

Cold War containment: the role of the military

Written by Simon Schoon

This PDF is auto-generated for reference only. As such, it may contain some conversion errors and/or missing information. For all formal use please refer to the official version on the website, as linked below.

Cold War containment: the role of the military

<https://www.e-ir.info/2011/07/26/cold-war-containment-the-role-of-the-military/>

SIMON SCHOON, JUL 26 2011

'To what extent were military factors the most significant aspect of the United States' foreign policy of containment towards the Soviet Union, 1946-1953?'

In the aftermath of Japan's surrender on August 15th 1945, the final act of the Second World War, policy makers in the United States (U.S.) struggled to comprehend the seismic shifts that had occurred in the world balance of power. Having formed a wartime alliance with the Soviet Union the U.S. helped the state gain a position of immense power, the consequences of which had become apparent during 1945. The death of President Roosevelt in April 1945 saw the collapse of his attempt to reconcile the Soviets to his 'grand design' vision for the post-world order. Empowered, the Soviet Union proved unwilling to relinquish the gains that allowed it a sizeable stake in shaping the future world order. At the start of 1946 the U.S. was therefore faced with the emergence of a protracted hostility it little understood. Washington's absence of policy was revolutionized by the interpretation of a little known Moscow based diplomat George F. Kennan, explaining the sources of Soviet intransigence. Kennan advocated assuming a firmer approach in dealing with the Soviets and was instrumental in the formation of the U.S.' strategic response known as 'containment'. At its simplest this notion describes the 'American effort, by military, political and economic means to resist communist expansion throughout the world',[1] and can be understood as a product of the post-war structure of international power and desire of U.S. leaders to avoid a repeat world war.[2] It is remarkable because its pursuit led directly to a radical change in the global positioning of the U.S. In the early period of Truman's presidency U.S. armed forces were undergoing a large-scale programme of demobilisation, yet by its end in 1953 military and economic alliances were held with states in virtually every continent of the globe.

Implementation of the containment strategy was based upon the use of a wide variety of policy levers, yet the period is notable for a distinct dwindling in the variety of resources used to contain the Soviet threat. The first term of the Truman presidency reveals a multifaceted approach to containment, in which economic measures were prioritized but military and diplomatic components made up significant elements of the wider strategy. The interpretation of John-Lewis Gaddis explains this multifaceted approach through the influence of Kennan's strategy on policy planning. However Wilson Miscamble credibly challenges Gaddis' view by arguing the plural approaches of containment prior to 1949 can be explained by the absence of any overriding strategy. During Truman's second term a militarisation of containment occurred as the military levers of the strategy became overwhelming favoured. To explain this trend requires wading into the interpretative schools of the origins of the Cold War. In seeking to demonstrate the U.S.' complicity and responsibility for the onset of tensions, historians of the revisionist school like Arnold Offner and Richard Freeland argue militarisation can be explained as the result of its bid for global hegemony, or a product of the ideological anti-communist crusade established by the Truman Doctrine. In contrast, those of the traditionalist school like Charles Maier explain the militarisation of containment as a reaction to the expansion of the Soviet threat. It is clear that at times elements of both schools succinctly explain how military factors became the most significant aspect of the U.S. foreign policy of containment. A true understanding of the strategy incorporates these ideas with the notion that the seeds of the militarisation of containment were sown inadvertently by Kennan himself.

The early policies of the Truman administration's firmer diplomatic approach, conducted during 1946 in the context of a developing Cold War reveal the multifaceted nature of containment policies. For Truman the fate of Eastern Europe and extent of its domination by the Soviets remained an issue of continued concern, having just fought a war against an empire seeking to subjugate the peoples of the same territory. In this arena the U.S. first employed its economic

Cold War containment: the role of the military

Written by Simon Schoon

power as a means to contain Soviet expansionism. Initially refusing to surrender the territories of states including Czechoslovakia, America attempted to establish multilateral trade agreements as a means to encourage independence from the developing Soviet sphere and 'test [the] loyalties' of governments within it.[3] Secretary of State James F. Byrnes notably suspended loans given to Prague after a foreign minister of the Czech government was seen rapturously applauding a speech with distinctly anti-American sentiments, whilst aid to Poland was similarly withdrawn after its government failed to publicize the American source.[4] In offering aid America hoped to tip the balance of the immensely difficult act played by the governments of the war-torn states of Eastern Europe, exposing the weakness of relying on the Soviet economic system. Robert Garson argues its withdrawal can be understood as an instance of ideological containment of Soviet expansionism. By relinquishing aid the U.S. tacitly accepted the Soviet sphere of influence that was to be held up as a 'sobering [ideological] example', a demonstration of the threat of repression encouraging acquiescence with the U.S.' developing containment policies.[5]

The assumption of a firmer approach in dealing with Soviet related issues was the product of a revolution in thinking initiated by George Kennan's 'Long Telegram' in February 1946. Kennan argued the sources of Soviet international hostility were internal preventing any foreseeable normalization of relations. Ideology did not determine action; it provided merely a vehicle to legitimize totalitarian power for the Communist Party, by constructing the image of a lurid and hostile capitalist world and cloaking the traditional expansionist tendencies of Russian imperialism. Kennan's interpretation of Soviet power encouraged the view expansionism could be restricted 'without recourse to any general military conflict' by cultivating a 'positive and constructive picture' for threatened societies.[6] These ideas provided the underlying rationale for the earliest initiatives of the firmer approach, employing a variety of tools of American power to restrict Soviet expansionism. The importance of military force was demonstrated in an August 1946 instance of 'gunboat diplomacy', whereby a demonstration of U.S. naval power was used to quell Soviet demands for possession of the Bosphorus and Dardanelle straits from Turkey. The U.S. attempted to isolate the Soviet Union by bringing its violation of the Tehran Agreement regarding the positioning of troops in Iran to the United Nations (U.N.). The Security Council's third resolution requested the removal of troops, a diplomatic attempt to contain Soviet expansionism revealing how the approach of the Truman administration during 1946 was multifaceted in nature.[7]

