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## RESEARCH REPORT

No. AU-AWC-86-170

CONTAINMENT--ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE,  
THE REVISIONIST VIEW

By COLONEL RICHARD F. PHILLIPS,

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AIR UNIVERSITY  
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE  
MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

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by

Richard F. Phillips  
Colonel, USAF

A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY  
IN  
FULFILLMENT OF THE RESEARCH  
REQUIREMENT

Research Advisor: Colonel George Allen

MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE

May 1986

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AIR WAR COLLEGE RESEARCH REPORT ABSTRACT

TITLE: CONTAINMENT--ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE, THE REVISIONIST  
VIEW

AUTHOR: Richard F. Phillips, Colonel, USAF

This paper addresses the claim that American foreign policy since Truman has assumed an overly aggressive nature, supported by a U.S. military force structure needed to back such an aggressive policy. The validity of this perspective, how such a militarized version of foreign policy could occur, and the outcome of this approach are subjects discussed.

## CONTAINMENT--ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE,

### THE REVISIONIST VIEW

The astute national security affairs scholar (Air War College student) can easily trace the evolution and changes in the policy of containment over the past 40 years--Truman through Reagan. Most experts would agree that the historical perspective presented in the AWC curriculum is objective and generally correct. There exists, however, another viewpoint, small but vocal, which claims that the U.S. policy of containment was not a rational response by America's leaders to their view of Soviet aggression and expansion. Subscribers to this perspective claim that an elite, powerful group of Americans manufactured a "trumped up" Soviet threat, "sold" this threat to the American public through fear and exaggeration, and finally, using these scare tactics, insured popular support for military spending far in excess of funds (capability) necessary to defeat the actual threat. This revisionist perspective would claim further that the creation of an overly strong U.S. military force permitted an aggressive American foreign policy--imperialism.

Some obvious questions arise. Who are some of the spokesmen for this minority viewpoint? Why one needs to know something about their views? Is their perspective valid? Did, in fact, a few powerful men and women shape American public opinion to militarize U.S. foreign policy? What were the motives of this elite group? And finally, what was the

outcome--did the militarized version of containment work? The purpose of this paper is to provide the answers to these basic questions.

### Spokesmen Against Military Nature of Foreign Policy

Jerry W. Sanders, author of Peddlers of Crisis, a book which documents the growth of militarism in U.S. foreign policy is a typical leader of the revisionist perspective. Sanders comes to us by way of University of California at Berkeley armed with the conviction that just about everything wrong in America, and in fact, the world, has been caused by the expense of maintaining a U.S. military force larger than necessary. (1:338; 1:299) Sanders is an advocate of redistribution of world wealth without regard to friendship or a country's policy towards the U.S. (1:299) He would fight for nothing as evidenced by this remark, ". . . what is at stake that is possibly worth the risk of human extinction." (1:10) His heroes are such "distinguished" Americans as Daniel Ellsberg (Pentagon Papers) and Leslie Gelb (purged from Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs, State Department). Both of these individuals have been accused of treason at one time or another.

The proponents of this pacifist view are extremists. They are on the outside of government, particularly the Reagan Administration.

### Importance of Knowing Other Perspective of Containment

The revisionist view led by Sanders, opposes a militarily strong America, believing such a force as we have been building over the past few years unnecessary. They are against the Reagan policy of showing that the U.S. can punish an enemy and reward a friend. (1:299) While conceding that a strong military worked for containment in the 50s, Sanders claims that it no longer will work today and that other priorities outweigh military expenditures.

What will staying the course entail? Nothing less than an awesome shift of resources from the already ailing civilian economy to the expanding military colossus, a trend which if continued will put to rest speculation as to whether we are in the throes of recession or a full fledged depression. (1:345)

The group against the military nature of containment stands for total disarmament (unilateral if necessary) and has denounced Reagan's stance with regard to SALT as totally impractical. (1:318; 1:333-337) Although this peace-at-any-price mentality appears to some as extremely naive, if not outright dumb, it has an attractive ring, particularly to young people unfamiliar with the realities of power politics--Soviet style. Therefore, people like Sanders in University teaching positions cannot be discarded as merely "crackpot philosophers and/or politicians." Sanders urges that "the merchants of fear and peddlers of

crisis "be challenged; therefore, military leaders must understand that challenge. (1:345)

Validity of Charge That a Power Elite Has Caused Excessive Militarism in American Foreign Policy.

