U.S. needed to exploit these divisions by cooperating with some communist states and not others, “dividing enemies by driving wedges,” emphasizing “that the domestic character of a government was less important than its internal behavior.”²³⁹

In a similar situation on the other side of the world, Kennan once again differentiated between a nationalistic communist regime and a Moscow backed puppet state, advising strongly against continual U.S. involvement in the quagmire of the Chinese Civil War. In his opinion, the United States had erred in supporting Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalists so long in the fight against Mao’s CCP. “Chiang succeeded neither in unifying nor in defending China” and “continuing exclusive commitment to Chiang... [was] not good diplomacy.”²⁴⁰ Astutely predicting a Nationalist defeat, Kennan wanted to preserve U.S. resources for winnable fights.²⁴¹ Talks with the State Department’s China expert, John Paton Davies Jr., convinced Kennan that a communist victory in the Chinese Civil War did not equate to a victory for Moscow.²⁴² As with Yugoslavia, a Maoist China did not necessarily pose a significant threat to the U.S. Kennan argued passivity remained the best response. While “the allegiance of China’s millions is worth striving for,”²⁴³ Kennan wrote to the State Department in PPS/39 in the fall of 1948, Mao’s strength as a national

²³⁸ PPS/35, “The Attitude of this Government Toward Events in Yugoslavia,” June 30, 1948, in *PPS Papers*, II, 317.

²³⁹ Gaddis, *George F. Kennan*, 323.

²⁴⁰ PPS/39, “United States Policy Toward China,” September 15, 1948, in *PPS Papers*, II, 425-426.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 425-6.

²⁴² Gaddis, *George F. Kennan*, 351-2.

²⁴³ PPS/39, September 15, 1948, in *PPS Papers*, II, 422.

leader of the people made China an unlikely long term ally of the Kremlin.²⁴⁴ In controlling China, the Kremlin ran into similar problems as in Yugoslavia, except that unlike Tito, Mao remained highly popular in China. Against such a revered persona, letting events play out seemed like the best strategy to Kennan.

It is impossible that the Kremlin could in the pace of the next crucial five years mobilize China's resources and manpower to the extent that they would constitute a serious threat to U.S. security. It remains to be proved that the Kremlin could, if it survives as a predatory international force, accomplish this over the long run. If Soviet imperialism does not survive, Chinese communism will be of minor security concern to us for it has potentially grave significance to us only as a possible adjunct of Soviet politico-military power.²⁴⁵

Establishing and running a brand new national regime would keep Mao too busy to focus on interfering against the U.S. Instead of approaching China as a political concern, Kennan advised basing Chinese relations off more traditional, local economic considerations.²⁴⁶ With little chance of the Soviet's achieving political control, the United States needed only to keep its distance, which would preserve valuable U.S. resources for more winnable fights.

Strong nationalist movements, rather than revolutions against communist ideology, gave the United States the best chance then of containing, if not rolling back Soviet power. The "Stalinist dogma of subservience to the U.S.S.R., particularly the dictum that satellite interests cannot and must not conflict with those of the U.S.S.R.," meant in 1949 that Soviet interests always dominated the satellites', such as Bulgarian, Czechoslovak, and Polish, national ones. The Policy Planning Staff under Kennan's leadership identified "considerations of national as well as personal interest" coming "into conflict with the

²⁴⁴ PPS/39, September 15, 1948, in *PPS Papers*, II, 430.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 432.

²⁴⁶ PPS/39/1, "The United States Policy Towards China," November 24, 1948, in *Policy Planning Staff Papers*, II, 450-451.

colonial policy pursued by Soviet interests.”²⁴⁷ Like any stereotypical imperialist regime, the Soviet Union, as exemplified with Tito, ran into problems when faced with strong nationalist opposition, even if it came from a fellow communist government. The long-term goal for the United States did not after all rest in the total destruction of the Soviet Union, but in forcing Soviet troops back behind their own border.²⁴⁸ The main strategy then in containing the Soviet Union and eventually reducing their power stood in provoking the retraction of Soviet political interests, not by unilateral military means, but by exposing fractions already existing in the satellite states through subversive forces of the U.S.’s own design.

In accomplishing this feat, the United States stood as its own worst enemy, getting lost in what Kennan characterized as the idea of U.S. “exceptionalism” instead of acknowledging its faults and acting as an example to the world.²⁴⁹ Rather than the gun ho, universalistic leadership that the United States touted in 1949, Kennan wanted a realist approach. He perceived American idealism, the belief that the United States stood as a city upon a hill, the only hope for the free world, as a drastic oversimplification of the problems of peace with the Soviet Union. It over exaggerated the Soviet threat, forgetting that the Soviets were made of flesh and blood, with the weaknesses of ordinary people.²⁵⁰ Kennan warned again and again against universalistic approaches to foreign policy that overextended U.S. resources, such as in the Far East.²⁵¹ “If the conflict came it would be the result of [Washington’s] own tactics and their own insistence that it was inevitable.”²⁵² A global

²⁴⁷ PPS/59, “United States Policy Toward the Soviet Satellite States in Eastern Europe,” August 25, 1949, in *Policy Planning Staff Papers*, III, 129-130.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 138.

