

5-1999

**THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF CONTAINMENT: AN EXAMINATION OF
THE FOREIGN POLICY PRESENTED TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE
AND TO CONGRESS BETWEEN SPRING 1946 AND SUMMER 1947**

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THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF CONTAINMENT
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AMERICAN PEOPLE AND TO CONGRESS BETWEEN
SPRING 1946 AND SUMMER 1947

A Thesis

Submitted to the Undergraduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Honors Degree

in

The Department of History

by
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May 1999

Introduction

From Japan's invasion of Manchuria to the signing of a peace treaty aboard the U.S.S. *Missouri*, the world was torn by over a decade of warfare on a scale never known before in mankind's history. Real peace, however, would not be seen on the world-stage for nearly half a century because the seeds of the Cold War had been planted long before 1945. Though all members of the Grand Alliance demanded the unconditional surrender of Germany, these nation-states harbored differing concepts as to what the map of postwar Europe should look like. Throughout the war, the United States, the Soviet Union, and Great Britain had endeavored to devise a strategy to defeat the Axis powers and lay the foundations for peaceable postwar relations at conferences held in Newfoundland (1941), Casablanca, Cairo, Teheran (1943), Yalta, and Potsdam (1945). Roosevelt and Churchill envisioned a postwar world where all peoples were free from fear, want, and oppression. Self-determination and respect for sovereign rights would characterize political relations after the final victory. Such political agreements, however, were not laid out until after the Soviet armies had occupied almost all of Eastern and Central Europe and established a "friendly" government in Poland. At the close of the war, the Red Army had liberated Eastern Europe and brought it under the influence of a Soviet Russia determined to protect its western borders, which had twice been the route of

invasion during the past generation. The Western powers, now unequivocally dominated by the United States, were uncomfortable with this new world order. They had waged war to make the world, especially Europe, safe for democracy and free from oppression. To permit the Soviet Union to create a sphere of influence in a region that had traditionally harbored strong anti-Soviet sentiments would be to abandon the ideals for which the Anglo-Americans had fought the war. The Grand Alliance crumbled in the months between Yalta and Hiroshima, while two superpowers prepared for a face-off that would be a struggle to control the destiny of the world.

Wartime collaboration among the Western powers and the Soviets faltered during the last months of the hostilities. Without political agreements for peace firmly established through treaties, the mistrust and hostility rooted in the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 grew in the early postwar years. Western fears of a revived Russian plan for world revolution found an outlet in the postwar environment where the Soviets used their superior military hold on Europe to create a bloc of nations subservient to the Kremlin. This reality made it clear that the United States must reinforce its military and economic defenses against the Soviet Union if the world was to remain open to democracy.¹

In the twenty-two months between September 1945 and July

¹ Hammond, Paul y., *The Cold War Years: American Foreign Policy Since 1945* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1969) p.4.

1947 the superpowers sought to create spheres of influences conducive to their own ideas of a balance of power. In the United States this meant a policy dedicated to checking the advancement of communism throughout the world. By the summer of 1947 that policy had evolved from abstract ideas into American doctrine. Four key documents (the "Long Telegram" being under two guises) presented this policy to Washington circles and gained its acceptance with the American public. In the spring of 1946 the "Long Telegram" from George Frost Kennan introduced the idea of "containment," at that time called "firmness," to a select few in the State Department and the White House. He, together with Dean Acheson, postulated that the Soviets would seek to expand into any power vacuum that existed in the modern world if the United States did not commit to a firm policy of vigilant counter-pressure. Winston Churchill followed Kennan with a speech at Fulton, Missouri intended for public consumption. In it, he suggested to the American citizenry that their once wartime ally had dropped an "iron curtain" across Europe and divided the world into two hostile camps. Together, these two documents cultivated an America ready to accept the greatest reorientation of foreign policy since the Monroe Doctrine.

By 1947, this ready environment had turned rhetoric into policy with the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan. Through economic recovery, backed by a pledge of military intervention, the world would be preserved for democracy and capitalist development. Kennan's famous Mr. "X" article, "The Sources of

Soviet Conduct" represented the fourth document shaping this process, though it was in fact an elaboration of the "Long Telegram" of the previous year. This thesis will seek to illustrate the evolution of containment as it was initially presented in Washington and to the American people. Containment did not become the cornerstone of American foreign policy overnight. It was the cumulative effect of careful preparation by men who sought to lead the United States into a policy that preserved its national ideals and reflected its dominant status in world affairs. Through containment, the United States assumed global responsibilities unprecedented throughout its history. While the debate rages on among historians over the prudence and long-term implications of the policy, those in the upper echelons of Washington and in the ranks of the general public supported containment in 1947 as a coherent, feasible, and acceptable strategy to deal with what was perceived as the aggressive advancement of communism throughout the free world.

Part I.

Spring 1946

The Origins of Containment

Though the nature of Stalin's regime permitted him to manipulate communist doctrine to fit his needs, the structure of America's democratic society offered no such option for President Truman. Hence Stalin took the first recognizable step towards mobilizing his people to accept the costs of a prolonged struggle against an economically and militarily stronger nation. In a February 1946 radio address, Stalin exhorted a war-weary Soviet populace to prepare for a new five-year plan that would require additional personal sacrifices to promote heavy industry as a safeguard for their nation against the capitalist threat. He warned that "war arose in reality as the inevitable result of the development of the world economic and political forces on the basis of monopoly capitalism."² This rare speech by Stalin illustrated that no longer were mutual antagonisms to remain the exclusive exchanges of policy makers and state officials. Now that the head of one of the polarized superpowers in standoff had addressed the incompatibility of two inherently different ideological systems within one international system, the world bitterly accepted it as a *fait accompli*. In Washington, the

² *Vital Speeches*, Vol XII, No. 10. March 1, 1946, p. 300-302. For a "revisionist" view of Stalin's speech, see Jonathan Harris "Historicus on Stalin," *Soviet Union*, 1, no 1 (1974):66.

speech displaced fence-sitters by turning debate over the emergence of a Cold War into accepted gospel. Even without an indubitable call for armed conflict in Stalin's "election" address, Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas verbalized this newly solidified capitol sentiment, aptly dubbing the speech a "declaration of World War III."³

Less than a month later, another public address would provide a counter-call to raise American awareness to the threat of Soviet ambitions and the imminent need for swift preparedness. Taking time away from a Florida vacation, former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill answered a request by President Truman to articulate to the American people the dangers of the Soviet Union and the burgeoning necessity for the implementation of a new foreign policy. Combined with his international reputation and with admiration by Truman, Churchill was an excellent choice to serve as a vehicle to rally American public opinion. In their eyes, he maintained his untarnished image as the steadfast and urbane wartime leader of America's greatest ally.

