

THE TRUMAN DOCTRINE

GEOPOLITICS

Analysis of the Truman Doctrine, 12. March 1947 Speech

In the period after the end of the Second World War, there emerged two groups seeking to control Greece; the communists and the monarchists. The communists enjoyed the support of the Soviet Union while the monarchists had the support of Great Britain and the United States of America. Considering that Greece borders the country of Turkey in the Middle East and some countries in Europe, it played a key role in the attempt of the United States to contain the spread of communism and in turn the emergence of the cold war. This article evaluates the critically and analytically the geopolitical implications of Truman's letter to Congress in terms of its significance, the context, the structure, evidence and contradictions, and highlights its consequence in shaping the history of the world.

The speech marked the beginning of the cold war. In a thinly veiled attack, President Harry Truman, on March 12, 1947, addressed a joint session of congress on the issues of Greece and Turkey. The president sought to prompt the attention of the country and congress to focus the foreign policy of the country towards the problem of the communist subversion sweeping across Europe and Asia. Truman came to power towards the end of world war two. Only one month after his inauguration, Hitler committed suicide. The situation with Japan was threatening to blow out of proportions with human losses escalating and the impending ground attack by the Japanese. The president ordered the use of the first atomic bomb on Japan in 1945 in what marked the beginning of the arms race.

The conflict with the Soviet Union did not start with the end of the war. Even before the war ended, tensions between the Soviets and the U.S. mounted as both sides looked to take center stage in the shaping of the international post-war order. The biggest flashpoint of the conflict was in Poland. At the Yalta conference held in February 1945, the Soviet Union agreed to support the establishment of freely elected governments in Eastern Europe. Going against this promise, it orchestrated the establishment of a puppet communist Polish government. This set the trend on what was to happen in Eastern Europe.

Truman had hoped that the U.S.S.R. could honor its part of the bargain and help maintain amicable relations. However, as events in Eastern Europe unfolded, the president realized that he could not steer away from conflicts. His concern was compounded by fears that countries in Western Europe would elect indigenous communist governments that would in turn orient their nations towards the Soviet Union politically, economically, and militarily. He was setting forth a tough-minded negotiation with no compromises that would make the Soviets feel the presence of the United States in Eastern Europe.

The Soviets and the United States had failed to agree on various issues, such as the future of the post-Hitler Germany, the Polish boundaries, and the nature of wartime reparations. These issues set forth a conflict that was boiling and waiting to explode. At this time, the Soviet Union was involved in the communist-led uprising in Greece, tightened their control over Eastern Europe, and wanted to establish control over Turkey. These developments

worried Truman. He told the Secretary of State Byrnes in January 1946, "I'm tired of babying the Soviets"

The American ambassador to Moscow sent a telegraph on February 1946 arguing that the Soviets were bent on expansion, and that the United States needed to act to curb their expansion. This turning point motivated Truman to issue this letter in March 1947. The letter was a pledge to support the free governments of Greece and Turkey and by extension, the support of "free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures" (Todd, 2011).

The international foreign relations with the rest of the world would take a new dimension after this address. The country would employ the carrot to control governments and distance them from the Soviet Union during the cold war. Geopolitics would be approached henceforth as being favorable to communist influence or under the tutelage of the capitalist West. This was the first time that the president was appealing to Congress to approve funding to change the political landscape of a foreign country. The president's address talks about giving economic aid in order to control the political atmosphere. This was to mark the nature of the United States foreign policy involvement for years to come. Greece and Turkey were under the threat of the communist USSR in different ways. While Turkey was under pressure to relinquish some control of the Dardanelles, Greece was in the middle of a civil war pitting the communists and the government. With the outstretched Britain no longer in a position to support these countries, an appeal was made to the United States to intervene.

