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Interview with

GEORGE F. KENNAN

19 February 1953

Room 5011, New State

15) 20-21

12/18, 20-23  
17) 2, 9-13, 17, 19,  
20) 9, 9-13,

1. I see no reason why two papers prepared by the policy planning staff - one just before the Harvard speech and the other shortly after that speech - should not be de-classified and made available to you. However, I do not have the authority to make them available and I suggest that you request Mr. Matthews or General Smith. You can say that Kennan said that he no longer saw a need for them to be classified and saw no objection to their being de-classified, believing that it could do no harm and that he would indeed welcome their being publicized.
2. When we first worked out preliminary estimates we visaged a total of about \$16 billion. This wouldn't fully solve the exchange problem - especially that of the British. But we felt that it was worth doing.
3. I would be glad eventually to see all of the policy planning staff papers released.
4. As to the contributions from the staff on the problem - it was our thought, after some anguished attention to this problem, that the U.S. should avoid coming up with a plan and telling the Europeans what to do. As it was, the European response was healthy. We would have landed ourselves in a very difficult situation if the other approach had been taken. (If we had really adhered to this principle throughout, it would have been better in my opinion; there was a tendency to diverge from it.)
5. It was also the aim of the staff to give a fairly authoritative initial view of the problem and a general notion of our response to it.
6. (In a press announcement following the Harvard speech, Marshall referred to a request to the public planning staff after his speech, to prepare a further study.)
7. I was first asked to come over in May 1947, just as they were completing the move from the old State Department Building. I believe it was near mid-May. I picked up five or six people.
8. The General, who had recently returned from Paris, called me in. He was deeply perturbed. He said that he wanted to take the initiative. "I don't want to wait," he said, "for Congress to beat me over the head." After discussing the problem on which we were to work he said that he had only one piece of advice to give: "Avoid trivia." That was a nice laconic piece of advice, wasn't it?
9. He was impatient but it took several days. It was a big problem. After our study was completed, and before he decided what to do, he held a meeting in his office. As I recall Bohlen, Cohen, Will Clayton

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probably Acheson and I were there. General Marshall's way of handling that meeting made a great impression on me. After outlining briefly the main issues he went around the table and asked each one in turn to give his views. After all had finished (and some expressed reservations or criticisms) he asked only one question: "Are we safe in addressing this to all of Europe? What if Russia reacts affirmatively and decides to come in?"

10. My answer to this was that we had said nothing here to indicate which countries should be contributors or which, recipients. My feeling was that if Russia accepted, we should welcome it - saying, in effect: "You produce raw materials and foodstuffs. Western Europe is in great need of both. We shall be glad to examine together what contribution you, as well as we, could make." The tenor of the proposal, moreover, was not one which emphasized bounty, but rather the difficulties of countries in Western Europe - especially for those which produce heavily for export and depend on trade for necessities including raw materials.

11. Had any other countries wished to join, we would have welcomed them but we would have come up with demands for their help.

12. Also, a price of Russian participation would have been cooperation in overcoming real barriers to East-West trade. Such a move toward a real merging of trade would have meant a reversal in Russian policy so, in a sense, we put Russia over the barrel. Either it must decline or else enter into an arrangement that would mean an ending of the Iron Curtain.

13. When the full horror of these alternatives dawned upon them, they left suddenly in the middle of the night.

14. As regards the timing of the Harvard speech and its follow-up, I believe that General Marshall was anxious not to be in a defensive situation vis a vis Congress.

15. As to the bi-partisan approach that subsequently developed - the Harriman Committee was important. Lovett put great store on preserving the bi-partisan approach.

16. The legislative branch of the government finally took the ball and ran with it and we couldn't do anything about it. Lovett was much more concerned with Congressional reaction than with further objective analysis and planning by the policy planning staff. In fact, the moments of real foreign policy planning are brief and fleeting.

17. I believe it was Vandenberg who contributed the idea of "self-help and mutual aid" - or possibly it was Baruch; I always thought he (Baruch) had a reconciling role.

18. One problem which Walter Lippman discussed in his column yesterday or today, is the lack of intellectual intimacy between people on the executive and legislative sides. I think we would have benefitted had

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there been real opportunities for us to have direct intellectual intimacy in talks with Vandenberg.

19. The psychological success at the outset was so amazing that we felt that the psychological effect was four-fifths accomplished before the first supplies arrived. *(But of course it would have been short lived without the follow-through. HBP)*

20. Question: During the ECA operation, after it got well under way, there was a notable widening in our governmental and non-governmental contacts in many of the European countries; do you think that this was advantageous?

21. Reply: I am not so familiar with what actually happened. But I have some doubts. I would have my fingers crossed about it. It would have been better in any case if we had had a chance to indicate diplomatic angles more adequately to the personnel engaged in these relationships. Maybe it would have been better if the European countries had been left more alone.

22. I rather deplored the size of staff that developed.

23. Although I have great respect for Hoffman, I deplored the setting up of a separate agency. I think it is best if there is one ambassador to each country. The emphasis should be placed on adequate staffing for the Ambassador.