As a private citizen, Churchill possessed a rare opportunity to advocate two sweeping political objectives while simultaneously being shielded from the direct effect of a public backlash. He used his prestige to rouse public and congressional support for the emergency loan so desperately needed by the

³ Millis, Walter, ed., *The Forrestal Diaries* (New York: Viking Press, 1951) p. 134. In a statement that proved to have more long-term validity Walter LaFeber termed the speech the Soviet "declaration of the Cold War." *America, Russia and the Cold War, 1945-1980*, 4th ed. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1980), p. 39.

British. His greater purpose, however, was to garner American support for intimate Anglo-American collaboration against the Evil Empire's expansionism.⁴ Throughout the war, America had followed a policy that respected the tripartite powers of each member of the Grand Alliance. Churchill's proposal of a special relationship between the United States and Great Britain, which would inevitably involve a face-off against their former ally, was a major departure from practiced wartime diplomacy.

President Truman was well aware of the implications of this redirection of policy. No participating party still harbored delusions that the Grand Alliance could function under peacetime conditions. Despite "universalist" American hopes that nations would share responsibilities for the affairs of the world and guarantee security through an international organization, global events were directing policy away from this Wilsonian ideal.⁵ Churchill's speech at Fulton, Missouri publicly indicted the Soviets for dividing the postwar world into spheres of influence.

The anti-Soviet feeling captured in the speech was legitimized both by President Truman's presence during the harangue and his early collaboration with Churchill over the text of the speech. The position articulated at Fulton was no real surprise to those inside Washington circles. The speech at Westminster College was merely the culmination of changing

⁴ Harbutt, Fraser J., *The Iron Curtain: Churchill, America and the Origins of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) p. 159-163.

⁵ Gardner, Lloyd C., Schlesinger, Jr., Arthur, Morgenthau, Hans J., *The Origins of the Cold War* (Waltham, Massachusetts: Ginn and Company, 1970) p. 47.

attitudes among policymakers that had occurred throughout the past months. Admiral Leahy noted in his February 10th diary entry that the President and Churchill intended the speech to address the "necessity for full military collaboration between Great Britain and the United States in order to preserve peace in the world until the UN [United Nations Assembly] is fully able to keep the peace which will be some time in the distant future." Eighteen days later, Secretary of State James F. Byrnes announced to the Overseas Press Club in New York that America's new approach regarding the Soviet Union would be based on "patience with firmness."⁶ Before Churchill pledged the United States to a peacetime alliance with Great Britain and a year before the Truman Doctrine, Byrnes warned the Soviet Union that the United States intended to uphold the United Nations Charter, even at a substantial cost:

We will not and cannot stand aloof if force or the threat of force is used contrary to the purposes and principles of the Charter. We have no right to hold our troops in the territories of other sovereign states without their approval and consent freely given. No power has a right to help itself to alleged enemy properties in liberated or ex-satellite countries before a reparation settlement has been agreed upon by the Allies ... We must not conduct a war of nerves to achieve strategic ends.⁷

⁶ Gaddis, John Lewis, *The United States and Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972) p. 304-305.

⁷ *Newsweek*, XXVII No. 26, (March 11, 1946)

Though Byrnes's speech clearly marks the beginnings of a major policy reorientation, it was Churchill's speech that galvanized widespread public reaction because it completed the warning made to Stalin that further aggressive expansion across Eastern Europe and elsewhere would be met by a united Anglo-American counter pressure. Though not the first person to use the phrase, Churchill dramatized the real threat of Soviet expansionism to peace, saying,

From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of central and eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest, and Sofia, all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in the Soviet sphere and are all subject in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and increasing measure of control from Moscow. The Communist parties, which were very small in all these eastern states of Europe, have been raised to preeminence and power far beyond their numbers and are seeking everywhere to obtain totalitarian control. Police governments are prevailing in nearly every case, and so far, except in Czechoslovakia,

there is no true democracy.⁸

Churchill intended to play on the still fresh memories of wartime hatred for Nazi Germany. He carefully paralleled the totalitarian nature of the Third Reich with that of Communist Russia. In foreshadowing events to come, he alerted the "community of English-speaking peoples" to the dangers of internal Communist subversion, stressing that "the Communist parties or fifth columns constitute a growing challenge and peril to Christian civilizations." Churchill had to drive home the idea that the Soviets posed a direct threat to the daily lives of American citizens. Eastern Europe was far from the hearts and minds of much of the general population that longed to return to peacetime and domestic concerns. Churchill needed to, and did, tap into humanitarian sentiments and fears of hazarded personal security. He cast Soviet Russia as endangering free nations on all fronts, whether socially, militarily, or politically. In accepting that idea, some Americans, especially in government, took the first step towards preparing to bear the burden of global leadership. This was a far cry from the stance that the United States adopted after the Great War. Though it did not

⁸ James, Robert Rhodes, ed., *Winston S. Churchill: His Complete Speeches, Vol VII 1943-1949*, (London: Chelsea House Publishers, 1974) "The Sinews of Peace" p. 7290. Churchill first used the phrase "iron curtain" on May 12, 1945 in a telegram to Truman to term his anxiety about Russian Westward advancement from Berlin after V-E Day. (See Churchill's *Triumph and Tragedy*, p. 572-574) Senator Vandenberg and Undersecretary of State Dean Acheson also used the phrase in subsequent 1945 public addresses.

possess the strength in 1919 that it held in 1945, the US then stood at the head an international system lacking any functioning mechanisms for successful trade and financial relations or worldwide cooperation. The nation, not yet even one hundred and fifty years old, had refused to assume its international responsibilities following the war and bitter peace settlement. This legacy weighed heavily on the minds of policymakers in the 1940s, especially now that the world was living with the atomic bomb and cooperation was needed more than ever. America was the only nation in a position to promote such unity in the postwar years, even though worldwide cooperation meant only partnership among the Western powers. It was Churchill's mission to make the public accept that isolationism had no place in a world edging toward globalization.

The Fulton speech shattered any lingering hopes of continuing Rooseveltian collaboration and accommodation among the members of the now collapsed Grand Alliance. Churchill theorized that because of an innate differences between the two capitalist and communist systems, the United States and British Commonwealth and Empire should forge a "special relationship" to prevent war and promote the rise of world organizations. The fraternal association of English-speaking peoples required "not only the growing friendship and mutual understanding between our two vast but kindred systems of society, but the continuance of the intimate relationships between our military advisors, leading to a common study of potential dangers, similarity of weapons and

manuals of instruction and interchange of officers and cadets at colleges." Churchill called for military preparedness because he postulated that war would evolve from Soviet expansionist tendencies. Immediately, however, the push for military strength served to bolster Truman's efforts in Congress to extend Selective Service and install universal military training.⁹ As a master diplomat and orator, Churchill remained careful not to call for a re-mobilized army. His aid was enlisted to push the American citizenry into an acceptance of a widened peacetime military establishment against their demand for demobilization. Unfortunately, a substantial standing army was needed to counter Soviet encroachment, especially since the limitations of atomic diplomacy became evident during the Foreign Minister's Conference in London the previous fall.

