

[This letter is fictional but authentically represents the ideas of the historical character.]

Background information: You are the primary advisor to the President in determining and carrying out U.S. foreign policy (how we interact with other nations). You served as the Chief of Staff of the Army during WWII and retired when the war ended (after 45 years of military service). The President greatly admires you, and you have his total confidence.

Mr. President,

I need not tell you that the world situation is very serious. That must be apparent to all intelligent people. I think one difficulty is that the problem is one of such enormous complexity that the very mass of facts presented to the public by press and radio make it exceedingly difficult for the man in the street to reach a clear appraisal of the situation. Furthermore, the people of the United States are distant from the troubled areas of the earth such as Eastern Europe and it is hard for them to understand the situation and consequent reactions of the long-suffering peoples, and the effect of those reactions on their governments in connection with our efforts to promote peace in the world.

Given all this, it is vital that we, with France and Great Britain, take a firm and unwavering stand in the face of this latest example of Soviet aggression. We have labored for so long to contain this communist aggression through political and economic means, our plan to invest in Europe and so secure them from the false attractions of communism are working, surely we cannot back away at this critical time! The majority of Germany stands on the edge of stability or chaos. We must not leave them to sway in the wind of Soviet blackmail, lest they be pushed in the wrong direction and become added to a long list of Eastern European countries hidden behind Iron Curtain.

We have seen appeasement before with Hitler's Germany, and we have witnessed its complete failure. The idea that this is not our problem, that it is simply a European concern, is, as the Nazis so terribly demonstrated, without merit. Sir, I know you have not forgotten the horrible cost of hesitation on the part of the United States to fulfill her obligation to world peace. We must stay the course and finish what we have started. Soviet aggression must be met head-on, without hesitation. Strength of determination, strength of character, and strength of a free people given the opportunity to experience a free economy will prevail.

Eastern Europe is, as Mr. Churchill so clearly stated, already behind an iron curtain of Soviet paranoia and insecurity. Now they are testing the resolve of the West in Berlin. We must resist; we must demonstrate our readiness by reacting immediately. I am not suggesting an immediate military confrontation, but rather a demonstration of the industrial might of the U.S. and her European allies that underpins our military capabilities. We must be willing to take the risk of finding a way to provide the basic necessities for the free people of West Berlin. Again, this is a risk, but one worth taking one which I calculate will not create a military showdown. Freedom must be cherished and preserved. The time to act is now. In the face of a determined effort to save the free people of West Berlin, the Soviets will back down and end their blockade! Do we risk war? Yes! But better a final move today in Berlin than the endless bloodbath that could spill across the world if the Soviets, like Hitler, are appeased.

Sincerely,

George C. Marshall

Guiding Questions:

1. What are the political and economic means used to contain communist aggression that Marshall refers to?
2. Why is he so set against any form of appeasement?
3. What "horrible cost" is Marshall referring to?
4. Why does Marshall seem so committed to a free economy in Europe?
5. What does Marshall think will happen if West Berlin falls to Soviet control?
6. What responsibility does Marshall believe has been placed on the U.S.?
7. What course of action does Marshall seem to be suggesting to Truman?
8. What reasons does he give to support this position?