The president began his address by bringing to the fore the economic hardships facing Greece after the end of World War Two. Greece was suffering from the aftermath of the German invasion, with destroyed infrastructure and skyrocketing inflation that had wiped out the savings (Todd, 2011). The country relied on the financial and technical support of Britain, its ally in the war to help it rebuild. With Britain faced with problems of its own, it could not sustain such support to foreign allies. The established government in Greece struggled to control the country. The economic aid was to help establish a stronger political control of the interests of the United States. Future economic aid to help governments, restore governments and even to establish governments that are favorable to the interests of the country will develop well into the 21st century.

The text is structured in a manner that the main theme of the discussion is about financial aid to Greece and Turkey. Behind this appeal, the president also mentions the forces that have to be contained by the financial and military aid. Most of the references to the Soviet Union are covered in behind words such as forces, "totalitarian regimes forced on people" among other terms. On the other hand, the president continually repeats the words, democratic, democracies and democratic governments free from coercion to justify why the United States need to support Greece and Turkey.

The shift from a neutralist to a central participant in the affairs of the world is best embodied in this letter. The president was finally committing the country to a long protracted battle for the control of the international stage. With the approval of a \$400 million grant, began a new era of U.S foreign policy. Before this move, the country seemed unconcerned by what happened outside its borders. The president grew concerned by the expansion of the communist extremist control of the Soviet Union in regions such as China, Eastern Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. A U.S diplomat George Kennan suggested containment measures to

counter this growing influence. Containment was adopted by the Truman administration and defined the future of his foreign policy. With the passing of the request to fund the containment efforts in Greece and Turkey, the president took drastic steps to formulate other measures, such as the Marshall plan that provided financial support to Europe and the establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) a military partnership with Europe to contain the Soviet Union. One of the significant changes in the eventual conflict with the Soviet Union was the drafting of the top-secret NSC-68 paper, which designed a military build-up in preparation to combat the Soviets. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States has carried on with its combatant approach to tackling international issues, like in the recent Syrian conflict.

The president continually talks about democratic Greece, democratic government, and democratic process. The letter by extension was an indication that the United States will henceforth fight for the protection of democratic processes in its foreign policy. This was the case in countries such as Libya and Kuwait. By the approval of the demands of this letter, the president sought to drag the country into the conflicts of the world. The president is fully aware of the "broad implications involved if the United States extends assistance to Greece and Turkey" (Todd, 2011). Such actions were grouped under containment strategies, to limit the increasing influence of communist Soviet Union and its supporters and sympathizers. In some circumstances, the containment policy dragged the country into challenging conflicts, such as the wars in Korea and Vietnam. During the Vietnamese war, the United States suffered one of the biggest casualties post the Second World War, he was reluctant to jump into every conflict in the name of containment. In fact, during the recent Syrian and Libyan situations, it has been argued that the government is now taking a containment strategy of no containment.

This letter opened the doors for the arms race experienced during the cold war. One of the requests that the president wanted fulfilled was the personnel and economic support to the governments of Greece and Turkey. This support would anger the Soviet Union and the resultant conflict lead to arms proliferation in preparation for war. While the president's letter was to request for the approval of funding of aid in Greece and Turkey, it opened a new chapter in the foreign policy of the United States. The doctrine opened doors to the cold war that resulted in one of the biggest arms races of all times. While this had been long coming, the aftermath of the decision defined the geopolitical landscape of many regions of the world. This marked the change in the manner the United States perceived the world, with a more proactive approach in the way it addressed foreign policy, the country got into an all out cold war with the Soviet Union and the communist controlled countries. The end of the conflict only came with the death of the Soviet Union.

It is evident that Truman's letter not only sought to aid Greece and Turkey but also sought to address the deep-rooted concerns that the United States had about its former ally, the Soviet Union. The letter advocates for the creation of democracies free from coercion. Truman cites the creation of the United Nations as part of the efforts of the United States to promote democracies free from coercion. The question is, has the United States itself been coercing and influencing free democracies without the consent of the United Nations. The support of the coup in Guatemala in 1957 speaks volumes of the contradiction to the stance the letter sought to establish.

Reference

Todd, A. (2011). *The Cold War*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.