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The X–Article

AMONG the many papers prepared in the winter of 1946-1947, there was one that was written not for delivery as a lecture and not for publication but merely for the private edification of Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal. Ever since the receipt in Washington of the long telegram of February 22, 1946, Mr. Forrestal had taken a lively personal interest in my work. It was, I suspect, due to his influence that I was assigned to the War College and later chosen by General Marshall to head the Planning Staff.

During the period of my service at the War College — in December 1946, to be exact — Mr. Forrestal sent me a paper on the subject of Marxism and Soviet power, prepared by a member of his immediate entourage, and asked me to comment on it. This I found hard to do. It was a good paper. With parts of it I could agree; other parts were simply not put the way I would have put them. The whole subject was one too close to my own experience and interests for me to discuss it in terms of someone else's language. I sent the paper back to him with the observation that rather than commenting I would prefer, if he agreed, to address myself to the same subject in my own words. This, he replied, he would like me to do.

The result was that on January 31, 1947, I sent to him, for his private and personal edification, a paper discussing the nature of Soviet power as a problem in policy for the United States. It was a literary extrapolation of the thoughts which had been maturing in

my mind, and which I had been expressing in private communications and speeches, for at least two years into the past. Even the term "containment" which appeared in the course of the argument was, as we have just observed, not new.

Mr. Forrestal read the paper. He acknowledged it, on February 17, with the words: "It is extremely well-done and I am going to suggest to the Secretary* that he read it."

Now I had, as it happened, spoken informally, early in January, at the Council of Foreign Relations, in New York, on the same general subject. The editor of the council's magazine *Foreign Affairs*, Mr. Hamilton Fish Armstrong (a great editor and, incidentally, one with whom this association was to be the beginning of a long and close friendship), asked me whether I did not have something in writing, along the lines of what I had said to the council, that could be published in the magazine. I had no text of what I had said on that occasion, but I thought of the paper I had prepared for Mr. Forrestal. In early March, therefore, I sought and obtained Mr. Forrestal's assurance that he had no objection to its publication. I then submitted it (March 13) to the Committee on Unofficial Publication, of the Department of State, for the usual official clearance. In doing so, I explained that it was the intention that it should be published anonymously. The committee pondered it at leisure, found in it nothing particularly remarkable or dangerous from the government's standpoint, and issued, on April 8, permission for its publication in the manner indicated. I then crossed out my own name in the signature of the article, replaced it with an "X" to assure the anonymity, sent it on to Mr. Armstrong, and thought no more about it. I knew that it would be some weeks before it would appear. I did not know how my position would be changed in the course of those weeks, or how this would affect the interpretations that would be placed upon the article when it was published.

In late June, as I recall it, the article appeared in the July issue of *Foreign Affairs*, under the title: "The Sources of Soviet Conduct." Its appearance was followed shortly (July 8) by that of a

* Presumably, the Secretary of State.

piece in the *New York Times* from the pen of the well-known and experienced Washington columnist Mr. Arthur Krock, hinting at the official origin of the article and pointing to the importance that attached to it by virtue of that fact. He, I later learned, had been shown the article by Mr. Forrestal at a time when it was no more than a private paper lying around in Mr. Forrestal's office. His keen journalistic eye had at once recognized it when it appeared in print; and he had put two and two together.

It was not long, after the appearance of Mr. Krock's piece, before the authorship of the article became common knowledge. Others began to write about it, to connect it with the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan, to speculate on its significance. It soon became the center of a veritable whirlpool of publicity. *Life* and *Reader's Digest* reprinted long excerpts from it. The term "containment" was picked up and elevated, by common agreement of the press, to the status of a "doctrine," which was then identified with the foreign policy of the administration. In this way there was established — before our eyes, so to speak — one of those indestructible myths that are the bane of the historian.

Feeling like one who has inadvertently loosened a large boulder from the top of a cliff and now helplessly witnesses its path of destruction in the valley below, shuddering and wincing at each successive glimpse of disaster, I absorbed the bombardment of press comment that now set in. I had not meant to do anything of this sort. General Marshall, too, was shocked. It was a firm principle, for him, that "planners don't talk." The last thing he had expected was to see the name of the head of his new Planning Staff bandied about in the press as the author of a programmatical article — or an article hailed as programmatical — on the greatest of our problems of foreign policy. He called me in, drew my attention to this anomaly, peered at me over his glasses with raised eyebrows (eyebrows before whose raising, I may say, better men than I had quailed), and waited for an answer. I explained the origins of the article, and pointed out that it had been duly cleared for publication by the competent official committee. This satisfied him. He was, as I have already observed, an orderly man, accustomed to require and to

respect a plain delineation of responsibility. If the article had been cleared in this manner, the responsibility was not mine. He never mentioned the matter again, nor did he hold it officially against me. But it was long, I suspect, before he recovered from his astonishment over the strange ways of the department he now headed.

