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**A Most Interesting Time:
The Militarization of Containment after the Czechoslovakian *Coup d'Etat* of 1948**

A Senior Paper

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation
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By

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Abstract

This paper discusses the development of American foreign policy during the first few years of the Cold War through the containment doctrine. This doctrine, which in modern times has come to mean aggressive military action against any perceived communist threat, is not at all what the architect of containment George Kennan had in mind when he first pitched the idea to the Truman Administration in 1946. The reason that the definition shifted in the course of a few short years is because of the communist *coup d'état* that occurred in Czechoslovakia in February 1948. Scholars have traditionally assigned more importance to the Berlin Blockade as the reason for America's aggressive shift in relations with the Soviet Union, but my research establishes that the coup was far and away the most important event that changed the definition of containment to this military focus.

The Truman Administration began to believe that direct military deterrence was the best solution to this new aggressive Soviet threat in the aftermath of the coup. Economic containment was considered to be ineffective in comparison to this threat and in the subsequent months the U.S. began acting aggressively to any potential attempts at communist expansion in both Italy and Germany as a result of this shift in mentality. The end of economic containment was found in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization as it directly tied the United States to the military defense of Europe and marked the end to any meaningful Soviet American rapprochement.

Introduction

The end of World War II (WWII) was supposed to be a triumph; the defeat of Nazi Germany by the victorious Allied armies was cause for jubilation. The question of what facilitated the shift from postwar happiness to Cold War fear has engaged historians for decades. The thrill of victory only temporarily obscured the separation between the goals of the United States and those of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The United States had dropped its prewar isolationist stance and was engaged in creating a postwar world in which conflicts would not be allowed to escalate. The USSR shared this goal as well, but it was very clear that in order to achieve security for itself, the ideal of self-determination proclaimed by the Allies at the peace conferences at Yalta and Potsdam (February and July 1945 respectively) was not going to be applied to areas now occupied by the Soviet Union.

This transition of the USSR from postwar ally to calculating enemy did not occur overnight, but was created by Soviet obstructionism and American fears. The attempt to bring the Soviets into the financial reconstruction of Europe in 1946 through the International Monetary Fund (IMF) ended in failure and out of that failure arose a new type of diplomacy; containment. The concept, created by junior foreign ambassador to the USSR George Kennan in his 1946 Long Telegram, called for economic aid for the U.S.'s Western European allies and for destabilization tactics to be directed against the Soviet Union and its allies. The idea of economic aid to non-communist nations eventually became the Marshall Plan, while the destabilization tactics became the basis of the Truman Doctrine in which military aid was used to disrupt communist takeover attempts throughout the world.

This paper will argue that the violent overthrow of Czechoslovakia's democratic government in February 1948 was the beginning of the end for economic containment and the

instigator for a militarization of the doctrine. this new militarized outlook is notable in the three major events that followed the coup, the Italian elections in April 1948, the Berlin Blockade in June 1948, and the founding of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in April 1949. These events all culminated in *United States Objectives and Programs for National Security* or National Security Council Document sixty-eight (NSC 68), the document that enshrined military containment as official American foreign policy for the rest of the Cold War.

Methodology

This paper is focused on the evolving nature of American foreign policy and therefore most primary sources used are American diplomatic papers. The documents are pulled from several primary source collections and the bottomless pit of information that is *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS). The FRUS as it is called, was a published journal that was then digitized within the last five years and is a repository for a wide range of diplomatic cables, resolutions, and treaty documents dating back to 1865. The other primary sources used by the essay are post-collapse government minutes from Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union along with additional FRUS documents that were sent to American embassies by foreign parties. The essay does make use of secondary sources but only ones that have been published after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The overall style of this essay is of a post traditionalist method although this is the result of many months of study which was not thinking of applying any one school of research more than any other.

Literature Review

The study of the Cold War and the arguments over who caused and escalated it are as divisive as the Cold War itself. The literature on the Cold War can be divided into three schools with a fourth school slowly developing. The first school of literature is called traditionalism or orthodoxy. This dominated American writing on the Cold War from the 1940s to the late 1960s. Historians of this school believed that the USSR was to blame for the start and escalation of Cold War tensions after World War II. A great example of this sort of literature is Thomas Bailey's book *America Faces Russia* (1950). Bailey argues that the Soviet Union only wanted collaboration when it was convenient and was always going to be opposed to restraints on its own power, this makes the subsequent escalation of hostilities unsurprising.¹

The turmoil of the late 1960s, especially during the Vietnam War, caused some historians to begin looking at the origins of the Cold War from the perspective of American, not Russian, responsibility. The Wisconsin School and the more volatile members of the New Left produced legions of articles and studies in a new revisionist style, claiming the Soviet Union was reacting to a hostile American enemy and that otherwise it would not have any reason to antagonize. The primary feature of these revisionists, besides a heavy emphasis on American ideology, was they wrote some of the first books that traced the origins of the Cold War all the way back to 1917. D.F. Fleming's two volume *The Cold War and its Origins* (1961) is the best example of this long form approach despite its early publication. In the book Fleming argues that America's anti-red hysteria both before and after WWII caused the escalation of the Cold War more than anything the Soviets did.²

¹ Thomas Bailey, *America Faces Russia* (New York: Cornell University Press 1950), 349-350.

² D.F. Fleming, *The Cold War and its Origins: 1917-1960* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday 1961), XIII.

The revisionist school opened the debate over Cold War responsibility and soon a new school of historiography appeared, the post-revisionists. This school attempted to even out the blame between East and West in the spirit of detente and during the late-1970s to mid-1980s John Lewis Gaddis and his book *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (1978) was the closest thing to a manifesto that this movement ever produced. Gaddis argues in favor of a return to a more even-handed approach to Cold War responsibility than the absolutism argued by the revisionists.³

The fourth phase began with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. It was mostly post-revisionist authors like Gaddis who jumped into the newly opened Soviet state department archives, in order to produce material reflecting this new world. These archives were important because primary sources relating to the Soviet Union had been closed to Western scholars for most of the twentieth century. The revisionist scholars' views shifted with the opening of the archives, although their anti-West hostility never abated, and traditionalism started to sneak back into the field. Gaddis produced a book entitled *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (1997) in which he argued that Joseph Stalin and The Soviet Union held opposing views of what defined international security after World War II compared to the Western Allies. Despite attempts to bridge the opposing views, Joseph Stalin was unable to accept any world that was not the same as the Soviet Union. This for Gaddis, was the primary cause of the escalation of the Cold War.⁴ The historiography of the Cold War will only get richer once more historians from the old Eastern Bloc begin to publish their stories in this new international age.

³ John Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press 1978), 8.

⁴ John Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press 1997), 14-17.