Churchill's pledge to maintain the Anglo-American monopoly over nuclear weaponry drove a further wedge between the East and West, while receiving virtual unanimous approval from American listeners. He said, "It would be virtual madness to cast it [the secret knowledge or experience of the atomic bomb] adrift in this still agitated and un-united world." Experts predicted that other powers would possess the secret of the bomb within five years.¹⁰ Eighty-five percent of Americans, with the notable exceptions of Undersecretary of State Dean Acheson and former Secretary of War

⁹ Harbutt, *The Iron Curtain*, p. 191.

¹⁰ Alsop, Joseph and Stewart, "Your Flesh Should Creep," *Saturday Evening Post*, 219 (July 13, 1946). Five years proved to be a poor estimate. In September 1949, American planes collecting air samples over the Soviet Union confirmed that Russia has successfully detonated an atomic bomb.

Henry Stimson, favored guarding the monopoly of the atomic bomb as part of the general "get tough with Russia" policy that was taking shape in early 1946.¹¹

Though the overall impact of this "magnificent trial balloon" roused public support for a policy that the Administration already planned to implement, it did not receive laudation on all fronts.¹² While *New York Times* and *Time* writers expressed nearly wholehearted approval in their textual reviews, flanking pictures of Churchill's subsequent trip to New York highlighted left-wing protesters chanting "Winnie, Winnie, go away, UNO is here to stay!"¹³ Soviet reaction echoed the chants of war voiced by Justice William O. Douglas following Stalin's February address. Stalin called Churchill a warmonger and noted that war, according to Churchill's theory, would proceed along racial lines pitting the valuable, English-speaking nations against the lesser peoples of the world.¹⁴ Clearly Churchill's address antagonized already strained relations between the two powers. Still, the speech raised American awareness and hostility towards the current reality of Soviet-American relations and prepared the public to accept the reoriented, firmer policy towards the Russians that had already been unofficially adopted by the Administration.

If the drama and celebrity surrounding Churchill's speech

¹¹ Department of State, "Fortnightly Survey of American Opinion," No 36, October 5, 1945.

¹² *Time*, XLVII, No. 11 (March 18, 1946).

¹³ *The New York Times*, March 6, 7, and 16, 1946; *Time*, XLVII, No 12 (March 25, 1946)

¹⁴ *Newsweek*, XXVII, NO. 28 (March 25, 1946)

encouraged popular support for a military stand against the Russians, the scholarly writings of George F. Kennan coordinated elite opinion in Washington circuits. Serving as the disillusioned and disconsolate *charge d'affaires* in Moscow, Kennan responded to an Administration request for a comprehensive precis of recent Soviet foreign policy and behavior, as especially manifested in Stalin's February "election speech" and the Soviet refusal to withdraw troops from Azerbaijan in Iran. After eighteen months of relative anonymity, Kennan recognized this opportunity to crystallize his place in the Establishment, while articulating a redirection of policy at a time ripe for such a revolution in accepted thought on the Soviet Union.¹⁵

By February 1946, previous faith that the former allies could reconcile their ideological differences had waned. Within a month, Secretary of State Byrnes, Winston Churchill, George Kennan, and Stalin all verbalized that the restructuring of the world would be directed from two vehemently antagonistic and ideologically irreconcilable power centers.¹⁶ Kennan participated in this rising crescendo of animosity by presenting Washington's officialdom with an intellectual argument for a tougher policy with the Soviets. Since 1944, he had opposed the conciliatory stance that Roosevelt's administration had taken towards Russia. By stressing Soviet prowess and by reviving the Marxist-Leninist doctrine that capitalist bloc cradled within it the origins of

¹⁵ Kennan, George F., *Memoirs 1925-1950*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967) pp. 293-295.

¹⁶ Acheson, Dean, *Present at Creation: My Years in the State Department*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc. 1969) p. 726.

another war, Stalin's February speech appeared to confirm for Kennan the Soviet's belief that cooperation with the West was no longer possible.¹⁷ It also awakened many lingering isolationists to the dangers posed by the Soviet Union. Russia could be expected to promote actions essentially "negative and destructive in character," designed to increase Soviet influence at the expense of major Western powers.¹⁸ Against such an enemy, appeasement had no rational place.

Kennan cast Communist Russia as the enemy to replace Nazi Germany. Like Churchill after him, he played on dread of war and the rise of another totalitarian power that would seek to repress the free peoples of the world for its own benefit. The crux of his containment thesis was that the "traditional and instinctive Russian sense of insecurity" and the overarching influence of dogma in Soviet affairs had propelled the Kremlin to adopt a policy committed to the destruction of personal, economic, political and moral freedoms in all capitalist nations.¹⁹ Marxism provided justification for virulent xenophobia, for dictatorship, for cruelty, and for sacrifices demanded from the war-torn people of Russia. Through military might and police rule, Kennan foresaw Moscow's aim to increase in every way the "strength and prestige of the Soviet state" in an attempt to "advance the official limits of Soviet power" and prevent a capitalist encirclement.

¹⁷ *The New York Times*, February 10, 1946.

¹⁸ Wright, C. Ben, "Mr. 'X' and Containment," *Slavic Review* 35 (March 1976) p. 1-31.

¹⁹ Jensen, Kenneth M., ed., *Origins of the Cold War: The Novikov, Kennan, and Roberts "Long Telegrams" of 1946* (Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 1991) pp. 17-31.

He chillingly concluded in the most famous clause of the Long Telegram that:

We have here a political force committed fanatically to the belief that with [the] U.S. there can be no *modus vivendi*, that it is desirable and necessary that the internal harmony of our society be disrupted, our traditional way of life be destroyed , the international authority of our state be broken, if Soviet power is to be secure.

Enduring, peaceful coexistence was not possible so long as exploitation and repression remained the primary tactical weapons in the Kremlin's arsenal.²⁰ To face this foe and preserve the American way of life, the United States needed to erect a rampart of resistance with other Western powers against this expansionist enemy bent on world domination.

The effect of the Long Telegram was "nothing less than sensational," despite its lack of specific prescription for future action to contain the Soviet menace.²¹ This ambiguity, which was not wholly corrected in the Mr. "X" article, encouraged various interpretations.²² Nowhere within the telegram does Kennan call for the increased economic or military aid to nations threatened with communist annexation. Nonetheless, by identifying

²⁰ Leffler, Melvyn P., *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992) pp.107-108

²¹ Kennan, *Memoirs*, 295.

²² Ideological interpretations often sprang from Kennan's weighty emphasis on the influence of Marxist-Leninist doctrine in Soviet life. See Daniel F. Harrington, "Kennan, Bohlen, and the Riga Axioms," *Diplomatic History* 2 (Fall 1978), p. 423-37; Daniel Yergin, *Shattered Peace: The Origins of the Cold War and the National Security State* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977) pp.168-171.

the preeminent sources of Soviet conduct as traditional Russian nationalism, Marxist-Leninist (or Stalinist) ideology, and the insecurity of Kremlin leaders stemming from the fragility of their internal power substructure, the United States could now more effectively counter the Soviet threat, which presently posed "the greatest task our diplomacy has ever faced." The Western powers needed to yoke their superior collective strength to successfully oppose a weaker adversary, though an incredibly dangerous one, which responded far more to the logic of force rather than the logic of reason.

