

HARRY S. TRUMAN, "SPECIAL MESSAGE TO THE CONGRESS ON GREECE AND TURKEY:  
THE TRUMAN DOCTRINE" (12 MARCH 1947)

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**Abstract:** In the Truman Doctrine speech, Truman depicted Greece and Turkey as nations threatened by communism and deserving of U.S. aid. He also linked their fate to a larger world conflict between freedom and totalitarianism. The Truman Doctrine paved the way both for the Marshall Plan of economic assistance and the arms race. Later presidents used Truman's precedent to justify military intervention abroad, and even Bush's rhetoric about the war on terror reflected Truman's polarized themes.

**Key Words:** Harry Truman, Truman Doctrine, cold war, containment, Soviet Union, Greece, Turkey

Historian Robert Ferrell once noted that the "principal accomplishment" of Truman's presidency was "to change the foreign policy of the United States, from abstention to participation in the affairs of Europe and the world."<sup>1</sup> While many Americans were ready to return to isolationism after World War II, Truman urged them, instead, to embark on a new foreign policy that—for good and for ill—would lead the United States to interact fully with the world around it. The major announcement that began this public transformation of American foreign policy was the March 1947 Truman Doctrine speech.

In the early post-war United States, Americans largely focused on domestic concerns, but key members of the administration and eventually Truman himself came to view the Soviet Union as an adversary who posed a threat to democracies in Europe and, hence, to the post-war peace and security of the United States. Administration concerns became more acute in February 1947 when Great Britain sent word concerning its withdrawal of support from Greece—then embroiled in conflict with communist partisans—and from nearby Turkey. In making the case for assuming Britain's burden, the White House argued for a broader policy of assistance to "free peoples" seeking to "maintain their free institutions and their national integrity against aggressive movements that seek to impose upon them totalitarian regimes" (32), culminating in what later would become known as the Truman Doctrine.<sup>2</sup> The president carefully deployed crisis rhetoric to depict Greece and Turkey as allies in dire need of assistance and to link their fates with a broader struggle to avoid another war. In doing so, Truman urged war-weary Americans to assume a new leadership role and put pressure on anti-communist Republicans to abandon their isolationist tradition. The president's success would have long-term implications for American foreign policy that persist even to this day. In the analysis that follows, I first provide background on Truman himself and discuss the context for the Truman

Doctrine speech. I then examine the speech itself, illuminating how the president cast the situation in Greece and Turkey as a crisis and portrayed it as part of a larger struggle against totalitarianism. Finally, I discuss the legacy of the Truman Doctrine speech and its implications for today's war on terrorism.

### *Truman's Background*

Harry S. Truman was born just 120 miles south of Kansas City in the hamlet of Lamar, Missouri, on May 8, 1884. When he was five years old, his mother feared he was going blind, but a physician concluded that he had "flat eyeballs" and that his vision could be corrected with a pair of thick glasses. Truman's new glasses allowed him to see, but their fragility and expense led him to shun sports and neighborhood games and, instead, to immerse himself in reading and later playing the piano.<sup>3</sup> As an adult politician, Truman's eyesight would prove an impediment to his public presentations, yet through extensive reading he still became better informed than many of his peers in the United States Senate.

In 1890, Truman's family moved to Independence, Missouri, where he received a strong education. Truman never went to college, but his training in Latin gave him the knowledge and confidence later to correct Supreme Court Chief Justice Fred Vinson's quotation of Cato.<sup>4</sup> Truman also impressed people with his command of history. Dean Acheson, who served as Secretary of State under Truman and studied at Yale and Harvard Law, commented in 1971 that Truman had "a remarkable education" and had learned more by reading "every book in the Independence library" than he would have learned by "listening to all of this crap that goes on at Yale and Harvard."<sup>5</sup> Acheson did not suffer fools gladly, and his affection and respect for Truman were real. As Ferrell observed, it was highly unlikely that Truman actually had read every book in the library, considering his busy schedule of school, work, piano practice, and chores.<sup>6</sup> And his knowledge of history, while broad, was not particularly deep. Although he learned a great deal about the names, dates, and events of history, Truman often demonstrated an inability to reflect upon the past in a sophisticated way and to identify policy alternatives and the potential consequences of those alternatives.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, Truman would display a tendency in adulthood to personalize international relations by making judgments based on his assessment of the character of various foreign leaders, to the detriment of considering historical, cultural, and other influences.<sup>8</sup>