Acronym List

CIA Central Intelligence Agency

Cominform Communist Information Bureau

Comintern Communist International

IMF International Monetary Fund

KPD German Communist Party

KSC Czech Communist Party

NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NSC National Security Council

PCF French Communist Party

PCI Italian Communist Party

PPS Policy Planning Staff

UN United Nations

URO Central Trade Union Council

US United States

USSR Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

The United States after World War II

The question of when the Cold War began is difficult to pin down, but a break from the WWII Grand Alliance is clear starting in 1945. The German army had conquered most of the European landmass during WWII and the February 1945 Yalta and August 1945 Potsdam Agreements were supposed to ensure safety and free elections for all the countries formerly under Nazi German control, including the areas occupied by the Soviet Red Army, which had overrun most of Eastern Europe by May 1945. The Soviet Union ignored these agreements and the Red Army actively suppressed non-communist political movements and established minority communist governments, first in Poland and then in Bulgaria and Romania. The schism between the U.S. and USSR was widened by issues regarding reconstruction efforts in postwar Europe. The U.S. and the USSR agreed on the need for a collective security organization and both were founding members of the United Nations (UN), upon its announcement in the declaration of January 1, 1942.⁵ This moment of unity proved to be an aberration and not an indication that the Soviet Union had abandoned its more opportunistic stance toward engagement with the capitalist Western Allies, but this was not clear at the time and any anti-Soviet opinions were widely disregarded while the war was still raging.

The fact that the Soviet Union had not truly abandoned its anti-capitalist hostility was understood by everyone in the U.S. government by 1946, when the Soviets refused to take part in either the IMF or the World Bank. These organizations, which had their origins in the 1944 Bretton Woods Conference, intended to create the groundwork for postwar European recovery,

⁵ "Declaration by the United Nations," January 1, 1942, in *The Cold War a Book of Documents*, ed. Hans Trefousse (New York: Putnam 1965), 4-5.

and were created with the belief that the Soviet Union would want to be included.⁶ A sense of pessimism grew in the American State Department as the Soviets continued to demand more and reciprocate less in the reconstruction of Europe. This hostility on the part of the Soviets was not surprising to George F. Kennan, a State Department official who had spent many years in Moscow and by the end of WWII was considered an authority on Russian motivations. Kennan was convinced that collaboration with Moscow was folly ever since the 1944 debacle over the installation of the communist government in Poland, in the aftermath of the Warsaw Uprising.⁷

During the Uprising, the Red Army, despite being just across the Vistula river, did not render aid to the Polish Home Army to help them fight the larger and better equipped German forces and refused Allied requests to use Soviet airfields to provide supplies.⁸ The Soviets were reluctant to assist the Poles or Western Allies, for both logistical reasons and because the Home Army was loyal to the non-communist Polish Government in exile and not the pro-Soviet Communist Lublin Committee.⁹ The preferential treatment given by the Soviets to the Lublin Committee over the Polish government in exile after Poland was cleared of Germans in 1945 made a mockery of Allied promises to Poland.¹⁰ This led Kennan to conclude that the USSR was only interested in consolidating power at any cost.¹¹

⁶ George Kennan, *Memoirs: 1925-1950* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967), 293.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 211-212.

⁸ Richard Evans, *The Third Reich at War*, (New York: Penguin Publishers 2009), 623.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 621-622.

¹⁰ "Protocol of Proceedings of the Crimea Conference," February 4-11, 1945, Trefousse, *a Book of Cold War Documents*, 24-25.

¹¹ Kennan, *Memoirs*, 521-522.

Creation of Containment

The initial 1944 framework of Kennan's ideas regarding how to stop the spread of communism, which in time would be called containment, were developed in a memorandum submitted to the U.S. State Department in the aftermath of the Warsaw Uprising and the subsequent suppression of non-communist Poles, but it made no obvious impact.¹² The U.S. was not going to alienate the USSR before the end of WWII and it was only after the war ended in August 1945, that the continued and mounting difficulties of dealing with the Soviet Union began killing the appeal of collaboration in the U.S. Federal government. The state of collaboration by 1946 was just the opinion of the U.S. Treasury Department before it too was disillusioned by Soviet refusal to take part in European reconstruction efforts via the IMF.

In the wake of the IMF failure, a new post-collaborationist road forward was required. In response to the U.S. Treasury Departments query about why the Soviet Union had refused to participate in the IMF and what should be done when dealing with the USSR in the future. Kennan wrote the Long Telegram, a five-part epic created on February 22, 1946, that described the mentalities behind Soviet foreign policy and how that policy reflected their own system of internal security.¹³ According to Kennan, the Soviet refusal to take part in the IMF is understandable, as it seemingly offered them no possibility to disrupt the affairs of other Western nations in the way they could through the UN.¹⁴ The reason for their disruptive behavior is spelled out by Kennan in part two of the telegram. The Soviets, according to Kennan, must have

¹² Ibid., 226.

¹³ George Kennan, "Sources of Soviet Conduct," February 26, 1946, in *Origins of the Cold War: the Novikov, Kennan and Roberts 'Long Telegrams' of 1946*, ed. Kenneth M. Jensen (Washington D.C.: United States Institute for Peace press 1993), 20.

¹⁴ Ibid., 23-24.

the threat of a hostile Western world to justify their dictatorship over their own populace.¹⁵

Kennan portrays Soviet control over its postwar acquisitions as being less stable than the Third Reich's control had been, and that after Stalin's death, continued USSR control over the territory was unlikely. Kennan compared the eventual collapse to the end of the Tsarist regime in 1917.¹⁶ According to Kennan, the United States should first make a detailed study of the threat of communist expansion and second be clear to the people of the U.S. what difficulties might arise when dealing with the USSR in order to undercut the public hysteria that could come from being uninformed. The final steps should be plans for the Western European Allies that would provide stability and security while not employing Soviet-style control methods. These steps would allow for a containment of Soviet expansion as they would prevent the growth of communism by depriving it of the malignant societal tissue on which its fed.¹⁷

The Long Telegram and a streamlined version published for public consumption dubbed the "X" Article sent shockwaves through the American government. The process of containment as defined by Kennan was focused on stopping communist expansion economically via aid programs and reconstruction efforts.¹⁸ The issue was that others in the American government thought that rather than building up the economies of European allies, it would be better to provide military assistance to help suppress communist interference within their borders. These different interpretations of containment led to two very important foreign policy initiatives, the military aid of the Truman Doctrine and the economic aid of the Marshall Plan. The possible implementations of containment are well highlighted in a memo produced by Special Council

¹⁵ Ibid., 21.

¹⁶ Ibid., 29.

¹⁷ Ibid., 31.

¹⁸ Kennan, *Memoirs*, 336-337.

Clark Clifford that was sent to the president on September 24, 1946. He took the approach in the memo that the best way to contain the highly centralized Soviet Union would be with trade and economic assistance to the more loosely connected Western countries such as France and Britain.¹⁹ He also argued for a unified Department of Defense (DoD), so that all the different spheres of Soviet aggression could be managed by a unified military body.²⁰

President Truman took up the idea of military aid starting with a speech given to the U.S. Congress on March 12, 1947. In this speech, Truman proclaimed that the United States had an obligation to help citizens fight tyranny and that this battle would begin with aid to Greece and Turkey.²¹ The ideas in the speech became known as the “Truman Doctrine.” This doctrine represented the end of fifteen weeks of discussion and debate over the place of the United States in the postwar world. The problems in Greece were a continuation of issues dating back to 1944. The tensions in Greece between Communist and anti-Communist forces, had escalated in 1944 despite the establishment of a government in exile, which included six Communist members in its cabinet.²² Greece broke out into outright civil war when the communist ministers resigned on November 15, 1944.²³

The Soviet Union took an active interest in the developing Greek Civil War. The Soviets armed and trained communist guerillas and began a massive disinformation campaign to discredit the British aid program. Soviet allies were also involved in the conflict, Romania

¹⁹ Clark Clifford “American Relations with the Soviet Union: A Report to the President by the Special Counsel to the President” September 24, 1946, *Containment Documents*, 67.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 68.

