

# Origins of the Cold War: The Containment Policy

## READING 1

Soviet power...bears within itself the seeds of its own decay, and the sprouting of these seeds is well advanced...[If] anything were ever to disrupt the unity and efficacy of the Party as a political instrument, Soviet Russia might be changed overnight from one of the strongest to one of the weakest and most pitiable of national societies....This would...warrant the United States entering with reasonable confidence upon a policy of firm containment, designed to confront the Russians with unalterable counter-force at every point where they show signs of encroaching upon the interests of a peaceful and stable world.

George Kennan

## READING 2

At the present moment in world history nearly every nation must choose between alternative ways of life. The choice is too often not a free one. One way of life is based upon the will of the majority, and is distinguished by free institutions, representative government, free elections, guarantees of individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from political oppression. The second way of life is based upon the will of a minority forcibly imposed upon the majority. It relies upon terror and oppression, a controlled press and radio, fixed elections, and the suppression of personal freedoms.

I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.

Truman Doctrine, 1947

## READING 3

The truth of the matter is that Europe's requirements for the next three or four years of foreign food and other essential products--principally from America--are so much greater than her present ability to pay that she must have substantial additional help or face economic, social, and political deterioration of a very grave character....

Our policy is directed not against any country or doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation, and chaos. Its purpose should be the revival of a working economy in the world so as to permit the emergence of political and social conditions in which free institutions can exist.

The Marshall Plan, 1947

## READING 4:

Article 5 The parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all; and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack

occurs, each of them...[will take] such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.

The North Atlantic Treaty, 1949

## READING 5

Why, by inter-weaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe, entangle our peace and property in the toils of European ambition, rivalry, interest, humour, or caprice? It is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world.

George Washington, 1796

## READING 6

The security of the United States would again be seriously endangered if the entire European continent were once more to come under the domination of a power or an association of powers antagonistic to the United States....Today, the weakened condition in which the nations of Europe find themselves as a result of the destruction and privation of war has afforded a golden opportunity for a new aggressor....It is believed essential to the security of the United States, therefore, that it consolidate the friendship and support which it now enjoys from free and friendly nations.

State Department

## READING 7

The pact destroys the chances of European recovery. A permanently militarized Europe is doomed to living on an American dole. The pact is not an instrument of defense but a military alliance designed for aggression. It bypasses the United Nations and violates its Charter in a most flagrant manner. It divides the world permanently into two armed camps. And it provocatively establishes military bases on the borders of the Soviet Union.

Henry Wallace

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## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Describe the containment policy. What was its goal?
2. Why did the United States decide to broaden its overseas commitments? Did the Soviet threat justify this expansion of America's commitments?
3. Was the containment policy essentially offensive or defensive?

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