Twitter Thread by Paul Poast

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Let's talk about that "Longer Telegram" making the rounds...and why it's a

First, to be clear, it IS NOT a telegram. It's a report. I mean, it has a flipping 11.5 page executive "summary"...



...a two page table of contents...



...and clocks in at 62 pages (minus the forward and executive summary) or 73 pages (if you include the executive summary).

Of course, the author of "The Longer Telegram" calls it a "telegram" because they want it to be directly and explicitly compared to George Kennan's 1946 "Long Telegram" about US policy towards the Soviet Union.

https://t.co/rHikkOYuoT



But Kennan's "Long Telegram" is called "The Long Telegram" because it was, in fact, a telegram.

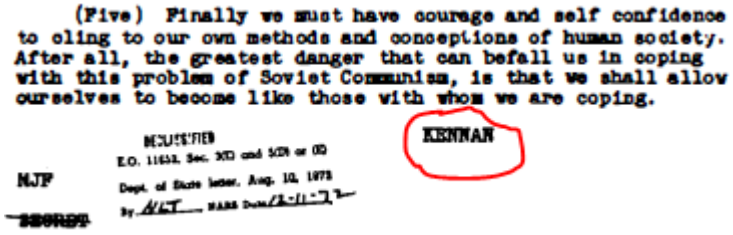
Kennan is even apologetic about that fact, as he writes at the beginning, "I apologize in advance for this burdening of telegraphic channel"

Also, Kennan's "Long Telegram" was long for a telegram, but not as a report. It clocks in at 18.5 pages.

Second, the Kennan-obsession of "The Longer Telegram"'s author is also evident by the author choosing to be anonymous.



But here is a fun fact: Kennan put his NAME on the Long Telegram



(Five) Finally we must have courage and self confidence to cling to our own methods and conceptions of human society. After all, the greatest danger that can befall us in coping with this problem of Soviet Communism, is that we shall allow ourselves to become like those with whom we are coping.

KENNAN

NJF

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 11652, Sec. 3(E) and 5(D) or (E)
Dept. of State letter, Aug. 12, 1975
By NLT NARS Date 12-11-75

The ANONYMOUS writing came a year later (July 1947), when Kennan expanded the telegram into a report that was then published in @ForeignAffairs under the title "The Sources of Soviet Conduct"

Oh, and it wasn't "Anonymous", it was "X"

THE SOURCES OF SOVIET CONDUCT

By X

For those keeping track, the FA article was 17 pages.

Third, I love bullet points & numbered lists. I really do (ask anyone who has served on a committee with me). But "The Longer Telegram" is just TOO much.

Nearly every page of the "Executive Summary" is a list.

ambitions. That means first clarifying which US national interests are to be protected, together with those of principal partners and allies. This includes the following:

- retain collective economic and technological superiority
- protect the global status of the US dollar
- maintain overwhelming conventional military deterrence and prevent any unacceptable shift in the strategic nuclear balance
- prevent any Chinese territorial expansion, especially the forcible reunification with Taiwan
- consolidate and expand alliances and partnerships
- defend (and as necessary reform) the current rules-based liberal international order and, critically, its ideological underpinnings, including core democratic values
- address persistent shared global threats, including preventing catastrophic climate change

Given China's significant and growing "comprehensive national power," some may question how this can realistically be achieved.[1] The overriding political objective should be to cause China's elite leadership to collectively conclude that it is in the country's best interests to continue to operate within the existing US-led liberal international order rather than build a rival order, and that it is in the party's best interests, if it wishes to remain in power at home, not to attempt to expand China's borders or export its political model beyond China's shores. In other words, China can become a different type of global great power than that envisaged by Xi.

The primary way in which the United States can seek to achieve these ends (while also protecting its own core advantages) is to change China's objectives and behavior. A detailed, operationalized strategy should comprise seven integrated components:

- rebuild the economic, military, technological, and human-capital underpinnings of US long-term national power
- agree on a limited set of enforceable policy "red lines" that China should be deterred from crossing under any circumstances
- agree on a larger number of "major national security interests" which are neither vital nor existential in nature but which require a range of retaliatory actions to inform future Chinese strategic behavior
- identify important but less critical areas where neither red lines nor the delineation of major national interests may be necessary, but where the full force of strategic competition should be deployed by the United States against China
- define those areas where continued strategic cooperation with China remains in US interests—where such "megathreats" include climate disruption, global pandemics, and nuclear security
- prosecute a full-fledged, global ideological battle in defense of political, economic, and societal freedoms against China's authoritarian state-capitalist model
- agree on the above strategy in sufficiently granular form with the United States' major Asian and European treaty allies so that their combined

It doesn't get much better in the report itself.