²¹ Joseph Jones, *The Fifteen Weeks: February 21-June 5, 1947* (New York: The Viking Press, 1955), 21.

²² *Ibid.*, 70.

²³ *Ibid.*, 71.

assisted in training guerilla fighters and the Yugoslavians tried to create an independent Macedonia which it could then annex with Moscow's permission.²⁴ The overstretched British, who had been spearheading the anti-communist effort in Greece since 1944, were hemorrhaging what little capital they had after World War II and it was clear that they soon would be unable to continue supporting the Greek government forces.

The dire position of the British was first expressed in a memorandum sent to the Truman administration on January 20, 1947.²⁵ This note, along with the general stagnation of recovery in Western Europe, required action by the United States and aid for the containment of communist expansion seemed the best way to justify it. There was concern about the ability of an aid bill to pass as the Democratic Truman administration was faced with a Republican congress at the same time as the Greek crisis. The fear stemmed from the fact that both before and during WWII, the Republicans had acted with revulsion toward any European aid program and it was assumed that the idea of massive military aid would get nowhere.

In order to pass the bill Truman immediately started working behind the scenes with amiable House Republicans and the Democratic head of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Arthur Vandenberg. These meetings and an unarguably good speech from President Truman, secured the funding needed for military aid to Greece and Turkey to the tune of 400 million dollars.²⁶ These funds would mostly cover what the British had already been doing since 1944, training soldiers, providing weaponry, as well as supplying additional funding for military expansion. This program was heavily expanded in 1948 as a result of the Czechoslovakian

²⁴ Ibid., 67.

²⁵ Ibid., 79.

²⁶ Ibid., 22.

Communist *coup d'état*. The Truman Doctrine's methods of using military deterrence to contain communist aggression was not what Kennan described as containment and was a clear indication that a possibility existed for an aggressive anti-Soviet military strategy in the near future.

The Marshall Plan was the final major foreign policy initiative made by the U.S. before the Czechoslovakian *coup d'état* in February 1948. The plan represented the economic application of containment that Kennan had envisioned upon writing the Long Telegram and the Policy Planning Staff (PPS), which he headed, was tasked by Secretary of State George Marshall with constructing it. The staff created a process in which, first, the major world powers would be presented with the plan at a convention held in Paris, and then second, countries both inside and outside the Soviet orbit could vote to participate regardless of whether they attended to initial meeting in Paris. The countries that voted to participate would create their own version of the plan that described where the funds would be applied, how they would benefit the economy of the host country, and then that application would be approved and funded by the United States.²⁷

The Truman Doctrine never directly condemned communism and the Marshall Plan, likewise, had no ideological bias and was hypothetically open to all European nations including those in the Soviet orbit, soon to be called the Eastern Bloc. Containment policy dictated that the initial focus of the plan would be determined by a nation's economic status. This meant France and Italy in particular, would receive funds first, although all of Europe was suffering from severe ecological and economic problems during 1947. The idea that communism was most successful in the countries where economic prosperity was low meant that if the United States wanted to insure its national security, then under no circumstances could Europe continue to slide downhill. That this plan was separate from the United Nations was obvious. The UN had its

²⁷ Kennan, *Memoirs*, 343.

own aid council called the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) that the Soviets tried to sabotage from both within and without. The implementation of the Marshall Plan was delayed after its development, because the U.S. congress would not allocate more funds before a major foreign minister's conference in London. In addition, bitterness surrounding a perceived over-extension of U.S. commitments continued to linger long after the passage of the aid bills to Turkey and Greece.

Soviet Background and Reaction

The Soviet Union found itself in a complicated position after World War II. Although the Soviet Red Army controlled almost all of Eastern Europe and a third of Germany, it had come at the cost of much industry and agriculture, for which Soviet leader Joseph Stalin expected to be compensated. This compensation was supposed to come in the form of continued American aid via the Lend Lease Act, along with reparations from Germany and its former allies, such as Romania and Hungary. The USSR was interested in preventing another German attack which fitted in perfectly with the mindset of most European nations in 1945. the USSR signed many mutual defense pacts against Germany with the agreement with France in particular covering a preemptive strike.²⁸

These treaties provided some security, but what Stalin really wanted were friendly governments; in Soviet thought this meant subservience to Moscow. Stalin intended that in the countries controlled by the Red Army, the communist minority would take control and punish

²⁸ Georges-Henri Soutou, "France," in *The Origins of the Cold War in Europe: International Perspectives*, ed. David Reynolds (New Haven CT: Yale University Press 1994), 99.

the discredited former regimes.²⁹ To accomplish this goal and play for time, the Soviet Union continued to drag its feet on peace treaties with former German allies like Austria and continually refused to match Western troop demobilizations. The end game for Stalin was a Europe united under the USSR.³⁰ This was not to be accomplished via immediate armed conflict but would only require the Soviet Union to wait for the inevitable downfall of capitalism and the embrace of communism.³¹

The Truman Doctrine was not exactly well received in Moscow, but despite its sweeping promises and possible implications for further American military expansion, the immediate outcome of the doctrine, support to Greece and Turkey, was of little concern to Stalin. The reason for this lack of concern is because Stalin had made a secret deal with the British for Soviet non-intervention in Greece in exchange for British non-intervention in Romania.³² In contrast, when the U.S. Secretary of State George Marshall gave his famous Harvard speech in June 1947 that announced the Marshall Plan, and the intention of the U.S. to rebuild Europe³³, Stalin reacted very differently. This was entirely in keeping with Soviet reactions to previous aid European programs such as the IMF.

The Marshall Plan had been calculated in part to destabilize and frighten the Soviet Union into making diplomatic errors that would end up strengthening the U.S. position in

²⁹ Karel Bartosek, "Central and Southeastern Europe," in *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, ed. Stephane Courtois and Mark Kramer (London: Harvard University Press 1999), 396.

³⁰ John Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin Publishers, 2005), 14.

³¹ Vyacheslav Molotov, *Molotov Remembers: Conversations with Felix Chuev* (Chicago: Terra Publishing Center 1993), 63.

³² William Hardy McNeil, "The View from Greece," in *Witnesses to the Origins of the Cold War*, ed. Thomas Hammond (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press 1982), 105.

³³ Jones, *The Fifteen Weeks*, 249-250.

Europe, which is exactly what happened.³⁴ The Marshall Plan never specified the organization's details and, in an attempt to ferret out said details, the USSR sent a massive group to the Paris conventions headed by Soviet foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov with orders to see if the Marshall Plan was to be organized on a country-to-country basis or as an all European U.S. hegemony style system.³⁵ The latter was the case and the Soviet Union became very concerned about how the countries within the Soviet sphere of influence would react to the possibility of Western aid.

The issue of keeping a strict party line in all communist nations had been the obsession of the Soviet Union ever since the first Communist International (Comintern) was founded in 1919. Despite the official dissolution of the Comintern in 1943, less than three months later a secret group was started up by the USSR to ensure the party line from Moscow was followed.³⁶ The Marshall Plan was the first major test of postwar communist party unity as once the Soviet Union condemned it as being obvious American imperialism, it was expected that the rest of its allies would do the same.