Though Kennan's telegram and Churchill's speech did not instigate a canonical change in policy, they successfully cultivated an environment conducive to accepting the need for the reorientation of policy and the reappraisal of Soviet intentions. A shift in the perception of the Soviet Union occurred throughout the armed services and the State Department once American officials were required to read Kennan's "Long Telegram" by the hundreds. They no longer viewed Russia as "an estranged ally but as a potential enemy, whose vital interests could not be recognized without endangering those of the United States."²³ The autocratic nature of the Soviet regime, backed by ideological obsession to view one's global neighbors as malicious foes, drove Russia to prepare for a prolonged stand-off so that it might protect its security interests. Against such steadfast

²³ Gaddis, *Origins of the Cold War*, p. 284.

determination, America could not wait for a direct attack before initiating plans to mobilize. Within an irrationally militarized culture that understood only the language of force, many Soviets viewed such restraint as a sign of weakness. After years of total war, however, neither superpower wanted to risk another armed conflict, but the flaring of mutual hostilities made the prospect of a different sort of war, albeit under the semblance of peace, loom ominously on the near horizon.

On September 24, 1946, Clark Clifford and George Elsey submitted a one-hundred page analysis to the president that further solidified the White House belief that "the conflict between Capitalism and Communism is irreconcilable."²⁴ Drawing the toughest line against the Soviets during the turning point year of 1946, Clifford called for total military preparedness, even a willingness to use atomic or biological weapons, in order to restrain Soviet expansion. Cooperation and "accord" with the Soviet Union would sacrifice future American security, while sending the United States slowly drifting into the dark "shadow of Munich." Though America's economic prowess should be used as the primary tool to force Soviet compliance, it must be accepted that "the language of military power is the only language which disciples of power politics understand."²⁵ The echoes of Kennan's "Long Telegram" clearly sounded through the rhetoric of the

²⁴ Truman, Margaret, *Harry S. Truman* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc, 1973) p. 348.

²⁵ Clifford, Clark, *Memorandum to President Truman*, September 24, 1946. Reprinted in excerpted form in *A History of Our Time: Readings on Postwar America*, Third Edition, Edited by Chafe, William H. and Sitkoff, Harvard (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) pp. 53-58.

Clifford-Elsey Report. Taken together, they provided President Truman with a realistic assessment of Soviet ambitions. Simultaneous external events appeared to validate the reports' hypotheses. Though Soviet occupation forces had threatened and later relented in Iran, emerging crises in Greece and the strategically important Turkey gave credence to the emanating belief that the United States stood at the dawn of a long-term ideologically based struggle against the Soviet Union.

Part II.

Spring 1947

From the Cultivation of Opinion to the Implementation of Policy

Though the precarious situation in early 1947 demanded swift action to curb the Soviet threat, the November elections of 1946 drastically reshaped the face of Congress, thereby casting uncertainty over the entire Washington environment. After fourteen years of uninterrupted Democratic domination, Republicans captured both Houses of Congress. The restructuring of the eightieth Congress in part reflected popular dissatisfaction with President Truman. Because he had ascended to the office following the death of President Roosevelt, his presidency lacked the legitimacy of an election. Roosevelt's presidential management style often left Truman grossly uninformed and therefore unprepared for the challenges of the office. This handicap, combined with Truman's brusque personality and determination to appear a commanding leader, led to numerous mistakes throughout his first months in office.²⁶

²⁶ Determined to assert his presidential authority, President Truman told Molotov in a White House meeting on April 23rd that the Russians "could go to hell," if they did not accept the conditions of the San Francisco Conference and Yalta accords regarding Poland. Truman also handled the issue of telling Stalin of the successful Trinity atomic test, which occurred during the Potsdam Conference, with less than prudent respect for the Russian leaders knowledge of the Manhattan Project.

On January 3, 1947, the nation came under the leadership of a Democratic President and a Republican Congress. Despite Truman's attempts to offset stagnation and contention on the Hill, Congress and the public presented him with two great challenges that threatened to forestall the acceptance of what would become known as the Truman Doctrine. Most policymakers agreed that only the economic reconstruction of Europe and Japan would successfully contain Soviet ascendancy. Undersecretary of State Dean Acheson cautioned that peace and prosperity would remain elusive in the postwar world if the "greatest workshops of Europe and Asia —Germany and Japan— remained idle."²⁷ Resurrecting these economies, however, would necessitate an unprecedented peacetime program of foreign aid. The conservative composition of the eightieth Congress precluded passage of such a program unless the Administration could provide dramatic evidence for the need of such aid. After years of war and a revolution in the role of government, the Republicans pushed for retrenchment and a focus on domestic policy in 1947. Demobilization and fears of a return to the economic depression of the 1930s topped public concerns. Unemployment rose in early 1946 when the first wave of over ten million veterans flooded the job market. Without some form of shock treatment, the public and Congress increasingly critical of the president would never support an Administrative initiative that diverted funds away from domestic investment and into an increased military or foreign aid programs.

²⁷ Schaller, Micheal, *Present Tense*, p. 59.

After receiving the formal notification from Great Britain on February 21 that our ally could no longer maintain its overseas commitments in the Mediterranean or support the anti-Communist forces in Greece because of financial exigency, newly appointed Secretary of State George Marshall presented congressional leaders with an outline of the President's new policy initiatives. Together with Acheson, he stressed that an "unbridgeable ideological chasm" divided the United States from the Soviet Union. By now, America's officialdom was braced for crisis. When told that they again faced a totalitarian antagonist as evil as Hitler's Third Reich that endangered the democratic and the liberal ideas so cherished by this republic, they used their pent up fervor to transform ideology into policy. The Truman Doctrine resulted. The simple argument was that the free nations of Greece and Turkey desperately needed aid that only the United States could, and should, provide if they were not to fall into the waiting hands of the Soviets.

On the afternoon of March 12, 1947, President Harry Truman addressed a joint session of Congress to announce a reorientation of general foreign policy. In unequivocal language, he committed the United States to a broad national policy resolute to contain communism anywhere in the global arena, saying,

I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free people resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or outside pressures. I believe that we must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in

their own way. I believe that our help should be primarily through economic and financial aid which is essential to the economic stability and orderly political processes.²⁸

The Truman Doctrine clearly marked a watershed in American foreign policy. Though the American leaders felt that the Truman Doctrine responded defensively against Soviet actions, it inevitably led the United States into a fifty year period of heightened American influence in the economic, political and military affairs of foreign powers.²⁹ At the time, however, the vagueness of the speech left the policy open for much interpretation as to the direction American intervention would follow. Without any explicit limitations, the President had pledged American support to all free peoples resisting any form of communism at any strategic point in the world. The implication of this blanket pledge of assistance was that any advance of communism posed a direct and immediate threat to the security of the United States.