The young Truman not only completed his education in Independence, but also spent long hours working at a local drugstore before school and then from late afternoon until ten o'clock at night.<sup>9</sup> After graduation, Truman worked in two Kansas City banks and later on the family farm in Grandview, Missouri. When the United States entered the Great War in 1917, President Woodrow Wilson's idealistic appeals about making the world safe for democracy inspired Truman, who previously had served in the National Guard, to reenlist in the military. Somehow he convinced the military that his eyesight was adequate. Soon thereafter, the U.S. government sent Truman—then 33 years old—to Europe, made him a captain, and put him in charge of Battery D of the 129th Field Artillery Regiment, near the French village of Andard. It was there that Truman learned he had leadership skills. In those days soldiers from the same areas were kept together in battle, and Truman was responsible for a unit consisting of guardsmen from Kansas and Missouri. The fact that so many men from his unit admired his

leadership and made it home safely also gave Truman a ready-made audience of potential supporters for his future political endeavors.<sup>10</sup>

After the war, Truman and fellow veteran Eddie Jacobson opened Truman & Jacobson, a haberdashery in Kansas City. The business failed in 1922 for a variety of reasons, but Truman eventually paid off his debt—even though it took him twenty years.<sup>11</sup> During the war, Truman had become friends with young Jim Pendergast, the son of Mike Pendergast, who was part of the Kansas City political machine. Mike Pendergast approached Truman in early 1922 about running for district judge—or commissioner—for the eastern region of Missouri; he thought Truman would appeal to veterans and his election would help the Pendergasts gain control over rural Jackson County in the eastern district. When Truman won the 1922 fall election, it was the start of a long political career that would lead him from the district judgeship to presiding judge, and—in 1934—to the U.S. Senate.<sup>12</sup> Truman distributed enough patronage during his years as judge to keep the Pendergasts happy, but he also decreased the number of patronage jobs and developed a reputation for wise and fiscally responsible administration.<sup>13</sup> In the Senate, he would further develop this reputation when he chaired the Senate Special Committee to Investigate the National Defense Program. This committee—later called the Truman Committee—exposed shoddy production and fraud in defense contracts and helped make Truman a well-known public figure among those who followed politics.<sup>14</sup>

Consistent with his commitment to Wilson's ideals, Truman believed that the only way international peace could be sustained was if ideologically opposed world powers could find a way to cooperate. Wilson had been unable to achieve his dream of U.S. participation in a League of Nations, but Wilsonian idealism prompted Senator Truman to argue in 1943 that the United States needed to start thinking about how to maintain peace once the war was over. After the war, Truman became an advocate for the establishment of a postwar United Nations (UN). Although Truman did not propose the enabling legislation himself, he did a great deal of work behind the scenes to get bipartisan sponsorship of the measure. He also undertook a speaking tour in the summer of 1943 on behalf of the idea with Republican Congressman Walter Judd of Minnesota.<sup>15</sup> At the same time that he embraced Wilsonian idealism, however, Truman also had come to believe—in Hamby's words—that "power was the ultimate arbiter in relations among nations." The Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor and his experiences in World War I convinced Truman that the United States needed to maintain military strength because, in the end, military strength remained the fundamental authority.<sup>16</sup> These two perspectives—Wilsonian idealism and power politics—would come into conflict later when Truman became president, particularly in his foreign policy toward the Soviet Union.

In 1944, Truman unexpectedly found his political career advancing yet again. Because of dissension within the Democratic ranks over Vice President Henry Wallace and concerns that Franklin Roosevelt's deteriorating health might propel Wallace to the presidency, many party regulars wanted a different running mate for Roosevelt in the 1944 campaign. Eventually, they convinced Roosevelt to drop Wallace and, after a great deal of persuasive effort, talked Truman into accepting the second spot on the ticket.<sup>17</sup> Truman met with FDR in August of 1944 and came away shaken over the state of the president's health. After the Roosevelt-Truman ticket won in November, Truman became vice president, but Roosevelt did little to prepare Truman for his possible ascension to the Oval Office. FDR was in Washington, DC, only thirty days between January 20 and his death on April 12, 1945. During that time, he met with Truman just

twice. Truman worried aloud to a few friends and associates about Roosevelt's health and what would happen if Roosevelt died. The day after FDR's death, Truman met with reporters and clearly appeared overwhelmed, asking them to pray for him.<sup>18</sup>

