

CHAPTER  
O N E

*Prologue:*  
*Containment Before Kennan*

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“My children, it is permitted you in time of grave danger to walk with the devil until you have crossed the bridge.” It was Franklin D. Roosevelt’s version of an old Balkan proverb (sanctioned by the Orthodox Church, no less), and he liked to cite it from time to time during World War II to explain the use of questionable allies to achieve unquestionable objectives.<sup>1</sup> In all-out war, he believed, the ultimate end—victory—justified a certain broad-mindedness regarding means, nowhere more so than in reliance on Stalin’s Soviet Union to help defeat Germany and Japan. Allies of any kind were welcome enough in London and Washington during the summer of 1941; still the U.S.S.R.’s sudden appearance in that capacity could not avoid setting off Faustian musings in both capitals. Winston Churchill’s willingness to extend measured parliamentary accolades to the Devil if Hitler should invade Hell is well known;\* less familiar is Roosevelt’s paraphrase of his proverb to an old friend, Joseph Davies: “I can’t take communism nor can you, but to cross this bridge I would hold hands with the Devil.”<sup>2</sup>

The imagery, in the light of subsequent events, was apt. Collaboration with the Soviet Mephistopheles helped the United States and Great Britain achieve victory over their enemies in a remarkably short time and with surprisingly few casualties, given the extent of the fighting involved. The price, though, was the rise of an even more powerful and less

\*“If Hitler invaded Hell I would make at least a favourable reference to the Devil in the House of Commons.” (Winston S. Churchill, *The Grand Alliance* [Boston: 1950], pp. 370–71.)

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fathomable totalitarian state, and, as a consequence, a Cold War that lasted ten times longer than the brief and uneasy alliance that won the world war.

"Containment," the term generally used to characterize American policy toward the Soviet Union during the postwar era, was a series of attempts to deal with the consequences of that wartime Faustian bargain: the idea was to prevent the Soviet Union from using the power and position it won as a result of that conflict to reshape the postwar international order, a prospect that seemed, in the West, no less dangerous than what Germany or Japan might have done had they had the chance. George F. Kennan coined the term in July 1947 when he called publicly for a "long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansion tendencies,"<sup>3\*</sup> but it would be an injustice to wartime policy-makers to imply, as has too often been done, that they were oblivious to the problem. In fact, "containment" was much on the minds of Washington officials from 1941 on; the difficulty was to mesh that long-term concern with the more immediate imperative of defeating the Axis. What Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, and their advisers sought was a way to win the war without compromising the objectives for which it was being fought. It was out of their successive failures to square that circle that Kennan's concept of "containment" eventually emerged.

## I

One way to have resolved the dilemma would have been to devise military operations capable of containing the Russians while at the same time enlisting their help in subduing the Germans. Truman himself had suggested a crude way of doing this after Hitler attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941: "If we see that Germany is winning the war we ought to help Russia, and if Russia is winning, we ought to help Germany and in that way let them kill as many as possible."<sup>4†</sup> But Truman at the time was an obscure Missouri senator. His momentary flash of geopolitical cynicism attracted little attention until he unexpectedly entered the White House four years later. By that time, and with increasing frequency in the months that fol-

\* Kennan had used the term at least once previously, assuring a State Department audience in September 1946 that his recommendations "should enable us, if our policies are wise and non-provocative, to contain them [the Russians] both militarily and politically for a long time to come." (Quoted in George F. Kennan, *Memoirs: 1925–1950* [Boston: 1967], p. 304.)

† Truman added, though, that he did not want to see Hitler victorious under any circumstances.



lowed, questions were being raised as to whether the United States had not relied on the Russians too heavily to defeat the Germans too thoroughly. William C. Bullitt, former ambassador to the Soviet Union and now one of that country's most vociferous critics, said it best in a 1948 *Life* magazine article entitled: "How We Won the War and Lost the Peace."<sup>5</sup>

Bullitt himself had advocated an alternative strategy five years earlier in a series of top-secret memoranda to Roosevelt. Stalin's war aims were not those of the West, he had insisted: those who argued that participation in an anti-fascist coalition had purged the Soviet dictator of his autocratic and expansionist tendencies were assuming, on the basis of no evidence, a conversion "as striking as [that] of Saul on the road to Damascus." A Europe controlled from Moscow would be at least as dangerous as one ruled from Berlin, and yet "if Germany is to be defeated without such cost in American and British lives that victory might well prove to be a concealed defeat (like the French victory in the war of 1914), the continued participation of the Red Army in the war against Germany is essential." The problem, then, was to prevent "the domination of Europe by the Moscow dictatorship without losing the participation of the Red Army in the war against the Nazi dictatorship." Bullitt's answer, put forward long before Winston Churchill advocated a similar but better-known solution,\* was to introduce Anglo-American forces into Eastern Europe and the Balkans, for the purpose, first, of defeating the Germans, but second, of barring the Red Army from the rest of Europe. "War is an attempt to achieve political objectives by fighting," Bullitt reminded Roosevelt in August 1943, "and political objectives must be kept in mind in planning operations."<sup>6</sup>

There are hints that Roosevelt considered using military forces to achieve something like the political results Bullitt had in mind. The President showed more than polite interest in Churchill's schemes for Anglo-American military operations in the Balkans, despite the horrified reactions of Secretary of War Henry Stimson and the Joint Chiefs of Staff.<sup>7</sup> He emphasized, at least twice in 1943, the need to get to Berlin as soon as the Russians did in the event of a sudden German collapse.<sup>8</sup> And in April 1945, less than a week before his death, he countered Churchill's complaints about Soviet behavior by pointing out that "our armies will in a very

\* According to Forrest C. Pogue, Churchill did not explicitly propose to the Americans the idea of deploying Anglo-American forces in such a way as to contain the Russians until after the Yalta Conference in 1945. (*George C. Marshall: Organizer of Victory* [New York: 1973], p.517.)

few days be in a position that will permit us to become 'tougher' than has heretofore appeared advantageous to the war effort."<sup>9</sup>

But Roosevelt generally resisted efforts to deploy forces for the dual purposes of defeating the Germans and containing the Russians. He did not do this, though, in a geopolitical vacuum: there were, in his mind, powerful reasons other than a single-minded concentration on victory for holding hands with the Devil to cross the bridge.

One had to do with Roosevelt's conception of the balance of power. American security, he thought, required preventing the coming together of potentially hostile states. He had extended diplomatic recognition to the Soviet Union in 1933 partly to counter-balance, and attempt to keep separate, the growing military power of Germany and Japan.<sup>10</sup> When Stalin rejected that role by authorizing the 1939 Nazi-Soviet Pact, Roosevelt carefully left the way open for an eventual reconciliation with Moscow, despite his intense personal revulsion at the Russians' behavior.<sup>11</sup> He moved swiftly when the German invasion in June 1941 made it possible to reconstitute his strategy, even though collaboration with the U.S.S.R. was more difficult to sell in a still ostensibly neutral United States than in embattled Britain.<sup>12</sup> One of his persistent concerns after Pearl Harbor was to prevent a new "deal" between Hitler and Stalin, and simultaneously to secure the latter's cooperation in the war against Japan.<sup>13</sup> The geopolitical requirements of keeping adversaries divided, therefore, constituted one powerful argument against military deployments directed against Russia as well as Germany.

Coupled with this was an appreciation of the nature of American power. Roosevelt was an early and firm believer in the "arsenal of democracy" concept—the idea that the United States could most effectively contribute toward the maintenance of international order by expending technology but not manpower. Long before Pearl Harbor, he had sought to enlist the productive energies of American industry in the anti-fascist cause: the United States, he thought, should serve as a privileged sanctuary, taking advantage of its geographical isolation and invulnerable physical plant to produce the goods of war, while leaving others to furnish the troops to fight it.<sup>14</sup> Even after belligerency became unavoidable, Roosevelt and his chief military strategist, General George C. Marshall, retained elements of this approach, limiting the American army to 90 divisions instead of the 215 that had been thought necessary to defeat both Germany and Japan. As Marshall admitted, though, this could not have been done without Soviet manpower.<sup>15</sup> The United States, in this sense, was as dependent on



the Red Army as the Russians were on American Lend-Lease—perhaps more so. That fact, too, precluded military operations aimed at containing the Russians while defeating the Germans.

There was yet a third consideration, most often attributed to Churchill but very much present in Roosevelt's mind as well: the need to minimize casualties.\* Averell Harriman best summarized the President's concern in this regard:

Roosevelt was very much affected by World War I, which he had, of course, seen at close range. He had a horror of American troops landing again on the continent and becoming involved in the kind of warfare he had seen before—trench warfare with all its appalling losses. I believe he had in mind that if the great armies of Russia could stand up to the Germans, this might well make it possible for us to limit our participation largely to naval and air power.<sup>16</sup>

The United States was new at the business of being a world power, Roosevelt must have reasoned. If the sacrifices involved became too great, especially in a war in which its own territory did not seem directly threatened, then pressures for a reversion to a "fortress America" concept, if not outright isolationism, might still prevail. Letting allies bear the brunt of casualties was a way of ensuring internationalism for the future.

Finally, there was the fact that the United States had another war to wage in the Pacific, one in which it was bearing a far heavier share of the burden than in Europe. To be sure, American strategy even before Pearl Harbor had been to defeat Germany first. But Roosevelt recognized that support for military operations against Hitler also required progress in the war against Japan: the American people would not tolerate indefinite defeats in one ocean while arming to cross the other. Hence, F.D.R.'s strategy evolved by subtle stages into one of taking on Germany and Japan at the same time; the war in the Pacific became more than just the holding action that had originally been planned.<sup>17</sup> The effects were beneficial in one sense: few people would have anticipated that wars against both Germany and Japan could have been brought to almost simultaneous conclusions with so few casualties.<sup>18</sup> But the price, again, was reliance on Soviet manpower to carry the main burden of the struggle in Europe. Had the

\* "I was very careful to send Mr. Roosevelt every few days a statement of our casualties," General Marshall later recalled. "I tried to keep before him all the time the casualty results because you get hardened to these things and you have to be very careful to keep them always in the forefront of your mind." (Pogue, *Marshall: Organizer of Victory*, p. 316.)

atomic bomb not worked, the Russians might have been called upon to play a similar role in the Pacific after Germany's surrender.

It will not do, then, to see Roosevelt's strategy as totally insulated from political considerations. A war plan aimed at making careful use of American resources to maintain a global balance of power without at the same time disrupting the fabric of American society hardly fits that characterization. It is true that Roosevelt did not orient wartime strategy toward the coming Cold War—he foresaw that possibility, but hoped, indeed trusted, that it would not arise. Instead he concentrated on winning the war the United States was in at the time as quickly as possible and at the least possible cost. Given those objectives, it would have been hard to improve on the strategy Roosevelt followed.

It is interesting, as a corrective to those who have criticized Roosevelt for ignoring political considerations, to see how the Russians—especially Stalin—viewed his conduct of the war. The emphasis here was on the wholly political nature of American strategy: one historical account has even claimed that F.D.R. explicitly adopted Truman's 1941 recommendation to let Russians and Germans kill each other off.<sup>19</sup> Certainly, on the basis of statistical indices, this would appear to have been the effect; for every American who died in the war, thirteen Germans and *ninety* Russians died.\* It is worth asking whether something like this might not have been Roosevelt's intent all along: might his strategy in reality have been a crafty way of ensuring both full Russian participation in the war and the postwar containment of the Soviet Union, not by denying that country territory or resources, but by exhausting it?