Measured against the interpretations that were at once attached to it, and have continued to a considerable extent to surround it ever since, the article that appeared in *Foreign Affairs*, in June 1947, suffered, unquestionably, from serious deficiencies. Some of these I might have corrected at the time by more careful editing and greater forethought, had I had any idea of the way it was to be received. But I cannot lay these failures exclusively to the innocent and unsuspecting manner in which the article was written. Certain of the public reactions were ones I would not, in any event, have foreseen.

A serious deficiency of the article was the failure to mention the satellite area of Eastern Europe — the failure to discuss Soviet power, that is, *in terms of* its involvement in this area. Anyone reading the article would have thought — and would have had every reason to think — that I was talking only about Russia proper; that the weaknesses of the Soviet system to which I was drawing attention were ones that had their existence only within the national boundaries of the Soviet state; that the geographic extension that had been given to the power of the Soviet leaders, by virtue of the recent advances of Soviet armies into Eastern Europe and the political exploitation of those advances for Communist purposes, were irrelevant to the weaknesses of which I was speaking. Obviously, in mentioning the uncertainties of the Soviet situation — such things as the weariness and poor morale among the population, the fragility of the constitutional arrangements within the party, etc. — I would have had a far stronger case had I added the characteristic embarrassments of imperialism which the Soviet leaders had now taken upon themselves with their conquest of Eastern Europe, and the unlikelihood that Moscow would be permanently successful in holding this great area in subjection.

To this day, I am not sure of the reason for this omission. It had something to do, I suspect, with what I felt to be Mr. Forrestal's needs at the time when I prepared the original paper for him. I have a vague recollection of feeling that to go into the problems of the satellite area would be to open up a wholly new subject, confuse the thesis I was developing, and carry the paper beyond its intended scope. Whatever the reason, it was certainly not that I underrated the difficulties with which the Soviet leaders were faced in their attempt to exercise political dominion over Eastern Europe. It has been noted above, in Chapter 9, that even as early as V-E Day, two years before, I had expressed the view that the Russians were over-extended in this area. Without Western support, I had written at that time

> Russia would probably not be able to maintain its hold successfully for any length of time over all the territory over which it has today staked out a claim . . . The lines would have to be withdrawn somewhat.

Similarly, in the long telegram I had sent to Washington from Moscow, in February 1946, I had pointed out that the Soviet internal system

> will now be subjected, by virtue of recent territorial expansions, to a series of additional strains which once proved a severe tax on Tsardom.

Had I included these appreciations in the X-Article, and added to the description of the internal weaknesses of Soviet power a mention of the strains of Moscow's new external involvement in Eastern Europe, I would have had a far stronger case for challenging the permanency of the imposing and forbidding facade which Stalin's Russia presented to the outside world in those immediate postwar years.

A second serious deficiency of the X-Article — perhaps the most serious of all — was the failure to make clear that what I was talking about when I mentioned the containment of Soviet power was not the containment by military means of a military threat, but the political containment of a political threat. Certain of the language

used — such as "a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies" or "the adroit and vigilant application of counterforce at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points" — was at best ambiguous, and lent itself to misinterpretation in this respect.

A third great deficiency, intimately connected with the one just mentioned, was the failure to distinguish between various geographic areas, and to make clear that the "containment" of which I was speaking was not something that I thought we could, necessarily, do everywhere successfully, or even needed to do everywhere successfully, in order to serve the purpose I had in mind. Actually, as noted in connection with the Truman Doctrine above, I distinguished clearly in my own mind between areas that I thought vital to our security and ones that did not seem to me to fall into this category. My objection to the Truman Doctrine message revolved largely around its failure to draw this distinction. Repeatedly, at that time and in ensuing years, I expressed in talks and lectures the view that there were only five regions of the world — the United States, the United Kingdom, the Rhine valley with adjacent industrial areas, the Soviet Union, and Japan — where the sinews of modern military strength could be produced in quantity; I pointed out that only one of these was under Communist control; and I defined the main task of containment, accordingly, as one of seeing to it that none of the remaining ones fell under such control. Why this was not made clear in the X-Article is, again, a mystery. I suppose I thought that such considerations were subsumed under the reference to the need for confronting the Russians with unalterable counterforce "*at every point where they show signs of encroaching upon the interests of a peaceful world.*"

