



Fredrik Logevall, "A Critique of Containment" (Bernath Lecture), *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 28, Issue 4 (September 2004): 473-499.

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'Innocence is a liability because it can't see beyond its own expectations.'

Pico Iyer, 'Fairy Tales for Grown Ups,' *The New York Review of Books* LII, no. 1 (13 January 2005), 29.

Logevall has given us much to think about in this excellent lecture. I think it was Senator Paul Tsongas who in the late 1980s or early 1990s declared that the Cold War had ended and that Japan won! It is extraordinary that US diplomacy during the Cold War, which lasted over forty five years, depending on how one defines and dates both its origins and its conclusion, arrived at no substantial accommodation through negotiations. Indeed, a constant refrain in US diplomacy was that it would only negotiate from a position of strength as Logevall cites Acheson in his Bernath lecture. The Reagan administration was no stranger to such inclinations. They could not substantially engage with the 'Evil' Empire until they could negotiate from that position of strength. Indeed there was a kind of symmetry in the presence of Paul Nitze who was present both at the creation and at the conclusion. Though as we've often seen over the decades and at times across the centuries the barbarians have provided a kind of solution. The reluctance to negotiate with 'them' for fear that accommodation might result in a less than perfect solution was also evident in the autumn of 2002 and in the differences between the United States and some Europeans on the approach to Iran over their nuclear capacity. One feels that Logevall is touching on a theme that could be extended across time and space.

Logevall is concerned with American diplomacy understood in the narrow sense of a pursuit of negotiations and dialogue with, in this case, the Soviet Union at the origins of the Cold War. He points out that there was no meaningful diplomacy with the communists through long periods of the Cold War. Many in Washington thought that because of the communists' moral shortcomings that there was no point in negotiations till they abandoned their ideology or underwent fundamental transformation. This much of course was the case by the time Reagan chatted by the fireside in Geneva and then ultimately strolled through Red Square with Gorbachev two years later. Thus there were few summits to begin with and those that were held were more about scoring points for propaganda purposes or allaying various domestic concerns and constituencies.

Logevall fully acknowledges that containment worked in a fundamental manner; Soviet expansion was curtailed for decades and US civil society was not destroyed. What the costs to US society were could be worth exploring through other angles. What lay behind the gist of

Eisenhower's Chance for Peace speech? What were the opportunity costs of 'choosing [Cold] War' in the late 1940s as opposed to exploring other options through negotiations with the Soviets? After all much work over the last decade has demonstrated that the Soviets were indeed looking for accommodation in the months prior to the Berlin Blockade and then again after the Stalin's death. Beyond these direct costs one might also consider the centripetal political, ideological and cultural forces that perhaps compromised some of the democratic facets of the United States, ironically also compromising its exceptionalism, the very sentiment that inhibited the US wont to talk. Such criticism is perhaps a bit unfair because it lies beyond the scope of Logevall's intentions. It is offered merely to suggest other routes of investigation.

In this considered 'critique of Containment' Logevall make clear that the Cold War was perpetuated longer than necessary because of the US reluctance to a engage with the type of diplomacy that a European tradition of a more realist engagement with its various enemies might have produced. Of course the use of the term European is problematical, but one takes the point that within the broad traditions of diplomacy Europeans and in this case Churchill was more inclined to push for negotiations. That much was evident in the Churchill-Stalin meeting of late 1944 and in Churchill's attempts to seek negotiation in the mid-1950s; spheres of influence were a reality, why not recognise them? Of course, Logevall argues that such mutual accommodation was considered unsatisfactory and he investigates some of the domestic politics that developed such an exceptional stance: 'Whereas for Europeans diplomacy was a natural first recourse, for Americans it was not.' This despite the well reviewed criticisms provided by Wallace and Lippmann.

These critics of the Truman administration's pursuit of containment understood both the limited capabilities of the Soviet Union beyond Eastern Europe and also thoroughly recognised the internal nature of the Soviet system. Despite the confidence that the internal contradictions of the Soviet Union would eventually undermine their system, there was also this simultaneous sense of fear and loathing within the official US attitude which was enhanced by the long telegram and the 'X' article, solidified through NSC-68 and widely distributed through the work of Edward Barratt, the Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, NSC 59/1 in the 1940s and the 'Campaign for Truth' in the 1950s as both Emily Rosenberg and Scott Lucas and have demonstrated. Yet despite the very cautious and limited capabilities of the Soviets, pointed out by the early revisionists as well, Washington's attitude was one of belligerence and non-compromise. Perhaps it was the historical analogy of Munich working overtime, but as Logevall cites Churchill, it was folly to appease from a position of weakness, though 'appeasement from strength is magnanimous ... and might be the surest way to peace.' Instead, Washington engaged in the type of public diplomacy exercises much decried by Hans Morgenthau, which in a sense positioned the United States on a pedestal, from where they would talk past the diplomats with megaphones to assert moral principles rather than recognising the pluralism of a complex world and engaging in diplomacy with opponents, however distasteful their polity and practices. To circle back to the epigraph: to see beyond their expectations. For Lippmann, Logevall presciently cites, 'the history of diplomacy is the history of relations among rival powers, which did not enjoy political intimacy, and did not respond to appeals to common purposes. Nevertheless, there have been settlements. ... For a diplomat to think that rival and unfriendly powers cannot be brought to a settlement is to forget what diplomacy is all about.' If as early revisionists argued that the Soviet presence in Eastern Europe was a result of security concerns,