With the elusive Roosevelt, one can never be sure. Few statesmen cloaked their intentions more carefully than the deceptively loquacious F.D.R.. If this had been his strategy, it is unlikely that he would have told anyone about it. There is, though, a more plausible and less sinister explanation. To have done what the Russians wanted—create an early second front—or what his domestic critics wanted—deploy forces against both Russians and Germans—would have violated Roosevelt's fundamental

\* Gerhard Weinberg cites American casualties in World War II at 300,000, German casualties at over 4 million, and Soviet casualties at approximately 25 million. More recent research places the Soviet figure at 27 million. (Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* [New York: 1994], p. 894; Vladimir O. Pechatnov and C. Carl Edmondson, "The Russian Perspective," in Ralph B. Levering, Vladimir O. Pechatnov, Verena Botzenhart-Viehe, and C. Carl Edmondson, *Debating the Origins of the Cold War: American and Russian Perspectives* [New York: 2002], p. 86.)



aversion to the use of American manpower in shaping world affairs. The President fully intended to have an impact, but he sought to do it in such a way as to neither demoralize nor debilitate the nation. In short, he wanted to keep means from corrupting ends. It is easy to write off this approach as naïve, as some of Roosevelt's American detractors have done, or as self-serving, as the Russians did. What seems more probable, though, is that Roosevelt's strategy reflected the rational balance of objectives and resources any wise statesman will try to achieve, *if he can*. It was Stalin's misfortune, largely as a result of his errors of strategy between 1939 and 1941, to have denied himself that opportunity.\*

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## II

Another reason for doubting that Roosevelt set out deliberately to contain the Russians by exhausting them is that his postwar plans seemed to lean in a wholly different direction—that of containment by integration. F.D.R. sought to ensure a stable postwar order by offering Moscow a prominent place in it; by making it, so to speak, a member of the club. The assumption here—it is a critical one for understanding Roosevelt's policy—was that Soviet hostility stemmed from insecurity, but that the sources of that insecurity were external. They lay, the President thought, in the threats posed by Germany and Japan, in the West's longstanding aversion to Bolshevism, and in the refusal, accordingly, of much of the rest of the world to grant the Russians their legitimate position in international affairs. "They didn't know us, that's the really fundamental difference," he commented in 1944. "They are friendly people. They haven't got any crazy ideas of conquest, and so forth; and now that they have got to know us, they are much more willing to accept us."<sup>20</sup> With the defeat of the Axis,<sup>†</sup> and with the West's willingness to make the Soviet Union a full partner in shaping the peace to come, the reasons for Stalin's suspicions, Roosevelt expected, would gradually drop away.

The President had never seen in the ideological orientation of the Soviet state a reason not to have cooperative relations at the interstate level.

\* It is worth speculating as to whether Stalin would have ordered suicidal missions to rescue Great Britain or the United States had they been under severe attack. The precedent of 1939–1941 does not suggest so.

† One reason for Roosevelt's insistence on harsh treatment for Germany after the war was his desire to reassure the Soviet Union. (See, on this point, Robert Murphy, *Diplomat Among Warriors* [Garden City, N.Y.: 1964], p. 227.)

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As a liberal, he lacked the visceral horror with which American conservatives regarded the use of state authority to bring about social change. As a self-confident patrician, he discounted the appeal communism might have inside the United States.<sup>21</sup> As a defender of the international balance of power, he distinguished between fascism's reliance on force to achieve its objectives and what he saw as communism's less dangerous use of subversion and propaganda.<sup>22</sup> But, most important, as an intelligent observer of the international scene, he sensed a trend in the evolution of the Soviet state that many experts on that country were only beginning to grasp: that, for the moment at least, considerations of national interest had come to overshadow those of ideology in determining Stalin's behavior.

It was within this context that Roosevelt developed his idea of integrating the Soviet Union into a common postwar security structure. F.D.R. had long advocated some form of great-power condominium to maintain world order. He was, it has been argued, a "renegade Wilsonian," seeking Wilson's goals by un-Wilsonian means.<sup>23</sup> Chief among these was his conviction that the peace-loving states should band together to deter aggression, first by isolating the perpetrators, and then, if necessary, by using force against them. As early as 1935, Roosevelt had spoken of an arrangement along those lines to blockade Nazi Germany; two years later he was proposing similar though vague plans for collective resistance against Japan.<sup>24</sup> Nothing came of either initiative, but it is worth noting that Roosevelt had counted on the Soviet Union's cooperation in both of them. It was not too surprising, then, that after June 1941, when Moscow was again in a position to cooperate with the West, F.D.R. should have revived his plan, this time in the form of the "Four Policemen"—the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union and China—who would, as the President described it, impose order on the rest of the postwar world, bombing anyone who would not go along.<sup>25</sup>

The "Four Policemen" concept appears, at first glance, to have reflected an unrealistic assumption on Roosevelt's part that the great powers would always agree, an expectation that seemed at odds with the obviously antagonistic nature of the international system. Again, though, surface manifestations are deceiving. "When there [are] four people sitting in a poker game and three of them [are] against the fourth," F.D.R. told Henry Wallace late in 1942, "it is a little hard on the fourth." Wallace took this to mean the possibility of American, Russian, and Chinese pressures against the British, and indeed the President did subsequently make efforts to impress both Stalin and Chiang Kai-shek with his own anti-imperial aspira-



tions.<sup>26</sup> But Roosevelt was telling others, at roughly the same time, that he needed China as one of the "Four Policemen" to counter-balance Russia.<sup>27</sup> Certainly Churchill could have been counted upon to join in any such enterprise, should it become necessary. The picture is hardly one of anticipating harmony, therefore; rather, it is reminiscent, as much as anything else, of Bismarck's cold-blooded tactic of keeping potential rivals off balance by preventing them from aligning with each other.<sup>28</sup>