The notion of containment as a strategic doctrine first gained currency after Kennan published an anonymous article in July 1947 calling for a 'long term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies'.[8] In his own mind he had already formed the substance of the containment strategy, which he sought to implement through his heading of the State Department's newly formed Policy Planning Staff (P.P.S.). Fundamental to this was Kennan's belief that Soviet expansionism represented a 'primarily political [not military] threat to the balance of world power. Economics was deemed the most useful instrument to address this. A hands-off approach to the provision of aid could help 'restore [the] self confidence' required to cultivate independent centres of power resistant to communism, and it exploited the U.S.' comparative advantage in wealth.[10] John-Lewis Gaddis argues the influence of Kennan's ideas are reflected in the multifaceted approach of U.S. foreign policy between 1947-1948, in which economic factors made up the most significant aspect of the strategy. His argument regarding the influence of Kennan's ideas appears credible, given the decision of the administration to frame Truman's March 1947 request to Congress of \$400 million in aid to Greece as 'essential to economic stability and orderly political processes'.[11] The psychological impact of countering the Soviet attempt to infiltrate Greece contained further expansionism on the European continent, keeping safe the non-industrial regions around the Soviet sphere.[12]

When guerrilla warfare in Greece intensified through 1947, the Truman administration realised internal security had to be guaranteed before economic stability could be prioritized, resulting in a short-term transfer of approximately half the funds allocated for Greece to the provision of military equipment.[13] In its interpretation of the containment strategy, the administration therefore recognized that military force played a crucial role in maintaining the balance of power. This merging of the economic and military forms of containment in Greece reflects how the U.S.' foreign policy at this time was flexible and defined by a cautious balance of approaches.[14] The importance of economics as the most significant tool to contain the political threat communist subversion represented is suggested by the reorientation of aid back to forms aimed to guarantee economic stability, following the end of Greece's civil war in 1949. The Truman Doctrine, regarded as an official endorsement of containment, thus reveals through a variety of approaches its multifaceted nature. The emphasis placed on economics as the most significant aspect amongst many arguably suggests Gaddis is correct in his interpretation U.S. foreign policy followed the strategic doctrine of

Cold War containment: the role of the military

Written by Simon Schoon

containment inspired by Kennan.

However the problem with Gaddis' attempt to explain the nature of containment by alluding to Kennan's influence is that recognition of this alone cannot explain the course of U.S. foreign policy. Consensus exists amongst historians that Kennan did at times exercise a crucial influence over policy. Wilson Miscamble recognizes the P.P.S. as the 'principal source of policy' in State Department planning at the time, and Truman is known to have favoured secretaries of state (advised by Kennan) who wielded an active influence over policy like George Marshall.[15] Yet Kennan's influence through the hierarchies of the administration bureaucracy was at best a source of competent advice for Truman amongst what Sarah-Jane Corke describes as a series of 'competing strategic visions'. [16] Gaddis' attempt to examine containment in relation to the original strategy of its founder Kennan is useful to reveal the extent of its divergence. However his approach imposes a sense of order scarcely apparent at the time which neglects the reality of how foreign policy was formed.[17] Despite Kennan's personal conception of a broad strategy, instances of its implementation should be understood as responses to immediate crisis that were decided in a 'piecemeal and staggered manner'. [18] The notion of containment as a structured and doctrinal approach of U.S. foreign policy is therefore flawed, it is more likely containment was at best a 'bundle of assumptions' the administration adhered to at various times.[19] In contrast to Gaddis' argument, the multifaceted nature of the administration's approach can therefore be better understood as a product of the *lack* of any overriding doctrine. The significant use of economics as a tool to achieve its ends represents the extent of Kennan's influence during Truman's first term.

This critique of the modern interpretive approach to history is used by John Gimbel to explain what he argues are the true origins of the Marshall Plan, formally known as the European Recovery Programme (E.R.P.). He argues the dissemination of the idea the plan originated as part of the U.S.' strategy of containing Soviet expansionism in Europe conceals its true origins.[20] Gimbel's view is that the Marshall Plan must be understood as an attempt by the U.S. to escape the quagmire of its occupation of Germany whose economy was utterly ruinous. To make this politically acceptable a wider European programme was initiated whose purposes then 'mushroomed' to the extent it lacked clear objectives.[21] However Gimbel's bid to redress the orthodox interpretation by arguing its purpose was solely economic is guilty of his own charge against traditional historians. By going too far in the other direction Gimbel completely rejects the wider European diplomatic intentions of the plan that a true understanding of the past needs to account for.