Two Soviet aligned countries did both attend the Paris meeting and vote on participating in the Marshall Plan, Czechoslovakia and Poland. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC) voted in favor of opting in, while the Poles did not. This is in large part because of the strong economic ties the Czechoslovakians had with Western countries compared to Poland. 60-

³⁴ PPS 1, "Policy with Respect to American Aid to Western Europe" May 23, 1947, in *Containment Docs*, Gaddis, 108.

³⁵ Instructions for the Soviet Delegation to the Meeting of Foreign Ministers in Paris, June 25, 1947, in *Debating the Origins of the Cold War: American and Russian Perspectives*, Vladimir Petchatnov and C Earl Edmonson (New York: Roman and Littlefield Publishers 2001), 167.

³⁶ Gregory Malenkov, "Statement on the Activity of the Central Committee of the Communist Party", September 22, 1947, in *The Cominform: Minutes of the Three Conferences 1947/1948/1949*, ed. Giuliano Procacci (Milan: Feltrinelli Foundation 1994), 93.

70% of Czech imports came from Western countries and to vote against a proposal that would assist the Czech economy in paying for these imports would have killed KSC reelection chances in May 1948.³⁷ The failure of the Czech communists to follow official policy dictates from Moscow was very troubling to the Soviet Union. This concern combined with increasing demands from Hungarian communist party leaders for a new official Comintern to better coordinate communist party activities in Europe.³⁸

The founding of this organization, called the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform), in September 1947 marked an increase in the militancy of communist activists. Thus began the great postwar consolidation of the Soviet satellite states. The major casualty of this new phase was any collaboration with non-communist or right leaning Socialist parties. The anti-fascist united fronts of the 1930s were reformed as communist dominated national fronts. These new groupings would include only the very left wing of local Social Democratic parties and exclude all others as anti-democratic enemies of the state.³⁹ The KSC leader Klement Gottwald was not present at the first Cominform meeting in which his party was degraded for its weakness in collaborating with the opposition parties, but he was informed of the resolutions and knew that if he wanted to stay in power, any semblance of independence within Czechoslovakia must be crushed and a communist state created.

The Czechoslovakian *coup d'état*

³⁷ Hubert Ripka, *Czechoslovakia Enslaved, the Story of the Communist Coup d'état* (London: Gollancz 1950), 68.

³⁸ Matyas Rakosi, "Co-Ordination Among Communist Parties," May 17, 1946, in *The Cold War: A History in Documents and Eyewitness Accounts*, ed. Jussi Hanhimaki and Odd Westad (New York: Oxford University Press 2003), 49-50.

³⁹ Andrei Zhdanov, "On the International Situation" September 25, 1947 in *Cominform Minutes*, Procacci, 247-251.

The country of Czechoslovakia in many ways was as much a trigger for World War II as it was for the Cold War. WWII was supposed to be prevented by the signing of the Munich Agreement in 1938. The Munich Agreement stated that in exchange for the part of Czechoslovakia known as the Sudetenland, Germany would make no more claims to the territory of Czechoslovakia.⁴⁰ This did not work, and the creation of a separate fascist Slovakian state run by former Catholic priest Josef Tiso, was created as an excuse to complete the process of Czech subjugation during 1939.

The process of dismantling both the occupied Czech zones and the fascist Slovakian state after WWII was very vicious with most of the violence directed against the large German and Hungarian minorities still living in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. The London based Czech government in exile under Eduard Benes had concluded a mutual assistance and friendship treaty with the Soviet Union in 1943 and the official structure of an interim postwar government was decided upon during negotiations that took place in Moscow in March 1945.⁴¹ The KSC was given several important cabinet positions and demanded the creation of national committees that would replace existing administration and government bureaucracy in the areas liberated by the Red Army.⁴² The negotiations continued in the Czech capital of Prague after liberation and the result was the April 5, 1945 Kosice agreement which called for partial nationalization of agriculture and industry by the state.⁴³

The structure of the government on the eve of the first postwar elections in 1946 had communists in charge of the Ministries of Industry, Education, Agriculture and the Interior, with

⁴⁰ Richard J Evans, *The Third Reich in Power* (New York: Penguin Publishers 2009), 674.

⁴¹ Ripka, *Czechoslovakia Enslaved*, 32.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 30.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 33.

the Ministry of Defense in the hands of reliable non-party stooges. In the election, the KSC did the best overall with 37% of the vote. The elections allowed the non-communist National Socialist Party with 18% of the vote (no relation to the German party) to grab the Ministry of Education out of KSC control and to maintain control over the Ministry of Justice.⁴⁴ The international position of Czechoslovakia in the eyes of non-communist ministers, such as National Socialist Minister of Foreign Trade Hubert Ripka, was to act as a bridge between East and West. This bridge, or rather a window as Eduard Benes called it, was closed in 1947.

The crackdown on Czechoslovakia started when Stalin and the KSC sabotaged the negotiations of a treaty between Czechoslovakia and France on July 1947. The KSC favored the treaty when the French Communist Party (PCF) was represented in the French government, but became remarkably more hostile when the French ousted the PCF ministers on May 4, 1947, as a result of the PCF obstructing the government's ability to function.⁴⁵ The treaty was supposed to be a mutual defense pact against Germany and her potential allies. This was largely due to Hubert Ripka and the Czech Foreign Ministry fearing Hungary under a new militant communist regime almost as much as a resurgent Germany.⁴⁶ The agreement eventually boiled down to a simple anti-German mutual defense pact that was recognized less for its practical application than its symbolic value. On July 5, 1947, Stalin crushed the negotiations by ordering the KSC party leader, Klement Gottwald, to refuse to go along with the non-communist ministers.

This condemnation of the Franco-Czech treaty went along with a Soviet disapproval of KSC support for the Marshall Plan. This support of U.S. aid got Gottwald in trouble back in

⁴⁴ Ibid., 47.

⁴⁵ Soutou, "France" 104.

⁴⁶ Ripka, *Czechoslovakia Enslaved*, 82.

Moscow, although his mentality was understandable as the Czechs needed any assistance they could get after the American foreign minister James Byrnes denied them aid credits in 1946.⁴⁷ The September 1947 opening of the Cominform in Warsaw saw a speech against deviationist parties from Soviet Politburo member Andrei Zhdanov, which was clearly aimed at the Czechs. The fact that Gottwald was absent and his number two, Rudolf Slansky, was present raised eyebrows around the communist world.⁴⁸ The stance against collaboration with other political parties who would not completely subordinate themselves to the communist party was the position that the Cominform took and that made the situation of the KSC very precarious, which Gottwald understood clearly.

The Czechoslovakian *coup d'état* took place over six days starting on February 19, 1948. The tension between the non-communist democratic parties, such as the National Socialists, and the KSC, had been steadily rising since the Franco-Czech treaty debacle. The revelation that three non-communist ministers were the targets of attempted assassinations and that these attacks were directly linked to the KSC was the final straw. This explosive revelation was announced by the National Socialist Minister of Justice, Prokop Drtina who pinned the blame on the KSC Minister of the Interior, Vaclav Nosek. More bad news arrived in early February 1948, when the Minister of the Interior fired nine non-communist police commissioners and replaced them with communists.⁴⁹ These police commissioners oversaw large stocks of weapons in and around the Czech capital of Prague. The non-communist ministers demanded an investigation and after the unsurprising refusal of the communist members of the cabinet to go along with this, the non-

⁴⁷ Ibid., 49.

