

Policy Set Loose in the World: From George Kennan's Long Telegram to the Vietnam War

“George Kennan came as close to authoring the diplomatic doctrine of his era as any diplomat in our history.”—Henry Kissinger¹

The Long Telegram and its author George Kennan are widely recognized for their importance. Written from Moscow in February 1946, in his capacity as the US charge d'affaires, at a pivotal juncture in world history, Kennan's Long Telegram² established the framework of American policy toward the Soviet Union, which, under the heading of “containment” would last for half a century. But what—exactly—was that framework, especially as it concerned the role of U.S. and Western military action abroad to “contain” Soviet expansionism? Was it one in which emerging tensions with the Soviet Union, as stated in the telegram itself, were “within our power to solve—and ... without recourse to any general military conflict?” Or did the Long Telegram instead allow for the latitude, and grant permission, for subsequent US actions in which the Cold War turned “hot,” notably in Korea (1950-1953) and most significantly and tragically in Vietnam (1954-1975)? This is the fundamental tension of the Long Telegram. The highly charged and authoritative language of the Long Telegram, freighted with existential stakes for democracy and freedom, and coupled with poorly formulated policy prescriptions, created a foundational justification for the nearly perpetual set of U.S. military actions to follow. This essay analyzes both the policies and the actions of the U.S. in the decades following Kennan's Long Telegram. This essay also, importantly, separates “containment” as articulated by Kennan at the time in the Long Telegram itself, and quickly memorialized in U.S. policy, from subsequent revisions and regrets by Kennan himself. We find that there is a through line for the more hawkish elements in

¹ Kissinger, “White House Years - The First Volume of His Classic Memoirs”, 185.

² Kennan's long telegram is called the Long Telegram because it was said to be the longest telegram in history.

American political thought and action that ultimately connects this fundamental American document to the Vietnam disaster.

The climate of international relations and generally thin U.S. understanding of the Soviets following World War II together help account for the powerful hold on the American consensus the Long Telegram would exert. In 1946, few Americans were ready for another conflict. Yet the increasingly aggressive foreign policy of the Soviet Union worried many in Washington. At that time, policymakers had not formulated a cohesive U.S. view in regard to Soviet expansionism. The Soviets had been allied with the U.S. in WWII; therefore, much of the American public did not view them as a threat. Stalin's escalating rhetoric toward the West, however, was worrying U.S. government officials. On February 9, 1946, notably, Stalin said, "As a matter of fact, the war [WWII] broke out as the inevitable result of the development of world economic and political forces on the basis of present-day monopolistic capitalism."³ Further, the Soviet Union specifically opposed the formation of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which had been advanced by the US as institutional pillars of the new global economic order. Concerned, the United States Secretary of State, James Byrnes, demanded an assessment from the U.S. embassy in Moscow. The response was the unusually long telegram, authored by George Kennan, the American charge d'affaires in Moscow, putting forward a novel interpretation of U.S.-Soviet relations that would soon become the foundation of American foreign policy: containment.⁴

This foundational document, the Long Telegram, can be read in two main movements. Kennan first notes the motivating factors behind Soviet actions and then proposes his plan to

³ "Speech Delivered by Stalin at a meeting of Voters of the Stalin Electoral District, Moscow."

⁴ While the word "containment" isn't actually mentioned in the Long Telegram, the policy came to be known as containment after the publication of Kennan's "X" article, the companion to the Long Telegram.

counter these acts of aggression. Kennan was determined to ensure U.S. policymakers were schooled in the many complex catalysts driving Soviet policy towards the West and the rest of the world. He explained that the Soviets were driven by Marxist ideology, as well as other long-standing historical motivations, which had existed since the time of the czars, centuries before the Communist Revolution of 1917. Kennan described Russia as historically underdeveloped economically, politically, and militarily compared to other European nations. Kennan's analysis said that Russian history and Marxist ideology made the current Soviet Union hyper-suspicious of other countries, especially Western capitalist nations: "[the] USSR still lives in antagonistic 'capitalist encirclement' with which in the long run there can be no permanent peaceful coexistence....At bottom of Kremlin's neurotic view of world affairs is traditional and instinctive Russian sense of insecurity."⁵ Moreover, Kennan highlighted that Russians were slavophiles—they felt a sense of pride for their culture and country (nationalism), and a had history of rejecting European Western culture and avoiding Western influence. Armed with these facts, Kennan warned that Russian nationalism that had been brewing for centuries was now veiled "in new guise of international Marxism, with its honeyed promises to a desperate and war torn outside world, it is more dangerous and insidious than ever before."⁶ The combination of Marxism and Russian historical precedent forged, according to Kennan, a supremely dangerous opponent to the U.S. on the world stage. Kennan underscored inherent Russian power: "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." An ideology hostile to the West, rooted in centuries-old resentments, combined with the recent industrialization of the Soviet Union, posed a major threat

⁵ History and Public Policy Program, "George Kennan's 'Long Telegram'".