²⁴⁹ Hixson, *George F. Kennan*, 100.

²⁵⁰ Kennan to Lippmann, April 6, 1948, GFK Papers, Box 299, folder 7.

²⁵¹ PPS/23, February 24, 1948, in *Policy Planning Staff Papers*, II, 134.

²⁵² George F. Kennan, entry on December 17, 1945, *The Kennan Diaries, 1904 -2005*, ed. Frank Costigoila, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014), 191.

strategy of containment as a complete war on communism, to Kennan remained not only impossible, but irresponsible, and he only considered communist encroachment in Europe and Japan as threats to the United States interests. Yet Kennan could only watch in vain as other policy decision makers adopted his containment ideology only in part, ignoring his advice for the U.S. to act as “a country...coping successfully with the problems of its internal life and with the responsibilities of a world power,” a role model to the rest of the globe.²⁵³ Instead, they only looked at the Soviet Union in terms of a traditional threat deserving traditional military strategy.

Kennan's Containment Unraveled

While policymakers and history manipulated and misconstrued Kennan's containment strategy, Kennan fell victim to his own intellectualism. He thought directing the Policy Planning Staff granted him power, but even in his more esteemed position he still felt the shackles of the government.²⁵⁴ Kennan had little say in the actual implementation of policy, and at times had little control of how his own ideas of containment panned out on the international stage. Despite his status as the creator of containment, his views on Germany remained largely ignored and thought of as naïve. Some even saw them as against the very containment of Soviet political advance for which he had advocated.

Historians such as Hixson, Miscamble, Scott Lucas, and Kaeten Mistry have portrayed Kennan as too self-important, too sensitive, and too emotional to effectively work in a team, limiting his influence.²⁵⁵ In the face of criticism, Hixson describes Kennan as falling back on his

²⁵³ George F. Kennan, “Sources of Soviet Conduct,” *Foreign Affairs* 25 (July 1947), 867.

²⁵⁴ Hixson, *George F. Kennan*, 86.

²⁵⁵ For one account, see Hixson's *George F. Kennan*, 91-92 and Miscamble, “Rejected Architect and Master Builder,” 448. For an apologist's view of Kennan see Gaddis's *An American Life*.

elitism and returning to his old mistrust of the common man.²⁵⁶ He overthought his influence in Washington while failing to bring “strategic coherence to American foreign relations.”²⁵⁷ While the U.S. frequently did appear blind in trying to guide foreign policy as a world power, to say Kennan “pointedly eschewed pursuit of a grand strategy” seems disingenuous to a man who had never before conducted foreign policy on a global scale and assigns him too much blame in the collective failure of the State Department and the White House. Kennan did attribute more importance to himself in Washington than warranted, missing his own Eurocentric bias, but no more so than any other person who achieves success.²⁵⁸

His inability to understand how his audience of policymakers, politicians, and journalists might interpret his strategy in the context of global developments however allowed the policy of containment to spiral out of his control. Kennan’s naivety regarding the implications of nuclear weapons in containing Soviet political power especially left room for interpretation. In his defense, beyond a brief stint in military school as a teen, he had no real experience with the practical implementation of military strategy. The totality of destructiveness of modern warfare seen in both World Wars made Kennan believe that war no longer served as a useful political tool, especially after the advent of the atom bomb.²⁵⁹ While he advocated for a state of long term military preparedness, he saw it as a joint operation with strongman diplomacy and part of the larger picture of containing Soviet power.²⁶⁰

Kennan did not see the U.S.S.R. as planning direct military action either. Most of the country’s infrastructure remained in shambles from World War II and the Soviet people as well

²⁵⁶ Hixson, *George F. Kennan*, 71.

²⁵⁷ Lucas and Mistry, “Illusions of Coherence,” 40.

²⁵⁸ See PPS/23, February 24, 1948, in *PPS Papers*, II, p. 119, where Kennan not so subtly implies he serves as the best possible arbitrator for any future negotiations with the Soviet Union.

²⁵⁹ George F. Kennan, *Russia and the West: Under Lenin and Stalin*, (New York: Mentor Book, 1960), 366.