Sanders builds a very strong argument that American foreign policy in the last 40 years has been shaped considerably by a few powerful men and women and that advocacy of a strong military capability has been a centerpiece of their efforts. Whether or not this military side of foreign affairs was excessive or not will be addressed later. A summary of the evidence presented in Peddlers of Crisis is provided.

Peddlers of Crisis--A Summary

When Truman directed his Secretaries of State and Defense to conduct a review of U.S. foreign and military policy in early 1950 there was considerable disagreement on the nature of the threat. George Kennan, former charge d'affaires in Moscow was the initial sponsor of the term containment in his "long telegram" and Mr. X article in "Foreign Affairs." His perception of the Soviet threat was primarily political ideology. Mr. Kennan believed that the U.S. should establish spheres of political, ideological, and economic influence in Europe and Japan to offset Soviet influences. He did not believe that the Soviets had plans or capability for global conquest via military force. Chales Bohlen, another Senior

Russian expert in the State Department agreed. The views of Paul Nitze, Director of Policy Planning and Secretary of State Dean Acheson prevailed, however, and the outcome of Truman's policy review, NSC-68, described the Soviet threat in military terms as formidable. It outlined a course of action which the U.S. would need to take to meet that threat.

The next step according to Sanders was to sell this threat and the concurrent need to invest in countering the threat to the American people. A group of distinguished private citizens who shared a mutual concern about potential European neutralism formed the Committee on the Present Danger (CPD) for this purpose. The CPD group was alarmed with American military demobilization and concerned about Russia's continued post WW II military buildup. The CPD founders and initial Chairman and Vice Chairman were respectively, Harvard President, James Conant and former Under Secretary of the Army, Tracy Voorhees. On this committee were several college presidents, representatives from big business and former government employees in such offices as Office of Secretary of War and Office of Strategic Research and Development. This was, in fact, an elite group of powerful men.

The CPD was extremely effective in its campaign to rearm America in accordance with NSC-68 recommendations. Nation wide radio addresses, newspapers, pamphlets, and films

were used in the lobbying effort. By constantly reiterating the theme of Soviet expansion and the fear of this danger the Committee succeeded in securing a Senate vote to garrison 100,000 troops in Europe.

Eisenhower, whose popularity lent support to the CPD position, recruited many members into his administration. Thus the CPD, after only two years in existence, was in a position to help Eisenhower carry out a policy they had initiated or implemented under Truman. With so many CPD members now in positions of authority within the new administration, the CPD had finished its active function and was disbanded. The military emphasis on foreign policy was now established, however, and would grow even stronger during the Eisenhower years with the increased attention on Asia as well as Europe. Military containment would be a global policy.

Sanders claims that the militarization of containment was further institutionalized during the Kennedy years. Kennedy used fear tactics much like the CPD. Citing the 1957 Gaither Report (frightening report on Soviet military power which stated that the balance of power was now unbalanced), Kennedy accused Eisenhower of being soft on communism around the globe. He said there was now a "missile gap."

Containment, the need to stop communism, was the sole justification for U.S. involvement in Vietnam according to

Sanders. Whether or not this is true, there did occur a significant rift between leaders in U.S. foreign policy as Vietnam drew to a close. One view was that the entire Vietnam strategy was based on a misconception that Vietnam was an arena of superpower conflict. Supporting this view were DOD advisors such as Paul Warnke who was against both the globalism of containment and the militarism. Another view, notably that of Nitze, supported the military nature of containment, but faulted the misapplication of this policy in Vietnam. The aftermath of Vietnam tended to favor a return to isolationism and those who championed the hard line military containment policy such as Nitze were now on the outside.

The Committee on the Present Danger became active again during the Nixon years. Conservative Democrats were displeased with McGovern's nomination in 1972 and other leaders believed that Nixon and Kissinger were claiming too much success for detente. They formed a non-partisan, independent CPD II, whose objective was to force 1976 election year candidates to address the Soviet threat. They wanted to push the entire presidential battle to the right.