⁶ History and Public Policy Program, "George Kennan's 'Long Telegram'".

to the national security of the United States, argued Kennan. What is more, the Soviets were “neurotic”; “ruled from a “fragile and artificial...psychological foundation”; and had “sacrificed every single ethical value.” This was a striking perspective to many in Washington who only recently were starting to worry about the looming Soviet threat.

In order to counter the vast power of the USSR, Kennan argued, the United States has to mobilize resources and capital as if to prepare for war, in order to keep the influence of the Soviet Union from spreading beyond its current position. This idea came to be known as containment. Kennan believed that containment would function as a viable strategy because the USSR was opportunistic, not adventuristic: “For this reason it [the USSR] can easily withdraw--and usually does when strong resistance is encountered at any point.”⁷ At the same time, Kennan explicitly cautioned U.S. officials about communist movements in other countries—and, critically, he explains that these movements are aligned with the Soviets. Kennan advocated for counterforce against communist movements under the broad heading of “immediate strategic necessity.”⁸ While he specified a finite number of world centers where the U.S. should intervene, he allowed that “other points may at any time come into question, if and as concealed Soviet political power is extended to new areas.” Soviet forces are insidious, Kennan argued, and the U.S. must allocate resources in order to stop potential communist takeovers.

For a policy prescription originating with a diplomat, though, where is the voice of diplomacy? The Long Telegram would have it both ways with respect to military action. While not explicitly endorsing a military prospect, Kennan goes right up to the line, and then around it. He says the U.S. should prepare all-out against an implacable and exceedingly well-resourced opponent that is vulnerable to counterforce. In fact, Kennan later admitted he was too ambiguous

⁷ History and Public Policy Program, “George Kennan’s ‘Long Telegram’”.

⁸ History and Public Policy Program, “George Kennan’s ‘Long Telegram’”.

in his policy prescription, and this ambiguity led U.S. officials to prioritize military containment at critical junctures over political and economic methods of containment.^{9 10} In the 1960s, against the backdrop of the Vietnam War, Kennan would note that authoring containment was comparable to “loosen[ing] a large boulder from the top of a cliff and now helplessly witness[ing] its path of destruction in the valley below.”^{11 12}

A few weeks after the Long Telegram sent shockwaves through Washington, Sir Winston Churchill, the former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, presented his “Sinews of Peace” speech, better known as the “Iron Curtain Speech,” in which he famously and forcefully asserted that “[f]rom Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent.”¹³ Coming from a figure of singular global prominence, the remarks had the effect of galvanizing public opinion against the Soviet Union, and marked the unofficial start of the Cold War. Stalin and the Soviets angrily denounced his remarks.¹⁴

As public opinion increasingly turned anti-Soviet, U.S. government officials drew upon Kennan’s Long Telegram for guidance.¹⁵ The Telegram reached the highest levels of government, including Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal, who helped spread its messages.¹⁶ While many in the government became familiar with the strategy of containment, it was further popularized in July 1947 when Kennan authored “The Sources of Soviet Conduct” for the

⁹ Linke and Weeren, “The Life and Times of George F. Kennan”, 279.

¹⁰ Kennan was specifically referring to the “X” article here. The “X” article contains the same precepts of the Long Telegram.

¹¹ Kennan, “Memoirs.”

¹² Kennan was referring specifically to the “X” article here. The “X” article contains the same precepts of the Long Telegram.

¹³ The International Churchill Society, “The Sinews of Peace (‘Iron Curtain Speech’)”.

¹⁴ Stalin, “Interview to “Pravda” Correspondent Concerning Mr. Winston Churchill’s Speech at Fulton”.

¹⁵ Linke and Weeren, “The Life and Times of George F. Kennan”, 276-277.

¹⁶ Linke and Weeren, “The Life and Times of George F. Kennan”, 276.

journal *Foreign Affairs*. It was this article, often called the “X” article due to Kennan having authored it anonymously under the name “X”, that coined the phrase “containment.”¹⁷

Where there had previously been a void in U.S. policy, Kennan provided clarity and structure. Kennan’s policy of containment was rapidly embraced by President Harry S. Truman, whose immediate concerns were communists winning the Greek Civil War and the Turkish Straits crisis (which involved the Soviets pressuring the Turkish government for free maritime shipping access). On March 17, 1947, Truman appeared before Congress and articulated what would come to be known as the Truman Doctrine: “I believe it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.”¹⁸ After this speech, the U.S. Congress was moved to quick action by approving monetary aid to Greece and Turkey. Henceforth, containment became the bipartisan foreign policy for the next fifty years.

