CHAPTER 5

FROM CONTAINMENT TO WESTERN COOPERATION

The Western responses to Stalin's resumption of a policy of confrontation took shape in the years from 1947 to 1949. Shortly after Stalin's speech of 9 February 1946, George F. Kennan sent his "Long Telegram" from the Moscow Embassy to Washington[1] in which he analysed Soviet behaviour and advanced some broad suggestions on how American foreign policy should deal with the problem. In 1947, Foreign Affairs published his analysis of Soviet behaviour. In it Mr. X wrote:

> "It is clear that the main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies."[2]

As he argued in the article, "Soviet pressure against the free institutions of the Western world is something that can be contained by the adroit and vigilant application of counter-force at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points." Russia, according to him, was by far the weaker party and Soviet policy was highly flexible. The United States could enter "with reasonable confidence upon a policy of firm containment, designed to confront the Russians with unalterable counter-force at every point where they show signs of encroaching upon the interests of a peaceful and stable world."

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1 This important document can be found under nr. I.5.1.

2 George F.Kennan, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct, attributed to Mr. X" in: *Foreign Affairs*, vol. XXV, July 1947.

Not long thereafter, Winston Churchill, a private citizen in the meantime, warned:

> "From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an *iron curtain* has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia; all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and, in some cases, increasing measure of control from Moscow. Athens alone – Greece with its immortal glories – is free to decide its future at an election under British, American and French observation. The Russian-dominated Polish Government has been encouraged to make enormous and wrongful inroads upon Germany, and mass expulsions of millions of Germans on a scale grievous and undreamed-of are now taking place. The Communist parties, which were very small in all these Eastern States of Europe, have been raised to pre-eminence and power far beyond their numbers and are seeking everywhere to obtain totalitarian control. Police governments are prevailing in nearly every case, and so far, except in Czechoslovakia, there is no true democracy."[3]

Despite Churchill's warning, West European politicians and intellectuals had great difficulty in the immediate post-war years to accept the new reality of a Soviet threat and a divided Europe. The politicians were primarily concerned with national restoration. The intellectuals preferred to think of a new Europe in which there would be neither separation between victors and vanquished, nor between East and West.

It was left to the United States to respond to the new reality. Its response came in 1947.

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[3] His Address can be found as document I.5.2.

THE POLICY OF CONTAINMENT

On 21 January 1947 General George C. Marshall – the man who as Chief of Staff of the American Armed Forces had organised the Allied victory in the Second World War – took the oath of office as U.S. Secretary of State. As he walked with Undersecretary of State, Dean Acheson, across the street from the White House to the State Department, he asked: "Will you stay?" "Certainly, replied Dean Acheson, as long as you need me, though before too long I ought to get back to my profession if I am to have one." "Would six months be too long?" he asked again. "That would get me started and give us time to find your successor." They agreed and settled on June 30 as Acheson's retiring date. During these six months, President Truman, George Marshall and Dean Acheson laid the foundations for post-war American foreign policy, known as the policy of containment.

On 12 March 1947 President Truman delivered a message to a joint session of Congress, requesting aid for Greece and Turkey, in which he expressed the belief:

> "That it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressure.
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> That we must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way.
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> That our help should be primarily through economic and financial aid which is essential to economic stability and orderly political processes."

On 5 June 1947, George C. Marshall addressed the commencement exercises of Harvard University in which he offered American assistance towards the economic recovery of war-ravaged Europe. It was an offer of "friendly aid" to a program,

"that should be a joint one, agreed to by a number, if not all, European nations."[4]

Together, the Truman Doctrine (as it later came to be called) and the Harvard Address signalled a major turning point in U.S. foreign policy, if not in the history of American relations with Europe. Henceforward the United States would become and remain the principal actor in shaping European politics and the future political order in Europe. From 1947 to 1989, the Cold War and Détente struggle over the future of Europe was waged primarily between the United States and the Soviet Union. During the same period, American leadership decisively shaped the evolution of Western cooperation and European unification. After the collapse of the Soviet system in 1989-1991, the extension of Western cooperation to the former communist countries dominated the search for a future European political order.