Roosevelt also used what a later generation would call "linkage" to ensure compliance with American postwar aims. His employment of economic and political pressure to speed the dismantling of the British Empire has been thoroughly documented.<sup>29</sup> No comparably blatant requirements were imposed on the Soviet Union, probably because Roosevelt feared that that relationship, unlike the one with London, was too delicate to stand the strain.<sup>30</sup> Still, he did keep certain cards up his sleeve for dealing with Moscow after the war, notably the prospect of reconstruction assistance either through Lend-Lease or a postwar loan, together with a generous flow of reparations from Western-occupied Germany, all of which Washington would have been able to control in the light of Soviet behavior.<sup>31</sup> Also, intriguingly, there was Roosevelt's refusal, even after learning they knew of it, to tell the Russians about the atomic bomb, perhaps with a view to postwar bargaining.<sup>32</sup> This combination of counterweights and linkages is not what one would expect from a statesman assuming a blissfully serene postwar environment. Although Roosevelt certainly hoped for such an outcome, he was too good a poker player to count on it.

But Roosevelt's main emphasis was on trying to make the Grand Alliance survive Hitler's defeat by creating relationships of mutual trust among its leaders. The focus of his concern—and indeed the only allied leader not already in some position of dependence on the United States—was Stalin. F.D.R. has been criticized for attempting to use his personal charm to "get through" to the Soviet autocrat, whose resistance to such blandishments was legendary.<sup>33</sup> As with so much of Roosevelt's diplomacy, though, what seems at first shallow and superficial becomes less so upon reflection. The President realized that Stalin was the only leader in the U.S.S.R. with the authority to modify past attitudes of hostility. However discouraging the prospect of "getting through," there was little point in dealing with anyone below him.<sup>34</sup> And it is worth noting that improvements in Soviet-American relations, when they occurred during the Cold War, generally did so when some basis of mutual respect, if not

trust, existed at the top: examples include Eisenhower and Khrushchev after the 1955 Geneva summit, Kennedy and Khrushchev after the Cuban missile crisis, Nixon and Brezhnev during the early 1970's, and Reagan and Gorbachev during the late 1980's. Winning Stalin's trust may have been impossible—no one, with the curious exception of Hitler between 1939 and 1941, appears to have managed it. But making the attempt, given the uncertainties of postwar politics and diplomacy, was neither an unreasonable nor an ingenuous enterprise.

Like any statesman, Roosevelt was pursuing multiple objectives. Building a friendly peacetime relationship with the Soviet Union was only one of them, and as often happens, other priorities got in the way. For example, his second front strategy, designed not so much to weaken Russia as to avoid weakening the United States, could not help but create suspicions in Moscow that Washington was in fact seeking containment by exhaustion.<sup>35</sup> These dark misgivings survived even the D-Day landings: as late as April 1945 Stalin was warning subordinates that the Americans and British might yet make common cause with the Germans; that same month the Red Army began constructing *defensive* installations in Central Europe.<sup>36</sup>

Another of Roosevelt's priorities was to win domestic support for his postwar plans, and thereby to avoid Wilson's repudiation by his own countrymen in 1919–1920. To do this, F.D.R. moderated his own harsh approach to the task of peacekeeping: the country was not ready, Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn told him late in 1942, for a settlement to be enforced through blockades and bombing.<sup>37</sup> Roosevelt sought, accordingly, to integrate the great power condominium his strategic instincts told him would be necessary to preserve world order, on the one hand, with the ideals his political instincts told him would be needed at home to overcome objections to an "unjust" peace, on the other.<sup>38</sup> Idealism, in Roosevelt's mind, could serve eminently realistic ends.

It would be a mistake, then, to write off Roosevelt's concern for self-determination in Eastern Europe as mere window-dressing. Although prepared to see that part of the world fall within Moscow's sphere of influence, he expected as well that as fears of Germany subsided, the Russians would moderate the severity of the measures needed to maintain their position there. Otherwise, he was convinced, it would be impossible to "sell" the resulting settlement to the American people.\* But, like Henry

\* Ralph B. Levering has pointed out that presidents have a considerable capacity to shape public opinion: the implication is that Roosevelt could have "educated" the public to accept a settlement based on classic spheres of influence. (See his *American Opinion and the Russian Alliance, 1939–1945* [Chapel Hill: 1976], pp. 204–7.) But what is important here is not the



Kissinger in somewhat different circumstances thirty years later, Roosevelt found himself in a situation in which domestic support for what he had negotiated depended upon the exercise of discretion and restraint in the Kremlin. Those tendencies were no more prevalent then than later; as a consequence, a gap developed between what F.D.R. thought the public would tolerate and what the Russians would accept—a gap papered over, at Yalta, by fragile compromises.

Competing priorities therefore undercut Roosevelt's efforts to win Stalin's trust: to that extent, his strategy failed. Even if these had not existed, there is reason to wonder whether F.D.R.'s approach would have worked, given the balefully suspicious personality of the Soviet dictator. But there are, at times, justifications for directing flawed strategies at inauspicious targets, and World War II may have been one of these. Certainly alternatives to the policies actually followed contained difficulties as well. And there are grounds for thinking that Roosevelt might not have continued his open-handed approach once the war ended: his quiet incorporation of counter-weights and linkages into his strategy suggests that possibility.\* One is left, then, where one began: with a surface impression of casual, even frivolous, superficiality, and yet with a growing realization that darker, more cynical, but more perceptive instincts lay not far beneath.

