

Excerpts from Telegram from George Kennan to Secretary of State George Marshall, February 22, 1946 (the "Long Telegram"):

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[A native of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, George F. Kennan (1904-2005) graduated from Princeton University in 1925 and soon thereafter went to work for the U.S. State Department as an expert on Russia. He spent much of the 1930s attached to the U.S. embassy in Moscow, where he witnessed firsthand the internal workings of the Soviet Union, including the show trials in which Stalin condemned thousands of suspected political opponents to death. This experience convinced Kennan that there was little hope for lasting cooperation between the Soviet Union and the West. In May 1944 he was appointed deputy chief of the U.S. mission in Moscow. Having spent years studying the history of Russia and the Soviet Union, he sent this telegram to Washington, offering his views on why the Soviets were behaving as they were.]

At the bottom of the Kremlin's neurotic view of world affairs is [the] traditional and instinctive Russian sense of insecurity. Originally, this was [the] insecurity of a peaceful agricultural people trying to live on [a] vast exposed plain in [the] neighborhood of fierce nomadic peoples. To this was added, as Russia came into contact with [an] economically advanced West, fear of [the] more competent, more powerful, more highly organized societies in that area. But this latter type of insecurity was one which afflicted rather Russian rulers than [the] Russian people; for Russian rulers have invariably sensed that their rule was relatively archaic in form, ...unable to stand comparison for contact with political systems of Western countries. For this reason they have always feared foreign penetration, feared direct contact between [the] Western world and their own, feared what would happen if [the] Russians learned [the] truth about [the] world without [that is, the world outside Russia] or if foreigners learned the truth about the world within [Russia]. And they have learned to seek security only in patient but deadly struggle for total destruction [of] rival power, never in compacts and compromises with it...

We have now seen nature and background of the Soviet program. What may we expect of its practical implementations? [...]

A. Internal policy devoted to increasing in every way strength and prestige of Soviet state; intensive military-industrialization; maximum development of armed forces; great displays to impress outsiders; continued secretiveness about internal matters, designed to conceal weaknesses and to keep opponents in [the] dark.

B. Wherever it is considered timely and promising, efforts will be made to advance [the] official limits of Soviet power. For the moment, these efforts are restricted to certain neighboring points conceived of here as being of immediate strategic necessity, such as northern Iran, Turkey, possibly Bornholm [a Danish island in the Baltic Sea]. However, other points may at any time come into question, if...Soviet political power is extended to new areas....

It may be expected that the component parts of this far-flung apparatus will be utilized, in accordance with their individual suitability, as follows:

1. To undermine [the] general political and strategic potential of major Western powers. Efforts will be made in such countries to disrupt national self-confidence, to hamstring measures of national defense, to increase social and industrial unrest, to stimulate all forms of disunity. All persons with grievances, whether economic or racial, will be urged to seek redress not in mediation and compromise, but in defiant violent struggle for destruction of other elements of society. Here poor will be set against rich, black against white, young against old, newcomers against established residents, etc. [...]

3. Where individual governments stand in [the] path of Soviet purposes pressure will be brought for their removal from office. This can happen where governments directly oppose Soviet foreign policy

aims (Turkey, Iran), where they seal their territories off against Communist penetration (Switzerland, Portugal), or where they compete too strongly, like Labor government [that is, government run by the Labor Party] in England, for moral domination among elements which it is important for Communists to dominate....

4. In foreign countries Communists will, as a rule, work toward [the] destruction of all forms of personal independence, economic, political, or moral. Their system can handle only individuals who have been brought into complete dependence on higher power [that is, the power of the Soviet state]. Thus persons who are financially independent - such as individual businessmen, estate owners, successful farmers, artisans, and all those who exercise local leadership or have local prestige, such as popular local clergymen or political figures, are anathema....

5. Everything possible will be done to set major Western powers against each other. Anti-British talk will be plugged among Americans, anti-American talk among British. Continentals [Europeans], including Germans, will be taught to abhor both Anglo-Saxon powers [that is, the United States and Great Britain]. Where suspicions exist, they will be fanned; where not, ignited. No effort will be spared to discredit and combat all efforts which threaten to lead to any sort of unity or cohesion among others from which Russia might be excluded....

6. In general, all Soviet efforts on [the] unofficial international plane will be negative and destructive in character, designed to tear down sources of strength beyond [the] reach of Soviet control. This is only in line with [the] basic Soviet instinct that there can be no compromise with rival power and that constructive work can start only when Communist power is dominant. But behind all this will be applied insistent, unceasing pressure for penetration and command of key positions in [the] administration and especially in [the] police apparatus of foreign countries. The Soviet regime is a police regime par excellence [that is, the ultimate police state]...accustomed to think primarily in terms of police power. This should never be lost sight of in gauging Soviet motives....