It is logical that Kennan’s containment doctrine became the core of U.S. foreign policy. It offered a solution that wasn’t overtly militaristic, but simultaneously demanded a stalwart stance regarding Communism and the Soviet Union.¹⁹ In theory, containment’s rhetoric offered a middle path between rollback, which demanded forceful military action to remove the Soviets from areas they already occupied, and detente, which called for an easing of tensions. In practice, however, these ambiguities were resolved, within the scope of the Long Telegram, by putting the U.S. on perpetual wartime footing.

Official U.S. policy and actions fulfilled both the suggestions in the Long Telegram as well as its larger, more aggressive, possibilities. In 1949, NATO (North Atlantic Treaty

¹⁷ Linke and Weeren, “The Life and Times of George F. Kennan”, 277.

¹⁸ Truman, “Truman Doctrine”.

¹⁹ Menand, “Getting Real: George F. Kennan’s Cold War”.

Organization) was formed, in keeping with the Telegram's suggestion that the consolidated power of the West could overwhelm Soviet capabilities. The Telegram recommended the United States provide guidance and aid to the war-torn nations of Europe. This was to be accomplished through the Marshall Plan (an economic program in which the U.S. sent around \$14 billion dollars to 17 European nations). Another suggestion, the call for counterforce when "being of immediate strategic necessity", was also pursued, as the U.S. military and covert groups, notably the CIA, began flexing their muscles abroad. In order to do so, more military spending was needed. In early 1950, NSC-68 (a report by the U.S. Department of States Policy Planning Staff) was prescribed, which called for major increases in defense spending. Under the Truman Administration alone, defense spending tripled as a percentage of gross domestic product.²⁰ The first instance of major military action in the name of containment soon followed: the Korean War (1950-1953).

American involvement in the Korean War was officially justified by the policy of containment. Strategically speaking, Korea was not necessarily vital for American national security interests. But under the doctrine of containment, a threat was seen as emanating from the Soviets and channeled through the North Korean state. The division of Korea had been an outgrowth of WWII. When the Communist North invaded, its leader, Kim Il Sung didn't believe the United States would come to the aid of South Korea. The invasion was viewed as the first overt military test of containment policy, and the U.S. backed the South with a full military commitment. As a matter of containment policy, and furthered by his own doctrine, Truman was compelled to send military aid to South Korea. Containment, then, as formulated by Kennan and practiced by Truman, was sufficiently malleable to support the use of military force in the

²⁰ U.S. Department of State, "NSC-68, 1950".

service of halting communist expansion. This was true notwithstanding later protestations by Kennan.²¹

While containment allowed for tools other than military options, the military option was often instinctive in the face of communist territorial advances. Kennan's Long Telegram speaks specifically to the importance of limiting communist advances for the essential protection of the American way of life and America itself. The Korean War set an important precedent as the first "successful" example of military counterforce to block a communist advance. "Rollback" entered the policy discussion in this period, advocated by many hard-liners in Washington as a more aggressive strategy for the reclamation of countries which had already fallen to Communism. By comparison, containment, even in its military form, could be framed as moderate. In the Korean War itself, General MacArthur's push to the border with China was met by Chinese troops that in turn pushed the Americans back to the 38th parallel. The risks of rollback included the possibility that larger communist forces, such as China or the USSR, would become involved in direct fighting with U.S. troops. But it was the willingness of the U.S. government to engage in a relatively large-scale war (with 34,000 U.S. deaths in Korea) under the umbrella of containment that would have drastic consequences.

The doctrine of containment proved to be disastrous for the United States in the following decade when it forced the United States' hand to war in Vietnam. By the early 1960's, South Vietnam faced a significant threat from communist North Vietnam and native communist Viet Cong insurgents. With containment entrenched as orthodoxy by this point, the United States viewed communism anywhere in the world as a global monolith controlled by the Soviet Union. In the absence of U.S. intervention, South Vietnam would have fallen to the communists, which

²¹ Doyle, "The Reluctant Heretic: George F. Kennan and the Vietnam War, 1950-1968", 56.