²⁶⁰ PPS/33, “Factor Affecting the Nature of the U.S. Defense Arrangements in the Light of Soviet Policies,” June 23, 1948, in *PPS Papers*, II, 290-292.

as the Red Army remained war weary. Following in the tradition of imperial Russia and their own ideology, Stalin and the Party heads had a strong preference for political rather than military expansion. Direct military action and occupation did not provide the Soviets with the “long-term political power over western European countries” they desired. Such action would provide them with “open responsibility which could not be easily liquidated” if necessary.²⁶¹ Any initiative on their own part would result in the loss of too much political capital. Yet Kennan left himself open on multiple occasions, even after the publication of the X-Article, for military interpretation by advising for a military deterrence in case “the shadow of the Soviet armed strength” grew too formidable for their allies.²⁶² He believed the United States needed to make it clear to the Soviets that they neither feared them nor were going away anytime soon. By advocating for an arms buildup as such a demonstration of readiness and deterrence with such generalized words as “counterforce,” “unceasing constant pressure,” and the “logic of force” though, he inadvertently promoted a nuclear arms race that others in Washington seized as a central part of the U.S.’s foreign policy.²⁶³

With the Soviet’s successful testing of an atomic bomb in August of 1949, Kennan faced the rapid transformation of the U.S.S.R.’s bargaining power and the rise of what appeared a very real and present threat to U.S. borders. Suddenly, all diplomacy seemed to revolve around military concerns, and increasingly Kennan felt the Soviets dictated how the United States and Western Europe conducted foreign relations.²⁶⁴ Rather than implementing reactionary policies, Kennan believed the West had to continue down the path it had already set for itself. The French particularly needed to get “rid of their preoccupation with what others can do to save them and

²⁶¹ PPS/33, June 23, 1948, in *PPS Papers*, II, 282-283.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 288-290.

²⁶³ See Kennan’s “Sources of Soviet Conduct” and Long Telegram.

²⁶⁴ Kennan Letter to Bohlen, October 12, 1949, GFK Papers, Box 140, folder 1.

strik[e] out themselves, with such other continental countries as they can gather around them, to make Europeans out of the Germans while there is still time.”²⁶⁵ To avoid war, the West needed to grant Germany greater military strength and stop inhibiting its integration to allow them to contribute to the West’s cause.²⁶⁶ A show of strength and solidarity on the border of Soviet influence would show the Kremlin that interference in the affairs of the West would not come easy. Kennan worried that if the U.S. continued with their current belligerent stance, they gave “the Russians no alternative but to continue their present policies or see further areas of central and eastern Europe slide into a U.S. – dominated alliance against them, and in this way mak[ing] it unlikely any settlement of east-west difference except by war.”²⁶⁷ The possession of such military strength did not mean the West necessarily had to use it. While the U.S. needed to contain the further advances of the Soviets, they also needed to provide them with a way out besides war.

Others in Washington however did not see the line with a nuclear Soviet Union so flexible. Many followed the thinking of Charles Bohlen, who had disillusioned himself to the idea of neutrality in Europe between the United States and Soviet Union.²⁶⁸ While Kennan saw such thinking as dangerous and leading towards another war,²⁶⁹ Acheson and other policymakers agreed that the United States needed to maintain its ties to the continent to help Europe face this increasing Soviet threat. Upon hearing the opinions of other advisors, Acheson did not believe negotiations with the Soviets remained possible, especially over nuclear weapons. An international agreement over weapons of mass destruction had no real means of enforcement,

²⁶⁵ Kennan Letter to Bohlen, November 7, 1949, GFK Papers, Box 140, folder 1.

²⁶⁶ Kennan Letter to Bohlen, October 12, 1949, GFK Papers, Box 140, folder 1.

²⁶⁷ Kennan Letter to Bohlen, November 7, 1949, GFK Papers, Box 140, 1.

²⁶⁸ Bohlen Letter to Kennan, October 6, 1949, GFK Papers, Box 140, folder 1.

²⁶⁹ See Kennan’s Letter to Bohlen, October 12, 1949, GFK Papers, Box 140, folder 1.

making it useless unless the Soviets changed their fundamental attitudes regarding international relations.²⁷⁰ He and his advisor Gordon Arneson generally questioned how to possibly “persuade a paranoid adversary to disarm by ‘example.’”²⁷¹

Kennan however did not find nuclear buildup as rational either. The bombing of the Soviet Union would only harden their resistance to change, and he questioned if the United States actually possessed the initiative to strike first. Kennan did not run counter to his arguments in the Long Telegram and X-Article as suggested by Hixson though. He considered the military as just another tactic within containment. His policy centered on containment and deterrence, and Kennan did not believe the United States needed such a large nuclear buildup to accomplish this task.²⁷² He particularly wondered about man’s responsibility to one another, considering that “weapons of mass destruction...reach backward beyond the frontiers of western civilization, to the concepts of warfare which were once familiar to Asiatic hordes.”²⁷³ Kennan failed though to recognize the changing dynamic in global affairs, and this failure to understand the broader implications of nuclear weapons demonstrated his weakness as a military strategic thinker. With an atomic arsenal, the Soviets had vastly increased their negotiating power. Dean Acheson and the Truman Administration did not want to assume the risk of the path Kennan suggested.