By 1947, the definition of national security had expanded beyond military protection to include economic well being. American producers desperately required the markets in Europe to sustain economic prosperity in the United States. America had emerged from the war as the only major power with an intact economic system and strong treasury. Cautious observers feared

²⁸ *Vital Speeches*, Vol XIII, No. 11, March 15, 1947, pp.322-324.

²⁹ Yergin, *Daniel, Shattered Peace*, p. 276.

that the termination of American credits to its financially crippled trading partners in Europe and Japan could even precipitate a collapse in global trade leading to world-wide depression. Financial distress indeed endangered Western Europe more than Stalin's armies, which by 1947 had halted their advance at the Elbe River and remained on the western borders of Austria and Yugoslavia. American officials dreaded the possibility that socialist influence would fill the vacuum if the democratic, capitalist systems of Western Europe toppled. Already four communists sat on the cabinet of France's Fourth Republic.³⁰ Elsewhere, the former colonies of European powers demanded independence, thereby further imperiling global stability by opening the areas to communist influence. Within these fragile areas, the Soviet menace could most easily spread its ugly tentacles, eventually posing a direct hazard to the United States unless it intervened on the side of freedom and democracy.

The Truman Doctrine united political, economic, and ideological rationale for America's official abandonment of its historic isolationist tradition regarding affairs beyond the Western Hemisphere.³¹ The President claimed that aid to Turkey and Greece "is an investment in world freedom and global peace." The alternate way of life, embodied by the Soviet Union, risked the tranquility of the world because it relied on terror,

³⁰ LaFeber, Walter, *America, Russia, and the Cold War*, Sixth Edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc, 1991) pp. 49-58.

³¹ Crabb, Cecil V., Jr., *The Doctrines of American Foreign Policy*. (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1982) p.107. In his memoirs, Truman emphasizes that the political and economic aspects of foreign relations are indivisible. The Truman Doctrine laid out that belief as policy. Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, p. 111.

oppression, and the suppression of personal freedoms to preserve its totalitarian regime. By depicting the battle in ideological terms, right wing opposition could be curbed. No Republican could afford politically to appear "soft on Communism," because anti-Communism resounded so deeply with their own ideological predilections and with their constituencies.³² The unmistakable anti-Communist stance of the Truman Doctrine masked the broader implications of the policy by presenting it in comprehensible terms, which emphasized the Communist danger, to Congress and to the public. As much as the policy set out to protect the political and military interests of the United States abroad, it provided a safeguard to its economic need for free trade.³³ Economic recovery would arrest Communist advancement on all fronts, while stabilizing the European economic and social structures.³⁴ The loss of markets in Western Europe and Japan would cripple the economy of the United States, which was already producing a surplus of goods intended for overseas consumption. This aspect of the Truman Doctrine was far less noble than any sort of ideological conflict, but it represented a highly important, though understated, aim of the new policy.

³² Leffler, Melvyn P. *The Specter of Communism: The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1917-1953* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994) p. 58. Despite the firmness of the Truman Doctrine, Republicans denounced Truman as a weak anti-Communist within two years. With the long standing history of anti-Communism and its present revival in America, combined with the unpopularity of Truman (though he did enjoy a rise in approval ratings following the Aid to Greece and Turkey speech –See *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Spring 1947). Allegations of weak dealings with the communists provided a pivotal campaign tool for republicans hoping to gain the White House in 1948.

³³ This line of interpretation is most fiercely argued in Kolko, *Limits of Power*, 331-341. However, it has been criticized for ignoring the fact that the Truman Doctrine was a policy that responded to real crisis in a strategic point in the world.

³⁴ Palmer, RR., and Colton, Joel, *A History of the Modern World, Since 1815* (New York: McGraw Hill, Inc., 1995) pp. 874-875.

Though most policymakers accepted the rhetoric of the Truman Doctrine, they objected to the sweeping responsibilities that it placed on the United States. Senator Arthur Vandenberg feared that Truman had unlawfully committed America to serving unilaterally as the world protector by not outlining how the policy accorded with the United Nations Charter.³⁵ The nature of the Charter required multilateral action and international cooperation. Other opponents from the Left worried that the Truman Doctrine would prop up undemocratic or reactionary regimes simply because they were anti-Communist, while those on the Right argued that such an unprecedented -or even unwanted- level of American commitment would probably lead to all-out war and unsustainable expenditure.³⁶

Truman's speech reflected the anti-Communist consensus that had taken hold of the Executive branch. With careful use of anti-Soviet language, he and his advisors had garnered wider support for the new policy in the months before its announcement. By uniting salesmanship with sincerity, Truman hoped to form a public consensus similar to the one that existed within the Administration.³⁷ To counter the criticism he nonetheless faced, Truman proposed that the present situation was so grave that it required "immediate and resolute action" that only the United States was in a position to provide. Such an assertion served as

³⁵ Edited by Vandenberg, Arthur H. Jr., *The Private Papers of Senator Vandenberg* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1952) pp. 342-347.

³⁶ Jones, Joseph M., *Fifteen Weeks* (New York: Viking, 1955) p. 177.

³⁷ Freeland, Richard M. *The Truman Doctrine and the Origins of McCarthyism* (New York: Knopf, 1968) p. 101.

a public declaration of the new, dominant role of the United States in world affairs, as well as an increase in the power of the president to initiate foreign policy.

Though the United States had no intentions of creating a *Pax Americana* or becoming an imperialist power, the Truman Doctrine provided it with the justification to intervene in the affairs of foreign nations. This scheme preserved the security of the United States while simultaneously contradicting one of the crux principles of the policy that all nations should be free of foreign pressures. Wherever America interceded, the pure sovereignty of that nation would be undermined by the presence of a foreign power. Though the immediate crisis in Greece did not require troop deployment, that nation inevitably accepted a degree of American influence because it welcomed the economic aid. Through monetary pressure, the United States established its sphere of influence while the Soviet strategy employed military force, and later, economic aid.

The Truman Doctrine clearly represented a reorientation in American foreign policy, but it was hardly one that emerged overnight. The immediate origins of the policy can be seen as a response to both internal and external events since the closing days of the war. American animosity toward the Soviets had increased over the previous two generations and is clearly captured in the anti-Communist tone of the speech. The address undoubtedly further strained Soviet-American relations, because it placed the blame for many of the world's ills and dangers

directly on the Soviets.³⁸ Truman, like many of his constituents, judged Soviet takeover of the "liberated" countries of Eastern Europe as a repeat of Nazi expansion and a foreshadowing of intentions for global domination. Though monetary and technical aid supplied by the United States would not provide a panacea to the world's problems, the rhetoric of the policy painted America as a fountain of hope for free nations across the globe. This attitude was reflected heavily in the press. The *New York Times* credited the United States with shielding the world from another Munich through its sweeping commitment to stop communist expansion.³⁹ It was not the commitment itself pledged by the United States that was revolutionary, but the levels provided. In 1946, before any policy had solidified, Gallup polls reported that seventy-two percent of both Democrats and Republicans supported an active role for the United States in world affairs.⁴⁰ The environment had been carefully cultivated for Americans to be relatively informed over issues of foreign policy (an anomaly in American politics); this primed them to accept the obligations that accompanied global leadership.