Containment would become the name for the policy on which the United States embarked in 1947 to counter Soviet expansion. As formulated by Truman and Marshall, United States containment policy would become something very different from what the head of the new Policy Planning Staff in the State Department had in mind – so much so that George Kennan resigned from the Foreign Service in early 1949. The immediate reason for his resignation occurred in the final stages of the Berlin Blockade and concerned the question of Germany. Kennan's staff formulated two alternative plans in preparation for another meeting on ministerial level with the Russians. As he described in a recent article:

> "The other alternative (...) was that we take the occasion to explore with the Russians the prospects for a limited withdrawal of both their occupational forces and ours from the heart of Germany, making way for the establishment, in the middle, of a disarmed and neutralized Germany."[5]

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4 The two texts can be found in documents I.5.3 and I.5.4.

5 George F. Kennan, "A Letter on Germany" in: *The New York Review of Books,* 3 December 1998.

The plan was leaked to the press, the French and the British were outraged and Washington, promptly, publicly and indignantly disowned the entire proposal. And indeed, the Plan ran contrary to the agreement reached in June 1948 between the U.S., Britain and France on the creation of the West German Federal Republic. Kennan also disagreed in 1949 on another major decision of U.S. containment policy, namely the signing of the North Atlantic Alliance.

The differences of 1949 can be traced back to both the assessment of the Soviet threat and the objectives to be pursued by U.S. foreign policy. Already in the Long Telegram and in his Resumé of World Situation of 6 November 1947, Kennan formulated views neither the Administration nor Congress any longer shared.[6]

Kennan assessed the Soviet threat in traditional balance of power terms, stating: "At the bottom of Kremlin's neurotic view of world affairs is traditional and instinctive Russian sense of insecurity." He considered the danger of war vastly exaggerated, emphasised the need for strengthening the local forces of resistance and considered direct American involvement "beyond our resources" and inadvisable, because:

> "All in all, our policy must be directed toward restoring a balance of forces in Europe and Asia."

Interestingly enough, Kennan's assessment of the Soviet threat and of U.S. post-war objectives in traditional balance of power terms, was neither based on his own analysis of Soviet behaviour, nor on his own definition of American objectives.

In Parts 3 and 4 of his Long Telegram, he depicted Soviet policy as destructive, aggressive and subversive and starkly different from traditionally known power politics aimed at territorial expansion. His conclusions in Part 5, as a consequence, went well beyond recommendations to restore the balance of forces. What was at stake, he wrote, was the internal harmony of our

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6 In document I.5.5.

society and our traditional way of life. And he went on: "we must formulate and put forward for other nations a much more positive and constructive picture of the sort of world we would like to see than we have put forward in the past."

From 1947 onwards, President Truman, George Marshall and Dean Acheson, did exactly what Kennan appeared to have recommended. They assessed Soviet behaviour as a comprehensive threat not only to American national interests but to the new order the American Administration had envisaged since the Atlantic Charter. The comprehensive character of the Soviet threat was seen by them as the outcome of the totalitarian, communist nature of the regime rather than as the outcome of traditional, Russian security concerns. The principal objective of Containment policy was not to restore a balance of forces in Europe but the realisation in the free world of a new order based on the principles of the Atlantic Charter and the Charter of the United Nations. As Canadian Foreign Minister St. Laurent expressed it in April 1948, the purpose [of a North Atlantic association]:

> "would not merely be negative. It would create the dynamic counter-attraction to Communism – the dynamic attraction of a free, prosperous and progressive society, as opposed to the totalitarian and reactionary society of the Communist world."[7]

The policy of containment was not an American effort to establish its sphere of influence against a similar Soviet effort to expand its sphere of influence – as later adherents to balance of power theories would argue. The objectives and methods of Western containment policy were and were meant to be qualitatively different from the Soviet objectives and methods.

Contrary to the Soviet design for Eastern Europe, the United States did not impose obedient, satellite regimes but sought responsible allies. Contrary to the Soviet Union, the United States

7 In: Lord Ismay, *NATO, The First Five Years 1949-1954*, p. 15.

did not kill efforts towards closer cooperation among European states – as Stalin did in Eastern Europe – but promoted closer West European unity. Contrary to the Soviet Union, the United States did not exploit the economic potential of its allies for strengthening its economic-military power, as Stalin did with the satellite states – but offered economic aid in the form of the Marshall Plan to help them restore their war-ravaged economies. Contrary to Stalin's policy of revenge, repression and expansionary isolation, containment policy sought reconciliation, cooperation and the removal of barriers among the states within the emerging system of Western cooperation.

Stalin's policies and the U.S. policy of containment created two sharply different European areas. Eastern Europeans, who had suffered so much from the combined German-Soviet assault on their freedom during the war, were to suffer again from Soviet totalitarian rule – imposed new borders, massive displacement of populations, purges and deportations. West Europeans were protected and assisted in their efforts to rebuild viable societies on the basis of freedom, democracy and the rule of law.