⁴⁸ Edward Tarborsky, *Communism in Czechoslovakia: 1948-1960* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1961), 101.

⁴⁹ Ripka, *Czechoslovakia Enslaved*, 195.

communist ministers resigned in protest on Friday, February 19, 1948. This mass resignation was supposed to trigger a crisis that would hasten the national elections scheduled for May 1948, although the non-communist ministers were assured by President Eduard Benes that he was with them and that he would not accept the resignations.⁵⁰ Despite Bene's assurances to the protesting ministers, he only met with them once during the six days, in contrast to the KSC ministers who meet with Benes multiple times throughout the coup.⁵¹

Over the weekend KSC leader Gottwald declared that a general strike would be called on Tuesday, February 24, if the resignations were not accepted and a new KSC controlled national front elected. In accordance with this plan, Gottwald gave Benes a list of acceptable candidates on February 23. On the day of the potential strike, the cries of subversion became steadily shriller, especially during the meeting of the KSC-controlled Central Trade Union Council (URO) that oversaw the main trade unions in Czechoslovakia.⁵² This meeting was turned by the KSC into a call to arms against the reactionary ministers and the government, demanding its immediate overthrow for working people everywhere.

The conference of the URO requested the formation of Revolutionary Action Committees to take control during the counter-revolutionary crisis. These committees would focus on bringing parts of the Czech government in Prague under communist control and would use violence against anyone who refused to abandon their posts, which did occur in the case of the Minister of Food Distribution who was literally thrown into the street.⁵³ This sham of a new government gained control by February 26, 1948, when President Benes accepted the

⁵⁰ Ibid., 212.

⁵¹ Ibid., 246.

⁵² Ibid., 188-189.

resignations of the non-communist ministers and the establishment of the new government under Klement Gottwald.

International Reactions and Responsibility

The party that has often been accused of foul play in the Czech coup is the Soviet Union, due to its more militant stance after the first Cominform meeting in September 1947. The Soviet Union was clearly displeased with the inability of the KSC to take control of the government and its voting in favor of Marshall Plan aid. This was the reason for Stalin exploding at Gottwald during a minister visit to Moscow in July 1947⁵⁴ and the repeated insults hurled at the KSC during the Cominform meeting in September the same year. The democratic status of Czechoslovakia was allowed by the Soviets when it was politically expedient for them to do so and once the world had been divided into Cold War duality the Czechs would need to be fully assimilated as a satellite state.

The new satellite status of the Czechs was an important part of economic restructuring within the Soviet sphere, because of the rehabilitation of Germany. The Czechs were going to be an important part of a closed economic system of Soviet satellites as a provider of coal. The upper section of Silesia that was available to the Czechs produced almost as much coal as the Western Allied occupied German Ruhr Valley which the Soviets lost access to in the course of their aggressive posturing after the founding of the Cominform in 1947 and the Czechoslovakian coup *d'état* in 1948.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Ripka, *Czechoslovakia Enslaved*, 65-67.

⁵⁵ Committee of Foreign Affairs, "Strategies and tactics of World Communism" 14.

The activities of the Soviets during the coup are still shrouded in mystery. The Soviet ambassador Valerian Zorin was in Prague right when the conflict was accelerating on February 23, 1948, and there are conflicting reports at the time of Red Army units being mobilized along the Czech border in case of trouble.⁵⁶ Post-Soviet collapse reports contradict this account as they show that no mobilizations or even partial mobilizations of Red Army units took place.⁵⁷ The KSC did use the threat of Red Army intervention to scare opposition and we do know that the Soviets likely put pressure on Gottwald to the point of threatening military action unofficially.⁵⁸

The real question is where was the U.S. in all of this? The hopes of the non-communist Czech ministers, like Hubert Ripka, rested on the assumption that the Western countries, when properly informed of the situation, would not abandon the Czechoslovakians to Soviet domination.⁵⁹ There was also the matter of some U.S. military forces in nearby Bavaria, but this was one under-strength division with no heavy weaponry and in no way comparable to the well-equipped Red Army forces surrounding Czechoslovakia at the time of the coup.⁶⁰ The American government's official opinion before the founding of the Cominform was that Czechoslovakia was stable and not vulnerable to a Soviet power move, contrasting it with Hungary during its *coup d'état* in 1947, which clouded a lot of U.S. thinking in the months before the founding of the Cominform.⁶¹ The impact of the creation of the Cominform on the domestic politics of the

⁵⁶ Ripka, *Czechoslovakia Enslaved*, 306-307.

⁵⁷ John Crane and Sylvia Crane, *Czechoslovakia: Anvil of the Cold War* (New York: Praeger Publishing 1991), 312.

⁵⁸ Ripka, *Czechoslovakia Enslaved*, 256; Taborsky, *Communism in Czechoslovakia*, 100-102.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 305.

⁶⁰ Morton Kaplan, *The Communist Coup in Czechoslovakia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1960), 18.

⁶¹ Laurence Steinhardt, "The Ambassador in Czechoslovakia to the Secretary of State" June 12, 1947, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1947 Eastern Europe* Vol 4. Document 153.

communists in Czechoslovakia was noted with some degree of worry from the American embassy in Prague.⁶² The U.S. government was already at odds with the Czechoslovakian government over the nationalization of U.S.-owned property after WWII, and in a telegram sent July 22, 1947, the U.S. ambassador to Prague, Laurence Steinhardt, recommended that no further economic aid be given to the Czechs until they agreed to stop both the nationalizations and attempting to gear their economy toward the Soviet Union.⁶³ Steinhardt advocated that the correct method to deal with the Czechs was to simply encourage cultural friendships and hope that cutting off U.S. aid would force the government in Prague to abandon their Soviet economic tilt. The assumption that the Czechoslovakian democratic parties would be able to stop KSC expansion was mixed with U.S. anger over the nationalizations. When the coup finally came, Steinhardt told Czech president Benes that no support was coming.⁶⁴

The Aftermath of the Coup and Italy

The uncaring attitude of the U.S. government at the time of the coup contrasts with the absolute panic that broke out in March 1948 in its aftermath. The U.S. public saw the coup as a failure of containment as clearly the Soviets had expanded again with the Western powers helpless to assist the non-communist Czechs. A war scare in the U.S. occurred due to the jitteriness exhibited by the Truman administration. These fears were not helped by the head U.S. military liaison in Berlin, Lucius Clay, sending a telegram to the U.S. State Department saying

⁶² John Armitage, "The View from Czechoslovakia," in *Witnesses to the Origins of the Cold War* (Seattle: University of Washington Press 1982), 220-221.

⁶³ Laurence Steinhardt, "The Ambassador in Czechoslovakia to the Secretary of State" July 22, 1947, in *FRUS 1947 Eastern Europe* Vol 4. Document 160.

⁶⁴ Kaplan, *Communist Coup in Czechoslovakia*, 19.

war might be imminent.⁶⁵ This hysteria reached such a high level that the recently formed American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) ended up giving Truman a memo on March 16, 1948, saying war was unlikely for sixty days just to diffuse the situation, as fear of war was causing real disruption in the Federal government.⁶⁶ The thinking that accompanied the war scare would have been inconceivable just one or two years earlier. It was the Czech coup that changed the game. Into this madness arose yet another issue, an Italian election.