So egregious were these errors that I must confess to responsibility for the greatest and most unfortunate of the misunderstandings to which they led. This was the one created in the mind of Mr. Walter Lippmann. It found its expression in the series of twelve pieces attacking the X-Article (later published in book form as *The Cold War, A Study in U.S. Foreign Policy*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1947) which he published in his newspaper column

in the late summer and autumn of 1947. As I read these articles over today (and they are well worth the effort), I find the misunderstanding almost tragic in its dimensions. Mr. Lippmann, in the first place, mistook me for the author of precisely those features of the Truman Doctrine which I had most vigorously opposed — an assumption to which, I must say, I had led squarely with my chin in the careless and indiscriminate language of the X-Article. He held up, as a deserved correction to these presumed aberrations on my part, precisely those features of General Marshall's approach, and those passages of the Harvard speech, for which I had a primary responsibility. He interpreted the concept of containment in just the military sense I had not meant to give it. And on the basis of these misimpressions he proceeded to set forth, as an alternative to what I had led him to think my views were, a concept of American policy so similar to that which I was to hold and to advance in coming years that one could only assume I was subconsciously inspired by that statement of it — as perhaps, in part, I was. He urged a concentration on the vital countries of Europe; he urged a policy directed toward a mutual withdrawal of Soviet and American (also British) forces from Europe; he pointed with farsighted penetration to the dangers involved in any attempt to make of a truncated Western Germany an ally in an anti-Soviet coalition. All these points would figure prominently in my own later writings. He saw them, for the most part, long before I did. I accept the blame for misleading him. My only consolation is that I succeeded in provoking from him so excellent and penetrating a treatise.

Nevertheless, the experience was a painful one. It was doubly painful by reason of the great respect I bore him. I can still recall the feeling of bewilderment and frustration with which — helpless now to reply publicly because of my official position — I read these columns as they appeared and found held against me so many views with which I profoundly agreed. A few months later (April 1948) lying under treatment for ulcers on the sixteenth floor of the Naval Hospital in Bethesda, very bleak in spirit from the attendant fasting and made bleaker still by the whistling of the cold spring wind

the windows of that lofty pinnacle, I wrote a long letter to Mr. Lippmann, protesting the misinterpretation of my thoughts which his articles, as it seemed to me, implied. I never sent it to him. It was probably best that I didn't. The letter had a plaintive and overdramatic tone, reflecting the discomfort of flesh and spirit in which it was written. I took a more cruel but less serious revenge a year or two later when I ran into him on a parlor car of the Pennsylvania Railroad, and wore him relentlessly down with a monologue on these same subjects that lasted most of the way from Washington to New York.

But the terms of the unsent letter still hold, as I see them, a certain interest as expressions of the way the Lippmann columns then affected me.

I began, of course, with a peal of anguish over the confusion about the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan. To be held as the author of the former, and to have the latter held up to me as the mature correction of my youthful folly, hurt more than anything else.

I also naturally went to great lengths to disclaim the view, imputed to me by implication in Mr. Lippmann's columns, that containment was a matter of stationing military forces around the Soviet borders and preventing any outbreak of Soviet military aggressiveness. I protested, as I was to do on so many other occasions over the course of the ensuing eighteen years, against the implication that the Russians were aspiring to invade other areas and that the task of American policy was to prevent them from doing so. "The Russians don't want," I insisted,

> to invade anyone. It is not in their tradition. They tried it once in Finland and got their fingers burned. They don't want war of any kind. Above all, they don't want the open responsibility that official invasion brings with it. They far prefer to do the job politically with stooge forces. Note well: when I say politically, that does not mean without violence. But it means that the violence is nominally *domestic*, not *international*, violence. It is, if you will, a police violence . . . not a military violence.

The policy of containment related to the effort to encourage other peoples to resist this type of violence and to defend the *internal* integrity of their countries.

I tried, then, to explain (I could have done it better) that the article was in reality a plea — addressed as much to our despairing liberals as to our hotheaded right-wingers — for acceptance of the belief that, ugly as was the problem of Soviet power, war was not inevitable, nor was it a suitable answer; that the absence of war did not mean that we would lose the struggle; that there was a middle ground of political resistance on which we could stand with reasonable prospect of success. We were, in fact, already standing on that ground quite successfully. And I went ahead to point proudly (and rather unfairly, for after all, Lippmann had approved and praised the rationale of the Marshall Plan in his articles) to what had already been accomplished. I cite this passage here, not as a correction to Mr. Lippmann, to whose arguments it was not really an answer, but as a sort of epilogue to the discussion of both Marshall Plan and X-Article.