The creation of the E.R.P. was very much encouraged by the influence of Kennan as a means of containment. This is reflected both in the principles of its implementation, and in the similarity of the language Marshall used when advocating the aid programme in June 1947 to Kennan's P.P.S. report that had recommended it.[22] First and foremost the E.R.P. provided a means to economically contain Soviet expansionism. The industrial capacity of Western Europe meant the area was deemed of vital interest to U.S. security, requiring rehabilitation to restrict its vulnerability to the spread of communism.[23] In Italy De Gasperi headed a fragile coalition where the Communist Party had in excess of two million members, and in France communism was on the march with the Party gaining approximately twenty nine percent of the vote in the elections of 1947.[24] To counter this growing threat, entry to the E.R.P. required various measures of internal monetary reform including the stabilization of currencies in order to enhance free market international trading conditions to encourage economic growth.[25] Like other initiatives of Truman's foreign policy the E.R.P. was multifaceted. Kennan planned to diplomatically contain the Soviets by offering Marshall Aid to both the Soviet Union and the states of Eastern Europe under its influence, in the knowledge it would be rejected effectively forcing the demarcation of a divided Europe, isolating the Eastern Bloc.[26] Aid was also offered on the condition states of Western Europe made a unified request for it. By doing so Kennan sought to encourage a Western European economic system to emerge that might act as a 'third force' between the two poles, and in time potentially develop into a cooperative defence network.[27] In providing aid to Britain and France the U.S. similarly hoped to militarily contain Soviet expansionism, through the rehabilitation of these economies so that they might assist in the task.[28]

In a variety of other foreign policy initiatives during the first term of Truman's presidency, evidence of the plural nature of its approaches suggests a lack of overarching strategy. Despite not being initiated as part of a containment doctrine, the change in German occupation policy that created the Bizone in January 1947 unified the economies of

Cold War containment: the role of the military

Written by Simon Schoon

the American and British occupied zones, providing a means to contain Soviet expansionism.[29] It marked the beginning of diplomatic initiatives that would lead to the unification of the Federal Republic of Germany in May 1949. The Bizone enabled economic rehabilitation through the development of a 'Coal for Europe' programme, the founding bloc of what would mature into a sustainable Western European unity.[30] The administration's policy towards Yugoslavia was radically altered following its leader Tito's split with the Soviet bloc in 1948 in a move that crushed the idea communism was monolithic. This reorientation provides perhaps the best example of how Truman's lack of a comprehensive strategy allowed Kennan to extend the influence of his own strategic vision for U.S. foreign policy.

Kennan's recommendations put forward in P.P.S. 35 demonstrate an aggressive twist to his own strategy 'aimed at actively undermining Soviet control' through exploiting the split.[31] By developing trading links Kennan meant to use Yugoslavia as a 'wedge' to deconstruct the Eastern Bloc, encouraging nationalism elsewhere by demonstrating how communist states could prosper outside of Soviet control.[32] Consequently Yugoslavia's gold assets were unfrozen in July 1948 and the subversive actions Kennan had recommended (that had led to the creation of the 'Office of Special Projects' by the National Security Council Directive (N.S.C.) 10/2) were stepped up. Truman's willingness to abruptly change approach to a more aggressive strategy is indicative of his own lack of an overarching doctrinal approach towards foreign policy. When containment, understood as the personal strategy of George Kennan was implemented, it reflects the extent of Kennan's influence and the convincingness of his own strategic vision over others in guiding U.S. foreign policy. The word containment is clearly ill suited to describe this alteration in Kennan's strategy (others have termed it liberation[33]), suggesting the difficulty of its use to comprehensively account for early post-war U.S. foreign policy. Kennan's influence had the effect of ensuring that during Truman's first term, when implemented economic means were undoubtedly the most significant aspect of containment. However acts to contain Soviet expansionism were multifaceted, explained in part by the lack of a comprehensive strategy guiding Truman's foreign policy actions.

During the course of the second term of Truman's presidency the nature of policy towards Yugoslavia changed again. The U.S. began to covertly provide arms in ever increasing amounts, to the extent that by late 1952 Yugoslavia received roughly proportionate levels of military equipment to U.S. partners in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) alliance.[34] This emphasis on military aid is indicative of a wider change that occurred in U.S. foreign policy from 1949, which Daniel Yergin argues was guided by the emergence of a doctrine of national security within the administration.[35] Despite continuing economic and diplomatic measures to contain Soviet expansionism, virtually all new containment initiatives overwhelming favoured military means. Evidence of the militarisation of containment is found in the tenants of N.S.C. 68 which increased the federal defence budget by two hundred and fifty seven percent for fiscal year 1951, and in an eruption of military alliances the U.S. formed globally.[36] Arguably the nature of this change, in which military factors became undoubtedly the most significant aspect of containment, can be explained by the U.S.' development of a global hegemonic role.

Richard Freeland argues the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty in April 1949, the clearest symbol of the militarisation of containment, provided the U.S. a means to politically dominate its member states by using NATO led rearmament as the 'mechanism to organize [a subservient] Western Bloc.'[37] His work forms part of the revisionist account that argues an American will to dominate the international system as global hegemon was instrumental in the onset of the Cold War. He explains the priority afforded to military means of containment in Truman's second term through the failure of the E.R.P. to foster a relationship of dependence with economies provided Marshall Aid. The unwillingness of the Republican dominated Congress to reduce import tariffs scuppered a trade system from flourishing in which assisted states relied upon exporting goods to the U.S. to prosper.[38] Consequently the idea of a European economic union gained currency which, instead of representing a 'third force' to contain Soviet expansionism, threatened to establish Western Europe independent of American power. The creation of an Atlantic defence system was therefore used by America as a means to reverse this trend, expanding military power through NATO in order to dominate.[39] However the problem with this interpretation is that like other revisionist arguments, Freeland's attempt to explain the militarisation of containment relies upon the idea that Truman's foreign policy was guided by an overarching strategy for domination.[40] Recognition that early post-war U.S. foreign policy was formed through a competition of pressures, not the product of a grand design, suggests the hollowness of this approach.

