

# George Kennan's "Long Telegram"

(excerpt)

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:** George Kennan had been a diplomat in Moscow following the Russian Civil War, and was a witness to Stalin's program of collectivization and the bloody purges of the 20s and 30s. He returned to the USSR as an assistant to US ambassador Averill Harriman, and in that capacity, wrote the "Long Telegram," a bleak assessment of the nature of Soviet-American relations, in 1946. His opinion was highly regarded in Washington, where he was considered the foremost authority on the Soviet Union.

The political personality of Soviet power as we know it today is the product of ideology and circumstances: ideology inherited by the present Soviet leaders from the movement in which they had their political origin, and circumstances of power which they now have nearly exercised for nearly three decades in Russia...

Belief is maintained in the basic badness of capitalism, in the inevitability of its destruction, in the obligations of the proletariat to assist in the destruction and to take power into its own hands. But stress has come to be laid primarily on those concepts which relate most specifically to the Soviet regime itself: its position as the sole truly Soviet regime in a dark and misguided world, and to its relationships of power within it. The first of these concepts is that of the innate antagonism between capitalism and socialism.....It must invariably be assumed in Moscow that the aims of the capitalist world are antagonistic to the Soviet regime itself: and therefore to the interest of the peoples it controls.

This means that we are going to continue for a long time to find the Russians difficult to deal with.

This brings us to the second of the concepts important to contemporary Soviet outlook. That is the infallibility of the Kremlin.

The leadership of the Communist Party is therefore always right, and has always been right ever since in 1929 Stalin formalized his personal power by announcing that the decisions of the Politburo were being taken unanimously. .. Thus the Kremlin had no compunction about retreating in the face of superior force. And being under the compulsion of no timetable, it does not get panicky under the necessity of such retreat. Its political action is a fluid stream which moves constantly, wherever it is permitted to move, toward a given goal. Its main concern is to make sure that it has filled every nook and cranny available to it in the basin of world power.

.....In these circumstances it is clear that the main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies.