

Summarize the ideas and views expressed by diplomat George F. Kenan. How did these views shape US containment policy during the cold war?

## INTRODUCTION

George F. Kenan is regarded as the architect of the containment strategy that the US applied in the decades that followed after WW2. A career diplomat he always had apprehensions about the expansion of the Soviet state and in turn communism. Later, it was confirmed that the Soviet Union wanted to export the revolution across the world. This prompted him to create the doctrine of containment. Kenan's doctrine helped shape various foreign policy tools that the US employed during the Cold War most important of which was the Truman Doctrine. The US later shifted into a more interventionist style of containment following the Korean and later on, Vietnam wars. For over 40 years, the US committed itself to containing communist expansion under guise of bringing/protecting human rights; establishing multi-national strategic treaties and actively intervening in other countries to bring regimes friendly to its interest.

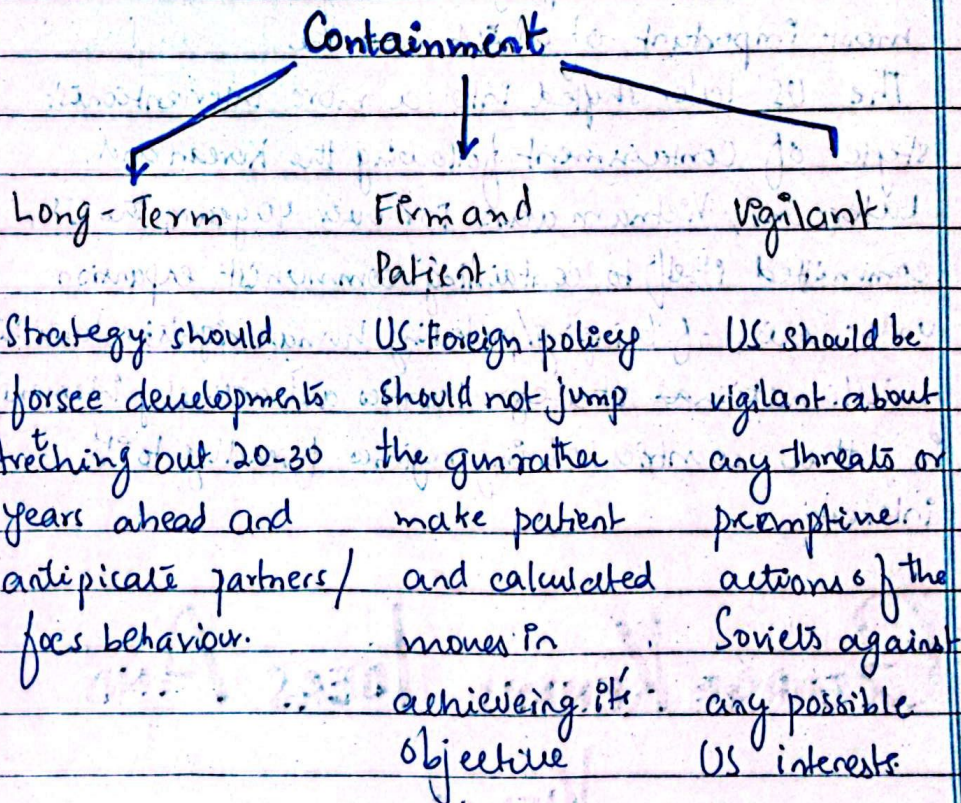
## GEORGE KENAN'S IDEAS AND VIEWS

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George F. Kenan wrote that the only viable response to Soviet expansionism was a long and concerted effort to contain it by using both hard and soft American power.

The only viable American response to Soviet power was a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian "expansive tendencies".

Kenan's ideas rested on 3 principles that the strategy should be



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American Leaders assumed the communists sought to spread their ideology in a global revolution and that all communist states were conspiring together to make it happen. Meanwhile, Stalin prioritized and lent the view that communist allies were more as vehicles of promoting the interests of the Soviet state than as ideological partners.