Containment, as it developed in the crucial post-war years, was not a unilateral American policy imposed upon its alleged sphere of influence, but a policy jointly developed and conducted by the United States and Western Europe. Their joint policy developed along three lines of action.

JOINT ECONOMIC RECOVERY

The first line of action concerned the economic recovery of Western Europe and the promotion of European economic cooperation and integration. When U.S. Secretary of State, George Marshall, offered economic aid – in his Harvard Address on 5 June 1947 – he said, it was the business of Europeans to draw up a joint programme of recovery. "It would be neither fitting nor efficacious for this government to undertake to draw up unilaterally a program designed to place Europe on its feet economically."

In response to Marshall Aid, the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC) was established to assure cooperation in the "elaboration and execution of a joint recovery programme." The OEEC went well beyond the task of distributing American aid. In articles 2-9, the contracting parties accepted such general obligations as joint programmes for modernisation and the production and exchange of commodities and services; the establishment of a multilateral system of payments; the removal of barriers to the expansion of trade with a view to establishing a multilateral trading system; and achieving full employment, currency stability and sound rates of exchange.[8]

Marshall Aid and OEEC laid the foundations for the post-war multilateral system of Western cooperation and would create the conditions for the first step towards European integration, taken a year later by the Schuman Plan.[9]

POLICY TOWARDS GERMANY

The second line of action concerned the creation of West Germany as a federal and democratic republic, to be associated with the West as an equal partner. Among the contracting parties to OEEC were the commanders in chief of the French, British and American zones of occupation of Germany, which – like the others would receive Marshall aid and participate in OEEC. On 7 June 1948, the three occupying powers decided to authorise the convening of constituent assemblies looking toward the formation of a West German federal republic. As is explained in the policy statement of the U.S. Department of State, the decision was the outcome of a twofold conclusion. It had, first, proven impossible to achieve a definitive solution of the German problem with the Soviet Union. U.S. policy, second, with respect to Western Europe, "dictates that Germany must not be drawn into

8 Document I.5.7. The OEEC was replaced by the OECD in 1961.

9 See this author's *European Unification in the Twentieth Century,* WLP 1998, p. 281.

the Soviet orbit or reconstructed as a political instrument of Soviet policy."[10]

As we now know, this decision has had far-reaching consequences. When the "order of Yalta" collapsed in 1989, Germany could be re-united as a reliable democracy, committed to peace, European unification and Western cooperation.

Berlin and the Federal Republic of Germany

The strength of the Western decision was soon put to a test, when the Soviet Union in June 1948 attempted to control all of Berlin by cutting surface traffic between West Berlin and the Western occupation zones – officially in reaction to the introduction of the West mark as the legal currency in Berlin, but in reality to provoke a crisis by which the Western powers could be driven from Berlin. Officials in the Western capitals seriously doubted the possibility to stay in Berlin and were not pleased when General Lucius Clay said that the Soviets "cannot drive us out by an action short of war as far as we are concerned." General Clay's proposal to move convoys with troop protection to Berlin was considered to be too dangerous by the American and British governments. The British deputy general governor, General Robertson:

> "then suggested to Clay that he consider the possibility of supplying Berlin by air and that Robertson had already secured agreement of the Royal Air Force to start supplying the Berlin garrison. The British government was also considering supplying the civilian population by air."

General Clay was not certain it could be done, but, "by process of elimination, Clay was forced to choose the only option open to him-the airlift." He had obtained the support of the British and the Berliners through Ernst Reuter, the Mayor-elect of Berlin, and made his decision.

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10 Document I.5.9.

> "He telephoned LeMay in Wiesbaden and ordered him to drop all other uses of transport planes and to begin flying supplies for Berlin. (...) The first planes began arriving in Berlin on Saturday, June 26."[11]

The Airlift had begun and its success would be of decisive influence on the evolution of post-war Western cooperation. Soviet policy had not encountered appeasement but resistance. The Western powers stayed in Berlin and would henceforward be seen by the Berliners as protectors rather than occupiers. Western Germany would become a federal republic, firmly tied to the West. The three Western governments, in April 1949, reached agreement on the establishment of the West German Federal Republic.