was unacceptable under containment. The “domino theory” of the time further held that if one country fell to communism, that alone would cause more nations to fall. Containment was the backbone of the domino theory (although Kennan personally rejected this idea).²² A group of policymakers in Washington, later referred to as the “best and the brightest,” advocated for U.S. military involvement in Vietnam, citing the need to follow containment and to thwart the domino effect. Robert McNamara, the highly influential Secretary of Defense under both Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, later explained his logic for military involvement in Vietnam: “I accepted the idea advanced by George F. Kennan, in his famous July 1947 “X” article in Foreign Affairs, that the West, led by the United States, must guard against Communist expansion through a policy of containment. I considered this a sensible basis for decisions about national security and the application of Western military force.”²³

The United States rapidly escalated its presence in Vietnam through the mid-1960s under President Lyndon Johnson. By the late 1960s the Vietnam War was unpopular in the U.S. and, after the Tet Offensive in 1968, was increasingly seen as impossible to win. Under President Nixon in the early 1970s, the U.S. launched a massive bombing campaign against North Vietnam and bordering countries. By the mid-1970s, the remaining U.S. troops left Vietnam, “unvictorious” in a war which killed 2,000,000 Vietnamese people and 58,000 American soldiers. Containment had inextricably bound the United States to military affairs in Vietnam—a course that hurt U.S. prestige abroad and, domestically, exerted enormous strains on the economic, political, and social fabric of the country.

²² Linke and Weeren, “The Life and Times of George F. Kennan”, 281.

²³ McNamara and VanDeMark, “In Retrospect: the Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam”, 30.

The Vietnam experience stretched the policy of containment to a devastating outcome. Containment had so rapidly become orthodoxy precisely because of its malleable nature. As orthodoxy, it had the potential to preclude alternative understandings that were closer to the truth of Vietnam. In deference to containment, the early exercise of diplomacy, the significance of nationalist sentiments, fissures within the Communist “monolith”, and the tenacity of homegrown military insurgencies all were not given their proper weight. Though Kennan himself voiced some of these concerns about the direction of “containment” in the context of Vietnam, his loose policy prescription had hardened into something closer to ideology, the results of which should be understood and not forgotten.

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Appendix

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“George Kennan's 'Long Telegram',” February 22, 1946, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, National Archives and Records Administration, Department of State Records (Record Group 59), Central Decimal File, 1945-1949, 861.00/2-2246; reprinted in US Department of State, ed., Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, Volume VI, Eastern Europe; The Soviet Union (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1969), 696-709. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116178>

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

INCOMING TELEGRAM

PEN-K-M

No paraphrase necessary

8963

Moscow via War

Dated February 22, 1946

Received 3:52 p.m.

SECRET

Secretary of State,

Washington.

511, February 22, 9 p.m.

Answer to Dept's 284, Feb 3 [13] involves questions so intricate, so delicate, so strange to our form of thought, and so important to analysis of our international environment that I cannot compress answers into single brief message without yielding to what I feel would be dangerous degree of over-simplification. I hope, therefore, Dept will bear with me if I submit in answer to this question five parts, subjects of which will be roughly as follows:

(One) Basic features of post-war Soviet outlook.

(Two) Background of this outlook

(Three) Its projection in practical policy on official level.

(Four) Its projection on unofficial level.

(Five) Practical deductions from standpoint of US policy.

I apologize in advance for this burdening of telegraphic channel; but questions involved are of such urgent importance, particularly in view of recent events, that our answers to them, if they deserve attention at all, seem to me to deserve it at once. *There follows*

Part One: Basic Features of Post War Soviet Outlook, as Put Forward by Official Propaganda Machine

Are as Follows:

(a) USSR still lives in antagonistic "capitalist encirclement" with which in the long run there can be no permanent peaceful coexistence. As stated by Stalin in 1927 to a delegation of American workers:

"In course of further development of international revolution there will emerge two centers of world significance: a socialist center, drawing to itself the countries which tend toward socialism, and a capitalist center, drawing to itself the countries that incline toward capitalism. Battle between these two centers for command of world economy will decide fate of capitalism and of communism

in entire world."

(b) Capitalist world is beset with internal conflicts, inherent in nature of capitalist society. These conflicts are insoluble by means of peaceful compromise. Greatest of them is that between England and US.

(c) Internal conflicts of capitalism inevitably generate wars. Wars thus generated may be of two kinds: intra-capitalist wars between two capitalist states, and wars of intervention against socialist world. Smart capitalists, vainly seeking escape from inner conflicts of capitalism, incline toward latter.

(d) Intervention against USSR, while it would be disastrous to those who undertook it, would cause renewed delay in progress of Soviet socialism and must therefore be forestalled at all costs.

(e) Conflicts between capitalist states, though likewise fraught with danger for USSR, nevertheless hold out great possibilities for advancement of socialist cause, particularly if USSR remains militarily powerful, ideologically monolithic and faithful to its present brilliant leadership.