Despite his apprehensions, Truman handled the transition to president well, but he often suffered from comparisons to FDR, particularly when it came to his communicative skills. Roosevelt was an extremely talented speaker, whether talking before Congress or "conversing" with citizens in his fireside chats. As he spoke, Roosevelt could make adept use of humor and conveyed the impression of an intelligent patrician who was born to lead.<sup>19</sup> FDR also was the only president that Americans had known for more than twelve years. Conversely, public speaking was a struggle for Truman who still remained an obscure figure for many citizens.<sup>20</sup> Truman spoke at a high rate of speed and with a nasal Missouri twang that varied little in its inflection.<sup>21</sup> The president's poor eyesight was also a liability since he had difficulty adjusting his focus when he looked at the audience and then tried to return to his manuscript. As a result, he often did not look up and, when he did, was prone to losing his place.<sup>22</sup> Truman effectively spoke extemporaneously from outlines during his 1948 whistle stop campaign, but his eyesight continued to be a problem in important policy addresses where he had to read from a manuscript. To help compensate, Truman's secretary made sure his reading copy was triple-spaced, with wide margins and short paragraphs.<sup>23</sup> The president's performance also suffered because he typically practiced very little—by his own admission, he simply read his speeches aloud "a time or two" before delivering them. Perhaps out of defensiveness over his own lack of skill, he dismissed the need for polished delivery. According to Truman, "I don't go in for theatrics. I do not believe the American people expect their speakers to be entertainers."<sup>24</sup>

Truman's style and language choices were likewise quite different from those of Roosevelt. He preferred a plain style with simple words and sentence structure.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, White House Counsel Clark Clifford and his assistant George Eley—both of whom were very much involved in White House speech writing—often had to "Trumanize" speeches drafted by others by simplifying difficult sentences and eliminating complex words. They deemed this necessary both to stay consistent with Truman's own preferences and to assist him with his delivery.<sup>26</sup> In his speeches, the president typically adopted a pedagogical style, wherein he stated his major idea and then supported it.<sup>27</sup> Truman's rhetoric also tended to be highly rigid or absolutist.<sup>28</sup> While the president was not an outstanding speaker, his poor delivery, plain style, and dogmatism would, ironically, contribute to the appeal of his most famous address: his March 12, 1947 message before a joint session of Congress on Greece and Turkey—the so-called Truman Doctrine speech.

### *The Evolution of White House Views of the Soviets and the Crisis in Greece and Turkey*

When World War II ended in 1945, Truman—like many American citizens—still considered the Soviet Union to be an American ally. Between 1945 and 1947, however, a number of factors convinced him that the only way to maintain peace and democracy was to establish a balance of power between the West and the East.<sup>29</sup> First, the Soviet Union's actions raised troubling questions about the motives of that nation's government, headed by Josef

Stalin, a brutal dictator. Initially, Truman had assessed Stalin positively as a leader with whom he could work. Stalin, who often made a favorable personal impression on foreign leaders, played well to the president's tendency to emphasize character over other factors in his political judgments. After meeting with Stalin at Potsdam in 1945, Truman wrote to his wife, Bess, "I like Stalin." He later observed that the Soviet leader reminded him of Tom Pendergast, the patriarch of the Kansas City machine for whom Truman always had great affection.<sup>30</sup> As the war concluded, however, Stalin began to implement policies that raised doubts about whether he could be trusted. The Soviets had unilaterally moved the boundaries of Poland 150 miles westward in 1945 to give themselves more territory. They also had engineered electoral victories for communists to head the governments of Poland, Rumania, and Bulgaria.<sup>31</sup> In the context of these acts, many American officials mistakenly interpreted a February 1946 speech by Stalin to his domestic political supporters as threatening the United States itself.<sup>32</sup> This perception gained credence the following month when the Soviet Union did not meet its agreed upon deadline to withdraw troops from Iran. The UN Security Council then set a May 1946 deadline, which the Soviets kept.<sup>33</sup> In August 1946, the Soviet Union proposed that the Black Sea Straits—the narrow body of water that connected the Black Sea and the Mediterranean and thus served as a conduit to Middle East oil—no longer be defended by Turkey alone, but by the Soviet Union and Turkey. The Americans and the British had argued, alternatively, that the Straits should be an international waterway open to and defended by all. To back up Turkey's refusal of the Soviet offer, Truman sent an aircraft carrier, two cruisers, and five destroyers to the eastern Mediterranean to join the American battleship that was already there.<sup>34</sup>