### III

Whatever Roosevelt's intentions were for after the war, dissatisfaction with the strategy he was following during it had become widespread within the government by the end of 1944. American military chiefs and Lend-Lease administrators resented the Russians' increasingly importunate demands on their limited resources, made with little understanding of supply problems or logistics, and with infrequent expressions of gratitude.<sup>39</sup> Career diplomats had always maintained a certain coolness toward the U.S.S.R. Now, with the State Department excluded by Roosevelt from any top-level dealings with that country, they brooded in relative isolation over the gap they saw emerging between Stalin's postwar aims and the principles of

President's theoretical power to manipulate public opinion, but his actual perception of that power. And the evidence is strong that Roosevelt habitually underestimated his influence in that regard, as far as foreign affairs were concerned.

\*"Averell [Harriman] is right," Roosevelt complained on March 23, 1945. "We can't do business with Stalin. He has broken every one of the promises made at Yalta." (W. Averell Harriman and Elie Abel, *Envoy to Churchill and Stalin, 1941-1946* [New York: 1975], p. 444.)

the Atlantic Charter.<sup>40</sup> But it was officials with direct experience of service in the Soviet Union who developed the strongest and most influential objections to Roosevelt's open-handedness. Attempts to win Stalin's trust through generosity and goodwill would not work, they argued: the Soviet dictator was too apt to confuse those qualities with weakness. What was needed instead was recognition of the fact that the Soviet Union was going neither to leave nor to lose the war, and that if its Western allies did not soon begin to apply such leverage as they had available, the Kremlin would shape its own peace settlement, without regard to their aspirations or interests.

The argument came most forcefully from W. Averell Harriman, United States ambassador in Moscow since 1943, and from General John R. Deane, head of the American military mission there. Both men had gone to the Soviet Union convinced that Roosevelt's strategy of unconditional aid was wise; both had been determined to make it work. Within a year, though, both had developed reservations about that strategy, on the grounds that trusting the Russians had produced few if any reciprocal benefits. Thus, Deane found his efforts to coordinate military activities foundering on the Russians' unwillingness to share information or facilities, while Harriman grew increasingly angry at Moscow's tendency to impose unilateral political settlements in Eastern Europe as its armies moved into that region. Both men had expressed their frustrations in strong terms by the end of 1944: "We must make clear what we expect of them as the price of our goodwill," Harriman wrote in September of that year. "Unless we take issue with the present policy there is every indication [that] the Soviet Union will become a world bully wherever their interests are involved." "Gratitude cannot be banked in the Soviet Union," Deane added three months later, in what became almost a slogan for those seeking a revision of Roosevelt's policy. "Each transaction is complete in itself without regard to past favors. The party of the second part is either a shrewd trader to be admired or a sucker to be despised."<sup>41</sup>

Harriman and Deane did not advocate giving up attempts to win post-war Soviet cooperation; in this respect, their position differed from that of a third influential American in Moscow, George F. Kennan, at that time minister-counselor of the embassy there. Kennan, one of the State Department's first trained Russian experts, saw little possibility of resolving differences with the U.S.S.R. on any other basis than a frank acknowledgment of respective spheres of influence. The Soviet Union intended to dominate its surroundings, he argued; there was no reason the United States or its democratic allies should sanction, or even appear to sanction,



the grisly procedures that would be necessary to accomplish that goal.<sup>42</sup> Harriman and Deane, together with Charles E. Bohlen, another State Department Russian expert then serving in Washington, were not prepared to go that far. The American public would never accept a settlement based on spheres of influence, they insisted; it was important to have made the effort to secure Stalin's cooperation, however discouraging the prospects. But that objective did not preclude taking a blunter and harder line than in the past. The idea, Harriman emphasized, should be to "strengthen the hand of those around Stalin who want to play the game along our lines and to show Stalin that the advice of the counselors of a tough policy is leading him into difficulties." What was needed was "a firm but friendly *quid pro quo* attitude."<sup>43</sup>

Roosevelt was not averse to this idea. He had been careful, in his handling of Lend-Lease, reparations, a postwar loan, and the atomic bomb, to hold out both the "sticks" and "carrots" needed to make a *quid pro quo* strategy work. But he was unwilling to resort to them while the war was still on: this was his major disagreement with Harriman, Deane, and a growing number of his other advisers. They thought it imperative to act while the fighting was under way because American leverage, primarily in the form of Lend-Lease, would be greater than after victory, and because if the United States waited until the end of the war to act, it might find the issues with which it was concerned already settled to Moscow's satisfaction. Roosevelt's priority, to the end, was to win the war: *quid pro quo* bargaining might follow, but it would not precede that accomplishment.

F.D.R.'s death, in April 1945, cleared the way for a revision of strategy he himself would probably have carried out, although not in as abrupt and confused a manner as was actually done. Truman, totally unbriefed as to what Roosevelt had been trying to do, consulted the late President's advisers. But those most directly associated with Soviet affairs, notably Harriman, had been trying to stiffen Roosevelt's position; now, with a new and untutored chief executive in the White House, they redoubled their efforts at "education." Eager to appear decisive and in command, Truman accepted this instruction with an alacrity that unsettled even those providing it, lecturing Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov in person, and his distant master by cable, in a manner far removed from the graceful ambiguities of F.D.R.<sup>44</sup> The result was ironic: Truman embraced a *quid pro quo* approach in the belief that he was implementing Roosevelt's policy, but in doing so he convinced the Russians that he had changed it. F.D.R.'s elusiveness continued to bedevil Soviet-American relations, even beyond the grave.