After three years in Washington as one of the principle advisors on foreign policy, Kennan found himself therefore once again as an outsider. He and Dean Acheson, while holding mutual respect for one another, adopted increasingly different policy stances regarding the Soviet Union, especially when it came to Germany, and most others in

²⁷⁰ Miscamble, “Rejected Architect and Master Builder,” 451.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, fn. 451.

²⁷² Hixson, *George F. Kennan*, 92.

²⁷³ Memorandum from George F. Kennan, “International Control of Atomic Energy,” from Washington on January 20, 1950 in *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1950*, Vol. I, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1950), 39.

Washington followed the Secretary of State's thinking. No longer feeling as if he had a voice, Kennan left the Policy Planning Staff in early 1950, handing over his directorship to his understudy and friend Paul Nitze, and forfeiting his ability to steer policy away from the militaristic containment path it had headed down.

Not long after assuming the title of Director of the Policy Planning Staff, Nitze helped pen the infamous NSC-68. Distributed to all major secretaries, it signaled a new wave of militarism in U.S. foreign policy. U.S. objectives did "not include the unconditional surrender, the subjugation of the Russian peoples or a Russia short of its economic potential," it insisted. However, given the growing intensity of nuclear armament, it presented a crisis in which the U.S. "can expect no lasting abatement...unless and until a change occurs in the nature of the Soviet system." Written on the precipice of a Soviet thermonuclear program, it raised the question of whether the United States should begin to stockpile thermonuclear weapons upon achievement of their capability. It adopted the very idealistic, broad sweeping language Kennan had despised during World War II and in the Truman Doctrine, with such proclamations as the idea that Soviet "slavery can only be overcome by the timely and persistent demonstration of the superiority of the idea of freedom."²⁷⁴ Unlike Kennan's rhetoric, Nitze's repeatedly referred to a "crisis" between the United States and the Soviet Union on the brink of a long lasting, continuous "cold war," invoking Kennan's fear of war from Washington's "insistence that it was inevitable."²⁷⁵ In face of such a threat, it urged the Administration to adopt "means short of war" to "frustrate the Kremlin design."²⁷⁶

²⁷⁴ James S. Lay, "A Report to the National Security Council by the Executive Secretary (Lay)," NSC-68, April 14, 1950, *National Security Affairs; Foreign Economic Policy*, vol. I in the *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1950), 242-243.

²⁷⁵ Kennan Diaries, December 17, 1945, 191.

²⁷⁶ NSC-68, April 14, 1950, in *FRUS: 1950*, I, 244.

NSC-68 directly adopted the ideas of Kennan's containment and used them to reason for nuclear proliferation. It defined U.S. foreign policy as consistent of two components, one "to develop a healthy international community," and "the other as a policy of 'containing' the Soviet system." Their notion of this policy of containment essentially followed Kennan's formulation, except with a decidedly military flavor.

As the policy of 'containment', it is one which seeks by all means short of war to (1) block further expansion of Soviet power, (2) expose the falsities of Soviet pretensions, (3) induce retraction of the Kremlin's control and influence and (4) in general, so foster the seeds of destruction within the Soviet system that the Kremlin is brought at least to the point of modifying its behavior to conform to generally accepted international standards... One of the most important ingredients of power is military strength. In the concept of 'containment', the maintenance of a strong military posture is deemed to be essential for two reasons (1) as an ultimate guarantee of our national security and (2) as an indispensable backdrop to the conduct of the policy of 'containment'. Without superior aggregate military strength, in being and readily mobilizable, a policy of 'containment'—which is in effect a policy of calculated and gradual coercion—is no more than a policy bluff.²⁷⁷

Continuing Kennan's thinking, the report further espoused that a "successful containment" must "always leave open the possibility of negotiation with the U.S.S.R.," advocating that "a diplomatic freeze" as currently held in relations between the two countries ran counter to the "moral ascendancy in our struggle with the Soviet system." "Containment" had to "exert pressure" without "challenging Soviet prestige." The United States needed "to keep open the possibility for the U.S.S.R. to retreat... with a minimum loss of face and to secure political advantage from the failure to the Kremlin to yield or take advantage of openings."