> "On May 12, 1949, at 12:01 a.m., our trains and trucks, carrying food and coal, crossed the boundaries between the Anglo-American zones and the Soviet Zone en route to Berlin. The steady drone of the airlift planes was still overhead. They had broken the Soviet attempt to drive the Western powers from Berlin by denying them access by land and water. That same morning I flew to Frankfurt to join my British and French colleagues in approving the Basic Law which would bring into being the federal state of West Germany."[12]

ORGANISING COLLECTIVE SECURITY

The third line of action concerned the maintenance of individual and collective security against external aggression. The United States supported the initial British initiative for the creation of a West European organisation for defence and cooperation. The Treaty of Economic, Social and Cultural Cooperation and Collective Self-Defence, better known as the Brussels Pact, was signed on 17 March 1948 by Belgium, France, Luxembourg,

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11 Quotations from: D.M. Giangreco and Robert E. Griffin, *Airbridge to Berlin. The Berlin Crisis of 1948, its Origins and Aftermath*, 1988.

12 General Clay, *Decision in Germany*. *Heinemann*, 1950, p. 1.

Netherlands and Great Britain.[13] After the *coup d'état* of 22 February 1948 in Prague and the Soviet blockade of Berlin, it would soon become clear, that their security required American military assistance and a firm American commitment to the defence of Western Europe. Exploratory talks towards further measures to strengthen security in the North Atlantic area began soon thereafter, leading to the signature of the North Atlantic Alliance Treaty in April 1949.[14] The Vandenberg Resolution, adopted by the U.S. Senate, assured support from those who had been the most isolationists in the past, for America's lasting commitment to a new, Western security order.[15]

Agreement on the terms of an Atlantic Alliance was reached, but not without difficulty. Members of the Western Union initially favoured American adhesion to their alliance. They wanted "at one and the same time full American participation in Western Union, including responsibility for Europe's defence, and complete exclusion from the decision-making process." They also "wanted to be certain that its core role in NATO would not be adulterated by the presence of new members."[16] The United States wanted a new alliance with an enlarged membership, but also without the automatic commitment to military assistance, as written in article IV of the Brussels Pact.

WESTERN COOPERATION

What gradually emerged from these three lines of action was a new and unprecedented system of Western cooperation that would last out the twentieth century, despite its regular crises and persistent Soviet efforts to undermine it. The system bore no

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13 Text in document I.5.6.

14 Preparatory talks towards its conclusions can be found in documents I.5.10 and I.5.11.

15 See document I.5.8 and compare Chapter I.3 *supra in fine*.

16 Lawrence S. Kaplan, *The Long Entanglement. NATO's First Fifty Years*, Praeger, 1999, p. 19.

resemblance to an American sphere of influence, even less to the methods by which the Soviet Union tried – and failed – to maintain its sphere of repression.

An interesting irony with respect to the disagreements between Kennan, as the inventor of containment and those who transformed the need for containment into Western cooperation, must be mentioned. Kennan had great reservations on the formation of an independent West German State and on the creation of a North Atlantic Alliance – the two lines of actions, which most clearly contributed to the success of post-war containment and Western cooperation. In line with his balance of power approach, Kennan requested and obtained a National Security Council directive for the development of covert-action capabilities within the Central Intelligence Agency.[17]

Policy towards Eastern Europe

Containment was primarily but not only a defensive policy. In NSC 58 on United States Policy Toward the Soviet Satellite States in Eastern Europe, a second objective was to reduce and eventually cause the elimination of dominant Soviet influence in the satellite states. The document makes most interesting reading.[18]

While it emphasises the ultimate objective of promoting democracy, enabling these states to play an important role in a free and integrated Europe, it were two more limited objectives, outlined in NSC 58, that would guide American policy until the end of the Cold War. The first objective was to foster Communist heresy or schismatic national communist regimes (along the model of Tito's Yugoslavia); the second one was to encourage nationalism. From our current, post-totalitarian perspective, we are faced with a bitter irony. It is the countries ruled by national

[17] See document 12 in Thomas H. Etzold & John Lewis Gaddis, *Containment. Documents on American Policy and Strategy, 1945-1950*, Columbia University Press, 1978.

[18] To be found as document I.5.13.

communist regimes, where the transition to democracy has proven to be most painful.

With respect to the methods by which these objectives were to be pursued, the document emphatically rejects resort to war (liberation) and limits possible action to economic, cultural and political measures short of war. For the same reason, it decided against democratisation as an immediate objective; it might provoke a strong Soviet reaction, possibly in the form of war.