In spite of this, the sheer extent of the U.S.' expansion suggests that the revisionists' assertion is fundamentally

Cold War containment: the role of the military

Written by Simon Schoon

correct; a drive for global hegemony did result in the militarisation of containment. By the mid-fifties the U.S. held military bases in thirty six countries globally proving the expansion of its influence and global power, which undoubtedly developed a form of empire. The question remains how to explain this trend given the failure of the revisionist position (which argues the Truman administration developed a strategy to expand and politically dominate states) to hold. Gier Lundestad provides some clue with his theory the U.S. constructed a global 'empire by invitation'.^[41] This is the idea that instead of imposing its power, individual states and their public opinions had varying motives for developing military and economic relationships with the U.S., resulting in the global expansion of its power. The history of the formation of NATO demonstrates why Lundestad's interpretation is credible. NATO formed as a result of the persuasion of British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin that the U.S. should incorporate itself into an Atlantic military alliance with the Western European member states of the Treaty of Brussels. Whilst not entirely selfless, American acquiescence was more a product of its sympathy for the Soviet threatened European plight than part of a drive to dominate, as reflected in the tenants of article five of NATO's charter and the level of 'national differentiation' this security system allowed for.^[42]

Post-revisionists take Lundestad's argument a stage further by suggesting the nature of U.S. power at the end of World War Two made its assumption of a dominant international role unavoidable.^[43] Certainly America's ability to mobilize its military force and the size of its economic power encouraged the invitations that resulted in a globalisation of U.S. interests in the period. Scott Lucas and Kaeten Mistry's provide a highly convincing explanation of the militarisation of containment by marrying the 'strategic vacuum that beset the Truman administration' others have recognized to this growth in America's hegemonic power.^[44] They argue that because the U.S. failed to define its end goal in its combat of communist expansion, the will to meet the perceived threat 'became, in and of itself, the defining objective of American policy'.^[45] This perception of threat was inherent to N.S.C.68, the blueprint for the global expansion of U.S. power, beginning an endless process whose goal was persistently ambiguous encouraging the development of military power *vis a vis* the Soviet Union for its own sake.^[46] This is perhaps the ultimate reflection of how far removed U.S. foreign policy came from Kennan's conception of the containment strategy, whose end goal had consistently been to foster a set of circumstances leading to an early and peaceful conclusion of the Cold War.^[47] The growth of U.S. hegemony arguably therefore provides a significant explanation of why containment policies became militarised. Full understanding of this phenomenon requires an account of the crucial role played by ideology in motivating the perception of threat the Soviet Union inspired.

Arguably the militarisation of containment is a product of America's pursuit of an ideological crusade to combat communism established by Truman when proclaiming his doctrine in March 1947. This explanation of the militarisation of containment forms part of the same revisionist strand that attempts to undermine the traditional account of the Truman presidency praising him as the first 'cold warrior'.^[48] The rhetoric of his doctrine, which stated it was to be the 'policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation', failed to distinguish between vital and peripheral interests (to Kennan's horror) and established ideological parameters that arguably guided future foreign policy initiatives.^[49] Having been shown the importance of military force to protect the balance of power through aid to Greece, Truman arguably encouraged a parallel and global military containment to combat communist expansion. Arnold Offner suggests the rhetoric of his doctrine is merely one instance demonstrating Truman's 'parochial and nationalistic heritage', a quality that conditioned his understanding of international events. ^[50] As a consequence Truman was unable to view expressions of nationalism resulting from decolonisation other than through the lens of Cold War hostilities. His narrow ideological view saw military response as the key to contain communist expansionism, a failure of leadership that Offner argues developed the Cold War.^[51] Evidence of the militarisation of containment in Asia appears to validate Offner's interpretation. Worried by the Soviet attempt to support the nationalist leader Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam, America concluded Mutual Defence Assistance Agreements with France (the region's former colonial power), Bao Dai's government in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos in December 1950.^[52] Similarly North Korea's invasion of South Korea in June 1950 was viewed as 'proof of Soviet imperialistic designs on Asia'. ^[53] American involvement in the Korean War was therefore a direct product of Truman's faith an inherently expansionist international communist movement was seeking to develop its strength. This belief was compounded by the entry of the Peoples Republic of China's in October 1950, encouraging the U.S. to further develop its network of military alliances as a means to contain the threat, incorporating the Philippines in August 1951.

Cold War containment: the role of the military

Written by Simon Schoon

However in order to demonstrate his responsibility for the militarisation of containment, Offner relies on an unbalanced and negative portrayal of Truman. Like several recent accounts,[54] Offner depicts Truman as the initiator and director of policy when his consistent use of influential subcommittees like the P.P.S. suggests he played more the role of a final authorizing figure than policy instigator. During 1949 Truman initially capped the defence budget for the following year at fourteen point four billion dollars, revealing how like many of his influential Republican critics in Congress he was a fiscal conservative, holding no pre-planned programme to militarily contain communist expansionism globally based on his ideological convictions.[55] The decision to frame the announcement of aid to Greece and Turkey in March 1947 as a global policy was the result of the amendment of Truman's speech by Dean Acheson (Secretary of State from 1949), who later testified the rhetoric was used as a tool to secure support amongst a sceptical and isolationist Congress by emphasizing the principled approach of U.S. foreign policy. [56] The suggestion Truman's rhetoric subsequently guided the path of foreign policy is an example of the ease with which the historian can 'cherry-pick' sources to fit an interpretation, instead of taking account of the broad set of factors accounted for when it was formed. A more convincing alternative to Offner's focus on Truman is to argue the militarisation of containment can be partially understood as a product of the effect this ideological rhetoric had on the U.S. public.