Other factors that contributed to the president's change in perspective toward the Soviet Union involved messages from policy elites, both within and outside of the administration, in favor of a harder line. After Stalin's February 1946 address prompted concern in the U.S. State Department, Secretary of State James Byrnes asked George Kennan, the *charge d'affaires* at the Moscow embassy, to analyze the speech. Kennan responded with what came to be known as the Long Telegram, a missive of over 8,000 words, in which he explained that Soviet actions were a result of Russian nationalism and security fears, but also the product of communist ideology. According to Kennan, the Soviets were "committed fanatically" to the idea that they could be secure only if communism prevailed over the democratic stability and authority of the United States.<sup>35</sup> Kennan maintained that the United States did not have to resort to a military solution regarding its conflict with the Soviet Union, yet Kennan's fear appeals overshadowed his calls for closer study of the Soviets, better education of the public as to the nature of the Soviet threat, and greater resolution of problems in American society to help the United States in its public relations competition with the USSR.<sup>36</sup> Within the State Department, the Long Telegram's analysis of Soviet motives received such positive responses that departmental officials distributed Kennan's message to its offices and missions overseas. Navy Secretary James Forrestal obtained a copy and then sent the Long Telegram to hundreds of colleagues and acquaintances in the government and military.<sup>37</sup> Bothered by the president's lack of concern over Soviet behavior, Esey passed the Long Telegram to Truman through Admiral William Leahy. Leahy and the president discussed it, but Truman's response to Kennan's analysis is unknown.<sup>38</sup> No presidential messages announcing a change in U.S. foreign policy were forthcoming. However, evidence that Truman's views were shifting came in a February 28

speech by Secretary of State Byrnes—approved by Truman—that mixed praise for the Soviets with a thinly veiled warning that signatories to the UN Charter must, in accordance with that governing document, forsake aggression.<sup>39</sup> In part, Byrnes was responding to a speech by Republican Senator Arthur Vandenberg the day before, which urged the administration to take a harder line with the Soviets.<sup>40</sup> The arrival of the Long Telegram just six days prior also likely played a role.

On March 5, 1946, Winston Churchill, the wartime prime minister of Great Britain, added his voice to those who were calling for a tougher line against the Soviets. He spoke at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, accompanied by Truman, who introduced him. In his speech, Churchill used a phrase that was not new but that had not yet gained a great deal of public currency—"iron curtain"—to describe the line in which the Soviets had drawn between Western and Eastern Europe. The British statesman claimed that behind this curtain, "Athens alone—Greece with its immortal glories—is free to decide its future at an election under British, American and French observation."<sup>41</sup> Churchill called for an alliance of English-speaking peoples against the Soviets as the only way to assure peace.<sup>42</sup> In the United States, Congress and the press had mixed reactions, but public opinion was vehemently opposed, prompting Truman to distance himself from Churchill's message and to cancel Acheson's appearance at a Churchill farewell reception.<sup>43</sup> Policy elites within the administration had made the transition to viewing the Soviets as adversaries, but American citizens and their president had not yet done so. In fact, Truman publicly sent word to Stalin that he would be happy to let the Soviet leader speak at the University of Missouri at Columbia if Stalin were so inclined.<sup>44</sup> The president might have agreed with Churchill's criticism of Soviet behavior in Europe, but Truman was not ready to make a formal break given his commitment to Wilsonian idealism, his predisposition to like Stalin personally, and the domestic political environment in which he had to operate.

Yet a third significant message from within the administration, the Clifford-Esey Report, took Truman further down the road toward a change in policy. In July 1946, Truman asked Clifford for a list of agreements that the Soviets had broken. However, Esey, Clifford's assistant, instead proposed that a comprehensive study of U.S.-Soviet relations would be more useful. Esey worked on the report for several months, integrating available facts, prior studies, and Clifford's consultations with key members of the Cabinet, the Joint Chiefs, Fleet Admiral Leahy, the Director of Central Intelligence, and "other persons who have special knowledge in this field." On September 24, 1946, Clifford submitted the completed volume, "American Relations with the Soviet Union"—later known as the Clifford-Esey Report—to the president. Truman stayed up late reading it and found its conclusions both useful and potentially explosive. Early the next morning, he contacted Clifford and told him to gather up any copies that existed and to bring them to the president for safekeeping before they could be distributed.<sup>45</sup>

