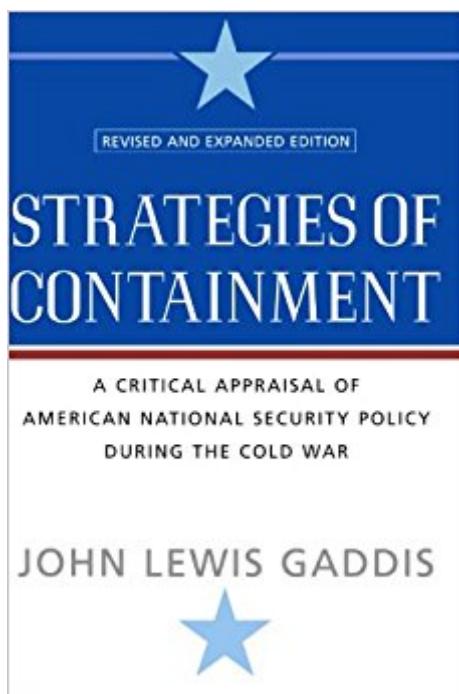


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# Strategies Of Containment: A Critical Appraisal Of American National Security Policy During The Cold War



## Synopsis

When Strategies of Containment was first published, the Soviet Union was still a superpower, Ronald Reagan was president of the United States, and the Berlin Wall was still standing. This updated edition of Gaddis' classic carries the history of containment through the end of the Cold War. Beginning with Franklin D. Roosevelt's postwar plans, Gaddis provides a thorough critical analysis of George F. Kennan's original strategy of containment, NSC-68, The Eisenhower-Dulles "New Look," the Kennedy-Johnson "flexible response" strategy, the Nixon-Kissinger strategy of detente, and now a comprehensive assessment of how Reagan - and Gorbachev - completed the process of containment, thereby bringing the Cold War to an end. He concludes, provocatively, that Reagan more effectively than any other Cold War president drew upon the strengths of both approaches while avoiding their weaknesses. A must-read for anyone interested in Cold War history, grand strategy, and the origins of the post-Cold War world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Excellently organized, a good focused survey of American foreign policy strategies during the cold war."--Tanya Charwick, Ohio State University "A welcome contribution to the literature of the subject and should become a point of departure for scholars of modern American foreign policy."--Review of Politics "Deserves the attention of every student of foreign affairs."--Foreign Service Journal "A superb and timely overview of the evolution of U.S. national security policy since the close of World War II."--Orbis "A work of truly distinguished scholarship that makes an invaluable contribution of

American policy towards the Soviet Union since World War II."--Alexander L. George, Stanford University --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

John Lewis Gaddis is at Yale University.

Used this book as a reference for a foreign policy paper... I had read Gaddis' "The Cold War" prior (which is a newer text), and it's refreshing to see how the two portray such varying perspective on the CW's history... Strategies of Containment is much more detailed but still as literary (in the sense of good narrative style) as Gaddis' newer text... It's a bit more advanced, I'd say, too.

I had to read this book for my American History Class. Now, when you are assigned a book, it automatically becomes a boring chore, and you cannot sit back and enjoy it. But that didn't stop me from sitting back and enjoying it. Now, I could have enjoyed it more, but I found Gaddis really engaging and knowledgeable with his analysis of containment in the Cold War. I am extremely interested in history, and the more you learn, the more you build on what you know. History is finite, but the knowledge you can gain from it is infinite. This book opened my eyes to the various strategies of containment throughout the Cold War, something you don't usually go over in your average class. Intriguing.