Despite being a top secret document N.S.C. 7 is symbolic of the ideological view of world affairs disseminating from the top of the administration, which argued the 'ultimate objective of Soviet-directed world communism is domination of the world'.[57] The domestic impact of this was to encourage an anti-communist panic to grip the nation known as McCarthyism in the period, placing political pressure on the administration with several effects.[58] In order to avoid the administration being labelled appeasers firm military countermeasures to contain expansion were encouraged, [59] isolationist sentiments of Congress that previously restricted the scope of such measures were quelled and radical sections of public opinion calling for preventative war were stoked, forcing the administration to tread a cautious line.[60] By publically creating this ideological world view the administration soon lost its own ability to separate the Soviet national will to expand, from the notion Soviet behaviour was determined by and directed the inherently expansionist international communist movement.[61] Fear that international communism would continue its expansion encouraged strong military countermeasures to meet this threat wherever it occurred, instead of operating on the basis of a hierarchy of interests. However this does not account for why the emphasis of this expansion was placed on the military aspect of containment during Truman's second term. The timing of the emphasis can be explained by the changing context of international events that encouraged the idea international communism was expanding, enhancing the perception of threat.

During 1948 two major events occurred that proved for a majority of Americans the expansionist tendencies of the Soviet controlled communist ideology. In February Czechoslovakia's Communist Party seized control of the state and beginning in June the Soviet Union imposed a blockade around its former allies' occupied zones of Berlin. Where Kennan argued such acts were merely the 'predictable bearing of [Soviet] fangs', a product of the success of the Marshall Plan, the vast majority of others feared the beginnings of Soviet encroachment onto West Europe.[62] This acted as a catalyst for the process of NATO's formation, explained by the orthodox interpretation of Charles Maier as a 'democratic reflex' that militarised containment, encouraging its members to unite in the face of enhanced military threat.[63] The Kremlin's detonation of an atomic bomb in late August 1949 ended the U.S.' nuclear monopoly several years earlier than anticipated resulting in a reassessment of the assumption Russia would not provoke war; by 1954 it was now considered it might win one.[64] As a consequence Truman authorised the construction of the hydrogen bomb in January 1950 and NATO expanded into offensive positions. Turkey was integrated in 1952 not because the U.S. expected an attack on the state, but due to its potential 'utility in waging war' with the Soviet Union.[65] NATO members were steadily rearmed until by the end of 1952 its army had fifty divisions and U.S. troops were permanently stationed in the West Germany, the revised front line of the Cold War where the military threat the Red Army posed was at its greatest.[66]

The outcome of the Chinese Civil War, where Mao-Tse Tung's Communist Party defeated the Chinese nationalists in October 1949 was also instrumental in the loss of the Truman administration's ability to make a distinction between Soviet expansionism and international communism. The two were now considered one and the same (China remained in the Soviet orbit until the beginnings of its divergence in the mid-fifties), resulting in a crucial change in occupation policy towards Japan. Instead of demilitarising Japan through international agreements (advocated by

Cold War containment: the role of the military

Written by Simon Schoon

Kennan[67]), the U.S. concluded a separate peace from the Soviet Union at San Francisco in September 1951, incorporating a security treaty that allowed the U.S. to retain major military bases. Japan was considered 'key to the balance of power in Asia'[68] as a means to contain China and protect South Korea, who the U.S. envisaged would act as a future market for Japan's economic rehabilitation.[69] Ultimately this was part of the drive Acheson had argued for in a February 1950 speech to form the 'situations of strength' underlying N.S.C. 68. [70] War in Korea made the globalisation of military containment politically acceptable and even convinced those of the middle ground like Charles E. Bohlen it was desirable.[71] As a member of the P.P.S. who supported many of Kennan's views but held his own relatively influential strategic vision, Bohlen's support for N.S.C. 68 demonstrates well how the changing context of international events convinced members of the administration for a need to globally expand its military containment initiatives. Over the course of just a few years the world had once again become massively unstable, with communist parties expanding globally and providing support to nationalist movements gaining momentum due to the rapid pace of decolonisation. The most convincing form of protection against what the administration viewed as the growing storm of international communism was a large increase military strength, resulting in this soon becoming the most significant aspect of containment.