Where the report starkly differentiated itself, however, from Kennan appeared in its assertion that the U.S. had largely "failed" up to this point to implement any of the above stated measures for "containment." Kennan found the early success of the Marshall Plan, the continual progress of Japan, and the Berlin Blockade as signs of strength in the cause for

²⁷⁷ NSC-68, April 14, 1950, in *FRUS: 1950, I*, 252-253.

capitalism and democracy. NSC-68 on the other hand saw the situation much more pessimistically, grimly espousing that “in the face of obvious mounting Soviet military strength our strength has declined. Partly as a byproduct of this...we now find ourselves at a diplomatic impasse with the Soviet Union, with the Kremlin growing bolder,” directly entrenching militarism and thus nuclear buildup with containment.²⁷⁸ While Kennan considered the Soviet economy underdeveloped, unable to compete with the U.S., Washington looked at only its potential for destruction. While Kennan advocated for the efficient allocation of resources to improve the U.S.’s ability to stand up to the Soviets, the authors of NSC-68 thought more risk adversely, reacting not to the probable course of Soviet action, but what had the greatest potential for disaster. NSC-68’s focus on the development of a thermonuclear program then completed the entanglement of Kennan’s containment with the nuclear arms race. Under these premises, Paul Nitze and the National Security Council officially concluded that “the cold war is in fact a real war.”²⁷⁹

As the historians Lucas and Mistry so candidly point out, the main debate over Kennan’s theory of containment surrounds militarization. They saw NSC-68 as providing a much needed blueprint to U.S. foreign policy, but still failing “to link political warfare to a coherent set of objectives.”²⁸⁰ It presented, they argued, no real way to connect containment with liberation, and instead settled for the “portrayal of the Soviet menace and the U.S. willingness to meet that menace” as “the defining objective of American policy.” This “nightmare” did not mean “an absolute victory in the Cold War but a never-ending advance towards it.”²⁸¹ In a similar argument, Hixson presented the three hundred percent increase in

²⁷⁸ NSC-68, April 14, 1950, in *FRUS: 1950*, 253.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 292.

²⁸⁰ Lucas and Mistrys, “Illusions of Coherence,” 41-45.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 63-65.

military spending to \$13 billion as confirmation of containment's militarization from its issuance.²⁸² As Miscamble also correctly states, NSC-68 further demonstrated Acheson's adoption of Nitze's views and "firm rejection of the geopolitical views (as opposed to specific recommendations) of George Kennan," as the U.S. came to consider containment as a global struggle against communist ideology rather than the dissuasion of Soviet power in shifting geographical locations Kennan had stated in his X-Article.²⁸³ The advent of nuclear weapons combined with the spread of communism, the increase in alliances such as NATO, and the geopolitical positioning of the U.S. and U.S.S.R., all made containment now seem impossible without a stronger military program.

With the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, containment received its last hammer blow towards being an entirely militaristic strategy. The Korean peninsula held great geopolitical importance given its proximity to Chinese, Soviet, Japanese, English and U.S. territory.²⁸⁴ Washington had feared that Korea would turn into another Soviet satellite, but since beginning their occupation they had not come up with a very coherent strategy—certainly nothing on the level seen in Japan—and had taken little interest in Korean internal affairs.²⁸⁵ For all intents and purposes though, Korea fit into the general periphery of containment under shifting points of geographical focus by any definition given its neighbors. Kennan before he officially left the State Department called for a strong response to North Korea's initial aggression, reasoning correctly that Kim Il-sung would not have attacked without Moscow's approval. In fighting, he wanted the most limited of wars, believing that

²⁸² Hixson, *George F. Kennan*, 95.

²⁸³ Miscamble, "Rejected Architect and Master Builder," 453.

²⁸⁴ Chong-Sik Lee "The Road to the Korean War: The United States Policy in Korea, 1945-48," *1945 in Europe and Asia*, (1997), 201.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 195-198.

containment entailed providing just enough military counterforce to prevent further expansion of Soviet political influence.²⁸⁶ While the Korean War served as a perfect example of Kennan's containment in action, it also gave credence to the more militaristic ideologies in Washington. It seemed to validate that the U.S. needed to possess strong military assets across the world to effectively counter communism.

The Korean War then forever altered the face of the spread of communism. Before the start of the conflict, communism had largely risen through Soviet occupation and political maneuvers to implement communist regimes. With the North's invasion of the South, a communist regime attempted for the first time to wage war to take down a capitalist counterpart. Even without the Red Army's participation, the conflict appeared to give the Soviet threat that kept Americans up at night real physical consequences. Kennan originally designed containment under the umbrella of a political communist threat, not a military one, and with the U.S.S.R. as the only capable communist power. The Korean War tore down these presumptions.

