The Containment Policy

The term containment describes the foreign policy strategy pursued by the United States after the Second World War. The term was introduced into the public debate by George F. Kennan, a diplomat and U.S. State Department adviser on Soviet affairs. In his famous anonymous X-article Kennan suggested a "long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies."

The Strategy of Containment found its first application in the Truman Doctrine of 1947, which guaranteed immediate economic and military aid to Greece and Turkey. John Lewis Gaddis has argued that all post-1945 U.S. foreign policy doctrines and concepts were in some way "Strategies of Containment."

How was the concept of containment developed?

For Kennan containment was a political concept. As a strategy, containment sought to achieve three goals: the restoration of the balance of power in Europe, the curtailment of Soviet power projection, and the modification of the Soviet conception of international relations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Means (Kennan)</th>
<th>Actual application</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>restoration of the balance of power</td>
<td>encouragement of self-confidence in nations threatened by Soviet expansionism</td>
<td>Long-term program of U.S. economic assistance (Marshall Aid)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reduction of Soviet ability to project power outside</td>
<td>exploitation of tensions in international communism</td>
<td>Cooperation with communist regimes; supporting Titoism in Yugoslavia using carrots and sticks; containing Germany with an embrace and Russia at arms length</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>modification of the Soviet concept of international relations</td>
<td>negotiating settlement of outstanding differences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First Goal: Restoration of the Balance of Power

According to Kennan, the ultimate goal of U.S. foreign policy should not be the division of the world into Soviet and American spheres of influences. Rather, U.S. foreign policy should aid the establishment of independent centers of power in Europe and Asia and help encourage self-confidence in nations threatened by Soviet expansionism.

In order to aid the establishment of diverse concentrations of power, Kennan believed it was vital to use restraint. For that purpose he suggested a long-term economic aid program. The aid program should treat geographical regions as a whole, and aid recipients should be responsible for the planning. The U.S. should only minimally interfere in internal affairs and should help specifically those that were willing to help themselves. In order to avoid overexertion the U.S. should concentrate on the vital but vulnerable industrial centers in Western Europe and Japan and only in a second step consider island strongholds such as Okinawa and Philippines and aid to Turkey and Greece.
Second Goal: The Reduction of Soviet Power Projection

Since the Soviet Union projected power toward the outside by relying on communist governments subservient to Moscow and communist parties elsewhere, Kennan suggested to exploit tensions between Moscow and the international communist movement. The Soviet Union would not tolerate independent-minded Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union could not control communist China. Rather, China may pose a threat to Moscow. Therefore it made sense to support Titoism in Yugoslavia without assuming responsibility and sometimes even to cooperate with communist regimes. Since nationalism would prove more durable than Communism, Kennan expected international communism to break up sooner or later.

Third Goal: Modification of the Soviet Concept of International Relations

Kennan's third goal was the most ambitious one, namely to lead the Soviet Union away from its universalistic notion of international affairs toward a particularistic understanding of reality.

Kennan's concept of containment was based on his particularistic notion of U.S. foreign policy. Kennan's containment differed significantly from the containment U.S. foreign policy-makers would later practice.