Something over a year has now gone by since General Marshall took over his present job. I would ask you to think back on the state of the world, as he faced it last spring. At that time, it was almost impossible to see how Europe could be saved. We were still caught in the fateful confusion between the "one-world" and the "two-world" concepts. The economic plight of the continent was rapidly revealing itself as far worse than anyone had dreamed, and was steadily deteriorating. Congress was in an ugly frame of mind, convinced that all foreign aid was "operation rathole." The Communists were at the throat of France. A pall of fear, of bewilderment, of discouragement, hung over the continent and paralyzed all constructive activity. Molotov sat adamant at the Moscow council table, because he saw no reason to pay us a price for things which he thought were bound to drop into his lap, like ripe fruits, through the natural course of events.

Compare that with today? Europe is admittedly not over the hump. But no fruits have dropped [into Molotov's lap]. We know what is West and what is East. Moscow was itself compelled to make that un-

pleasant delineation. Recovery is progressing rapidly in the West. New hope exists. People see the possibility of a better future. The Communist position in France has been deeply shaken. The Western nations have found a common political language. They are learning to lean on each other, and to help each other. Those who fancied they were neutral are beginning to realize that they are on our side. A year ago only that which was Communist had firmness and structure. Today the non-Communist world is gaining daily in rigidity and in the power of resistance. Admittedly, the issue hangs on Italy; but it hangs, in reality, on Italy alone. A year ago it hung on all of Europe and on us.

You may say: this was not the doing of US policy makers; it was others who worked this miracle.

Certainly, we did not do it alone; and I have no intention of attempting to apportion merit. But you must leave us some pride in our own legerdemain. In international affairs, the proof of the pudding is always in the eating. If the development of the past year had been in the opposite direction — if there had been a deterioration of our position as great as the actual improvement — there is not one of you who would not have placed the blame squarely on the failure of American statesmanship. Must it always, then, be "heads you win; tails I lose" for the US Government?

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In the years that have passed since that time, the myth of the "doctrine of containment" has never fully lost its spell. On innumerable occasions, I have been asked to explain it, to say whether I thought it had been a success, to explain how it applied to China, to state a view as to whether it was still relevant in later situations, etc. It has been interpreted by others in a variety of ways. Pro-Soviet writers have portrayed it as the cloak for aggressive designs on the Soviet Union. Right-wing critics have assailed it precisely for its lack of aggressiveness: for its passivity, for its failure to promise anything like "victory." Serious commentators have maintained that it was all very well in 1947 but that it lost its rationale with the Korean War, or with Stalin's death, or with the decline of bipolarity.

It is hard for me to respond to all these criticisms. What I said in

the X-Article was not intended as a doctrine. I am afraid that when I think about foreign policy, I do not think in terms of doctrines. I think in terms of principles.

In writing the X-Article, I had in mind a long series of what seemed to me to be concessions that we had made, during the course of the war and just after it, to Russian expansionist tendencies — concessions made in the hope and belief that they would promote collaboration between our government and the Soviet government in the postwar period. I had also in mind the fact that many people, seeing that these concessions had been unsuccessful and that we had been unable to agree with the Soviet leaders on the postwar order of Europe and Asia, were falling into despair and jumping to the panicky conclusion that this spelled the inevitability of an eventual war between the Soviet Union and the United States.

It was this last conclusion that I was attempting, in the X-Article, to dispute. I thought I knew as much as anyone in the United States about the ugliness of the problem that Stalin's Russia presented to us. I had no need to accept instruction on this point from anybody. But I saw no necessity of a Soviet-American war, nor anything to be gained by one, then or at any time. There was, I thought, another way of handling this problem — a way that offered reasonable prospects of success, at least in the sense of avoiding a new world disaster and leaving the Western community of nations no worse off than it then was. This was simply to cease at that point making fatuous unilateral concessions to the Kremlin, to do what we could to inspire and support resistance elsewhere to its efforts to expand the area of its dominant political influence, and to wait for the internal weaknesses of Soviet power, combined with frustration in the external field, to moderate Soviet ambitions and behavior. The Soviet leaders, formidable as they were, were not supermen. Like all rulers of all great countries, they had their internal contradictions and dilemmas to deal with. Stand up to them, I urged, manfully but not aggressively, and give the hand of time a chance to work.