(f) It must be borne in mind that capitalist world is not all bad. In addition to hopelessly reactionary and bourgeois elements, it includes (one) certain wholly enlightened and positive elements united in acceptable communistic parties and (two) certain other elements (now described for tactical reasons as progressive or democratic) whose reactions, aspirations and activities happen to be "objectively" favorable to interests of USSR. These last must be encouraged and utilized for Soviet purposes.

(g) Among negative elements of bourgeois-capitalist society, most dangerous of all are those whom Lenin called false friends of the people, namely moderate-socialist or social-democratic leaders (in other words, non-Communist left-wing). These are more dangerous than out-and-out reactionaries, for latter at least march under their true colors, whereas moderate left-wing leaders confuse people by employing devices of socialism to serve interests of reactionary capital.

So much for premises. To what deductions do they lead from standpoint of Soviet policy? To following:

(a) Everything must be done to advance relative strength of USSR as factor in international society. Conversely, no opportunity must be missed to reduce strength and influence, collectively as well as individually, of capitalist powers.

(b) Soviet efforts, and those of Russia's friends abroad, must be directed toward deepening and exploiting of differences and conflicts between capitalist powers. If these eventually deepen into an "imperialist" war, this war must be turned into revolutionary upheavals within the various capitalist countries.

(c) "Democratic-progressive" elements abroad are to be utilized to maximum to bring pressure to bear on capitalist governments along lines agreeable to Soviet interests.

(d) Relentless battle must be waged against socialist and social-democratic leaders abroad.

Part Two: Background of Outlook

Before examining ramifications of this party line in practice there are certain aspects of it to which I wish to draw attention.

First, it does not represent natural outlook of Russian people. Latter are, by and large,

friendly to outside world, eager for experience of it, eager to measure against it talents they are conscious of possessing, eager above all to live in peace and enjoy fruits of their own labor. Party line only represents thesis which official propaganda machine puts forward with great skill and persistence to a public often remarkably resistant in the stronghold of its innermost thoughts. But party line is binding for outlook and conduct of people who make up apparatus of power--party, secret police and Government--and it is exclusively with these that we have to deal.

Second, please note that premises on which this party line is based are for most part simply not true. Experience has shown that peaceful and mutually profitable coexistence of capitalist and socialist states is entirely possible. Basic internal conflicts in advanced countries are no longer primarily those arising out of capitalist ownership of means of production, but are ones arising from advanced urbanism and industrialism as such, which Russia has thus far been spared not by socialism but only by her own backwardness. Internal rivalries of capitalism do not always generate wars; and not all wars are attributable to this cause. To speak of possibility of intervention against USSR today, after elimination of Germany and Japan and after example of recent war, is sheerest nonsense. If not provoked by forces of intolerance and subversion "capitalist" world of today is quite capable of living at peace with itself and with Russia. Finally, no sane person has reason to doubt sincerity of moderate socialist leaders in Western countries. Nor is it fair to deny success of their efforts to improve conditions for working population whenever, as in Scandinavia, they have been given chance to show what they could do.

Falseness of those premises, every one of which predates recent war, was amply demonstrated by that conflict itself Anglo-American differences did not turn out to be major differences of Western World. Capitalist countries, other than those of Axis, showed no disposition to solve their differences by joining in crusade against USSR. Instead of imperialist war turning into civil wars and revolution, USSR found itself obliged to fight side by side with capitalist powers for an avowed community of aim.

Nevertheless, all these theses, however baseless and disproven, are being boldly put forward again today. What does this indicate? It indicates that Soviet party line is not based on any objective analysis of situation beyond Russia's borders; that it has, indeed, little to do with conditions outside of Russia; that it arises mainly from basic inner-Russian necessities which existed before recent war and exist today.

At 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 is why Soviet purposes most always be solemnly clothed in trappings of Marxism, and why no one should underrate importance of dogma in Soviet affairs. Thus Soviet leaders are driven [by?] necessities of their own past and present position to put forward which [apparent omission] outside world as evil, hostile and menacing, but as bearing within itself germs of creeping disease and destined to be wracked with growing internal convulsions until it is given final Coup de grace by rising power of socialism and yields to new and better world. 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. Basically this is only the steady advance of uneasy Russian nationalism, a centuries old movement in which conceptions of offense and defense are inextricably confused. But in new guise of international Marxism, with its honeyed promises to a desperate and war torn outside world, it is more dangerous and insidious than ever before.