This is admittedly not a pleasant picture. [The p]roblem of how to cope with this force is undoubtedly [the] greatest task our diplomacy has ever faced and probably the greatest it will ever have to face. It should be the point of departure from which our political general staff work at the present juncture should proceed. It should be approached with [the] same thoroughness and care as [the] solution of major strategic problem in war, and if necessary, with no smaller outlay in [the] planning effort. I cannot attempt to suggest all the answers here. But I would like to record my conviction that the problem is within our power to solve...without recourse to any general military conflict. And in support of this conviction there are certain observations of a more encouraging nature I should like to make:

(One) Soviet power, unlike that of Hitlerite [Nazi] Germany, is neither schematic nor adventuristic. It does not work by fixed plans. It does not take unnecessary risks. [It is] impervious to logic of reason, and it is highly sensitive to [the] logic of force. For this reason it can easily withdraw — and usually does — when strong resistance is encountered at any point. Thus, if the adversary has sufficient force and makes clear his readiness to use it, he rarely has to do so. If situations are properly handled there need be no prestige-engaging showdowns.

(Two) Gauged against Western world as a whole, [the] Soviets are still by far the weaker force. Thus, their success will really depend on [the] degree of cohesion, firmness, and vigor which [the] Western world can muster. And this is [one] factor which it is within our power to influence.

(Three) Success of Soviet system, as [a] form of internal power, is not yet finally proven. It has yet to be demonstrated that it can survive [the] supreme test of [the] successive transfer of power from one individual or group to another. [Vladimir] Lenin's [first leader of the Soviet Union] death [in 1924] was [the] first such transfer, and its effects wracked [the] Soviet state for fifteen years after. Stalin's death or retirement will be second. But even this will not be [the] final test. [The] Soviet internal system will now be subjected, by virtue of recent territorial expansions, to a series of additional strains.... In Russia, [the Communist] party has now become a great and — for the moment — highly successful apparatus of dictatorial administration, but it has ceased to be a source of emotional

inspiration. Thus, internal soundness and permanence of movement need not yet be regarded as assured. [In other words, the Soviet Union might collapse from within.]

**(Four) All Soviet propaganda beyond [the] Soviet security sphere [that is, the Soviet Union and its satellite states] is basically negative and destructive. It should therefore be relatively easy to combat it by any intelligent and really constructive program.**

For these reasons I think we may approach calmly and with good heart the problem of how to deal with Russia. As to how this approach should be made, I only wish to advance, by way of conclusion, the following comments:

**1. Our first step must be to apprehend, and recognize for what it is, the nature of the movement with which we are dealing. We must study it with the same courage, detachment, objectivity, and the same determination not to be emotionally provoked or unseated by it, with which a doctor studies unruly and unreasonable individuals.**

**2. We must see that our public is educated to [the] realities of Russian situation. I cannot overemphasize the importance of this. [The p]ress cannot do this alone. It must be done mainly by government, which is necessarily more experienced and better informed on [the] practical problems involved. In this we need not be deterred by [the] ugliness of the picture. I am convinced that there would be far less hysterical anti-Sovietism in our country today if the realities of this situation were better understood by our people. There is nothing as dangerous or as terrifying as the unknown....**

**3. Much depends on [the] health and vigor of our own society. World communism is like [a] malignant parasite which feeds only on diseased tissue. This is the point at which domestic and foreign policies meet. Every courageous and incisive measure to solve [the] internal problems of our own society, to improve [the] self-confidence, discipline, morale, and community spirit of our own people, is a diplomatic victory over Moscow worth a thousand diplomatic notes and joint communiqués....**

**4. We must formulate and put forward for other nations a much more positive and constructive picture of the sort of world we would like to see than we have put forward in the past. It is not enough to urge the people to develop political processes similar to our own [that is, democracy]. Many foreign peoples, in Europe at least, are tired and frightened by [the] experiences of the past, and are less interested in abstract freedom than in security. They are seeking guidance rather than responsibilities. We should be better able than the Russians to give them this. And unless we do, the Russians certainly will.**

**5. Finally, we must have courage and self-confidence to cling to our own methods and conceptions of human society. After all, the greatest danger that can befall us in coping with this problem of Soviet communism is that we shall allow ourselves to become like those with whom we are coping.**