Unlike the Long Telegram, the Clifford-Esey Report largely ignored the Soviet Union's historical security needs and, instead, attributed Soviet actions almost entirely to ideology. Kennan had insisted that problems between the United States and the Soviet Union could be resolved without armed conflict, but his ominous depiction of the Soviets suggested that military strength might be needed, at the very least, to defend the United States. Clifford and Esey took this concept one step further by declaring, "The language of military power is the only language which disciples of power politics understand." Furthermore, they argued, "It

must be made apparent to the Soviet Government that our strength will be sufficient to repel any attack and sufficient to defeat the USSR decisively if a war should start." The assumptions of the Clifford-Else Report may have rung especially true to the president. After all, his decision to make a show of American military strength in the Mediterranean had resulted in the Soviets relaxing their pressure on Turkey.<sup>46</sup> While Clifford and Elsey said war was not inevitable, they opposed all proposals for disarmament or arms limitation until the Soviet Union was no longer a threat. Their most frightening conclusion was that "the United States must be prepared to wage atomic and biological warfare if necessary" in order to provide a deterrent to Soviet aggression.<sup>47</sup> The Clifford-Else Report also proposed that the United States "support and assist all democratic countries which are in any way menaced or endangered by the USSR" and that it do so primarily through economic assistance, a recommendation that would become the central principle of the Truman Doctrine.<sup>48</sup> Like Kennan's Long Telegram, however, the Clifford-Else Report's portrayal of a menacing Soviet threat overwhelmed the primacy it gave economic assistance, as did the report's advocacy of militarization to meet that threat. It was small wonder, then, that Truman impounded the document, given public sentiment and potential Soviet reactions.

Aside from reinforcing negative views of the Soviets among administration policy makers, the Clifford-Else Report appears to have influenced Truman himself. He clearly was having second thoughts about the Soviets since his interest in a list of Soviet violations of international agreements had prompted the analysis in the first place. After reading the report, Elsey recalled, Truman no longer talked about extending a large loan to the Soviets and realized that the study's conclusions "presented the consensus of key figures in the Executive branch."<sup>49</sup> Only four days before Clifford delivered the report, the president had fired Secretary of Commerce Henry Wallace—FDR's former vice president and the only dove who remained in the administration—for publicly attacking the administration's foreign policy and what Wallace saw as plans to get tough with the Soviets.<sup>50</sup> Hence, no dissenting voices remained in the White House to counter Clifford and Elsey's claims. The impact that the Clifford-Else Report had on Truman may have been greatest, then, through the influence that it had on the policy makers who surrounded him.

Still, the president said nothing publicly. While his views were changing, Truman's continued public silence led to what rhetorical critic Martin J. Medhurst called a "rhetorical vacuum" that anti-communist Republicans like Representative Everett Dirksen and Senator Styles Bridges were happy to fill by warning of "red fascism" and attacking the Democrats for their "appeasement."<sup>51</sup> The president created an environment in which anti-communist rhetoric rose to the forefront and created additional pressure for him to toughen his stance against the Soviets. With the February 1947 crisis in Greece, Truman saw an opportunity to act on his new understandings and to announce a change in policy.

To say that the 1947 state of affairs in Greece was a disaster would be an understatement. The nation had exploded into civil war long before World War II ended, with conflicts occurring among several different groups, all of whom committed horrible atrocities against civilians. First, the EAM, the National Liberation Front, was a coalition of groups resisting Nazi occupation; it took form in 1941 and included Greek communists, the KKE. In the following year, EAM created the National People's Liberation Army, or ELAS, which attracted individuals as varied as Greek military officers and Greek communists. The next largest

resistance group was the National Republican Greek League, or EDES. This group was also vehemently anti-communist; eventually, some of its units collaborated with the Nazis against ELAS.<sup>52</sup> By the end of 1943, the resistance groups had begun fighting each other and continued to keep the country in crisis even after the Nazis had left. At that time, the KKE turned its energies against the Greek government that had returned from exile. U.S. intelligence believed that the KKE and the EAM were both participating in guerrilla warfare in northern Greece and relying on Yugoslavia for training and equipment, and that Yugoslavia and the rebels might be acting as "part of a Soviet-inspired plan to dominate all of the Balkans."<sup>53</sup>

As early as December 1945, the British had asked the Americans to help them in assisting Greece, but the United States had done relatively little, sending American personnel to oversee the Greek election after the war and helping Greece secure a \$25 million loan from the Import-Export Bank.<sup>54</sup> The Greek government was corrupt and had consistently refused to adopt reforms that would lead to economic and political stability, which—along with its decision to keep Nazi collaborators in the military and police and to use repressive measures against its opponents—hardly made it a sympathetic government in the eyes of most Americans.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, Great Britain had made an agreement with the Soviets to give the USSR dominance in Rumania and Bulgaria, while the British retained dominance in Greece. The United States disapproved of such spheres of influence, but its quiet assent to this arrangement offered a large advantage; it made Great Britain—not the United States—responsible for Greece.<sup>56</sup> Besides, the Republican Congress that swept to victory in 1946 remained dominated by isolationists who opposed foreign aid in general. They, along with a sizable segment of the public, also would have been reluctant to help Great Britain, whom many Americans saw as a colonial bully.<sup>57</sup> In this context, the Truman White House was happy to continue providing only minimal assistance to Greece.