In fact (and despite his 1941 remark about letting Germans and Russians kill each other off), Truman was no more prepared to abandon the possibility of an accommodation with Moscow than were Harriman and Deane. He firmly rejected Churchill's advice to deploy Anglo-American military forces in such a way as to keep the Russians out of as much of Germany as possible. He sent Harry Hopkins to Moscow in May of 1945, in part to repair the damage his own brusqueness had done. Long after relations with Stalin went sour, he continued to seek the counsel of Soviet sympathizers, notably Henry A. Wallace and Joseph E. Davies. The new President harbored a healthy skepticism toward all totalitarian states: ideology, he thought, whether communist or fascist, was simply an excuse for dictatorial rule. But, like Roosevelt, he did not see totalitarianism in itself as precluding normal relations. Not surprisingly in the light of his background, the analogy of big city political bosses in the United States came most easily to mind: their methods might not be delicate or fastidious, but one could work with them, so long as they kept their word.<sup>45</sup>

Truman found a kindred spirit in James F. Byrnes, whom he appointed Secretary of State shortly after taking office. An individual of vast experience in domestic affairs but almost none in diplomacy, Byrnes believed in practicing what had worked well for him at home. Nations, he thought, like individuals or interest groups, could always reach agreement on difficult issues if a sufficient willingness to negotiate and compromise existed on both sides. A *quid pro quo* strategy was as natural for Byrnes, then, as for Truman. Dealing with the Russians, the new Secretary of State observed, was just like managing the United States Senate: "You build a post office in their state and they'll build a post office in our state."<sup>46</sup>

The new administration thought it had leverage over the Russians in several respects. Harriman himself had stressed the importance of postwar reconstruction assistance, which the United States would be able to control, whether through Lend-Lease, a rehabilitation loan, or reparations shipments from its occupation zone in Germany. Roosevelt had been leaning toward using this leverage at the time of his death; Truman quickly confirmed that unconditional aid would not be extended past the end of the fighting. Lend-Lease would be phased out, and postwar loans and reparations shipments would be tied, at least implicitly, to future Soviet political cooperation.<sup>47\*</sup> Publicity was another form of leverage: the ad-

\*The Potsdam protocol, upon American insistence, specified that the Soviet Union was to receive 10 percent of such industrial equipment as was "unnecessary" for the functioning of the postwar German economy, but the Western powers would make the determination as to what



ministration assumed that the Kremlin was still sensitive to "world opinion," and that by calling attention openly to instances of Soviet unilateralism, it could get the Russians to back down.<sup>48</sup> Then there was the ultimate sanction of the atomic bomb: Byrnes, though not all his colleagues in the administration, believed that the simple presence of this awesome weapon in the American arsenal would make the Russians more manageable than in the past. At a minimum, he wanted to hold back commitments to seek the international control of atomic energy as a bargaining chip for use in future negotiations.<sup>49</sup>

None of these attempts to apply leverage worked out as planned. The Russians were never dependent enough on American economic aid to make substantial concessions to get it: intelligence reports had long indicated that such aid, if extended, would have speeded reconstruction by only a matter of months. Another difficulty was that key Congressmen, whose support would have been necessary for the passage of any loan, made it clear that they would demand in return nothing less than free elections and freedom of speech inside the Soviet Union, and the abandonment of its sphere of influence in Eastern Europe.<sup>50</sup> Publicity, directed against Soviet violations of the Yalta agreements in that part of the world, produced no greater success: when Byrnes warned that he might have to release a report on conditions in Romania and Bulgaria prepared by the American publisher Mark Ethridge, Stalin, with understandable self-confidence, threatened to have his own "impartial" observer, the Soviet journalist Ilya Ehrenburg, issue his report on those countries.<sup>51</sup> The Russians dealt effectively with the atomic bomb by simply appearing to ignore it, except for a few heavy-handed cocktail party jokes by a tipsy Molotov. In the meantime, domestic pressures had forced Truman to commit the United States to the principle of international control before Byrnes had even attempted to extract a *quid pro quo* from Moscow.<sup>52</sup>

By the time of the Moscow foreign ministers' conference in December 1945, Byrnes had come to much the same conclusion that Roosevelt had a year earlier: that the only way to reconcile the American interest in self-determination with the Soviet interest in security was to negotiate thinly disguised agreements designed to cloak the reality of Moscow's control behind a façade of democratic procedures.\* But that approach, manifested

was necessary and what was not. (*Foreign Relations of the United States* [hereafter *FRUS*]: *The Conference of Berlin (The Potsdam Conference), 1945* [Washington: 1960], II, 1485–86.)

\*The Russians, in return, extracted a token concession from the United States which appeared to broaden, but in fact did not, their role in the occupation of Japan.

in the form of token concessions by the Russians on Bulgaria and Romania, came across at home as appeasement. As a result, Byrnes found himself under attack from both the President and Congress, upon his return, for having given up too much.<sup>53</sup> The *quid pro quo* strategy, by early 1946, had not only failed to produce results. It had become a domestic political liability as well.

*Quid pro quo* proved unsuccessful for several reasons. One was the difficulty of making “sticks” and “carrots” commensurate with concessions to be demanded from the other side. The “sticks” the United States had available were either unimpressive, as was the case with publicity, or unusable, as in the instance of the atomic bomb. The major “carrot,” economic aid, was important to the Russians, but not to the point of justifying the concessions that would have been required to obtain it. Another difficulty was the problem of coordination. Bargaining implies the ability to control the combination of pressures and inducements to be applied, but that in turn requires central direction, not easy in a democracy in the best of circumstances, and certainly not during the first year of an inexperienced and badly organized administration. Extraneous influences—Congress, the press, public opinion, bureaucracies, personalities—tended to intrude upon the bargaining process, making the alignment of conditions to be met with incentives to be offered awkward, to say the least.