I mean, here's a page that makes the bold move of transitioning from a bullet point list to a number list....

The horror scenario for Xi and his strategy would be any permutations or combinations of five factors:

- **domestic political unrest driven by large-scale unemployment**, possibly brought about by a postpandemic global recession that Chinese domestic measures cannot effectively offset, or other major errors in the direction of central economic policy
- **a series of natural disasters** including floods, food insecurity, or further pandemics that undermine general public confidence in the regime and the sense of a mandate to rule
- **the coherence of a coordinated global strategic response to China's threat** to the collective interests and values of the world's democracies, brought about by Xi's failure to sufficiently moderate his 2013 decision to adopt a newly assertive foreign and security policy and by his post-2015 decisions to adopt a more mercantilist economic strategy[8]
- **a strategic miscalculation by Xi that results in a premature open military conflict** with the United States that fails to produce a clear-cut Chinese victory, thereby fundamentally delegitimizing his leadership and the party's overall credibility
- **a combination of the above culminating in an organized political putsch** within the party against Xi on the grounds of having mismanaged the impact of the pandemic on China's global reputation and strategic standing, allowing enemies to be created on multiple fronts, of failing to capitalize on the deficits of the Trump administration to win important friends abroad and drive a wedge between the US and its allies, and of having planted the seeds of long-term economic stagnation

Xi will be seeking to manage and minimize each of these risks where possible, although some lie well beyond his powers of control. Within these constraints, Chinese international strategy for the decade ahead is thus likely to include the following:

1. **China will reject all forms of international human rights pressure** concerning Xinjiang, Tibet, Hong Kong, as well as other forms of domestic political and religious dissent within China proper, as the regime doubles down through its repressive control systems in defense of the Leninist

...where the number list then goes on for several pages!

state. The party believes the West's interest in human rights is driven by episodic political fads, which have been successfully undermined in the past by economic inducements and diplomatic pressure. Because China is now much stronger in its ability to withstand any sustained external sanctions, it now cares much less than before.

2. **Beijing will accelerate its military preparedness for Taiwan Strait scenarios**, with a view to achieving absolute military supremacy over Taiwan and the United States out to the second island chain by decade's end. The objective would be to cause the United States to choose not to go to war in support of Taiwan out of fear that it may well lose. This would then leave Taiwan with little option other than to comply politically with Beijing's reunification formula.
3. **China also will continue to strengthen its military capabilities** including expanding its conventional forces and modernizing, expanding, and hardening its strategic nuclear force. In part this push is driven by US advances in ballistic missile defense technology and the increased deployment of US anti-ballistic missile platforms in East Asia to counter North Korean contingencies.

Now, it's true that Kennan used numbered/lettered lists in his telegram. But that's because it was...again...a TELEGRAM (it also had missing words in spots as is common with telegrams)

Even then, none of the lists had 17 (SEVENTEEN!) points!

"In course of further development of international revolution there will emerge two centers of world significance: a socialist center, drawing to itself the countries which tend toward socialism, and a capitalist center, drawing to itself the countries that incline toward capitalism. Battle between these two centers for command of world economy will decide fate of capitalism and of communism in entire world."

(B) Capitalist world is beset with internal conflicts, inherent in nature of capitalist society. These conflicts are insoluble by means of peaceful compromise. Greatest of them is that between England and US.

(C) Internal conflicts of capitalism inevitably generate wars. Wars thus generated may be of two kinds: intra-capitalist wars between two capitalist states; and wars of intervention against socialist world. Smart capitalists, vainly seeking escape from inner conflicts of capitalism, incline toward latter.

(D) Intervention against USSR, while it would be disastrous to those who undertook it, would cause renewed delay in progress of Soviet socialism and must therefore be forestalled at all costs.

(E) Conflicts between capitalist states, though likewise fraught with danger for USSR, nevertheless hold out great possibilities for advancement of socialist cause, particularly if USSR remains militarily powerful, ideologically monolithic and faithful to its present brilliant leadership.