Yet, a bitter winter in 1947 devastated the British economy and, in February, Prime Minister Clement Attlee and his government decided they could no longer support the Greek government or continue sending aid to its neighbor, Turkey.<sup>58</sup> The British Embassy contacted Secretary of State George Marshall's office on Friday, February 21, with diplomatic notes explaining that British aid would stop on March 31. Because Marshall had already left town for a speaking engagement, copies of the notes were left with Loy Henderson, the Director of Near Eastern and African Affairs; the actual notes were delivered to Marshall on the following Monday. Henderson and his colleague, Jack Hickerson, the Director of European Affairs, took the copies of the notes to Acheson, the Under Secretary of State. Prior to Marshall's return, Acheson had State Department staffers work all weekend on a report that would summarize the situations in Greece and Turkey, examine the strategic importance of the two countries, and propose actions that should be taken to help them.<sup>59</sup> The British request that the Americans assume responsibility for Greece found a most responsive audience in Henderson, who had long argued for a hard line with the Soviets, and with Acheson, who had a close relationship with Henderson and had been won over by his arguments. Indeed, the day before the news of the British withdrawal, Henderson had submitted a report to Acheson that advocated extending support to Greece. Acheson edited the document to convey a greater sense of urgency. For example, Acheson changed the title from "Critical Situation in Greece" to "Crisis and Imminent Possibility of Collapse in Greece."<sup>60</sup> Marshall, while agreeing that Greece needed help, was less dramatic than Acheson who depicted Greece as a major crisis that

urgently demanded a quick response. When Acheson called Truman that weekend, Clifford recalled that the president was already prepared to offer substantial aid to Greece and Turkey.<sup>61</sup> His predisposition to Wilsonian idealism and support for the UN to the contrary, Truman had struggled for a long time over how to interpret Soviet behavior. He had judged Stalin as a man of character with whom international agreements could be made and kept, but Truman's experience told him—as in the case of the controversy over the Black Sea Straits—that Stalin responded only to power. The interpretive frameworks offered by Kennan's Long Telegram, Churchill's Fulton address, and the Clifford-Elsey Report had also served to narrow Truman's perceptions and give the edge to his belief in power politics. The Truman Doctrine speech would reflect this change and announce his decision to launch a new U.S. foreign policy.

### *Truman's Strategic Use of Crisis*

The first draft of the Truman Doctrine speech came not from the White House, but from the State Department. Some of its wording derived from a report entitled "Informational Objectives and Main Themes," produced by the Subcommittee on Foreign Policy Information of SWNCC (State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee) after the British notes arrived.<sup>62</sup> In all, the address—after its initial draft in State—would undergo eight major revisions, with countless individuals first in State (most notably Joseph Jones of Public Affairs and Acheson) and then in the White House (chiefly Clifford and Elsey) involved. Truman took part in two White House meetings about the speech late in the process, but his contributions primarily consisted of simplifying language choices.<sup>63</sup> As the details of the speech took form, the State Department simultaneously engaged in a well-orchestrated media campaign to prepare the public for the major themes that Truman would employ.<sup>64</sup>

The final version of the address attempted to grapple with several problems. First, the president needed to convince Congress and American citizens that Greece was in a state of crisis and deserving of \$250 million in aid. Truman told listeners that Greece was an "industrious, peace loving country" that had "suffered invasion, four years of cruel enemy occupation, and bitter internal strife" (7). According to the president, the Germans had destroyed the nation's infrastructure as they retreated and burned more than a thousand villages. He gravely stated that at the war's end, "Eighty-five percent of the children were tubercular. Livestock, poultry, and draft animals had almost disappeared. Inflation had wiped out practically all savings" (8). Furthermore, Truman warned, a "militant minority" had chosen to exploit the situation, undermining the economic recovery and political stability of the country (9). The president did *not* discuss the Greek government's own complicity, nor the fact that the nation was in a state of civil war, which would have raised questions about the appropriateness of U.S. involvement. However, he did concede that the Greek government had not always acted wisely. According to Truman, the Greek government was "not perfect," but it represented "85 percent of the members of the Greek Parliament who were chosen in an election last year," overseen by international observers, including nearly 700 Americans (21). The president also excused some of the government's "mistakes" by emphasizing that it was "operating in an atmosphere of chaos and extremism." Furthermore, he distanced his administration from the Greek government's most odious acts by noting, "The extension of aid by this country does not mean that the United States condones everything that the Greek

Government has done or will do. We have condemned in the past, and we condemn now, extremist measures of the right or the left" (22). Through these explanations, Truman helped legitimize assistance to a less than sympathetic government.