The Truman Doctrine was hardly an average piece of presidential initiative. For most of the previous one hundred and twenty-five years, the foreign policy of the United States had

³⁸ In his influential memorandum, Clark Clifford also wholly indicts the Soviet Union for the increasingly hostile Cold War. However, such blame coming from a president in a public address had far greater implication.

³⁹ *New York Times*, March 13, 1947. This source provides an excellent comprehensive report of the immediate global and domestic reaction to the President's speech.

⁴⁰ Holsti, Ole R. *Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996) p. 132.

been guided by the principle of virtual noninvolvement or "nonentanglement" in global affairs as outlined in the Monroe Doctrine.⁴¹ Truman sought to completely revamp that image of America in the eyes of the world and in the perception of the nation's citizens. Weak language or wavering pledges would have failed. He needed to shock the public into perceiving the international situation the way Dean Acheson dramatically described it in a February 27th meeting between congressional leaders and the President:

Like apples in a barrel infected by one rotten one, the corruption of Greece would infect Iran and all [countries] to the east. It would also carry the infection to Africa through Asia Minor and Egypt, and to Europe through Italy and France...The Soviet Union was playing one of the greatest gambles in history at a minimal cost ... We and we alone were in a position to break up the play.⁴²

Acheson painted an emotionally charged picture of dominoes helplessly falling under the weight of communism's diablerie. Listening to such impassioned terminology, any common cross section of the public would have understood that the situation called for far more than rhetoric; the Truman Doctrine was a call to action. While United States enjoyed the economic and military strength enough to save the world, its global neighbors suffered from the pressing need for America to not serve as a "hollow

⁴¹ Crabb, *The Doctrines of American Foreign Policy*, p. 21.

⁴² See next page

hegemon" but as a world leader.⁴³ In fact, the speech marked the first usage of the phrase, "leader of the free world." Where such leadership would take the United States in March 1947 remained unknown, but the volatility of the situation demanded swift action that did not leave room for lengthy debate. To save the free world, the American people had to readily accept the initiatives of a courageous Commander in Chief and respond with strength of character, moral virtue, and personal sacrifice.⁴⁴

Like any bold initiative, debate nonetheless soon followed with a vengeance. Once aid to Greece and Turkey received congressional approval in April, the remainder of Europe looked with hungry eyes and empty bellies toward Washington for the mechanisms for which the policy would be carried out. The Truman Doctrine had laid out America's military pledge to support free peoples around the world, but it was the European Recovery Program, known for its architect, Secretary George C. Marshall, as the Marshall Plan, that provided the immediate economic help needed to offset the encroachment of Communism into the crippled nations of Western Europe. Far from being an impromptu response to the press surrounding the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan reflected the long-held belief that Communism would be more easily contained through the economic reconstruction of Europe. Communism's attractiveness was completely eroded if poverty, hunger, and hopelessness are not the dominant characteristics of

⁴² Acheson, *Present at Creation*, p. 219; ~~Yergin, *Shattered Peace*, p. 281-282.~~

⁴³ Huntington, Samuel P. *Foreign Affairs*, 78 (March/April 1999), pp. 35-49.

⁴⁴ Hogan, Micheal J., *Cross of Iron* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998) pp. 16-17.

nations. In 1947, however, Great Britain had increased its rations to include bread (a commodity not limited even during war) because of shortages. The financial demands of war, compounded by wartime damage, had left the industrial machine of Britain in disrepair or complete ruin. Germany and Japan faced near total destruction of their countrysides and industrial bases, and the burden of reparations. Europe needed food, fuel, and raw materials far more than arms in 1947 if it had any hope of halting Communist infiltration. In contrast to this bleak situation, American consumption had increased between 1939 and 1945 while its GDP had more than doubled making it the sole affluent society among the world's community of nations.

In a speech before the Delta Council in Cleveland, Mississippi, Acheson drove home the fact that the United States stood alone in its ability to "bridge the gap in commodities or dollars." In explicit terms, Acheson addressed the economic tier of the Truman Doctrine which had been overshadowed by the military aid that was to be given to Greece and Turkey. Addressing an audience far larger than the group of Southern farmers present, he reminded the nation that Truman pledged "help" (an incredibly broad term) to free nations resisting Communism. The international community needed American goods to survive, but lacked funds to purchase even essential products. Acheson proposed that \$5 billion in approved loans and grants to Europe would offset the deficit of \$8 billion that had already accrued by 1947. However, like those in Washington's military

circles who learned well the perils of isolationism, economists wanted to avoid a repeat of 1920s policies that repaid loans with loans. The present situation demanded a new strategy that liberalized trade, fostered economic and political cooperation, produced collective security as called for in the Atlantic Charter, and promoted democratic institutions.⁴⁵

Getting the policy out into American, and more importantly European, arenas proved to be a more arduous task. As a wartime hero, George C. Marshall captured the imagination and reverence of the American public and the Truman administration, but he fell far short of being a master orator. Marshall's stolid and dependable character nonetheless gained such high esteem from President Truman that he dubbed the former General "the greatest living American," even while Roosevelt remained in office.⁴⁶ He trusted him, teamed with Acheson, Will Clayton, Clark Clifford and Charles Bohlen, to be the primary architects of the European Recovery Program. This reflects Truman's exceptional regard for the capabilities of the State Department and its staff, and the increasing emphasis on planning staffs that could infuse White House prerogatives with greater legitimacy. Since early March, a Special Committee, composed of members from the State Department, the War Department, and the Navy Department, had conducted research and formulated preliminary proposals for the reconstruction of Europe. The newly created Policy Planning

⁴⁵ Kolko, Joyce and Kolko, Gabriel, *The Limits of Power: The World and the United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1954* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972) p. 360. Jones, *Fifteen Weeks*. p. 29.

Staff, headed by Kremlinologist George F. Kennan, used much of the research of this group as the basis for his advice to Marshall. The United States "must play it straight" and offer aid to the whole of Europe, including the Soviet Union. This risked sacrificing the fragile, but incredibly important, bipartisan support that the Administration enjoyed over its foreign policy initiatives, but the Marshall Plan had to be billed as an economic aid program and not as a tool to exclude the Soviets from the recovery opportunities, even if such billing was a ploy. Though the Truman Doctrine had completely shattered any lingering hopes for "One World," the nature of Cold War propaganda and ideological imaging prevented the United States from specifically structuring policy against the Soviets. Popular portrayals cast the Soviets as the aggressors, while the "white-hatted" Americans played an all-time defensive position. Kennan, however, correctly postulated that the Soviets would never participate in an inter-European cooperation scheme that risked loosening their control over the Eastern European satellites or open their financial records for American inspection, thereby failing to meet the requirements for aid consideration.