Italy was a defeated wartime enemy like Germany, but it was not as economically devastated. The Italian Communist Party (PCI) did pull a strong 20% of the vote in the first postwar elections on June 5, 1946, although it was not as much as the Christian Democrats' 35% share.⁶⁷ The PCI gained more support as Italian recovery stagnated and this situation worried the U.S. The PCI, mirroring their French comrades in the PCF, began to obstruct government work and to use their control over the labor unions to create unrest in early 1947.⁶⁸ The reaction of the Italian government dominated by the Christian Democrats was to kick the PCI ministers out of the government on May 5, 1947, which put the communists on a direct path of opposition with the ruling party. The PCI, predictably, claimed that the now clearly reactionary government had been seizing their establishments and beating up members of the communist-dominated trade unions.⁶⁹ The reality, according to U.S. intelligence reports, is that the communist tactics in Italy

⁶⁵ James Forrestal, "The March Crises" in *The Forrestal Diaries*, ed. Walter Millis (New York: Viking 1951), 387.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 395.

⁶⁷ *Foreign Relations of the United States. 1945-1952 Vol V. The British Commonwealth and Western Europe, 1946*, ed s. Everett Gleason (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1969) document 602.

⁶⁸ Longo, "Report on the Italian Communist Party," September 23, 1947, Procacci, *Minutes*, 192-193.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 195.

involved the same levels of violence and subversion as in Czechoslovakia, more than justifying their removal from government.⁷⁰

Italy was very different from Czechoslovakia as it never tilted in the direction of Soviet foreign policy and was in direct conflict with then Soviet ally Yugoslavia over the Northeastern Italian province of Trieste.⁷¹ The Italian government expelled the PCI from power in order to demonstrate Italy's pro-West leanings.⁷² The fear that the PCI could still attempt to retake the government by force was shared by both the Italian and the U.S. governments in the aftermath of the Czechoslovakian *coup d'état*.⁷³ The U.S. would attempt to prevent such an event by drawing up contingency plans on March 8, 1948, for what should be done in the aftermath of the April elections, if the PCI was successful in the elections or attempted a preemptive coup beforehand. These plans included at their most drastic level a partial mobilization of American military units and some sort of unspecified naval and aircraft show of force.⁷⁴ That last part was not unprecedented as during the conflict between the Soviet Union and Turkey over ownership of the Dardanelles in 1946, which was one of the events that spurred the creation of containment, President Truman had deployed the American 6th fleet to the Eastern Mediterranean to emphasize U.S. conviction to defend the integrity of Turkey.⁷⁵ The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff

⁷⁰ Memorandum for the Secretary of State November 28, 1947. *FRUS 1948 Western Europe Volume 3*. document 441.

⁷¹ Leonid Gibianskii, "The Beginning of the Soviet-Yugoslav Conflict and the Cominform" in *Minutes of the Cominform*, ed. Procacci 468.

⁷² Ilaria, Poggiolini, "Italy" in *The Origins of the Cold War in Europe International Perspectives*, ed. David Reynolds (New Haven CT: Yale University Press 1994),131-132.

⁷³ James Dunn, "Telegram to the Secretary of State March 1, 1948" *FRUS 1948 Western Europe Vol III*. Document 515.

⁷⁴ NSC, "Report of the National Security Council," March 8, 1948 in *FRUS 1948 Western Europe Vol III*. document 475.

⁷⁵ Gaddis, *Cold War*, 28.

after reading the March contingency report only added that the implementation of universal military training with the Selective Service Act would be needed for a proper show of force.

The Czech *coup d'état* caused the adoption of a far more active stance toward the potential communist takeover in Italy in the buildup to the April elections. The result of the elections was a triumph for the non-communist Christian Democrats, who received 48% of the vote compared to the PCI-dominated Popular Democratic Front coalition's 31%.⁷⁶ This was an improvement over the PCI's previous showings, but nowhere near enough to influence government policy. The head of the PCI, Palmiro Togliatti, sent a telegram to the USSR in April 1948 on the possibility of an attempt at a *coup d'état*, but was quickly rebuffed by Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov. This response was no doubt influenced by the aggressive American stances in the Mediterranean and the war scare still convulsing the Western Allies at that time.⁷⁷ The detailed plans drawn up by the Americans for a possible communist takeover in Italy was a clear indication that because of the Czech *coup d'état* military, not economic, containment would be the standard operating procedure for the American government going forward.

The Berlin Blockade and Containment

The Italian elections were followed by a far greater crisis in Germany when the Soviet Union cut off land access to West Berlin starting on June 24, 1948. The question of what to do with Germany was always a sore spot in Allied post-war negotiations, with the Soviet Union and

⁷⁶ Ambassador in Italy to the Security of State, April 20, 1948. *FRUS 1948*. document 541.

⁷⁷ Silvio Pons, "Stalin, Togliatti, and the Origins of the Cold War in Europe," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 3, no. 2 (2001), 20-21.

France both wanting something akin to the way Germany was carved up after World War I. The Americans, attempting to not allow history to be repeated, wanted to integrate Germany into the international community and thus, in a sense, save it from itself. The decision on how Germany was to be divided started at the Casablanca conference in 1943, in which the Soviet zone of occupation was clearly defined.⁷⁸ The zones of the other Western Allies were defined in February 1945 and included four zones within the German capital city Berlin.⁷⁹ The division of Germany was not supposed to be a permanent state of affairs. Stalin certainly did not want to be left holding the bag of mostly agricultural East Germany, and he was left with the choice of industrializing and consolidating the Soviet zone into a communist state or abandoning the East German communists to a settlement with the West as long as the new German state was harmless.⁸⁰

As the postwar tensions with the West intensified, Stalin attempted to get what he could from the Allied zones of occupation under provisions in the Potsdam Agreement. The provisions in the agreement allowed Stalin to get coal and industrial goods from the Ruhr valley, which was in the Western Zone of Occupation, in addition to materials from the Western Zones in Berlin.⁸¹ This was done while Stalin simultaneously attempted to push the Allies out of their occupied zones in Berlin via a mixture of intimidation, subversion, and obstinance. The overall future of Germany was supposed to be decided by a series of foreign ministers conferences between

⁷⁸ Protocol on Zones of Occupation of Germany and Administration of the “Greater Berlin” Area, September 12, 1945, *Cold War a Book of Documents*, Trefousse, 13.

⁷⁹ The French Zone of Occupation: Amending Agreement on Zones of Occupation July 26, 1945., Trefousse, *Cold War a book of Documents*, 59.

⁸⁰ Stephan Burant, *East Germany: A Country Study* (Washington D.C.: Library of Congress 1988), 226.

⁸¹ Potsdam Conference, Trefousse, *Cold War Documents*, 65-66.