It should not be thought from above that Soviet party line is necessarily disingenuous and insincere on part of all those who put it forward. Many of them are too ignorant of outside world and mentally too dependent to question [apparent omission] self-hypnotism, and who have no difficulty making themselves believe what they find it comforting and convenient to believe. Finally we have the unsolved mystery as to who, if anyone, in this great land actually receives accurate and unbiased information about outside world. In atmosphere of oriental secretiveness and conspiracy which pervades this Government, possibilities for distorting or poisoning sources and currents of information are infinite. The very disrespect of Russians for objective truth--indeed, their disbelief in its existence--leads them to view all stated facts as instruments for furtherance of one ulterior purpose or another. There is good reason to suspect that this Government is actually a conspiracy within a conspiracy; and I for one am reluctant to believe that Stalin himself receives anything like an objective picture of outside world. Here there is ample scope for the type of subtle intrigue at which Russians are past masters. Inability of foreign governments to place their case squarely before Russian policy makers--extent to which they are delivered up in their relations with Russia to good graces of obscure and unknown advisors whom they never see and cannot influence--this to my mind is most disquieting feature of diplomacy in Moscow, and one which Western statesmen would do well to keep in mind if they would understand nature of difficulties encountered here.

Part Three: Projection of Soviet Outlook in Practical Policy on Official Level

We have now seen nature and background of Soviet program. What may we expect by way of its practical implementation?

Soviet policy, as Department implies in its query under reference, is conducted on two planes: (1) official plane represented by actions undertaken officially in name of Soviet Government; and (2) subterranean plane of actions undertaken by agencies for which Soviet Government does not admit responsibility.

Policy promulgated on both planes will be calculated to serve basic policies (a) to (d) outlined in part 1. Actions taken on different planes will differ considerably, but will dovetail into each other in purpose, timing and effect.

On official plane we must look for following:

(a) Internal policy devoted to increasing in every way strength and prestige of Soviet state: intensive military-industrialization; maximum development of armed forces; great displays to impress outsiders; continued secretiveness about internal matters, designed to conceal

weaknesses and to keep opponents in dark.

(b) Wherever it is considered timely and promising, efforts will be made to advance official limits of Soviet power. For the moment, these efforts are restricted to certain neighboring points conceived of here as being of immediate strategic necessity, such as Northern Iran, Turkey, possibly Bornholm. However, other points may at any time come into question, if and as concealed Soviet political power is extended to new areas. Thus a "friendly Persian Government might be asked to grant Russia a port on Persian Gulf. Should Spain fall under Communist control, question of Soviet base at Gibraltar Strait might be activated. But such claims will appear on official level only when unofficial preparation is complete.

(c) Russians will participate officially in international organizations where they see opportunity of extending Soviet power or of inhibiting or diluting power of others. Moscow sees in UNO not the mechanism for a permanent and stable world society founded on mutual interest and aims of all nations, but an arena in which aims just mentioned can be favorably pursued. As long as UNO is considered here to serve this purpose, Soviets will remain with it. But if at any time they come to conclusion that it is serving to embarrass or frustrate their aims for power expansion and if they see better prospects for pursuit of these aims along other lines, they will not hesitate to abandon UNO. This would imply, however, that they felt themselves strong enough to split unity of other nations by their withdrawal to render UNO ineffective as a threat to their aims or security, replace it with an international weapon more effective from their viewpoint. Thus Soviet attitude toward UNO will depend largely on loyalty of other nations to it, and on degree of vigor, decisiveness and cohesion with which those nations defend in UNO the peaceful and hopeful concept of international life, which that organization represents to our way of thinking. I reiterate, Moscow has no abstract devotion to UNO ideals. Its attitude to that organization will remain essentially pragmatic and tactical.

(d) Toward colonial areas and backward or dependent peoples, Soviet policy, even on official plane, will be directed toward weakening of power and influence and contacts of advanced Western nations, on theory that in so far as this policy is successful, there will be created a vacuum which will favor Communist-Soviet penetration. Soviet pressure for participation in trusteeship arrangements thus represents, in my opinion, a desire to be in a position to complicate and inhibit exertion of Western influence at such points rather than to provide major channel for exerting of Soviet power. Latter motive is not lacking, but for this Soviets prefer to rely on other channels than official trusteeship arrangements. Thus we may expect to find Soviets asking for admission everywhere to trusteeship or similar arrangements and using levers thus acquired to weaken Western influence among such peoples.

(e) Russians will strive energetically to develop Soviet representation in, and official ties with, countries in which they sense strong possibilities of opposition to Western centers of power. This applies to such widely separated points as Germany, Argentina, Middle Eastern countries, etc.