Containment was now applied in a completely different world order than when Kennan had first written his X-Article. His conception of containment had achieved success in Japan, Germany, and Western Europe as a whole, but over time the evolving political strength of the Soviet Union made containment as perceived by Kennan no longer viable in Washington. The ambiguity in his X-Article as well as his misunderstanding of nuclear weapons and Washington's misperception of communism paved the way for a global, military foreign policy based solely off the containment of the advancement of communism anywhere the idea took hold. In this way, Kennan's policy of containment in U.S.-Soviet affairs transformed into a global foreign policy. As Kennan himself said though regarding United States objectives towards

²⁸⁶ Miscamble, "Rejected Architect and Master Builder," 454-455.

the Soviet Union: “The actions of people in power are often controlled far more by the circumstances in which they are obliged to exercise that power than by the ideas and principles which animated them when they were in the opposition.”²⁸⁷

²⁸⁷ PPS/38, August 18, 1948, in *PPS Papers*, II, 397.

Conclusion

The Fall of Kennan's Containment to Cold War History: A Story of Unintended Consequences

In the fall of 1950, seventeen years after he had sat up through the night, giddy with excitement on a train into the unknown Soviet Union, George F. Kennan found himself ready to start a new phase in his life working in academia at Princeton's Institute for Advanced Study. As he looked "out over the fields to the woods" in his office, he felt "a sense of peace and happiness such [that he had] not had for a long, long time."²⁸⁸ His time in the State Department had taken its toll as Kennan increasingly found his views on U.S. foreign policy misinterpreted and shunned. At one point a journalist even told a colleague of Kennan's that while John Foster Dulles "used to think highly of...Kennan, he had now concluded that he was a very dangerous man," with his apparently more conciliatory views of the Soviet Union putting the U.S. at risk.²⁸⁹ Kennan however saw the President and Congress as wandering "around in a labyrinth of ignorance and error and conjecture, in which truth is intermingled with fiction at a hundred points, in which unjustified assumptions have attained the validity of premises, and in which there is no recognized and authoritative theory to hold on to."²⁹⁰

By trying to make his voice heard about the political threat of the Soviet Union, Kennan left himself exposed to the criticism and manipulation of his peers. His colleagues, the military, Congress, and historians all now had the opportunity to scrutinize and interpret his idea of containment in whatever way they wished, and Kennan in leaving the State Department largely

²⁸⁸ Kennan, *The Kennan Diaries, 1904 -2005*, ed. Frank Costigoila, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company: 2014), entry at Princeton on September 10, 1950, 272.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, July 31, 1950 269.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, August 14, 1950, 270.

lost any control or responsibility in further shaping their opinions. Policymakers latched onto the parts of Kennan's containment strategy they deemed useful, specifically his rhetoric, to advocate for a military buildup in the name of "containing" the spread of communism, and, thus, weakening the Soviet Union and preserving the global peace sought after World War II. Similar to Kennan, they characterized it as "means short of war" to "foster the seeds of destruction within the Soviet system" and to bring "the Kremlin...at least to the point of modifying its behavior to conform to generally accepted international standards." However, they proceeded to divert their rhetoric away from Kennan's to their more familiar comfortable, less risky, policy by deeming "in the concept of 'containment', the maintenance of a strong military posture...to be essential." As a result, policymakers such as Paul Nitze, Dean Acheson, and those on the National Security Council, with President Truman's approval, took the brand name of Kennan's containment and applied it to their own thinking. In selling their ideas to both the President and Congress, they appealed to their sense of duty in supporting "free societies," a responsibility from which the U.S. could not run from in the current state of global affairs.²⁹¹ Therefore, in the summer of 1950, the containment policy of the Truman Administration and the one Kennan had conceived in 1947 involved divergent methods of dealing with the Soviet political threat.

Recognizing the similarities in rhetoric between what Kennan expressed in his X-Article and NSC-68, historians have largely credited, if not branded, Kennan as the founder of the militaristic containment stance adopted by Paul Nitze, Dean Acheson, and the Truman Administration. They fall into this misinterpretation by not examining the prehistory involved in forming containment. Literature covering Kennan's contribution to Washington

²⁹¹ James S. Lay, "A Report to the National Security Council by the Executive Secretary (Lay)," NSC-68, April 14, 1950, *National Security Affairs; Foreign Economic Policy*, vol. I in the *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1950), 245.

characteristically starts with his career in full swing in 1946 or 1947. Books may provide more background detail, but this context largely pays lip service to understanding Kennan as a man, spending a vast majority of their pages discussing his post-World War II endeavors, even though he held little influence in foreign policy after 1950.²⁹² His time though in Europe in the 1930s and 1940s had shaped his thinking, to the point where he considered himself an “expatriate,” of the United States as he had spent more time in Europe than in his home country.²⁹³ Scholarly lack of recognition of this important period in Kennan’s life may come from the fact that in the historiography of this time period there appears a clear divide between the discussion of pre-World War II, World War II, and the post-World War II eras in the 1940s. While such an approach works when examining the policies of countries, it does not work as well when applied to people, whose lives and experiences do not always fit into arbitrary historical categorizations. Even during World War II, Kennan had already begun to consider the Soviet Union rather than Germany as the greatest threat to the U.S. The end of the war meant the end of violent, military hostilities, but served as just another stage in contentious diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, now defined along lines determined during the war. His distrust of the Soviet Union extended further back to his time as a young diplomat in Moscow, where he developed a deep suspicion and loathing of Stalin, who he has no qualms strongly vindicating in his writings.²⁹⁴ By overlooking this early era in Kennan’s life, historians lose the context that surrounded and developed his thinking, about containment as a non-military, Soviet specific theory.