This book describes how the US responded to the Soviet Union that turned from ally to ideological adversary after World War II. John Lewis Gaddis gives a convincing interpretation of the various phases of the Cold War until the collapse of the Soviet Union. The concept of containment described US policy. No direct confrontation was sought, but the Soviet Union should be kept within bounds. George Kennan's description of the Soviet Union as a repressive government that required an external enemy to justify its existence determined early US policy. Kennan argued that the US should use the arsenal of democracy, i.e. economic progress to win the ideological war. A huge military build-up would undermine economic advance. Economic aid given to Western Europe would immunize it against communism. But, policies of self determination run counter to advances of communism in Eastern Europe and Asia that seemed irreversible. This evoked a new strategy of flexible response in the 1960s. The US would give military assistance to its allies in their struggle with armed minorities and outside pressure. The dire effects of increased military spending were denied in Keynesian theories of stimulating economic growth through government spending. However, flexible symmetric response gave the initiative to the other side. The Vietnam debacle

signalled the end of this policy. It left the US weakened with high inflation and low growth. The balance of power seemed to tilt in favor of communism in Asia and Africa. The Kissinger/Nixon policy of detente wanted to restore the balance by controlling Soviet behavior through a system of economic rewards and military punishments. However, this policy turned out to be opportunistic and nihilistic in its execution. Reagan restored confidence by proclaiming that the US had the future in the information age. Inflation was curbed and economic growth soared. The US could easily outspend the Soviet Union on arms, but would use it to build up a defense shield. His policy went back to the Kennan doctrine that the Soviet Union would succumb due to the inferiority of its economic model.

Strategies of Containment, by John Lewis Gaddis, is a description of the evolving strategy of containment that was the basis of US policy toward the Soviet Union from 1946 through 1989. Gaddis traces the concept of containment from its inception by George F. Kennan through the modifications applied by five administrations and assesses the strengths, weaknesses, and effectiveness of each version. This book is more than another chronology of the cold war; it provides deep insights into strategic thinking and is essential reading for any serious student of the cold war. Here's a brief summary: Kennan's Original Doctrine of Containment\* Identify and defend vital interests based on the centers of industrial strength - Britain, Western Europe, Japan - don't try to defend the entire world.\* Use all instruments of power: economic, diplomatic, political, and cultural power as well as military power. Rebuilding the economic vitality of the above areas is a high priority.\* Seek to divide the communist world. Our primary adversary is the Soviet Union. Other communist countries, if not actively supporting Soviet policy, may be led to serve as quasi-allies by depriving the Soviets of their support.\* General war with the Soviets is unlikely, so we can afford to take risks. We can limit our defense spending and not try to defend the world. A point defense of our vital interests is probably adequate.\* Define threats in light of US vital interests, not in terms of Soviet capabilities. Truman and NSC-68\* The policies articulated in NSC-68 moved toward a perimeter defense covering the entire world rather than a point defense of vital interests.\* Primary emphasis was switched to military power and to the entire spectrum of war\* US interests were redefined in response to perceived threats (anything that is threatened must be an interest).\* US strategy became based on a symmetric response to threats - responding in the same time, place, and with the same means as the adversary (e.g., the Korean War). Eisenhower, Dulles, and the New Look\* Eisenhower's guiding philosophy was that defense is not just defeating the enemy - it is the preservation of our economic and political systems.\* Spending too much on defense could destroy

these systems by leading to either inflation or the imposition of autocratic controls. He reduced the defense budget by 33% from Truman's last year and held it at about that level for eight years.\* Alliances relied on allies for ground forces with the US providing Air and Naval support.\* The nuclear threat became the cornerstone of deterrence across the spectrum of conflict - with goal of avoiding war - in belief that any war was all too likely to escalate to nuclear.\* Asymmetric response to threats - response need not be in same place or using same methods as Soviet threat\*