(f) In international economic matters, Soviet policy will really be dominated by pursuit of autarchy for Soviet Union and Soviet-dominated adjacent areas taken together. That, however, will be underlying policy. As far as official line is concerned, position is not yet clear. Soviet Government has shown strange reticence since termination hostilities on subject foreign trade. If large scale long term credits should be forthcoming, I believe Soviet Government may eventually again do lip service, as it did in 1930's to desirability of building up international economic exchanges in general. Otherwise I think it possible Soviet foreign trade may be restricted largely to Soviet's own security sphere, including occupied areas in Germany, and that a cold official shoulder may be turned to principle of general economic collaboration among nations.

(g) With respect to cultural collaboration, lip service will likewise be rendered to desirability of deepening cultural contacts between peoples, but this will not in practice be interpreted in any way which could weaken security position of Soviet peoples. Actual manifestations of Soviet policy in this respect will be restricted to arid channels of closely shepherded official visits and functions,

with superabundance of vodka and speeches and dearth of permanent effects.

(h) Beyond this, Soviet official relations will take what might be called "correct" course with individual foreign governments, with great stress being laid on prestige of Soviet Union and its representatives and with punctilious attention to protocol as distinct from good manners.

Part Four: Following May Be Said as to What We May Expect by Way of Implementation of Basic Soviet Policies on Unofficial, or Subterranean Plane, i.e. on Plane for Which Soviet Government Accepts no Responsibility

Agencies utilized for promulgation of policies on this plane are following:

One. Inner central core of Communist Parties in other countries. While many of persons who compose this category may also appear and act in unrelated public capacities, they are in reality working closely together as an underground operating directorate of world communism, a concealed Comintern tightly coordinated and directed by Moscow. It is important to remember that this inner core is actually working on underground lines, despite legality of parties with which it is associated.

Two. Rank and file of Communist Parties. Note distinction is drawn between those and persons defined in paragraph 1. This distinction has become much sharper in recent years. Whereas formerly foreign Communist Parties represented a curious (and from Moscow's standpoint often inconvenient) mixture of conspiracy and legitimate activity, now the conspiratorial element has been neatly concentrated in inner circle and ordered underground, while rank and file--no longer even taken into confidence about realities of movement--are thrust forward as bona fide internal partisans of certain political tendencies within their respective countries, genuinely innocent of conspiratorial connection with foreign states. Only in certain countries where communists are numerically strong do they now regularly appear and act as a body. As a rule they are used to penetrate, and to influence or dominate, as case may be, other organizations less likely to be suspected of being tools of Soviet Government, with a view to accomplishing their purposes through [apparent omission] organizations, rather than by direct action as a separate political party.

Three. A wide variety of national associations or bodies which can be dominated or influenced by such penetration. These include: labor unions, youth leagues, women's organizations, racial societies, religious societies, social organizations, cultural groups, liberal magazines, publishing houses, etc.

Four. International organizations which can be similarly penetrated through influence over various national components. Labor, youth and women's organizations are prominent among them. Particular, almost vital importance is attached in this connection to international labor movement. In this, Moscow sees possibility of sidetracking western governments in world affairs and building up international lobby capable of compelling governments to take actions favorable to Soviet interests in various countries and of paralyzing actions disagreeable to USSR

Five. Russian Orthodox Church, with its foreign branches, and through it the Eastern Orthodox Church in general.

Six. Pan-Slav movement and other movements (Azerbaijan, Armenian, Turcoman, etc.) based on racial groups within Soviet Union.

Seven. Governments or governing groups willing to lend themselves to Soviet purposes in one degree or another, such as present Bulgarian and Yugoslav Governments, North Persian regime, Chinese Communists, etc. Not only propaganda machines but actual policies of these regimes can be placed extensively at disposal of USSR

It may be expected that component parts of this far-flung apparatus will be utilized in

accordance with their individual suitability, as follows:

(a) To undermine general political and strategic potential of major western powers. Efforts will be made in such countries to disrupt national self confidence, to hamstring measures of national defense, to increase social and industrial unrest, to stimulate all forms of disunity. All persons with grievances, whether economic or racial, will be urged to seek redress not in mediation and compromise, but in defiant violent struggle for destruction of other elements of society. Here poor will be set against rich, black against white, young against old, newcomers against established residents, etc.

(b) On unofficial plane particularly violent efforts will be made to weaken power and influence of Western Powers of [on] colonial backward, or dependent peoples. On this level, no holds will be barred. Mistakes and weaknesses of western colonial administration will be mercilessly exposed and exploited. Liberal opinion in Western countries will be mobilized to weaken colonial policies. Resentment among dependent peoples will be stimulated. And while latter are being encouraged to seek independence of Western Powers, Soviet dominated puppet political machines will be undergoing preparation to take over domestic power in respective colonial areas when independence is achieved.