²⁹² The only exception comes when he served as Ambassador to the Soviet Union from 1951 to 1952 and Ambassador to Yugoslavia from 1961 to 1963. Arguably, however, an ambassadorial role serves more as a mouthpiece of policy rather than a creator of policy.

²⁹³ Kennan, *The Kennan Diaries*. For one reference see entry at Princeton on April 15, 1951, p. 284.

²⁹⁴ The best examples appear in his “Russia – Seven Years Later,” where he provides a detailed account of Stalin’s past and the influence of his Georgian upbringing on his thinking, and *Russia and the West Under Lenin and Stalin*, where he credits Stalin’s Five Year Plans and purges as the root cause of Soviet political and economic weakness at the start of World War II. See George F. Kennan Papers; 1861-2014 (mostly 1950-2000), Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library, Box 251, folder 2.

Scholarly neglect has consequently led to a great debate amongst historians of Kennan's intention behind the theory of containment. While they generally describe Kennan as the father of the containment strategy that appeared as the foundation of the United States' Cold War foreign policy starting in the later 1940s, they still disagree over his total contribution to U.S. foreign policy. Walter Hixson for instance rejects Kennan's retroactive attempts at qualifying Washington's interpretation of containment. "Despite Kennan's belated apologies and a spirited defense of his position by historian John L. Gaddis and political scientist David Mayers," he did not see the X-Article as "a misleading depiction of [Kennan's] views in the early cold war."²⁹⁵ Hixson does have a point that Kennan apologists often ignore or pass over the weaknesses and ambiguity in the X-Article, and that he had sought for years for Washington to take a harder line against the Soviet Union.

Other historians such as Ben Wright, Scott Lucas, and Kaeten Mistry have provided similar criticisms.²⁹⁶ Lucas and Mistry, while criticizing containment as incoherent, still credit Kennan with defining the idea of "political warfare," a break with previous ideology of combating U.S. enemies.²⁹⁷ Wilson Miscamble, however, goes a step further, saying there exists an "erroneous portrayal of Kennan as the principle designer of the containment policy" in light of Secretary of State Dean Acheson's work, who he argues served as the main builder of the containment policy implemented by the U.S.²⁹⁸ Miscamble's argument poses an interesting distinction between theory and practice. Kennan may have invented the theory of containment, but Acheson and other Washington decision makers put the theory into practice. Consequently, history must

²⁹⁵ Walter L. Hixson, *George F. Kennan: Cold War Iconoclast*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 44.

²⁹⁶ See Ben Wright's "Mr. 'X' and Containment" and Lucas's and Kaeten's "Illusions of Coherence"

²⁹⁷ Lucas and Mistry, "Illusions of Coherence: George F. Kennan, U.S. Strategy and Political Warfare in the Early Cold War, 1946-1950," *Diplomatic History* 33 (January 2009), 39-40. Their interpretation of Kennan's definition: "political warfare sought the integration of every possible method, short of war, to achieve U.S. objectives," 40.

²⁹⁸ Wilson D. Miscamble, "Rejected Architect and Master Builder: George Kennan, Dean Acheson and Postwar Europe," *The Review of Politics* 58 (Summer, 1996), 439.

determine whether the distinction between Kennan's idea of containment and Washington's practice of containment should exist and deserves acknowledgement.

This controversy over Kennan's contribution to U.S. foreign policy at the time stems from the perfect timing of his Long Telegram and "Sources of Soviet Conduct." They created a prophetic persona around Kennan, furthered by the press given to him from such pundits as Walter Lippmann to significantly advance his career to a position of power. This characterization as a prophet, however, disregards the twenty years of work experience for the State Department in Europe that informed his analysis and his ability to read a situation and know when to assert his ideas. Consequently, Kennan's advice to the State Department did not stem from some inherent internal talent that he possessed, but from years of study, and such characterizations discredit his knowledge as career diplomat. The problems with Kennan's containment theory came not from his original presumptions regarding the Soviet Union, but from a changing of the global context.

