

triggered an intense "space race," the United States and the Soviet Union temporarily suspended their atmospheric testing of atomic weapons and began cultural exchanges. However, hopes for improved Soviet-American relations proved short-lived when the 1960 U-2 incident prompted the cancellation of a U.S.-Soviet summit meeting. The Cold War would rage unabated until its sudden end in 1991.

THEMES TO CONSIDER

- The motives for and components of the containment policy
- Criticism of containment
- The origins and impact of domestic anti-Communism
- The intersections of anti-Communism with postwar anxieties related to gender and sexuality
- U.S. government efforts to calm and protect citizens in the nuclear age

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George F. Kennan, "The Long Telegram" (1946)

In early 1946, relations between the United States and the Soviet Union deteriorated markedly. While militarily occupying most of Eastern Europe, the Soviets were installing Communist regimes in several countries. U.S. officials opposed these actions and believed citizens had the right to choose their own governments. If the Soviets were allowed to expand their territory, President Truman and his advisors argued, American political and economic interests would be imperiled and international relations would be destabilized. Empowered by possession of the atomic bomb and the world's strongest economy, the Truman administration started fighting the spread of Communism.

George F. Kennan (1904–2005) was one of the leading architects of U.S. foreign policy in the post-WWII era. After graduating from Princeton in 1925, he entered the Foreign Service and worked in several countries, including Switzerland and Germany. From 1929 to 1931, he took intensive courses in Russian studies at the University of Berlin. In 1933, when the United States formally recognized the Soviet Union, Kennan accompanied U.S. ambassador William C. Bullitt to Moscow. From there, Kennan proceeded to Vienna, Prague, and Berlin before returning to the USSR in 1942.

Although Kennan adored the Russian language and culture, he detested Stalinism. In February 1946, when asked to interpret recent Soviet statements and actions, Kennan composed an 8,000-word telegram. This “long telegram” was widely circulated within the Truman administration and became the basis of the containment policy—the guiding principle of U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War. In 1947, Kennan was named director of the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff. After leaving the government in 1950, Kennan joined the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton and became a prize-winning historian and memoirist. He served as the U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union (1952–1956) and to Yugoslavia (1961–1963).

FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. According to Kennan, what are the origins of Soviet foreign policy?
2. How does Kennan describe the Soviet government? Does he feel that the Soviets pose a threat to the United States? If so, why?
3. What predictions does Kennan make about the Soviets? How and why does he believe that the United States should respond?

Moscow, February 22, 1946

... At the bottom of Kremlin's neurotic view of world affairs is traditional and instinctive Russian sense of insecurity. Originally, this was insecurity of a peaceful agricultural people trying to live on vast exposed plain in neighborhood of fierce nomadic peoples. To this was added, as Russia came into contact with economically advanced West, fear of more competent, more powerful, more highly organized societies in that area. But this latter type of insecurity was one which afflicted rather Russian rulers than Russian people; for Russian rulers have invariably sensed that their rule was relatively archaic in form fragile and artificial in its psychological foundation, unable to stand comparison or contact with political systems of Western countries. For this reason they have always feared foreign penetration, feared direct contact between Western world and their own, feared what would happen if Russians learned truth about world without or if foreigners learned truth about world within. And they have learned to seek security only in patient but deadly struggle for total destruction of rival power, never in compacts and compromises with it.

It was no coincidence that Marxism, which had smoldered ineffectively for half a century in Western Europe, caught hold and blazed for first time in Russia. Only in this land which had never known a friendly neighbor or indeed any tolerant equilibrium of separate powers, either internal or international, could a doctrine thrive which viewed economic conflicts of society as insoluble by peaceful means. After establishment of Bolshevik regime, Marxist dogma, rendered even more truculent and intolerant by Lenin's interpretation, became a perfect vehicle for sense of insecurity with which Bolsheviks, even more than previous Russian rulers, were afflicted. In this dogma, with its basic altruism of purpose, they found justification for their instinctive fear of outside world, for the dictatorship without which they did not know how to rule, for cruelties they did not dare not to inflict, for sacrifice they felt bound to demand. In the name of Marxism they sacrificed every single ethical value in their methods and tactics. Today they cannot dispense with it. It is fig leaf of their moral and intellectual respectability. Without it they would stand before history, at best, as only the last of that long succession of cruel and wasteful Russian rulers who have relentlessly forced country on to ever new heights of military power in order to guarantee external security of their internally weak regimes. . . . This thesis provides justification for that increase of military and police power of Russian state, for that isolation of Russian population from outside world, and for that fluid and constant pressure to extend limits of Russian police power which are together the natural and instinctive urges of Russian rulers. . . .