(c) Where individual governments stand in path of Soviet purposes pressure will be brought for their removal from office. This can happen where governments directly oppose Soviet foreign policy aims (Turkey, Iran), where they seal their territories off against Communist penetration (Switzerland, Portugal), or where they compete too strongly, like Labor Government in England, for moral domination among elements which it is important for Communists to dominate. (Sometimes, two of these elements are present in a single case. Then Communist opposition becomes particularly shrill and savage. []]

(d) In foreign countries Communists will, as a rule, work toward destruction of all forms of personal independence, economic, political or moral. Their system can handle only individuals who have been brought into complete dependence on higher power. Thus, persons who are financially independent--such as individual businessmen, estate owners, successful farmers, artisans and all those who exercise local leadership or have local prestige, such as popular local clergymen or political figures, are anathema. It is not by chance that even in USSR local officials are kept constantly on move from one job to another, to prevent their taking root.

(e) Everything possible will be done to set major Western Powers against each other. Anti-British talk will be plugged among Americans, anti-American talk among British. Continentals, including Germans, will be taught to abhor both Anglo-Saxon powers. Where suspicions exist, they will be fanned; where not, ignited. No effort will be spared to discredit and combat all efforts which threaten to lead to any sort of unity or cohesion among other [apparent omission] from which Russia might be excluded. Thus, all forms of international organization not amenable to Communist penetration and control, whether it be the Catholic [apparent omission] international economic concerns, or the international fraternity of royalty and aristocracy, must expect to find themselves under fire from many, and often [apparent omission].

(f) In general, all Soviet efforts on unofficial international plane will be negative and destructive in character, designed to tear down sources of strength beyond reach of Soviet control. This is only in line with basic Soviet instinct that there can be no compromise with rival power and that constructive work can start only when Communist power is doming But behind all this will be applied insistent, unceasing pressure for penetration and command of key positions in administration and especially in police apparatus of foreign countries. The Soviet regime is a police regime par excellence, reared in the dim half world of Tsarist police intrigue, accustomed to think primarily in terms of police power. This should never be lost sight of in gauging Soviet motives.

Part 5: [Practical Deductions From Standpoint of US Policy]

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. Finally, it is seemingly inaccessible to considerations of reality in its basic reactions. For it, the vast fund of objective fact about human society is not, as with us, the measure against which outlook is constantly being tested and re-formed, but a grab bag from which individual items are selected arbitrarily and tendenciously to bolster an outlook already preconceived. This is admittedly not a pleasant picture. Problem of how to cope with this force in [is] undoubtedly greatest task our diplomacy has ever faced and probably greatest it will ever have to face. It should be point of departure from which our political general staff work at present juncture should proceed. It should be approached with same thoroughness and care as solution of major strategic problem in war, and if necessary, with no smaller outlay in planning effort. 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:

(One) Soviet power, unlike that of Hitlerite Germany, is neither schematic nor adventunstic. It does not work by fixed plans. It does not take unnecessary risks. Impervious to logic of reason, and 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.

(Two) 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.

(Three) 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. Lenin's death was first such transfer, and its effects wracked Soviet state for 15 years. After Stalin's death or retirement will be second. But even this will not be final test. Soviet internal system will now be subjected, by virtue of recent territorial expansions, to series of additional strains which once proved severe tax on Tsardom. We here are convinced that never since termination of civil war have mass of Russian people been emotionally farther removed from doctrines of Communist Party than they are today. 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.

(Four) 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:

(One) 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.

(Two) 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. In this we need not be deterred by [ugliness?] of picture. I am convinced that there would be far less hysterical anti-Sovietism in our country today if realities of this situation were better understood by our people. There is nothing as dangerous or as terrifying as the unknown. It may also be argued that to reveal more information on our difficulties with Russia would reflect unfavorably on Russian-American relations. I feel that if there is any real risk here involved, it is one which we should have courage to face, and sooner the better. But I cannot see what we would be risking. Our stake in this country, even coming on heels of tremendous demonstrations of our friendship for Russian people, is remarkably small. We have here no investments to guard, no actual trade to lose, virtually no citizens to protect, few cultural contacts to preserve. Our only stake lies in what we hope rather than what we have; and I am convinced we have better chance of realizing those hopes if our public is enlightened and if our dealings with Russians are placed entirely on realistic and matter-of-fact basis.

(Three) 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 meets 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. If we cannot abandon fatalism and indifference in face of deficiencies of our own society, Moscow will profit--Moscow cannot help profiting by them in its foreign policies.

(Four) 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.

(Five) Finally we must have courage and self-confidence to cling to our own methods and conceptions of human society. After AI, 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