The United States, also in this respect, would be guided by this policy until the end of the Cold War and Détente era. No intervention has ever been considered neither against the Soviet invasion in Hungary (1956), nor against the Soviet invasion in Czechoslovakia (1968), nor against the state of war in Poland (December 1981). From our current, post-totalitarian perspective, the choice of measures short of war may well have contributed indirectly to the (mostly) peaceful collapse of the Soviet system. During the Cold War, however, the policy of non-intervention came close to inaction and acquiescence of Soviet domination over Eastern Europe. In the 1950's the Eisenhower Administration reacted passively to the crushing of the Berlin uprising in 1953 and the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956. In the era of "bipolar stability" following the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961 and the Cuba crisis in 1962, Western policies moved towards acquiescence of Soviet domination in Eastern Europe and acceptance of the status quo in the 1970's. When Soviet domination over Eastern Europe began to crumble in the 1980's – with the creation of *Solidarnosc* in Poland – U.S. policy under President Reagan reactivated its peaceful challenge of Soviet domination, but met with European, especially West German, resistance in the name of East-West détente. These disagreements were resolved or, in fact, made irrelevant after Gorbachev came to power in Moscow and Soviet domination over Eastern Europe came to an end.

NATURE OF POST-WAR WESTERN COOPERATION

Western cooperation, as it developed since the Second World War, in no way resembled a relationship that could be characterised as an American sphere of influence extended over client or satellite states in Western Europe. As a dynamic counter-attraction to Soviet totalitarian domination in Eastern Europe, it was construed as a system of cooperation between democracies that was to distinguish itself from systems of domination or traditional spheres of influence.

The ruins of the war and the nature of the Soviet system taught leaders like George Marshall or Jean Monnet that an entirely different approach to relations between states would be needed. Economic aid and the pooling of economic resources and interests fostered a spirit of cooperation. America's economic momentum was a source of attraction rather than a source of fear for domination. The underlying principles and the objectives they formulated, gave meaning to the common enterprise – a meaning the peoples could understand and endorse, unlike *Realpolitik* or balance of power considerations that only speak to a limited circle of politicians. The practice of economic cooperation created favourable conditions for participation and reconciliation with Western Germany, thus eliminating policies of revenge or demands for reparations.

The choice for various forms of multilateral cooperation enabled dependent and smaller states to accept American leadership and subjected the exercise of such leadership to common rules, consultation and negotiation. Multilateral cooperation, in addition, engaged not just a few political leaders, but bureaucracies, parliaments, political parties and interest groups in the process. Habits of democratic decision-making found their way in international cooperation. Participants monitored each other's contribution and learned from each other. Like its economic momentum, America's constitutional and political system became a source of attraction and a useful model, for instance, for European federal union.

In the new framework of Western cooperation and European integration, pluralist democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights evolved from separate national aspirations to a shared and joint political credo.

As we saw already, Soviet expansion was not merely a threat to Western regimes, but to the harmony and way of life of Western societies. The policy of containment did not limit itself to economic recovery and the external security of states, but extended also to the strengthening and rebuilding of democratic and open societies. It included such initiatives as governmental support for educational exchanges with other countries. The Surplus Property Act of 1 August 1946 included the Fulbright amendment, intended to initiate government support for such exchanges. The amendment became the basis for an extensive bilateral educational exchange programme, for which adequate public funding was achieved with the passage of the 1948 U.S. Information and Educational Exchange Act (known as the Smith-Mundt Act).[19]

Mutual trust between people thus became a decisive element for the cohesion of the system of Western cooperation.

Economic cooperation, reconciliation with Germany and the common organisation of Atlantic security initiated post-war Western cooperation. Western cooperation was the positive and imaginative translation of the need to contain Soviet expansion. The North Atlantic Alliance under American leadership became the cornerstone of the multilateral system. Part II of this book will examine NATO in more detail.

Before doing so, we must first and briefly examine the state of Western cooperation beyond containment. Western cooperation emerged in response to post-war Soviet expansion. As a positive translation of the need for containment, Western coop-

[19] Compare my: *Cultural Diplomacy: waging war by other means?*, Footprints of the Twentieth Century Volume I, WLP 2009; Chapter 5, 'United States Public Diplomacy.'

eration did not collapse with the order of Yalta. On the contrary, it is alive and well and a source of attraction for those states and societies that were liberated from Soviet domination. Adherence to the organisations of Western cooperation and European unification became the principal objective from Tallinn in Estonia to Sofia in Bulgaria, following their liberation from Soviet domination in 1989-1990.