America, Britain, and the Soviet Union.⁸² These conferences quickly became pointless as the Cold War developed in late 1947. On March 20, 1948, the Allied organization charged with overseeing Germany after its defeat witnessed a dramatic Soviet walkout in which they declared the other Allies to be in violation of the Potsdam agreement.⁸³

The Soviets' ire with Germany, was no doubt inflamed by the fact that the American-and British-occupied zones were merged together without the input of the other two Allies on January 1, 1947. This union created an area of occupation referred to as the Bizone or Bizonia.⁸⁴ The French, who were pressured to join in, refused to do so for fear of antagonizing the USSR.⁸⁵ The French apprehension was overcome in the aftermath of the Czechoslovakian *coup d'état*. This was because of the French government's fear that the PCF might attempt a similar action to their Czech counterparts and this concern overwhelmed any considerations of Soviet displeasure.⁸⁶

A conference was then held starting February 27, 1948, between representatives from Britain, France, and the United States in which it was agreed that they would combine their occupation zones and create the groundwork for a German government complete with its own currency.⁸⁷ This reorganization clearly violated the Potsdam Agreement's decision of treating Germany as a single economic unit as the Soviets had no part in the reorganization of the West

⁸² Crimea Protocol, Trefousse, *Cold War Documents*. 27.

⁸³ Vladimir Pechatnov and C. Earl Edmondson, "The Russian Perspective" in *Debating the Origins of the Cold War: American and Russian Perspectives* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield 2001), 138.

⁸⁴ Eric Solsten, *Germany a Country Study* (Washington D.C.: Library of Congress 1996) 79.

⁸⁵ Soutou, 108-109.

⁸⁶ The Secretary of State to the Embassy in France March 2, 1948. *FRUS 1948 Western Europe Vol 3*.

⁸⁷ Wolfgang Krieger, "Germany" in *The Origins of the Cold War in Europe: International Perspectives*, ed. David Reynolds (New Haven CT: Yale University Press 1994), 147-148.

German zones or the political systems being formed within it.⁸⁸ The creation of a special currency for both this new trizonal area and West Berlin was the last straw for Stalin. If the Western allies refused to abide by the Potsdam Agreement, then neither would he despite all the evidence that the biggest cause of the creation of a separate Western Germany was his own obstructive behavior.⁸⁹

A weak and possibly divided Germany was better for the Soviet Union as communism took hold in areas hit with desperation better than in areas with economic prosperity, and the Soviet aligned German Communist Party (KPD) very much wanted power. The actions of the Western powers in creating Trizonia and the fact that it had its own currency gave the Soviet Union the excuse to attempt to consolidate West Berlin into their zone. This was to be done by squeezing the Allies out of their occupation zones in West Berlin by cutting off land access to the city in June 1948.⁹⁰ The aftermath of this consolidation would bring the Soviets either the ability to continue to loot Germany and block the use of European recovery funds or at least cause the reconvening of a foreign ministers conference that could be dragged out forever.⁹¹ The ultimate fear of the Soviet premier was German rearmament, which was not exactly a concern particular to the USSR, but how Stalin went about attempting to prevent it ended up accelerating it instead.⁹²

⁸⁸ Gaddis, *Cold War*, 33.

⁸⁹ Pechatnov and Edmonson, *Debating the Origins of the Cold War*, 139.

⁹⁰ Jeffrey Barlow, *From Hot War to Cold: The U.S. Navy and National Security Affairs, 1945-1955* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2009), 192.

⁹¹ Kennan, *Memoirs*, 420.

⁹² Pechatnov and Edmondson, *Debating the Origins*, 140.

The Berlin Blockade started in earnest on June 24, 1948 and lasted until May 4, 1949, when Stalin accepted the creation of two separate Germanies. The blockade would have worked and strangled West Berlin if it was not for the Berlin Airlift. The Berlin Airlift was a resupply effort to the besieged sections of Berlin from American and British cargo planes, carrying food medicine and other supplies, which the Soviets did not dare shoot at. There were two reasons for this; first, the blockade, at least officially, protested Allied violations of the Potsdam Agreement and it would be bad optics to shoot down planes that were providing supplies that did not violate said agreement. The second reason was while the supply planes did not have nuclear weapons, Truman had dispatched some B-29s to Europe that could be armed with atomic weaponry if Stalin decided to shoot at the cargo planes or American troops in West Berlin.⁹³ The airlift was a risky endeavor, but a concerted and coordinated effort between the head British and American generals ensured its success.⁹⁴

The U.S. military actions regarding the consolidation of West Germany and the Berlin Airlift demonstrate that the Czechoslovakian *coup d'état* frightened the American government into a new state of belligerency regarding the Soviet Union. The Americans, after losing one great European capital to Soviet proxies, was not about to lose another one to the Soviets themselves. The *coup d'état* in Prague was important for two aspects regarding Germany. First, it accelerated the reconstruction process and hastened the passage of Marshall Plan aid in the American Congress on April 1, 1948.⁹⁵ The Ruhr Valley was the primary provider for the Marshall Plan's coal reserves, which were cut off to the Soviet Union.⁹⁶ The second important

⁹³ Gaddis, *Cold War*, 56.

⁹⁴ Barlow, *From Hot War to Cold*, 191.

⁹⁵ Gaddis, *Cold War*, 34.

impact the coup had on Germany regarding the blockade, in particular, is that if it had not occurred, then it is possible that West Berlin might have been given up, as its status was in diplomatic limbo considering the city was well within the Soviet Zone of Occupation. Without the coup hardening Western resolve, it is questionable whether they would be willing to expend the resources that a successful airlift required. The aggressive and costly attempts to both resupply West Berlin and reorganize West Germany into what would eventually be called the Federal Republic of Germany, is clear evidence that the way in which the Czechoslovakian coup affected containment was by reinforcing a deterrent strategy by implicit threat of war.

NATO and the End of Economic Containment

The two ways that containment could have been implemented were clear in the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan. In the end, it was the Truman Doctrine and military deterrence that came to define containment in the form of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). As noted earlier, the Czech *coup d'état* did some great things for government funding, but it also caused a brief war scare in March 1948 which spread from U.S. diplomats to Western European nations who became convinced that communist insurgencies would soon be launched against their countries.

Kennan had written to Secretary of State George Marshall in November 1947 that the first place the Soviets would crack down would be in Czechoslovakia, but there is no evidence that Marshall ever read it.⁹⁷ Four months later a significant event for both NATO and the

⁹⁶ Telegram from Political Advisor to Germany to Secretary of State regarding German coal in Marshall Plan, June 17, 1947, *FRUS 1947* Council of Foreign Ministers Germany and Austria Vol. II document 371.

⁹⁷ Kennan, *Memoirs*, 379.

militarization of containment occurred, the signing of the Brussels Treaty. The treaty was signed between Britain, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands in the immediate aftermath of the Czechoslovakian *coup d'état*. While on the surface it appeared to be yet another anti-German treaty, the language of the agreement clearly indicated that its real target was the threat posed by the Soviet Union.⁹⁸ The United States was interested enough in the Brussels agreement and the control council in London to have both Truman speak favorably of it in front of Congress and have U.S. advisors sit in on London organization meetings.⁹⁹ The government was still divided on whether the United States should be militarily committed to the defense of Europe, as Marshall dismissed the idea when he was asked about it by the British Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin in April 1948.¹⁰⁰

On August 18, 1948, the Policy Planning Staff created *U.S. Objectives with Respect to Russia* or National Security Council document twenty (NSC 20), which spelled out the American State Department's official policy toward the USSR going forward. The overall parameters of the document established that in times of peace between the Soviet Union and the United States, the primary operation strategy must be to attempt to discredit communist ideology in the West and destabilize the relationship between the Soviet Union and its satellite countries, mentioning Yugoslavia as an example.¹⁰¹ The active preparation for war and extensive military commitment was considered to be peripheral to the main strategy and not the main goal.¹⁰² This contrasts with

⁹⁸ David Reynolds, "Great Britain" in *The Origins of the Cold War in Europe International Perspectives*, ed. David Reynolds (New Haven CT: Yale University Press 1994), 86-87.