A final interesting argument to explain the militarisation of containment is the idea that in part, it is a product of weaknesses in Kennan's conception of the strategy and his persistent failure to adequately explain its objectives. The language of his anonymous article called for the 'vigilant application of counter force' at 'every point where [the Soviet Union] shows signs of encroaching upon the interests of a peaceful and stable world.'[72] This strength of tone clearly lends itself to a wider misinterpretation of the strategy, demonstrated in the immediate criticisms of Walter Lippmann. Lippmann argued the strategy presented a blank cheque for a limitless expansion of military commitments due to its implicit sense war with the Soviet Union was inevitable. [73] The scope of this misinterpretation is astonishing given that Kennan has since argued the central themes of his strategy were that interests were divisible, and the goal of foreign policy should be to foster circumstances that altered the Soviet concept of international relations and encourage negotiation. The seminal writings of Kennan's poorly explained strategy were incredibly influential in the administration during the immediate post-war environment. Arguably then there is grounds to suggest Kennan himself was instrumental in developing the premise 'positions of strength have yet to be built', an idea that would come to shape the nature of containment during Truman's second term.[74] Overall this indicates the problem of relying on Kennan's memoirs to explain why his strategy failed to achieve its ends. Whilst Kennan accepts his shortcomings in explaining his theory, he fails to recognize that this language may have played a primary role in the militarisation of containment from its inception.[75] The extent of how his strategy was misinterpreted arguably placed a type of intellectual bias against the idea of accommodation with the Soviet Union that spread through the echelons of the administration.

Distinguished members of public like Lippmann were not aware of the intricacies of his strategy, however Kennan had ample opportunity to explain its means and ends to the administration, suggesting the relative weakness of the idea the early language of containment conditioned its eventual outcome. A far more credible critique is to argue that weaknesses in Kennan's original strategy made its ends unobtainable, resulting in the militarisation of containment instead of the pursuit of early accommodation with the Soviet Union. At its heart Kennan's strategy was concerned with human psychology, using economics as a tool to develop self-confident power centres resistant to outside political threats. Ironically Kennan appears to have misinterpreted how psychology and the perception of threat might change.[76] As the Soviet Union built its capabilities and consolidated its power, the peoples of Western Europe and members of the administration alike inevitably became concerned with these capabilities, not the Soviet intent that Kennan argued was not apparent and distinguished the threat faced as political. His aversion to the establishment of military alliances suggests how his strategy could never properly recognize the crucial role played by military security that was required to alleviate fears, and ensure the administration remained politically credible. The global expansion of communism had a public psychological impact, encouraging the administration to view the struggle as a zero-sum game, whereby a loss of credibility in one territory was deemed to affect the global balance of world power.[77] As the administration increasingly had to operate within the confines of this game, the perimeter defence concept of N.S.C. 68 soon overrid Kennan's claim that response should be based on a hierarchy of interests. In this way some of the misconceptions that underlined Kennan's strategy of containment prevented it from achieving its final ends, weaknesses that would ensure instead military factors became the most significant aspect of containment during Truman's second term.

Cold War containment: the role of the military

Written by Simon Schoon

In its struggle to negotiate the balance of international power left at the conclusion of the Second World War, the Truman presidency is notable for a change in the nature of its policies to counter Soviet expansionism labelled 'containment'. During Truman's first term instances of containment incorporated a variety of approaches, amongst which economics played arguably the most significant role. To a large extent this can be accounted for by the influence of George Kennan on policy planning. Reflecting his realist understanding of the international system, Kennan conceived a strategic doctrine to guide U.S. foreign policy that used diplomatic initiatives to contain the Soviet threat, but primarily employed the U.S.' economic power as the main tool to achieve its ends. However Kennan's own strategy of containment was personal and whilst influential, it never became the doctrine that guided all Truman's actions in foreign policy. Aside from Kennan's influence, the multifaceted nature of containment policies in the period reflected a competition of visions for the best means to restrict Soviet expansion, allowed to flourish under Truman because of the president's own lack of an overarching strategy. The idea that a comprehensive containment strategy provided a consistent direction is therefore, something of a historical myth.

Roughly coinciding with Truman's second term, a change occurred in the nature of new instances of containment, to the extent that military factors soon overwhelmingly comprised its most significant aspect. The militarisation of the U.S.' containment of the Soviet Union occurred at a global level, encouraging revisionists to explain it as part of a drive for global hegemony and an ideological crusade against communism. Many of these ideas are credible; it seems likely military means of containment were expanded to secure power over and above the Soviet Union, whilst an ideological world view encouraged strong means of resistance where the U.S. considered free peoples to be threatened by the expansion of international communism. However the timing of the militarisation of containment can only be explained by a growth in the perceived power of the international communist movement from 1948 onwards, emphasized by traditional historians as the key factor in the development of the Cold War. In this climate the influence of Kennan's strategy (which was soon considered a weak response as it only afforded a small role to military security) rapidly waned, resulting in military factors becoming undoubtedly the most significant aspect of containment by the end of Truman's presidency in 1953.

Bibliography

- Casey, Steven, 'Selling NSC-68: The Truman Administration, Public Opinion, and the Politics of Mobilization, 1950-51,' *Diplomatic History*, 29 no.4 (2005), pp.655-690
- Corke, Sarah-Jane, 'History, Historians and the Naming of Foreign Policy: A Postmodern Reflection on American Strategic Thinking during the Truman Administration,' *Intelligence & National Security*, 16 no.3 (2001), pp.146-165
- Encyclopaedia of American Foreign Policy: Studies of the Principal Movements and Ideas*, ed. DeConde, Alexander (New York: Scribner, 1978)
- Dockrill, Saki, *The End of the Cold War Era: The Transformation of the Global Security Order* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005)
- Containment: Documents on American Policy and Strategy, 1945-1950*, ed. Etzold, Thomas H., and Gaddis, John-Lewis (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978)
- Frazier, Robert, 'Kennan, Universalism, and the Truman Doctrine,' *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 11 no.2 (2009), pp.3-34
- Freeland, Richard M., *The Truman Doctrine and the Origins of McCarthyism: Foreign Policy, Domestic Politics, and Internal Security, 1946-1948* (New York: Schocken, 1974)
- Gaddis, John-Lewis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972)