But the major difficulty was simply the Soviet Union’s imperviousness to external influences. The *quid pro quo* strategy had assumed, as had Roosevelt’s, that Soviet behavior could be affected from the outside: the only differences had been over method and timing. In fact, though, there was not much the West could do, in the short term, to shape Stalin’s decisions. The Soviet dictator maintained tight control in a mostly self-sufficient country, with little knowledge or understanding of, much less susceptibility to, events in the larger world. It was this realization of impermeability—of the fact that neither trust nor pressure had made any difference—that paved the way for the revision of strategy set off by George Kennan’s “long telegram” of February 1946.

#### IV

Rarely in the course of diplomacy does an individual manage to express, within a single document, ideas of such force and persuasiveness that they immediately change a nation’s foreign policy. That was the effect, though,



of the 8,000-word telegram dispatched from Moscow by Kennan on February 22, 1946. Prodded by a puzzled State Department to explain the increasingly frequent anti-Western statements in the speeches of Soviet leaders, and by a Treasury Department wanting to know why the U.S.S.R. had refused to join the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, Kennan, with a mixture of exhilaration at having been asked and exasperation at having until then been ignored, composed a primer on Soviet foreign policy with all the speed and intensity that comes from direct experience and passionate conviction. As was once said of another career diplomat in another country at another time whose ideas had a similar impact, "there was . . . such a heat in his spirit that knowledge of history and contemporary politics, acute judgment and power of exposition ran together with a kind of incandescence which lit up everything on which his mind and feeling and words were directed."\*

The thesis of Kennan's "long telegram" was that the whole basis of American policy toward the Soviet Union during and after World War II had been wrong. That policy, whether in the form of Roosevelt's emphasis on integration or Harriman's on bargaining, had assumed the existence of no structural impediments to normal relations within the Soviet Union itself; the hostility Stalin had shown toward the West, rather, had been the result of insecurities bred by external threats. These could be overcome, it had been thought, either by winning Stalin's trust through openhandedness, or by commanding his respect through a *quid pro quo* approach. In either case, the choice as to whether cooperation would continue was believed to be up to the United States: if Washington chose the right approach, then the Russians would come along.†

Kennan insisted that Soviet foreign policy bore little relationship to what the West did or did not do: the "party line is not based on any objective analysis of [the] situation beyond Russia's borders; . . . it arises mainly from basic inner-Russian necessities which existed before [the] recent war and exist today." Kremlin leaders were too unsophisticated to know how to

\* Sir Owen O'Malley writing of Eyre Crowe, Senior Clerk in the British Foreign Office, whose January 1907 "Memorandum on the present state of British relations with France and Germany" had similar, if less dramatic, repercussions. (Quoted in Zara S. Steiner, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy, 1898-1914* [London: 1969], p. 117.)

† The extent to which Soviet behavior would be determined by Western attitudes was the most consistent single theme in wartime analyses of Soviet-American relations undertaken by the Office of Strategic Services. See especially Research and Analysis reports 523, 959, 1109, 2073, 2284, and 2669, all in the Office of Intelligence Research Files, Department of State records, Record Group 59, Diplomatic Branch, National Archives.

govern by any means other than repression: they therefore needed excuses "for the dictatorship without which they did not know how to rule, for cruelties they did not dare not to inflict, for sacrifices they felt bound to demand." Picturing the outside world "as evil, hostile and menacing" provided such a justification. "A hostile international environment is the breath of life for [the] prevailing internal system in this country," Kennan argued in another dispatch to the State Department the following month. "[W]e are faced here with a tremendous vested interest dedicated to [the] proposition that Russia is a country walking a dangerous path among implacable enemies. [The] disappearance of Germany and Japan (which were the only real dangers) from [the] Soviet horizon left this vested interest no choice but to build up [the] US and United Kingdom to fill this gap."<sup>54</sup>

There could be, then, no permanent resolution of differences with such a government, since it relied on the fiction of external threat to maintain its internal legitimacy. "Some of us here have tried to conceive the measures our country would have to take if it really wished to pursue, at all costs, [the] goal of disarming Soviet suspicions," Kennan noted in March.

We have come to [the] conclusion that nothing short of complete disarmament, delivery of our air and naval forces to Russia and resigning of [the] powers of government to American Communists would even dent this problem: and even then we believe—and this is not facetious—that Moscow would smell a trap and would continue to harbor [the] most baleful misgivings.

"We are thus up against the fact," Kennan continued, "that suspicion in one degree or another is an integral part of [the] Soviet system, and will not yield entirely to any form of rational persuasion or assurance. . . . To this climate, and not to wishful preconceptions, we must adjust our diplomacy."<sup>55</sup>

Within days of its receipt the "long telegram" and Kennan's other dispatches had been circulated, read, commented upon, and for the most part accepted in Washington as the most plausible explanation of Soviet behavior, past and future. "If none of my previous literary efforts had seemed to evoke even the faintest tinkle from the bell at which they were aimed," he recalled, "this one, to my astonishment, struck it squarely and set it vibrating with a resonance that was not to die down for many months." Why, though, did the Truman administration attach such importance to the views of a still relatively junior Foreign Service officer? What accounted for the fact, as Kennan later put it, that "official Washington,



whose states of receptivity or the opposite are determined by subjective emotional currents as intricately imbedded in the subconscious as those of the most complicated of Sigmund Freud's erstwhile patients, was ready to receive the given message"?<sup>56</sup>