Marshall's speech at the Harvard commencement exercises on Thursday, June 5, offered European leaders the funds for economic recovery if they agreed to strive toward continental unity and cooperation. Unlike aid programs of the past, the Marshall Plan would be a "joint" endeavor because, "It would neither be fitting

⁴⁶ John Hershey. "Mr. Secretary Marshall," *Reader's Digest*, Vol. 51, no. 303 (July 1947), 79-84.

or efficacious for this Government to undertake to draw up unilaterally a program designed to place Europe on its feet economically."⁴⁷ Marshall claimed that "it is the business of the Europeans" to initiate plans for a European program.⁴⁸ America would provide the leadership, but after years of war across an oceanic divide, it had no intentions of becoming a domineering power on the European continent. However, with the power to allot funds still coming from Washington, American influence on the direction of postwar European economics remained heavy. Even within the text, Marshall conceded that American help might not be preferred by all foreign powers. The sovereignty, both in political and cultural terms, of any nation accepting aid would be threatened because of the influx of dollars and American products. By offering aid to all nations across the continent, including those in the Eastern bloc, the Marshall Planners encroached more closely upon the Soviet sphere of influence than at any other time to date during the Cold War. Seeking to protect their own interests on the continent, Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav M. Molotov quickly charged the Marshall Planners with attempting to intentionally violate the principles of national sovereignty and influence the internal affairs of independent nations.⁴⁹ The failure of the Soviets to accept the terms of economic integration and political self-determination required by

⁴⁷ *New York Times*, June 6, 1947.

⁴⁸ *Vital Speeches*, Vol XIII, No. 18. July 7, 1947, pp. 552-553.

⁴⁹ Hogan, Micheal, *The Marshall Plan: American, Britain and the Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1947-1952* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987) p. 51.

the Marshall Plan solidified the inevitable division of Europe into East and West, even in the eyes of the most optimistic American officials.⁵⁰

Nowhere within the speech are communism, socialism, the Soviet Union, or military concerns mentioned, yet the backdrop of events made it clear to all observers that the program encompassed broader aims than sheer economic recovery, although that always remained the paramount goal. Though the Soviet armies had temporarily halted their western advances, Communist parties, commonly viewed as puppets of Soviet direction, grew in strength in the Western powers of Europe. Electoral victory of these parties would legitimize Soviet influence across the Continent, much the way that totalitarian and fascist powers subdued weakened nation-states less than a generation before. Marshall declared that the nations of Europe "must have substantial additional help, or face economic, social and political deterioration of a very grave character." Communism thrived on the kind of crisis that presently plagued Europe.⁵¹ To prevent further decadence, the Marshall Plan served as a continuation of wartime effort to contain a dangerous foe, but the replacement of "guns for butter" adapted a vigorous policy for a world under the guise of peace. Only the promotion of

⁵⁰ Gaddis, John Lewis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) pp.37-39. Another side effect was that the economically strapped Soviet Union was forced to formulate a similar aid plan, the Molotov Plan, for Soviet bloc countries.

⁵¹ Bohlen, Charles E., *Witness to History, 1929-1969* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1973) p. 263.

democratic ideals and organizations could arm Europe with the tools to protect itself from Soviet infiltration. If the prosperous conditions of postwar America could be transferred to the Western powers of Europe, then they would emulate American prosperity, democracy, and culture, thereby erecting an impenetrable bulwark against the Evil Empire.⁵²

The perceived magnitude of the Soviet threat forestalled the possibility that successful containment would result from the efforts of individual states. After the Paris Conference in July 1947 failed to incorporate the Soviets into the Marshall Plan, American leaders grew in resolve to achieve Marshall's original call for European unity.⁵³ Against Soviet opposition, they pushed for "agreement among the countries of Europe as to the requirements of the situation." Aimed at listeners on both sides of the Atlantic, Marshall laid out in stark terms the "dislocation of the entire fabric of the European economy." He had less need to relay to the Europeans the severity of their situation, but a program of such vast amounts of aid required effective salesmanship to the more conservative factions in the public and the money-pinching Republican Congress. His entreaty for European integration recaptured some who remained

⁵² For discussion of the cultural impact of the Marshall Plan on Europe, see Richard Pells, *Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture Since World War II*. (New York: Basic Books, 1997) pp. 52-57.

⁵³ Molotov attended this conference with eighty aides and advisors. Though the Soviet Union desperately needed the funds available through the Marshall Plan, it remained hesitant to open its financial records. When the America, French, and British delegations refused to accept Molotov's proposals for aid without inspection, the Russians abandoned the Conference. Under Soviet pressure all nations in the eastern bloc subsequently withdrew their applications for aid.

disillusioned about the American commitment pledged by the Truman Doctrine. Under the Marshall Plan, all Western powers would work toward a more liberal trading system, a political stability, a broader industrialization, a regulation of exchange rates, and a buildup of economic and democratic institutions throughout the continent.

The economic reconstruction of Europe constituted the preeminent bedrock of American national security. A Western alliance united against the Soviet Union seriously checked any plans for further Soviet expansion in Europe. The less altruistic side of the Marshall Plan's intentions, however, was the equally important need for Europe to achieve economic recovery, not solely for its own benefit, but so it could consume America's surplus of goods and be fully incorporated into the American capitalist system. To maintain its burgeoning domestic economy, American producers required the expansion of their overseas markets. As long as the nations in America's sphere of influence remained fragile, economic sluggishness threatened the entirety of the American "empire."

Together, the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan realigned the balance of power in Western Europe in America's favor. American policy makers found economic succor to be a more effective and politically acceptable tool to rebuilt Europe than military might. Without economic viability and unity, ensured through security institutions or military force, the conditions that created repression and war on the Continent would continue.

If these fundamental problems of European breakdown caused by war were rectified through economic revitalization, the containment of the communist threat would be the by-product.⁵⁴

By July 1947, most of the American public had grown to accept the reality that the grim state of affairs was quickly evolving into a Cold War. A fastidiously refined consensus finally existed among the majority of the public and Congress that the Soviet Union presented the greatest problem in American foreign relations. Much of this concurrence directly resulted from the alarm and flair of the Truman Doctrine. Its focus on a general ideological battle to keep the world safe for democracy tapped into the sympathies of an America still imaging itself as the sole big winner of the Second World War. America had the economic might, technical superiority, even the gifts of Providence and Godly blessing, to face and conquer any foe. But how solid was ready support behind this rhetoric? So far, no European Recovery Plan had been formally implemented, nor had ground troops seen combat in volatile areas. Criticism continued over the universal nature of the Truman Doctrine and the costs of the proposed Marshall Plan. The struggle and sacrifices that lay before the American population remained somewhat elusive in dimension, breadth, and demand, because never in the history of the nation had the country faced war without bullets or casualties.