By the 1950s a rapid reordering in global power dynamics between countries had occurred, which left Kennan's strategy containment to be applied in a context for which it was not created. The Soviet's achievement of nuclear capabilities in August of 1949, the rise of Mao's China, the Korean War, and Stalin's death in 1953 all altered the global order and the structure of Soviet political power. The U.S.S.R. could now theoretically compete with the U.S. in a nuclear arms race, but the rise of the Chinese Communist Party created competition for leadership in the global Marxist movement. The Korean War had turned the Cold War hot. While communism began to rise around the world, it lost steam in Europe, as the West began to largely outperform the East politically and economically. With this new organization of international relations there had to come new strategies for achieving the United States' objectives abroad.

Kennan however did not originally conceive containment to contend with this new world order. The preexisting conditions of traditional Russian and Soviet Communist attitudes towards foreign policy, the Soviet Union as the only global communist power, the spread of communism as a subversive weapon by Moscow, a Soviet Union without nuclear weapons, and Stalin as the leader of the U.S.S.R. served as the basis for his thinking. Kennan even acknowledged in his memoirs that if he “was the author in 1947 of a ‘doctrine’ of containment, it was a doctrine that lost much of its rationale with the death of Stalin and with the development of the Soviet-Chinese conflict.” He “emphatically” denied “the paternity of any efforts to invoke that doctrine...in situations to which, it has, and can have, no proper relevance.”²⁹⁹

The transition in Soviet leadership with the death of Stalin in 1953 especially altered the original context of Kennan’s containment. Kennan had only ever experienced Stalin’s Russia, and with the end of Stalin’s almost thirty-year reign, the nature of the Soviet Union and U.S.-Soviet relations progressed away from Stalin’s insecurity. He considered Stalin as a man with “a personal devil within his own soul” similar to that of Ivan the Terrible.³⁰⁰ A man with “an insatiable vanity and love of power...He is said once to have observed that there was nothing sweeter in life than to bide the proper moment for revenge, to insert the knife, to turn it around, and to go home for a good night’s sleep.”³⁰¹ Out of Stalin’s menacing shadow, Kennan hoped to move forward and let “the image of Stalin’s Russia to stand...as a marker of the distance we have come, a reminder of how much worse things could be, and were – not as a specter whose vision blinds us to the Russia we have before us today.”³⁰²

²⁹⁹ George F. Kennan, *Memoirs, 1925 – 1950*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967), 367.

³⁰⁰ George F. Kennan, *Russia and the West: Under Lenin and Stalin*, (New York: Mentor Book, 1960), 284.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 235.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 371.

The Soviet Union he characterized in his Long Telegram and X-Article therefore changed dramatically upon the death of this giant persona. Later in life, he contended that “not until the personality of Khrushchev replaced that of Stalin at the pinnacle of authority in the Soviet regime did it again become possible, as it had been in Lenin’s time, to have at least a clear-cut dialogue about the differences that divided the Russian Communist world from its non-Communist environment.”³⁰³ Consequently, unless adjusted to account for the different, arguably more conciliatory, leadership of Nikita Khrushchev, containment as Kennan originally conceived for U.S.-Soviet relations had turned obsolete. By starting the discussion however of Kennan’s containment in 1946 or 1947, historians miss this context of Stalin’s Russia under which Kennan operated. Only by examining the prehistory leading up to Kennan’s creation of containment do these root influences appear. Without first establishing these causes for the context of Kennan’s thinking regarding the Soviet Union and containment, historians cannot properly understand his motives or meaning in creating the theory. They therefore find themselves handicapped in trying to understand Kennan’s hopes for its implementation and a founding theory on the establishment of Cold War relations with the Soviet Union.

When examining diplomatic history, scholars must remember that people, with all their cultural and geographical inclinations, biases, and defects, serve as the main actors in forming and carrying out foreign policy. Diplomats do not fit neatly into the historical time frames identified by scholars, and they are as much influenced by their unique past experiences as by the current state of affairs. By only discussing these policymakers in set time frames, such as only discussing Kennan post World War II, and only examining the influence of recent events, such as the effects of World War II, scholars lose the substantial chain of experiences that formulates

³⁰³ George F. Kennan, *Russia and the West*, 245.

diplomats' ideas regarding foreign policy. Historical analysis, consequently, becomes clouded in generalized, ideological terms that fit into these predetermined historical periods, such as "Wilsonian," isolationist," "conservative," and "hawkish." By characterizing diplomats in these conceptual frameworks, historians lose sight of the entirety of their past and the context in which their world perceptions takes shape. As a result, scholars run the risk of mischaracterizing the theoretical intentions and practical implementations of policies, as demonstrated with Kennan's theory of containment, as they do not fully understand their thinking towards policy. The theory behind a foreign policy comes into being from the context of one diplomat's perspective and its application into world events comes from its interpretations of policymakers' with different global contexts.

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