The reason was a growing awareness in Washington that the *quid pro quo* strategy had not worked, but that nothing had yet arisen to take its place. Kennan's analyses did not, in themselves, provide such a strategy: they were devoted primarily to an elucidation of the Soviet threat. Such positive recommendations as they contained were limited to the need for candor, courage, and self-confidence in dealing with the Russians.<sup>57</sup> But there were more specific conclusions that seemed to emerge from Kennan's argument, and the Truman administration was quick to seize on these as the basis for yet another approach to the problem of Soviet power in the postwar world, a strategy best characterized by Secretary of State Byrnes (with all of the enthusiasm of a recent convert) as one of "patience and firmness."<sup>58</sup>

The new strategy contained several departures from past practice: (1) No further efforts would be made to conceal disagreements with the Russians; rather, these would be aired openly, frankly, but in a non-provocative manner. (2) There would be no more concessions to the Soviet Union: the United States would, in effect, "draw the line," defending all future targets of Soviet expansion, but without any attempt to "liberate" areas already under Moscow's control. (3) To facilitate this goal, United States military strength would be reconstituted and requests from allies for economic and military aid would be favorably considered. (4) Negotiations with the Soviet Union would continue, but only for the purpose of registering Moscow's acceptance of American positions or of publicizing Soviet intransigence in order to win allies abroad and support at home.<sup>59</sup> The idea, in all of this, was that, confronted by Western firmness, Stalin would see Western patience as the more desirable alternative, and would begin to exercise the restraint necessary to bring it about. Or, as Clark Clifford's top secret report to President Truman on Soviet-American relations put it in September: "it is our hope that they will change their minds and work out with us a fair and equitable settlement when they realize that we are too strong to be beaten and too determined to be frightened."<sup>60</sup>

"Patience and firmness" became the watchword for dealings with the Soviet Union over the next year—if anything, the emphasis, as the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended, was primarily on the "firmness."<sup>61</sup> The

new approach showed up in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Near East, where the administration not only induced the U.S.S.R. to withdraw troops from Iran and to give up demands for boundary concessions and base rights from Turkey, but in addition committed itself to support the government of Greece against an externally supplied communist insurgency and to station the Sixth Fleet indefinitely in the waters surrounding the latter two countries.<sup>62</sup> It showed up in East Asia, where Washington continued to resist any substantive role for the Russians in the occupation of Japan, while at the same time making clear its determination to prevent a Soviet takeover of all of Korea.<sup>63</sup> It showed up in Germany, where the United States cut off reparations shipments from its zone and began moving toward consolidating it with those of the British and the French, while at the same time offering the Russians a four-power treaty guaranteeing the disarmament of Germany for twenty-five years.<sup>64</sup> It showed up in the Council of Foreign Ministers, where Byrnes firmly resisted Soviet bids to take over former Italian territories along the southern Mediterranean coastline, while at the same time patiently pursuing negotiations on peace treaties for former German satellites.<sup>65</sup> Finally, and most dramatically, the new strategy manifested itself in the Truman Doctrine, in which the administration generalized its obligations to Greece and Turkey into what appeared to be a world-wide commitment to resist Soviet expansionism wherever it appeared.

Truman's March 12, 1947, proclamation that "it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or outside pressures" has traditionally been taken as having marked a fundamental point of departure for American foreign policy in the Cold War. In fact, it can more accurately be seen as the ultimate expression of the "patience and firmness" strategy that had been in effect for the past year. Decisions to aid Greece and Turkey, as well as other nations threatened by the Soviet Union, had been made months before.<sup>66</sup> What was new, in early 1947, was Great Britain's abrupt notice of intent to end its own military and financial support to those two countries, together with the need for quick Congressional action to replace it. It was that requirement, in turn, that forced the Truman administration to justify its request in globalist terms; even so, that rhetoric was consistent with the assumption, underlying the "patience and firmness" strategy for almost a year, that the United States could allow no further gains in territory or influence for the Soviet Union anywhere.<sup>67</sup>



No strategy can be effective, though, if it fails to match means with ends: what is striking, in retrospect, about the “patience and firmness” approach is the extent to which ends were decided upon without reference to means. No serious attempt had been made to reverse the headlong rush toward demobilization in the light of the Soviet threat: the armed forces of the United States, which had stood at 12 million at the end of the war with Germany, were down to 3 million by July 1946, and to 1.6 million a year later.<sup>68</sup> Defense expenditures, which had been \$83.0 billion in fiscal 1945, the last full year of war, went down to \$42.7 billion for fiscal 1946 and \$12.8 billion for fiscal 1947.<sup>69</sup> Nor, with the election of an economy-minded Republican Congress in November 1946, did there seem to be much chance of reversing this trend.<sup>70</sup> The Truman Doctrine implied an open-ended commitment to resist Soviet expansionism, therefore, at a time when the means to do so had almost entirely disappeared.

This obvious deficiency made it clear that something more than “patience and firmness” would be required: either means would have to be expanded to fit interests—an unlikely prospect, given the political and economic circumstances of the time\*—or, more likely, interests would have to be contracted to fit means. The latter is what in fact took place during the spring of 1947. That period was significant, not as one in which the United States took on new commitments, but rather as the point at which it began to differentiate between the ones it already had. The blunt reality of limited means had once again, as during World War II, forced the making of distinctions between vital and peripheral interests. But that task demanded more than just a set of attitudes, which is what “patience and firmness” had largely boiled down to. It required a strategy, based, as all successful strategies must be, on the calculated relationship of resources to objectives. It was within this context that the concept of “containment” began to develop—and with it the career of its chief architect, George F. Kennan.

\*That option would be undertaken, though, in 1950. See Chapter Four.