## IMPACT OF KENAN'S VIEW ON SUBSEQUENT US FOREIGN POLICY

### Unveiling of Truman's New Doctrine

President Harry S. Truman unveiled his new doctrine based on Kenan's ideas. While referring to the communist expansion in Eastern Europe, he said before the Congress

"I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support <sup>the</sup> free people who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures" (President Truman)

These words signalled a new era of US diplomacy not bound by the Monroe doctrine and others. The US in keeping with policy then intervened in multiple theatres across the world.

## **NATO, SEATO, CENTO formed to Counter Soviet Expansionism**

NATO (formed in 1949) or North Atlantic Treaty Organization was formed as a collective security organization. In turn, it emphasized that an attack against would be considered as an attack against all. Its main purpose was to deter expansion in Western Europe. SEATO and CENTO, South East Asia Treaty Organization and Central Treaty Organization or the Baghdad Pact, were formed to deter Soviet hold in Asia, Australasia and the Middle East. The US through the use of multi-lateral organizations pushed its containment agenda.

## **Korean War: The First Test for the Containment Doctrine**

The Korean war engulfed the Korean peninsula in a bloody conflict ensued in which hundreds of thousands lives were lost. The containment doctrine

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and the later on, the intervention strategy were tested in a live test. The communist forces supported by the Chinese were repulsed and the allied forces under US/UN banner were repulsed by the former to the 38th parallel. This back and forth set the stage for future interventions as the US realized it could not rely on its partners to contain communism.

## Interventions in Latin America and Rest of the World

The US carried out interventions in every part of the world replacing left-wing governments with regimes that it found better suited for its interests. The US actively changed regimes in order to prevent left wing government or movements take hold. Pinochet<sup>(Chile)</sup>, the Shah of Iran, Batista (Cuba) were brought through coups and extra democratic measures. Through these measures, the US ensured its economic and strategic interests were kept at bay. Containment was done not only at the strategic level but also at the economical and political level to prevent any Soviet or communism from forming.

## Vietnam and the True Test of the Doctrine

Containment was a brainchild of Kennan and

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thinkers added their own thoughts to refine and expand its domain. The National Security Council passed a vital policy report <sup>(NSC-68)</sup> that outlined the dependence on any other nation to take the initiative in resisting communism is no longer a viable or sustainable option. Vietnam made this even more clear as the US intervened to protect the South's government and Ho Chi Minh's advance and unification efforts.

## Containment Under the Guise of Human Rights Defense

Cartier Doctrine put forward and presented by the Jimmy Carter added a new dimension to the containment strategy - the defense of human rights and freedoms. By doing so, the US now broadened its reach over global affairs. It punished those who were violating fundamental human rights which were coincidentally its targets for containment through other means. Through various measures it implemented sanctions (strategic and economic) to condemn and make them change their ways. The targets of those sanctions were often those governments aligned with Soviet Russia or communist China.

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## Reagan and Containment

Containment was under full swing as the Reagan administration. Reagan actively intervened and stopped the expansion of what he called the 'evil empire'. Reagan often accused the Soviet Union of sponsoring terrorism and declared that "any armament negotiation must be linked to negotiations on Soviet behaviour in other areas". His famous speech on the Berlin wall in which he pleaded - 'Mr Gorbachev, Tear down this wall? Reagan hit the hammer on the nail's head when it came to stopping communism on its track. Finally, it came to fruition in 1991 when the Soviet Union was dissolved.

## New Era of Containment - Pivot to Asia

Obama in 2008 led a new initiative - the US's long awaited pivot to Asia. Today, the US is actively containing China. The First Island Chain and the military entanglement of the Chinese mainland is evident that after even multiple shifts in policy, the US is holding steady fast when it comes to containment policy. The US today has placed Chinese companies and individuals on its sanctions list. Moreover, the current US administration is heading a head-on

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collision,

In order to contain and press China

## CONCLUSION

George F. Kennan ideas and views shaped the foreign policy decisions of every US administration post WW2. His views placed an emphasis on the long-term, patient, vigilant nature of foreign policy to counter Soviet Expansionism. Later on, further administrations came and added their twists and adapted the strategy to match the scenarios and times of the day. Till date, the US is employing some sort of ~~the~~ containment to protect its allies and interest at home and abroad.