Cold War containment: the role of the military

Written by Simon Schoon

- Gaddis, John-Lewis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982)
- Garson, Robert, 'The Role of Eastern Europe in America's Containment Policy, 1945-1948,' *Journal of American Studies*, 13 no.1 (1979), pp.73-92
- Gimbel, John, *The Origins of the Marshall Plan* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1976)
- Graebner, Norman A., 'Global Containment: The Truman Years,' *Current History*, 57 no.336 (1969), pp.77-116
- Griffith, Robert, 'Truman and the Historians: The Reconstruction of Postwar American History,' *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 59 no.1 (1975), pp.20-50
- Heuser, Beatrice, *Western 'Containment' Policies in the Cold War: The Yugoslav Case, 1948-53* (London: Routledge, 1989)
- Jones, Howard, *"A New Kind of War": America's Global Strategy and the Truman Doctrine in Greece* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989)
- Kennan, George F., 'The Sources of Soviet Conduct,' *Foreign Affairs*, 25 no.4 (1947), pp.566-582
- Kennan, George F., *Memoirs, 1925-1950* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967)
- Kissinger, Henry, 'Reflections on Containment,' *Foreign Affairs*, 73 no.3 (1994), pp.113-130
- Koenig, Louis W., 'The Truman Doctrine and NATO,' *Current History*, 57 no.335, pp.18-53
- The Truman Presidency*, ed. Lacey, Michael J., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989)
- Force and Statecraft: Diplomatic Challenges of Our Time*, ed. Lauren, Paul G. [et all] (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007)
- Leffler, Melvyn P., 'Strategy, Diplomacy, and the Cold War: The United States, Turkey, and NATO, 1945-1952,' *Journal of American History*, 71 no.4 (1985), pp.807-825
- Lippmann, Walter, 'The Cold War,' *Foreign Affairs*, 65 no.4 (1987), pp.869-884
- Lundestad, Gier, 'Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945-1952,' *Journal of Peace Research*, 23 no.3 (1986), pp.263-277
- Lucas, Scott & Mistry, Kaeten, 'Illusions of Coherence: George F. Kennan, U.S. Strategy and Political Warfare in the Early Cold War, 1946-1950,' *Diplomatic History*, 33 no. 1 (2009), pp.39-66
- Miscamble, Wilson D., *George F. Kennan and the Making of American Foreign Policy, 1947-1950* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992)
- Offner, Arnold A., *Another Such Victory: President Truman and the Cold War, 1945-53* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002)
- Rees, David, *The Age of Containment: The Cold War, 1945-1965* (London: Macmillan, 1967)
- Richardson, James L., 'Cold War Revisionism: A Critique,' *World Politics*, 24 no.4 (1972), pp.579-612

Cold War containment: the role of the military

Written by Simon Schoon

Ruddy, Michael T., 'A Cautious Approach to the Militarization of Containment,' *Historian*, 48 no.3 (1986), pp.394-411

Schuessler, John M., 'Absorbing the First Blow: Truman and the Cold War,' *White House Studies*, 9 no.3 (2010), pp.215-231

Spalding, Elizabeth E., *The First Cold Warrior: Harry Truman, Containment and the Remaking of Liberal Internationalism* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2006)

Yergin, Daniel, *Shattered Peace: The Origins of the Cold War and the National Security State* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977)

[1] B.J Bernstein, 'Containment,' in *Encyclopaedia of American Foreign Policy: Studies of the Principal Movements and Ideas*, ed. A. DeConde (New York: Scribner, 1978), pp.191-203, p.191.

[2] J.L. Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p.4.

[3] R. Garson, 'The Role of Eastern Europe in America's Containment Policy, 1945-1948,' *Journal of American Studies*, 13 no.1 (1979), p.82.

[4] Garson,p.83.

[5] Garson, p.79.

[6] Cited in *Containment: Documents on American Policy and Strategy, 1945-1950*, ed. T.H. Etzold & J.L. Gaddis (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), p.61-63.

[7]*Force and Statecraft: Diplomatic Challenges of Our Time*, ed. P.G. Lauren [et all] (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.89.

[8] G F. Kennan, 'The Sources of Soviet Conduct,' *Foreign Affairs*, 25 no.4 (1947), p.575.

[9] G.F. Kennan, *Memoirs, 1925-1950* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967), p.317.

[10] Gaddis (1982), p.37.

[11] Cited in H. Jones, "*A New Kind of War*": *America's Global Strategy and the Truman Doctrine in Greece* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. viii.

[12] R. A. Pollard, 'The National Security State Reconsidered: Truman and Economic Containment, 1945-1950,' in *The Truman Presidency*, ed. M.J. Lacey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp.205-234, p.207.

Cold War containment: the role of the military

Written by Simon Schoon

[13] L.W. Koenig, 'The Truman Doctrine and NATO,' *Current History*, 57 no.335, p.19.

[14] Jones, p.37.

[15], Miscamble, Wilson D., *George F. Kennan and the Making of American Foreign Policy, 1947-1950* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), p.xi.

[16] S.J. Corke, 'History, Historians and the Naming of Foreign Policy: A Postmodern Reflection on American Strategic Thinking during the Truman Administration,' *Intelligence & National Security*, 16 no.3 (2001), p.156.