Anti-colonial Conundrum: The communists are fomenting wars of national liberation while the US is trying to rebuild Europe (the colonial powers). If the US backs decolonization, it undermines the European allies it is trying to rebuild. If the US backs the colonial powers, it loses any chance of support from the colonies. The Soviets really put us in a no-win position on this issue.Kennedy, Johnson, and Flexible Response\* Kennedy and Johnson return to NSC-68 reasoning by lowering threat of nuclear response and replaced it with flexible response, requiring a direct, symmetric response to threats - a respond in same time and place using the same means.\* These administrations applied a circular logic: Threats create interests which demand responses which require capabilities even where no interest previously had been identified. This was articulated in the "bear any burden, pay any price" rhetoric.\* This strategy necessitated greater reliance on military response versus economic, political, etc which increased demands on the defense budget.\* Kennedy abandoned Eisenhower's commitment to a balanced budget and relied on Keynesian fiscal policy to stimulate the economy. Spending was predicated on the potential of the economy rather than its actual performance. Lack of budgetary constraints led to inability to prioritize, to distinguish the essential from the peripheral, the feasible from the infeasible which encouraged more "bear any burden, pay any price' reasoning because it wasn't real money.\* Flexible response led to graduated escalation in Viet Nam which became "never enough to defeat the enemy, just enough to prolong the war". Stakes were repeatedly raised to prevent the humiliation of a defeat but this only made the eventual defeat more humiliating.\* Calibrated escalation yielded the initiative to the enemy - allowed him to define the terms of conflict. Deterrence can be made effective only if the adversary can be made to doubt that he can retain control of the situation. Taking the nuclear option away encouraged adversaries to call our bluff.Nixon, Kissinger and DÃƒÂ©tente\* Nixon and Kissinger moved the US government from a bi-polar to a multi-polar world view by positing the existence of five significant power centers: US, USSR, Western Europe, China, and Japan. They recognized that these five power centers were far from equal. Only the US and USSR were superpowers able to exert substantial influence via military, economic, political, or diplomatic means. This strategy was a return to the balance of power envisioned by Kennan.\* In the military

arena, they focused on sufficiency rather than superiority over the Soviet Union and sought to persuade Brezhnev that a similar policy would be in his country's best interest as well. Sufficiency won the logical argument over superiority because the latter invariably provoked the other side into matching every military advance, producing an endless and unwinnable arms race.\* Conceptually, Kissinger and Nixon changed the country's strategic definition of US interests and threats to those interests. For most of the interval between Kennan and Nixon-Kissinger, the US strategic view had started with the USSR, its capabilities and intentions, then identified the impact these capabilities could have. These impacts became viewed as threats and US interests were defined as anything thus threatened. Nixon and Kissinger reversed the logical flow, much as Kennan did, starting with the identification of US interests, independent of any adversary. They then identified as an adversary an entity with capability and intent to harm these interests.\* Again returning to Kennan's approach, Nixon-Kissinger sought to use negotiations to influence Soviet behavior. They took a long-term approach to negotiations, discarding the tendency of previous administrations from Roosevelt on to use negotiations and agreements with the Soviets for domestic political purposes. They discarded the approach of seeking agreements on specific areas where they could be reached and adopted a strategy of linkage - maintaining that Soviet unwillingness to negotiate in good faith on military and strategic issues of importance to the US would result in US refusal to accommodate Soviet desires for economic and trade relations and recognition of the post war division of Europe.\* The next step in the Nixon-Kissinger strategy was to seek an accommodation with China to reduce US-Chinese tensions and, thereby, free China to take a more assertive stance in its own dealings with the USSR. This was a return to Kennan's goal of dividing communism and redefined our prime enemy as the Soviet Union. Reagan continued the return to Kennan's original concept of containment: \* Adopt an asymmetric strategy - don't let the enemy determine the time, place, and terms of conflict\* Apply economic, political, diplomatic, and moral power more than military power. A prime example was his Berlin speech: "Mr. Gorbachev! Tear down this wall!" He put the Soviets in the same kind of no-win position that they had inflicted on Eisenhower over colonialism in the 1950s by setting the Eastern Europeans at odds with the Kremlin.\* He recognized that Soviet system was bankrupt financially, intellectually, morally and turned up the pressure until it collapsed.\* Reagan was also lucky. Kennan had hoped to transform the Soviet Union with the help of a new generation of Russian leaders. Gorbachev turned out to be the leader Kennan had hoped for. He and Reagan together ended the cold war and transformed the Soviet Union from a totalitarian system to one that might have evolved into a more liberal one had the 1991 coup d'État not destroyed it first.

Great buy. Strongly recommended.

Gaddis is by far, in my opinion, the best historian of the Cold War Era. Many attack him for being bias, but he supports his work with a plethora of cited works.

Great support

The very best look at the historiography of the Cold War.

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