Another rhetorical problem that the president faced was justifying an additional \$150 million in aid to Turkey, a country that also failed to uphold democratic ideals. During World War II, Turkey had refused the Allies' persistent requests that it join in fighting the Axis powers, so it had not suffered during the war as Greece had. Nor did Turkey in 1947 appear to be in imminent danger, as the Soviets had relaxed their pressure on the issue of the Black Sea Straits.<sup>65</sup> Truman's address dealt with Turkey by associating it with Greece and using strategic ambiguity. After discussing Greece's crisis situation, for instance, the president noted, "Greece's neighbor, Turkey, also deserves our attention" (23). He likewise stated, "The future of Turkey as an independent and economically sound state is clearly no less important to the freedom-loving peoples of the world than the future of Greece" (24). By way of explanation, however, Truman provided far fewer details, relying instead on strategic ambiguity. He said, for instance, "Since the war Turkey has sought additional financial assistance from Great Britain and the United States for the purpose of effecting that modernization necessary for the maintenance of its national integrity. That integrity is essential to the preservation of order in the Middle East" (26-27). The president did not explain what that modernization entailed nor how Turkey was key to stability in the region, but his words certainly made Turkey sound important enough to deserve aid, especially when he associated Turkey with the clearly more critical situation in Greece.

A third issue that Truman struggled with was how to justify the unilateral extension of aid to Greece and Turkey, in effect bypassing the United Nations. While the president had come to believe that the Soviets would only respond to power, he still had hopes for the Wilsonian ideals that the UN embodied. Eley, too, had concerns that the decision to aid Greece and Turkey would appear at odds with the administration's commitment to the UN and asked the State Department's Carl Humelsine to send him some possible wording that might help.<sup>66</sup> Among the possibilities that Humelsine offered, Eley selected the following: "We have considered how the United Nations might assist in this crisis. But the situation is an urgent one requiring immediate action, and the United Nations and its related organizations are not in a position to extend help of the kind that is required" (19). The problem, of course, was that this passage depicted the UN as ineffectual. In addition to portraying the UN as not yet prepared for the kinds of challenges that the current crisis presented, Truman's address charged that the threats posed against Greece, Turkey, and other "free peoples" were also threats to the Charter of the United Nations. This tack cast the United States as heroically attempting to protect the UN. For example, the president said, "In helping free and independent nations to maintain their freedoms, the United States will be giving effect to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations" (40, also 32). In other words, Truman argued that in order to support the UN, the United States had to work around it, at least in this instance.

Truman also faced the task of convincing a domestic audience—primarily American citizens who were focused on domestic concerns and Republican isolationists in Congress—that assistance to Greece and Turkey was essential. He did so by linking the events in those two countries with other critical events that involved the Soviet Union. Years later, persistent stories would circulate that Senator Vandenberg had told Truman that the only way to get his

policy passed would be to "scare hell out of the country." Eric Goldman's book, *The Crucial Decade*, credited Vandenberg with this statement, but no other sources confirm Goldman's claim.<sup>67</sup> Perhaps one reason this story remained so popular, however, is that Truman's address was frightening. He explained, "The peoples of a number of countries of the world have recently had totalitarian regimes forced upon them against their will. The Government of the United States has made frequent protests against coercion and intimidation, in violation of the Yalta agreement, in Poland, Rumania, and Bulgaria" (33). The efforts of the "militant minority" to undermine the democratic government in Greece, then, was not an isolated incident but connected to other incidents with which Truman's listeners were familiar. Heightening the stakes further, the president depicted an ongoing world crisis where "nearly every nation must choose between alternative ways of life. The choice is too often not a free one." While one way of life offered democratic governments, freedom of speech, free elections, and freedom of religion, the other way of life entailed "terror and oppression, a controlled press and radio, fixed elections, and the suppression of personal freedoms" (34-36). Truman also articulated the domino theory for the first time when he argued, "If Greece should fall under the control of an armed minority, the effect upon its neighbor, Turkey, would be immediate and serious. Confusion and disorder might well spread throughout the entire Middle East" (41).<sup>68</sup> Moreover, the president insisted that the demise of Greece could lead to the disintegration of "those countries in Europe whose peoples are struggling against great difficulties to maintain their freedoms and their independence while they repair the damages of war" (42). Truman then solemnly intoned, "Should we fail to aid Greece and Turkey in this fateful hour, the effect will be far reaching to the West as well as to the East. We must take immediate and resolute action" (44-45). By associating Greece and Turkey with a frightening crisis that threatened the entire free world, the president alarmed Americans and also implicitly challenged isolationist Republicans who had previously condemned Truman for being soft on communism. The speech's reliance on threatening metaphors—disease, for instance—likely enhanced the fear appeals that were explicit in the speech, as when he warned that if Greece were to fall that it would lead to the "collapse of free institutions" (43).<sup>69</sup>