or even if the security dilemma produced a process of tit for tat, what better way to achieve the ostensible US objective of freeing the East Europeans, [perhaps reversing the taint of Yalta], than 'to mollify those concerns' Logevall suggests.

Logevall then cites Stephanson, indeed the entire lecture / article provides a very good review of recent and older literature, that there was 'a deliberate moment of diplomatic refusal, a period of recharging the western batteries and rearranging the power configuration.' This sentence points to an important theme in US policy that I think is only partially taken up by Logevall. He does a superb job of in the second part of the article in explicating the narrow US framework and their failure not only to engage with negotiations but to not even consider them a serious option. His analysis quite rightly takes him down the road of investigating domestic US politics. We are treated to a detailed and considered reading of the proclivity of Americans to see things differently from Europeans, who were far more used to negotiations. Americans tended to see things in less ambiguous terms, they believed in their innate altruism and as Logevall argues that any opposition to the United States was also simultaneously considered opposition to notions of progress and righteousness (a theme we see repeated often in the debates on development later). Within the mindset, all such opponents of course are illegitimate. The Manichaeic tendencies, analysed in the work of Campbell and my earlier work, simplified and mobilised US culture around functional concepts and categories of the 'other'. While Logevall focuses on the issues of security, exceptionalism and the conduct of domestic politics in which such simple characterisations of the 'other' serves not only the process of extracting funds from a sometimes reluctant legislature but also that of inculcating that sense of fear and loathing. Logevall argues that geographic separateness and 'This long experience of security had another effect as well: it made Americans more sensitive to new dangers, more fearful of even the possibility of defeat, than were peoples more conditioned to the cycles of ups and downs in their national traditions and more gloomily modest in their expectations.' But Americans were imbued with a tradition and had 'great expectations' and as the epigraph suggests, could rarely see beyond them. One thinks of Pyle in Greene's novel in 1950s Indochina. And here's the point taking us back through Stephanson's thought to arguments advanced by Gardner.

This was not just a time of containment; it was also a time of US integration and expansionism. Was there not also an element of internal containment? At previous points of US expansion say the 1840s or the 1890s there has been considerable debate within US society on the wisdom of the process and on the effects it would have on US democracy and civil liberties. The rhetorical strategies and Manichaeic framework not only had the tendency to make it very difficult for alternative narratives to be taken seriously, or even to be advanced at certain points in time, but also obviously privileged the discourse of security over other explanations.

For the United States the post-War period was indeed a period of great expectations, a time of 'recharging the western batteries and rearranging the power configuration'. It was also a tale of two cities, it was the best of times and perhaps the worst of times. In a review of NSC-68 Gardner once argued that the United States had never on the defensive militarily, though it often was philosophically. The supposed Soviet 'design' [which Logevall clearly indicates did not exist in any concerted form early on] threatened US agendas; the collapse of the economic system in the 1930s Gardner writes, 'contributed to a malaise of doubt and uncertainty about the future of capitalist democracy.' This was the time to win that philosophical debate. This was the

time to ensure US integration with the key economies of the world, not to mention their colonies. This was also the time to overcome that erstwhile domestic reluctance. Could such integration be advanced without the Soviets? What incentive would there have been to finance the Truman Doctrine or for that matter the Marshall Plan or NSC 68? Negotiations, accommodation, a settled sphere of influence deal might have removed such Monsters. By the mid-1950s, Hartz in the Liberal Tradition aptly suggested: 'It is the absence of outright war, or the presence of what we call the 'Cold War', which makes these orientations plain; for military struggle, ... is the great simplifier, reducing complicated social issues to the simple lines of the battle chart. Because the current struggle against Communism is in significant part an ideological competition for human loyalties, it has brought into the plainest view America's psychological pattern. One of the issues it involves is the issue of a social 'message' to compete with the appeal of Communism.'

As addendum one might add that the tendency was evident at other points during the Cold War and beyond until we witnessed the tortured explanations on why diplomacy with the Sandinistas had not worked during the 1980s and how they posed an 'unusual and extraordinary threat' to US foreign policy. What is it in the political process, not just in the States and not just in the twentieth century, that makes cultures and society so willing to accept narratives of imminent danger?

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