

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

**Background information:** You are a diplomat (spokesperson for the U.S. to another nation) and work in the American embassy in Moscow, are 44 years old, fluent in the Russian language and its affairs, and clearly anti-communist. You wrote a 12-page telegram in response to an urgent request by the State Department for an explanation of Soviet behavior that was published in Foreign Affairs in 1947 as *The Sources of Soviet Conduct*. It was incredibly widely circulated and read.

Mr. President,

As we face this crisis in Berlin, let me urge you to consider once again some fundamentals of the Soviet mindset. At the bottom of the Soviet's unhealthy and paranoid view of world affairs is a traditional and instinctive Russian sense of insecurity. They see in the western/capitalist world only an inevitable time bomb, one they are convinced will be used against them. Consequently they will work tirelessly to strike first.

They have learned to seek security only in the patient but deadly struggle for total destruction of those who stand against them, never in agreements or compromises. Wherever it is considered possible, efforts will be made to advance their sphere of control, building a zone of protection around their homeland. In foreign countries Communists will, as a rule, work toward destruction of all forms of personal independence -- economic, political, or moral. Their system can handle only individuals who have been brought into complete dependence on the higher power of the Soviet government.

I know this sounds quite pessimistic given our present circumstances, so let me offer some reasons for approaching calmly and with good heart the problem of how to deal with Russia. Soviet power, unlike that of Hitler's Germany, does not work by fixed plans. It does not take unnecessary risks. Soviet power is highly sensitive to the logic of force and for this reason it can easily withdraw -- and usually does -- when strong resistance is encountered at any point. I need only reference their willingness to join Hitler's non-aggression pact less than a decade ago. They knew they could not match Hitler's might and consequently withdrew behind a smokescreen of diplomacy. Thus, if their opponent has sufficient force and makes clear his readiness to use it, he rarely has to do so. Consequently, if situations are properly handled there need be no showdowns that cause either side to risk losing face or prestige.

The Soviet Union must not be allowed to hold Berlin, and with it all of Germany, Europe, and eventually the world, hostage! A demonstration of the resolve and strength of the U.S., Great Britain, and France is demanded by these trying times. We have started Europe, and with her the world, down the path to recovery from dictatorial rule, territorial aggression, and repressive economic policies. With foresight, and willingness on the part of our people to face up to the vast responsibility which history has clearly placed upon our country, the difficulties I have outlined can and will be overcome. Though another war troubles me deeply, we must once again assemble the combined military might of the Allies. It is not without risk, but given the ultimate atomic trump card we hold, the Soviets are in no shape to stop us should we move across Germany to free the people of Berlin. If we stand firm, they will, as history has demonstrated, back down.

Sincerely,

George Kennan

**Guiding Questions:**

1. How does Kennan describe the "Soviet mindset"?
2. What does he say has created this?
3. How does he believe they will act now because of this worldview?
4. What good news does he offer Truman during this difficult time?
5. What course of action does he suggest to Truman?
6. What assurances does he offer that this will be effective without leading to war?