Again, the CPD used a massive, highly organized campaign to denounce the policy of detente as a "policy of appeasement." It was emphasized that military strength and the

threat of violence remained the principle currency of international politics and the U.S. needed to provide a more realistic capability to resist such coercion.

It appeared like the CPD position was totally out of favor in the early years of the Carter Administration. Carter selected no CPD sponsored candidates for his administration's foreign affairs or national security posts. He advocated a position change on foreign policy--a move from "balance of power" to a policy based on "global cooperation." Thus, the CPD went back to work to "sell" the growing Soviet threat and aggressive intentions.

The timing was right. A new conservatism was sweeping America. Public opinion had shifted away from detente and was becoming more anti-Soviet. Congress quickly joined the parade as did leaders of big business, labor, and the religious right. Iran and Afghanistan certainly had an influence, but Carter was already moving away from detente and back toward the NSC-68 of two decades earlier. The Carter Doctrine declaring the Persian Gulf region to be of vital interests to the United States was crowning victory for the CPD. Carter was listening to the CPD, both formally and informally. In essence, Carter joined the CPD when he realized he couldn't beat them.

The CPD position endorsed by their new member, candidate Reagan, was that "the U.S. must be able to confront the Soviet

Union with an array of unacceptable (military) risks. (1:279)  
With Reagan in office, the traditional east/west world view was restored. Even third world dealings were viewed from this perspective. Human rights issues were down-played and the concept of self interest became important for third world members. "It pays to be a friend of the United States." (1:300) In only a few years, the CPD moved from the outside, minority position back to the head of the Reagan parade. Militarism as a large portion of American foreign policy was back "in." This was made possible by "the consummate skill of CPD warriors in turning events of crisis to their advantage . . ." (1:344)

Motives of Power Elite--Members of Committee on the Present Danger

The reasons why a group of distinguished, non-partisan American citizens would band together, create national alarm about a "trumped up" Soviet threat, and publicly advocate an unnecessarily strong military are unclear. Sanders identified some members of the Committee on the Present Danger as representatives from defense industry. Surely, there is a profit motive in increased military spending for these men. However, they are a minority in the CPD membership. What prompted so many university professors and statesmen to sound the alarm?

This author suggests that these individuals were motivated by a sincere concern for the Soviet threat. They viewed the continued post World War II Soviet military buildup, Soviet expansion into Eastern Europe, Soviet atomic bomb capability, and the Soviet export of arms/ideology as clear indicators of malicious intent. They were also alarmed by the rapidity of post World War II U.S. demobilization and the return to pre-war isolation. A massive propaganda campaign, using scare tactics, if necessary, was probably considered necessary to shake the American public out of its traditional foreign affairs lethargy. Remember, these men were some of the cream of our society--our foremost educators and statesmen. They were not mean, little men seeking personal gain. Their view of the need for a strong U.S. military force is best summed up by these words from National Security Memorandum #68 (NSC-68):

Without superior aggregate military strength in being and readily mobilizable, a policy of "containment"--which is in effect a policy of calculated and gradual coercion--is no more than a policy of bluff.

#### Impact of Militarism on National Security Affairs

Has this militarized version of the containment policy worked? This is a hard question to answer because U.S. policy and corresponding military strength has not been consistent over these past 40 years. That is, we have vacillated between

periods of relative strength (a position we enjoy in 1986) and relative weakness (a condition that existed in the late 70s). Using avoidance of a major conflict with the Soviet Union as a measure of merit, the militarism of the U.S. containment policy must be viewed as a success. In dealings with other parts of the world, South East Asia, Central and South America, Africa, and the Mid East, options other than military force may often be more appropriate. The containment of communism may best be accomplished by combating the economic and social situations which make communism appear attractive. But before we go overboard on that notion, it should be noted that people everywhere still respect strength. Therefore, military capability should still be a readily available and credible tool for foreign policy makers. This author, unlike Sanders, would argue that the creation and maintenance of a strong military force in America does not rule out the use of other alternatives for implementing foreign policy. It is not an either/or situation. Rather, the maintenance of a credible force, even if the public must be "sold" on the need for this force, is essential for implementing foreign policy when all other measures fail.

REFERENCE

1. Jerry W. Sanders, Peddlers of Crisis, South End Press, Boston, Ma, 1983.

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