⁵⁴ Policy Planning Staff 1, "Policy with Respect to American Aid to Western Europe" May 23, 1947. [Source: *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1947*, III, 224-230.] Much of the language and many of the ideas presented in this key document were used in Marshall's Harvard address.

Responding to a request from James Forrestal in late January 1947 for a private commentary on another paper,⁵⁵ George Frost Kennan ultimately published his famous article "The Sources of Soviet Conduct" in the influential journal *Foreign Affairs*. Through that medium he finally fulfilled a public need for an articulation of the Soviet behavior and American responsibilities from an academic standpoint. By July 1947, Kennan had secured his place in Washington's upper echelon by serving as the highly respected, and somewhat domineering, head of Secretary Marshall's new State Department Policy Planning Staff. Speaking from this vantage point, his call for "containment" of Soviet expansionism through "the adroit and vigilant application of counter-force at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points, corresponding to the shifts and manoeuvres of Soviet policy" carried a tone of messianic purpose and rightness.⁵⁶ It was this perceived proposal of strategy that captured the imagination and attention of American readers. The vast majority of the article, however, served as an elaboration of the "Long Telegram" of spring 1946.

Kennan insidiously cast the Soviet Union as a more dangerous enemy than Hitler or Napoleon because of the patience and firmness of doctrine rooted deep within Communist thought. Historical attitudes and experiences of invasion pushed the

⁵⁵ Edward F. Willett's "Dialectical Materialism and Russian Objectives." See Gardner, Lloyd C., *Architects of Illusion: Men and Ideas in American Foreign Policy, 1941-1949* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970) p. 290.

⁵⁶ [Kennan, George F.] Mr. X. "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs*, XXV (July 1947) 566-582.

Soviets into a perpetual state of xenophobia because the nation lacked any sense of national security.⁵⁷ Behind the cry of ideology, the Soviets stood protected enough from world opinion to erect a wall of defense, thereby legitimizing the unlawful tactics taken by the Soviet government to expand its empire. Beyond the boundaries of Russia proper, Soviet leaders perceived free democratic systems as direct and immediate threats to the Soviet sphere of influence. It is in this peripheral arena that Soviet ideology enjoyed its greatest strength, and became most ominous in the eyes of American observers.

To counter that threat, Kennan publicly proposed the strategy that had long achieved hardy reception among Washington officials. He said that, "The main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansionist tendencies." As a realist, Kennan intended "containment" to mean the preservation of the balance of power and not containment "by military means of a military threat, but the political containment of a political threat."⁵⁸ The lack of such

⁵⁷ Mayers, David. *George Kennan and the Dilemmas of US Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) p. 111.

⁵⁸ For a full account of Kennan's recollections and regrets about the "X" article, see his *Memoirs*, pages 354-357. Quote on page 358.

clarification within the article led to much misinterpretation. Following on the heels of Truman Doctrine and the rising anti-Soviet sentiment at home, the recently cultivated anti-Communist American public (mistakenly) embraced Kennan's thesis as a call to arms against the Soviet Union at any point in the world. Without any mention as to the specific geopolitical areas in which the United States would intervene through political and economic means to contain communism, the "X" article committed a fallacy similar to that of the Truman Doctrine, while reaffirming America's perceived commitment to halt Soviet expansion anywhere in the world.

Columnist Walter Lippmann emerged as the greatest vocalized critic of the policy and wrote a series of scathing articles denouncing the military implications of containment. His response seems plausible in an America unprepared for war (though that is what he feared Kennan's policy might lead to). In fact Lippmann's fault finding echoed many of Kennan's own objections to the sweeping military commitment pledged by the Truman Doctrine. What Kennan had intended to write was an expose on the ideological-political threat that Russia posed to the national security of the United States. He postulated that if the war-fatigued peoples of Western Europe or Japan fell victim to the lure of communism's intrigue and pledges of prosperity for all, then the loss of these allies would deal the United States a defeat equal to that

it would have received had Nazi Germany won the war.⁵⁹ By portraying the United States in such peacetime peril, Kennan tapped into public fears and thereby completed a process of policy cultivation and implementation that had been taking shape since late 1945.

The hype surrounding the article only served to solidify the placement of "containment" in the American mind-frame. As debate escalated, so the readership of *Foreign Affairs's* elite circle of subscribers broadened. *Reader's Digest* and *Life* reprinted large excerpts of the article. *Life's* headline summarized the frenzy, saying, "Magazine article is causing a sensation because it is believed that it expresses the official U.S. views of why the Russians act as they do." By late 1947, containment had taken on a life of its own.

⁵⁹ Kennan, George F. *At a Century's Ending: Reflections, 1982-1995* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1996) pp. 111-112.

Conclusion

Within two years, the United States had reevaluated its attitude toward the Soviet Union, re-characterizing it from one of wartime ally into the greatest ideological and political threat yet to imperil the United States. This transition resulted from the lessons of the inter-war years, World War II, and the immediate external and internal events in the postwar period that together produced a revolution in American foreign policy. The overall effect was to turn a nation away from a heritage of virtual isolationism and into one embracing of an international involvement (though some would argue that "interventionist" is the correct term). As the self-proclaimed postwar "leader of the free world," America finally assumed the global responsibilities befitting its role in the balance of power. The foreign policies that took shape between spring 1946 and summer 1947 reflect America's interpretation, and sometimes misinterpretation, of its worldwide obligations. The men of the White House and State Department assumed that America must make the world safe for democracy, while preserving its national security. Economic and political containment, as best exemplified by the success of the Marshall Plan in facilitating economic recovery in Western Europe led to a powerful alliance among the United States, Japan, and the majority of Europe, was judged by realists to be the most appropriate and prudent

strategy. Implementation of sweeping new policy required the cultivation of sweeping public and congressional approval.⁶⁰ Truman and Churchill especially realized that the American public would not readily accept the burdens of global leadership without first being "scared" into the realities of the situation. The alarmist rhetoric of the Fulton speech and of Truman's April 12th address to Congress was catered for public consumption as much as the academic writings of Kennan or Marshall's stolid oratories addressed the penny-tight eightieth Congress.

Though an alarmist anti-Communist tone characterized the Soviet policy in the postwar years, American fears had a great basis in extant realities and recent history. Retrospective clarity may allow historians today to question the wisdom of the swift implementation of containment, which sometimes fell short of the lengthy debate that usually typifies most democratic initiatives. The situation, as a worldwide audience and Washington policymakers described it, was too fragile to allow for vacillation among the ranks of the only truly powerful democratic state in existence. A select few understood this stark reality in 1946 and 1947, and hence, proceeded to adapt American foreign policy to the perceived and real threats of Soviet expansionism through the long-term application of the containment doctrine.

⁶⁰ Pollard, Robert "The National Security State Reconsidered: Truman and Economic Containment, 1945-1950," Printed in *The Truman Presidency*, (ed.) Michael J. Lacey (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989) p. 234.

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