In summary, we have here a political force committed fanatically to the belief that with US there can be no permanent *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. This political force has complete power of disposition over energies of one of world's greatest peoples and resources of world's richest national territory, and is borne along by deep and powerful currents of Russian nationalism. In addition, it has an elaborate and far flung apparatus for exertion of its influence in other countries, an apparatus of amazing flexibility and versatility, managed by people whose experience and skill in underground methods are presumably without parallel in history. . . .

This is admittedly not a pleasant picture. Problem of how to cope with this force [is] undoubtedly greatest task our diplomacy has ever faced and probably greatest it will ever have to face. . . . I cannot attempt to suggest all answers here. But I would like to record my conviction that problem is within our power to solve—and that without recourse to any general military conflict. And in support of this conviction there are certain observations of a more encouraging nature I should like to make:

1. Soviet power, unlike that of Hitlerite Germany, is neither schematic nor adventuristic. It does not work by fixed plans. It does not take unnecessary risks. Impervious to logic of reason, it is highly sensitive to logic of force. For this reason it can easily withdraw—and usually does when strong resistance is encountered at any point. Thus, if the adversary has sufficient force and makes clear his readiness to use it, he rarely has to do so. If situations are properly handled there need be no prestige-engaging showdowns.

2. Gauged against Western World as a whole, Soviets are still by far the weaker force. Thus, their success will really depend on degree of cohesion, firmness and vigor which Western World can muster. And this is factor which it is within our power to influence.
3. Success of Soviet system, as form of internal power, is not yet finally proven. It has yet to be demonstrated that it can survive supreme test of successive transfer of power from one individual or group to another. . . . In Russia, party has now become a great and—for the moment—highly successful apparatus of dictatorial administration, but it has ceased to be a source of emotional inspiration. Thus, internal soundness and permanence of movement need not yet be regarded as assured.
4. All Soviet propaganda beyond Soviet security sphere is basically negative and destructive. It should therefore be relatively easy to combat it by any intelligent and really constructive program.

For those reasons I think we may approach calmly and with good heart problem of how to deal with Russia. As to how this approach should be made, I only wish to advance, by way of conclusion, following comments:

1. Our first step must be to apprehend, and recognize for what it is, the nature of the movement with which we are dealing. We must study it with same courage, detachment, objectivity, and same determination not to be emotionally provoked or unseated by it, with which doctor studies unruly and unreasonable individual.
2. We must see that our public is educated to realities of Russian situation. I cannot over-emphasize importance of this. Press cannot do this alone. It must be done mainly by Government, which is necessarily more experienced and better informed on practical problems involved. . . .
3. Much depends on health and vigor of our own society. World communism is like malignant parasite which feeds only on diseased tissue. This is point at which domestic and foreign policies meet. Every courageous and incisive measure to solve internal problems of our own society, to improve self-confidence, discipline, morale and community spirit of our own people, is a diplomatic victory over Moscow worth a thousand diplomatic notes and joint communiqués. . . .
4. We must formulate and put forward for other nations a much more positive and constructive picture of sort of world we would like to see than we have put forward in past. It is not enough to urge people to develop political processes similar to our own. Many foreign peoples, in Europe at least, are tired and frightened by experiences of past, and are less interested in abstract freedom than in security. They are seeking guidance rather than responsibilities. We should be better able than Russians to give them this. And unless we do, Russians certainly will.
5. Finally we must have courage and self-confidence to cling to our own methods and conceptions of human society. After all, the greatest danger that can befall us in coping with this problem of Soviet communism, is that we shall allow ourselves to become like those with whom we are coping.

KENNAN