**Cold War and US Policy of Containment**

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The ‘Policy of Containment’ refers to a series of policies that became a major determinant of foreign policy during much of the cold war with the Soviet Union. This policy in its true form originated from a report submitted to the US defense secretary by diplomat George Kennan. However, the word ‘containment’ is also used for the policies introduced in the cold war era by US President Harry Truman and can be collectively called Truman’s doctrine. It basically meant that the USA would take measures to prevent the spread of communism in the world and consisted of policies to ‘contain’ USSR influence. (page 6 cold war 3)

Following the rise and fall of fascism in World War 2, the nations in Latin America saw a surge in nationalist and socialist sentiment. These ideas had come into being and existed primarily as a deterrent to Nazism and fascism, but their sustained growth post WWII was a cause of worry for the United States. By 1947, the number of communist movements in Latin America alone was 400,000. Much of this continued increase in communist sentiment was owed to the relevance of the Soviet Union in the aftermath of WWII. Several countries in Eastern Europe all the way to the Berlin Wall had fell under Soviet control after the war and they were all administered under the Communist Party of Russia. The Soviet Union called the boundary between communism and democracy the Iron Curtain. The United States of America was categorically opposed to the communist ideology and hence, its growing pertinence especially in the countries neighboring USA was a cause of alarm. The containment policy was therefore a direct reaction to the rising global threat of communism. Truman’s doctrine termed it as supporting the free peoples all over the world against external threats or militarized minorities. (pages 3-13 cold war 3)

This policy of containment seemed as a reaffirmation of the Monroe Doctrine due to the similarities in the context of both eras of US foreign policy. In the 19th century, the Monroe Doctrine declared that the USA would resist the subjugation of the American continent to European powers. It was brought forth in a time when Spanish and Portuguese colonies were declaring independence in South America. Meanwhile, the interests of North America lay in keeping the Europeans limited to the Old World so they could take hold of the New World. The theory of containment was also based upon resisting a foreign ideology. Therefore, its implementation in Latin America became the twentieth century reaffirmation of the Monroe Doctrine.

A general glimpse of the interests of the USA during cold war can be easily accessed via a close observation of the theory of containment. USA was the leader of the democratic world as it was the only country that came out of WWII with its cities and forces intact. It also had a formidable nuclear weapon and was undeniably the new superpower. Therefore, all of Europe that was west of the Berlin Wall represented an extension of the West that USA was leading. The US interests hence lay in ensuring that democracy and capitalism overpowered in any nations that were not protected by the Iron Curtain.

The three tiers of US interest in Latin America during the cold war were ideology, economy and security. USA provided arms to democratic regimes to curb militarization of leftist and communist movements. They used several means to prevent psychological erasure of democracy at the hands of labor movements and any left-leaning political parties. Moreover, economic reforms were directly or indirectly funded by various US Presidents that benefitted a capitalist system of economy. Ideological interests that involved eliminating the public interest in communism took the front seat. (pages 16-17 cold war 3)

USA was keen on implementing the theory of containment in Latin America and provided funding and weapons to fight off communism. The USA and Soviet Union had created a bipolar world but had agreed on preventing direct confrontation as both were nuclear-armed superpowers. The only option to be used in this scenario was proxy wars by taking sides in international conflicts. Latin America was one such location where this indirect confrontation played out. (pages 14-15 cold war 3)

Latin America was different from Europe because of weaker economies and no serene experience with democracy. The Marshall Plan could work smoothly in Western Europe but could not be similarly implemented in Latin America. Preventing the rise of communism in Latin America was, therefore, more difficult. USA, however, took measures that ensured a fulfillment of its theory of containment in Latin America. On an ideological level, USA took interest in rejecting policies by Latin American leaders that hinted at socialism. The ousting of Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala in the early 1950s was one such example. The CIA was used to overthrow his government in response to an agrarian policy that expropriated land from corporates and large owners to landless peasants. His land reforms were termed socialist and his government replaced. (page 23 cold war 3) The second major incident for the USA to practically showcase its policy of containment came in Cuba. After the Cuban revolution of late 1950s, USA placed economic embargo on the communist regime of Fidel Castro, resisted any provision of arms to Cuba by Soviet Union. (pages 37 to 39 cold war 3) USA also provided support to the previous regime of Fulgencio Batista but to no avail. In the aftermath, USA dedicated its resources to prevent another Cuba. USA policymakers termed it the “Domino Effect” and were determined to prevent it. (page 45 cold war 3) US intervention in the democratically elected socialist government of Salvador Allende in Chile was also in alignment with its policy of containment. (page 51 cold war 3)

Other than Cuba, the only other country to have a successful communist revolution was Nicaragua. Almost two decades after the Cuban Revolution, Nicaragua saw a communist uprising by the Sandinistas that replaced a dictatorship under Anastacio Somoza. Unlike Cuba where USA had fought back with economic embargos and proxy nuclear standoffs with the USSR, President Reagan opted for military intervention. A group called contras (short for contra-revolutionaries) was armed and trained by the US had amounted to around 15,000 troops by mid 1980s. Contras fought the Sandinista government. However, the Nicaraguan leadership sought peace as soon as in 1987 and was already ready for elections in 1989. Therefore, a totalitarian system of government under the communist ideology did not last long. (pages 21-24 cold war II)

The US struggle of restoration of democracy in Latin America during the cold war era of 1947-1989 was partially successful. There were several levels of intervention that the USA carried out in order to thwart communist revolutions and to make sure that democratic process took hold. This process continued into the 1980s where USA even carried out two direct interventions to restore democracy. These were Operation Just Cause in Panama by President George Bush and Operation Uphold Democracy in Haiti by President Bill Clinton. (page 15 postcoldwardemocracies)

Other than direct interventions, the US maintained a policy of indirect intervention via funding and weapons to prevent the rise of any form of the political left. Later, in the post-cold war era, the subsequent US administrations adopted a relaxed form of similar relationships as democracy slowly settled in Latin America.