[17] Corke, p.157.

[18] Miscamble, xiv.

[19] Corke, p.148.

[20] J. Gimbel, *The Origins of the Marshall Plan* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1976), p.4.

[21] Gimbel, p.5.

[22] See Etzold & Gaddis, p.102.

[23] Kennan (1967), p.336.

[24] Kennan (1967), p.331.

[25] Gimbel, p.269.

[26] Kennan (1967), p.343.

[27] Miscamble, p.74.

[28] B. Heuser, *Western 'Containment' Policies in the Cold War: The Yugoslav Case, 1948-53* (London: Routledge, 1989), p.11.

[29] Gaddis (1982), p.60.

[30] J.M. Schuessler, 'Absorbing the First Blow: Truman and the Cold War,' *White House Studies*, 9 no.3 (2010), p.222.

[31] Heuser, p.13.

Cold War containment: the role of the military

Written by Simon Schoon

[32] Heuser, p.82.

[33] See Corke for a historiographical overview, p.153.

[34] Heuser, p.164.

[35] D. Yergin, *Shattered Peace: The Origins of the Cold War and the National Security State* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), p.195-196.

[36] Gaddis (1982), p.113.

[37] R.M. Freeland, *The Truman Doctrine and the Origins of McCarthyism: Foreign Policy, Domestic Politics, and Internal Security, 1946-1948* (New York: Schocken, 1974), p.324.

[38] Freeland, p.330.

[39] Freeland, p.331-333.

[40] J.L. Richardson, 'Cold War Revisionism: A Critique,' *World Politics*, 24 no.4 (1972),p.592.

[41] G. Lundestad, 'Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945-1952,' *Journal of Peace Research*, 23 no.3 (1986), p.263.

[42] C. S. Maier, 'Alliance and Autonomy, European Identity and United States Foreign Policy Objectives in the Truman Years,' in *The Truman Presidency*, ed. M.J. Lacey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp.273-298, p.273.

[43] S. Dockrill, *The End of the Cold War Era: The Transformation of the Global Security Order* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), p.xxii. Saki Dockrill argues the growth of America's hegemonic power was instrumental in the development of the Cold War.

[44] S. Lucas, & K. Mistry, 'Illusions of Coherence: George F. Kennan, U.S. Strategy and Political Warfare in the Early Cold War, 1946-1950,' *Diplomatic History*, 33 no. 1 (2009), p.49.

[45] Lucas & Mistry, p.63.

[46] Lucas & Mistry, p.65.

[47] Kennan (1967), p.303.

[48] For a modern example of the traditional interpretation of the Truman presidency see E.E. Spalding, *The First Cold Warrior: Harry Truman, Containment and the Remaking of Liberal Internationalism* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2006).

Cold War containment: the role of the military

Written by Simon Schoon

[49] Cited in Jones, p.vii.

[50] A.A Offner, *Another Such Victory: President Truman and the Cold War, 1945-53* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002), p.xii.

[51] Offner, p.470.

[52] N.A. Graebner, 'Global Containment: The Truman Years,' *Current History*, 57 no.336 (1969), p.80.

[53] Graebner, p.81.

[54] See Spalding, p.2. Despite the polar opposite nature of her conclusion that views Truman's presidency as an unparalleled success, Spalding like Offner suggests it was 'Truman who conceived, enunciated and directed the strategy of containment.'

[55] Pollard, p.217.

[56] R. Frazier, 'Kennan, Universalism, and the Truman Doctrine,' *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 11 no.2 (2009), p.15.

[57] Etzold & Gaddis, p.166.

[58] Freeland, p.5.

[59] J.L. Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), p.261.

[60] S. Casey, 'Selling NSC-68: The Truman Administration, Public Opinion, and the Politics of Mobilization, 1950-51,' *Diplomatic History*, 29 no.4 (2005), p.661.

[61] Etzold & Gaddis, p.35.

[62] Kennan (1967), p.403.

[63] Maier, p.275.

[64] Etzold & Gaddis, p.383.

[65] M.P. Leffler, 'Strategy, Diplomacy, and the Cold War: The United States, Turkey, and NATO, 1945-1952,' *Journal of American History*, 71 no.4 (1985), p.824.

[66] Koenig, p.23.

Cold War containment: the role of the military

Written by Simon Schoon

[67] Kennan (1967), p.396.

[68] J.W. Dower, 'Occupied Japan and the Cold War in Asia,' in *The Truman Presidency*, ed. M.J. Lacey, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.366.

[69] B.J. Bernstein, 'The Truman Administration and the Korean War,' in *The Truman Presidency*, ed. M.J. Lacey, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.442.

[70] Cited in R. Griffith, 'Truman and the Historians: The Reconstruction of Postwar American History,' *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 59 no.1 (1975), p.30.

[71] M.T. Ruddy, 'A Cautious Approach to the Militarization of Containment,' *Historian*, 48 no.3 (1986), p.407.

[72] Kennan (1947), p.576.

[73] W. Lippmann, 'The Cold War,' *Foreign Affairs*, 65 no.4 (1987), p.872 & p.882.

[74] H. Kissinger, 'Reflections on Containment,' *Foreign Affairs*, 73 no.3 (1994), p.122.

[75] Kennan (1967), p.118.

[76] Etzold & Gaddis, p.34.

[77] Gaddis (1982), p.97.

—

Written by: Simon Schoon
Written at: University of Leeds
Written for: Martin Thornton
Date written: May 2011