This is all that the X-Article was meant to convey. I did not suppose, in saying all this, that the situation flowing immediately from the manner in which hostilities ended in 1945 would endure for-

ever. It was my assumption that if and when the Soviet leaders had been brought to a point where they would talk reasonably about some of the problems flowing from the outcome of the war, we would obviously wish to pursue this possibility and to see what could be done about restoring a more normal state of affairs. I shared to the full, in particular, Walter Lippmann's view of the importance of achieving, someday, the retirement of Soviet military power from Eastern Europe, although I did not then attach quite the same political importance to such a retirement as he did. (In this he was more right than I was.)

No one was more conscious than I was of the dangers of a permanent division of the European continent. The purpose of "containment" as then conceived was not to perpetuate the status quo to which the military operations and political arrangements of World War II had led; it was to tide us over a difficult time and bring us to a point where we could discuss effectively with the Russians the drawbacks and dangers this status quo involved, and to arrange with them for its peaceful replacement by a better and sounder one.

And if the policy of containment could be said in later years to have failed, it was not a failure in the sense that it proved impossible to prevent the Russians from making mortally dangerous encroachments "upon the interests of a peaceful world" (for it did prevent that); nor was it a failure in the sense that the mellowing of Soviet power, which Walter Lippmann took me so severely to task for predicting, failed to set in (it did set in). The failure consisted in the fact that our own government, finding it difficult to understand a political threat as such and to deal with it in other than military terms, and grievously misled, in particular, by its own faulty interpretations of the significance of the Korean War, failed to take advantage of the opportunities for useful political discussion when, in later years, such opportunities began to open up, and exerted itself, in its military preoccupations, to seal and to perpetuate the very division of Europe which it should have been concerned to remove. It was not "containment" that failed; it was the intended follow-up that never occurred.

When I used the term "Soviet power" in the X-Article, I had in

view, of course, the system of power organized, dominated, a inspired by Joseph Stalin. This was a monolithic power structu reaching through the network of highly disciplined Commun parties into practically every country in the world. In these circu stances, any success of a local Communist party, any advance Communist power anywhere, had to be regarded as an extension reality of the political orbit, or at least the dominant influence, the Kremlin. Precisely because Stalin maintained so jealous, so h miliating a control over foreign Communists, all of the latter had, that time, to be regarded as the vehicles of his will, not their ow His was the only center of authority in the Communist world; a it was a vigilant, exacting, and imperious headquarters, prepared brook no opposition.

Tito's break with Moscow, in 1948, was the first overt breach the monolithic unity of the Moscow-dominated Communist blc For long, it remained the only one. It did not affect immediate and importantly the situation elsewhere in the Communist worl But when, in the period between 1957 and 1962, the differenc between the Chinese and Russian Communist parties, having la latent in earlier years, broke to the surface and assumed the form a major conflict between the two regimes, the situation in the wor Communist movement became basically different. Other Comm nist parties, primarily those outside Eastern Europe but partly t Eastern European ones as well, had now two poles — three, Belgrade was included — to choose among. This very freedom choice not only made possible for them a large degree of ind pendence; in many instances it forced that independence upon the Neither of the two major centers of Communist power was now a position to try to impose upon them a complete disciplinary co trol, for fear of pushing them into the arms of the other. They, the other hand, reluctant for the most part to take the risks of tot identification with one or the other, had little choice but to mane ver, to think and act for themselves, to accept, in short, the respo sibilities of independence. If, at the end of the 1940s, no Comm nist party (except the Yugoslav one) could be considered anythi else than an instrument of Soviet power, by the end of the 195

none (unless it be the Bulgarian and the Czech) could be considered to be such an instrument at all.

This development changed basically the assumptions underlying the concept of containment, as expressed in the X-Article. Seen from the standpoint upon which that article rested, the Chinese-Soviet conflict was in itself the greatest single measure of containment that could be conceived. It not only invalidated the original concept of containment, it disposed in large measure of the very problem to which it was addressed.

Efforts to enlist the original concept of containment with relation to situations that postdate the Chinese-Soviet conflict, particularly when they are described in terms that refer to some vague "communism" in general and do not specify what particular communism is envisaged, are therefore wholly misconceived. There is today no such thing as "communism" in the sense that there was in 1947; there are only a number of national regimes which cloak themselves in the verbal trappings of radical Marxism and follow domestic policies influenced to one degree or another by Marxist concepts.

If, then, I was the author in 1947 of a "doctrine" of containment, it was a doctrine that lost much of its rationale with the death of Stalin and with the development of the Soviet-Chinese conflict. I emphatically deny the paternity of any efforts to invoke that doctrine today in situations to which it has, and can have, no proper relevance.