⁹⁹ Harry Truman, "Address by the President of the United States to Congress March 12, 1948" *FRUS 1948 Western Europe Vol. 3* document 48.

¹⁰⁰ Barlow, *From Hot War to Cold*, 205.

¹⁰¹ NSC 20/1, "U.S. Objectives with Respect to Russia," August 19, 1948, in *Containment Documents*, ed. Thomas Etzold and John Gaddis (New York: Columbia University Press 1978), 183.

the fact that military aid was already being considered as an important part of U.S. aid-programs by June 1, 1948, on account of the Czech Coup, albeit not as a direct U.S. military commitment beyond just standardizing armaments and providing updated technology.¹⁰³

A series of meetings to discuss a more direct U.S.-European military alliance took place in Washington, D.C., throughout July 1948 and involved both the original signatories of the Brussels pact along with new members, such as Canada. The meetings served as the basis for U.S. involvement in terms of not just military aid, but full-fledged commitment.¹⁰⁴ This commitment had to be within the confines of the Vandenberg Resolution, a bill passed by the powerful head of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that specified under what circumstances the U.S. would participate in this new organization.¹⁰⁵ The emphasis of the resolution was that NATO would not be a solely U.S. endeavor and that reciprocal trade should be enforced. In addition, the treaty should include members with strategically valuable territories, such as Denmark and Portugal.¹⁰⁶ The possibility of adding Italy was also discussed, along with the need for this organization to protect the sovereignty of future West Germany and Austria.¹⁰⁷ A consistent theme of these meetings was the emphasis on the Soviet Union as being

¹⁰² Ibid., 193.

¹⁰³ NSC 14/1, "The Position of the United States with Respect to Providing Military Assistance to Nations of the Non-Soviet World," July 1, 1948, in *Containment Documents on American Policy and Strategy*, ed. Thomas Etzold and John Gaddis (New York: Columbia University Press 1978), 130.

¹⁰⁴ Foreign Relations of the United States, "Washington Exploratory Conversations on Security," September 9, 1948 in *Containment Documents on American Policy and Strategy*, ed. Thomas Etzold and John Gaddis (New York: Columbia University Press 1978), 149.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 151.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 152.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 149.

aggressively expansionist and totally unconcerned with legal niceties like sovereignty and, while maybe not actively preparing for war, would be the most likely cause of it in the near future.¹⁰⁸

On April 4, 1949, the treaty establishing NATO was signed by Britain, France, Belgium, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, the U.S., Canada, Iceland, Norway, Denmark, Portugal, and Italy. The Norwegians had originally been involved in trying to set up a Scandinavian defense league in 1947, but in the tense atmosphere of March 1948, the Norwegians became very concerned that a coup a la Czechoslovakia was going to occur and, therefore, were interested in American military aid similar to what was being given to Greece and Turkey.¹⁰⁹ The inclusion of Italy was initially the cause of friction with the British, although French pressure and the importance of the Mediterranean to U.S. military planning created out of the Truman Doctrine ensured its inclusion.¹¹⁰ The actual funding for the U.S. part of the treaty was delivered by the Mutual Defense Assistance Act, which was passed by the U.S. in October 1949. The Policy Planning Staff (PPS) put out a document strongly advising against the sort of sweeping military commitments implied by the creation of NATO, but the head of the PPS, champion of economic containment George Kennan, would soon be removed as head and replaced with Paul Nitze in 1950. The new head of staff created a new version of containment in National Security Council Document 68 (NSC 68), which replaced NSC 20. The document still emphasized the great danger posed by the USSR, but instead of placing economics as the prime way to contain the Soviets, the emphasis shifted to military deterrence.¹¹¹ The document itself states the reason for

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 145-146.

¹⁰⁹ The Secretary of State to the Embassy in Norway March 12, 1948, in *FRUS* 1948 Volume 3. document 43.

¹¹⁰ Secretary of State to Norwegian Embassy, January 26, 1949, *FRUS* 1949 *Western Europe*, Vol IV. document 38.

this change in position was the Czechoslovakian *coup d'état*, less for any material detriment to the United States, but more for the principle of communist violation of democracy.¹¹² The establishment of NATO was the final result of the impact of the Czechoslovakian *coup d'état* on containment, as any sort of economic aid, let alone diplomatic rapprochement with the Soviets, was replaced with armed posturing.

Conclusion

The doctrine of containment was created as a reaction to the perceived threat of Soviet expansion into Western Europe and, indeed, the entire world. These fears were eloquently put in place by Kennan and translated by Truman's own national security apparatuses into a policy that involved military planning against the USSR. The Long Telegram made clear that communism was reliant on misery and suffering of the kind that prevailed in Europe after WWII and that the Soviets had no interest in fixing it, as evidenced by their violent reactions to American attempts to address it.¹¹³ The way to stop communism was to contain it with diplomatic aid initiatives abroad and public information campaigns at home. Containment was not intended to be a military deterrence strategy, but despite the intentions of Kennan, that is what many people saw it as and what it ultimately became.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ NSC 68, "United States Objectives and Programs for National Security, April 14, 1950" in *Containment Documents on American Policy and Strategy*, ed. Thomas Etzold and John Gaddis (New York: Columbia University Press 1978), 401.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 389.

¹¹³ Kennan, *Memoirs*, 556-557.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 360.

The first warning sign was the Truman Doctrine and its policy of military aid to fighting tyranny, which suggested a possible military mobilization. The attempt to use military means to halt communist expansion opened a potential Pandora's Box of overreach. The Marshall Plan was more on the line of what containment was originally intended to be, blocking communist expansion by depriving it of the misery and want that it needed to gain power. The economic side of this argument might have won out, if it were not for the Czechoslovakian *coup d'état* that crushed the only remaining democracy in the Soviet sphere.

The coup is the reason that economic containment policy was overtaken by the military deterrence policy. The aftermath of the *coup d'état* caused recovery for military defense, not recovery for economic success to become the definition of containment for many American policymakers. This shift was clear with the Italian elections that occurred in April 1948 in which the possibility of a communist success caused the creation of various modes of escalation, depending on their level of success. The military deterrence, as evidenced in 1946 over the Dardanelles, was potentially to be replicated on a greater scale in the buildup to the Italian elections. The Berlin Blockade represents a further example of the failure of economic containment and the need for collective defense to halt Soviet expansion. The famous landmark moment of the Berlin Airlift would not have occurred without the Czechoslovakian *coup d'état*, as it gave more urgency to block any Soviet show of force.

The creation of a permanent American military commitment to Western Europe in 1949 with the formation of NATO was the real end of the economic containment envisioned by Kennan. The concept of a united NATO as providing safety for Western Europe with a military force that would deter Soviet military forces, was the result of a climate in which war was thought to be occurring within the hour. That is the impact that the Czech coup had on American

foreign policy. The Truman Doctrine of military deterrence trumped the Marshall Plan ideal of economic assistance as the way in which Americans would contain Soviet expansion. The legacy of this process lives on to this day as NATO outlasted the collapse of the Soviet Union and all its satellites.

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