(F) It must be borne in mind that capitalist world is not all bad. In addition to hopelessly reactionary and bourgeois elements, it includes (one) certain wholly enlightened and positive elements united in acceptable communistic parties and (two) certain other elements (now described for tactical reasons as progressive or

Moreover, the FA article version (again, the one that was actually anonymous) had NO bullet points or numbered lists. Just prose and paragraphs (and section headings)

But least of all can the rulers dispense with the fiction by which the maintenance of dictatorial power has been defended. For this fiction has been canonized in Soviet philosophy by the excesses already committed in its name; and it is now anchored in the Soviet structure of thought by bonds far greater than those of mere ideology.

II

So much for the historical background. What does it spell in terms of the political personality of Soviet power as we know it today?

Of the original ideology, nothing has been officially junked. Belief is maintained in the basic badness of capitalism, in the inevitability of its destruction, in the obligation of the proletariat

Fourth, let's move to substance. After all, all of the above is cosmetic and what really matters is the substance, right? Sure, but the substance doesn't make things better in this case.

Let's start by considering the substance of Kennan's telegram.

MOST of it is about the Soviet Union itself. Indeed, 4 of the telegram's 5 parts focus on the USSR.

Answer to Dept's 284, Feb 3 involves questions so intricate, so delicate, so strange to our form of thought, and so important to analysis of our international environment that I cannot compress answers into single brief message without yielding to what I feel would be dangerous degree of over-simplification. I hope, therefore, Dept will bear with me if I submit in answer to this question five parts, subjects of which will be roughly as follows:

(One) Basic features of post-war Soviet outlook.

(Two) Background of this outlook.

(Three) Its projection in practical policy on official level.

(Four) Its projection on unofficial level.

(Five) Practical deductions from standpoint of US policy.

The final part addresses how the US should respond given the telegram's description of the USSR and its policy.

The key point is that USSR typically backs down when confronted. Therefore, a show of strength & resolve should result in the US never having to actually use force

(One) Soviet power, unlike that of Hitlerite Germany, is neither schematic nor adventuristic. It does not work by fixed plans. It does not take unnecessary risks. Impervious to logic of reason, and it is highly sensitive to logic of force. For this reason it can easily withdraw ---- and usually does----when strong resistance is

In the FA piece, Kennan called this approach "containment"

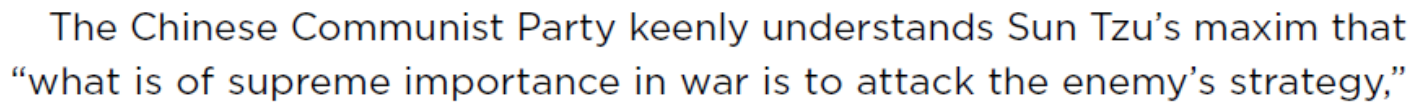
In these circumstances it is clear that the main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies. It is important to note, however, that such a policy has nothing to do with outward histrionics: with threats or blustering or superfluous gestures of outward "toughness."

As for "The Longer Telegram"?

If you're playing buzz-phrase bingo, mark "Liberal International Order"



Oh, and OF COURSE the report has a reference to Sun Tzu. I'll admit this got a hard ■ from me



I will acknowledge that the Longer Telegram's goal of "keep China in the US order" is distinct from the Long Telegram's recommendation of "keep the Soviets outside the US order".

But this recommendation for US policy towards China is not new.

It's been said better (& more economically) elsewhere.

For example, see this @CarnegieEndow report by @MiraRappHooper, @Michael_S_Chase, Matake Kamiya, Shin Kawashima, & @Yuichi_Hosoya.

https://t.co/CqOnaq2Gp1

I'll admit that my assessment of this telegram/report/memo/doorstop is influenced by my own views on the future of US-China relations, which tend toward the "hawkish" side (as I wrote recently in @WarOnTheRocks)

https://t.co/zvonnh78IS

And I would of course defer to experts on China and Chinese foreign policy (though from what I've seen, they are also NOT IMPRESSED)

https://t.co/bdfGhpBFjL

> The full version of this anonymously authored "Longest Telegram" is fascinating in some ways, but the attempt to claim Kennan's mantle is hobbled by questionable assumptions and logical contradictions. Thread: (1/x) https://t.co/5CliU03uKB
>
> — Eric Hundman | \u4f55\u8af3\u92b3 (@ehundman) January 29, 2021

But, overall, this report/telegram/whatever falls WAY short of it's aspiration of mimicking Kennan.

[END]