The president also gave voice to a larger, overarching policy designed to deal with the world situation. With the help of Eley's editing, Truman presented what Eley and Clifford called his credo:

I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures. (37)

I believe that we must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way. (38)

I believe that our help should be primarily through economic and financial aid which is essential to economic stability and orderly political processes. (39)70

The repetition of "I believe" was rhetorically appealing and appropriate, for—after remaining silent on the issue of U.S.-Soviet relations for so long—this passage truly did serve as Truman's credo, while also laying the groundwork for the future economic assistance that would become known as the Marshall Plan. The administration in 1947 had no intention of applying the Truman Doctrine universally, for Truman, Acheson, and others saw Chiang Kai-shek, who was

battling communists in China, as a corrupt lost cause. Indeed, Clifford and Esey removed a State Department phrase from an earlier draft that suggested such universal applications.<sup>71</sup> The credo, however, contained no qualifications, which implied that the policy did, indeed, apply everywhere. Later, critics would accuse the Truman Doctrine of serving as a call to arms, but Esey would rightly counter that the credo clearly gave economic assistance precedence.<sup>72</sup> Undermining Esey's case, however, was the fact that the reference to "economic and financial aid" did not appear until the third part of the credo and that aid to Greece and Turkey actually was more oriented to military rather than economic assistance.<sup>73</sup>

A final problem that Truman faced was rallying Americans to embark on his new policy without provoking the Soviet Union or heightening American fears of war. To deal with the first audience, the president's speech writers were careful to mention communists/communism only once and not to refer to the Soviet Union by name at all. Instead, Truman described "the terrorist activities of several thousand armed men, led by Communists," "totalitarian regimes," and "armed minorities" who engaged in the "attempted subjugation" of "free peoples" (12, 32, 37). Assistant Press Secretary Eben Ayers recorded in his diary that the benefit of this approach was that the Soviets could not take umbrage without themselves suggesting that the president's negative descriptive terms referred to the Soviet Union.<sup>74</sup> While Truman's listeners knew exactly whom he meant, his use of ambiguous terms made his speech sound less aggressive than war rhetoric that includes references to more specific enemies. The president also refrained from calling for military aid or intervention, instead emphasizing "relief assistance" and "needed commodities, supplies, and equipment" (47-48). On just one occasion, he specifically mentioned "military personnel," but he paired the phrase with reference to American civilian personnel, both of whom would "assist in the tasks of reconstruction" (47). The president wanted to put the Soviets on notice, but he did not want to provoke armed conflict.

In a similar vein, Truman's depiction of a world crisis had the potential to backfire if Americans thought his policies would lead to war. World War II had ended less than two years earlier, and Americans had little interest in a new military conflict. This was another reason that the president's speech emphasized economic and humanitarian assistance in its descriptions of proposed U.S. aid. Nevertheless, Truman explicitly mentioned World War II to make his case, stating that the war was fought to create "conditions in which we and other nations will be able to work out a way of life free from coercion" (31). He also recalled the \$341 billion the United States had contributed toward winning that war and characterized his proposed aid to Greece and Turkey as necessary to protect that outlay: "This is an investment in world freedom and world peace. The assistance that I am recommending for Greece and Turkey amounts to little more than 1/10 of 1 percent of this investment. It is only common sense that we should safeguard this investment and make sure that it was not in vain" (52-53). Through this passage, the president downplayed the cost of the proposed aid, while his use of the phrase "not in vain" implied that the proposed aid would *prevent* another war. Truman's conclusion likewise connected the Truman Doctrine itself with the prevention of war when he warned, "If we falter in our leadership, we may endanger the peace of the world—and we shall surely endanger the welfare of this Nation" (57).

Throughout the speech, the president enhanced his credibility through his terse, unadorned style and characteristically unpolished delivery. Rhetorical critic Robert Ivie has

pointed out that the president's "simple straightforward language" and "matter-of-fact delivery" gave believability to his depictions of Soviet actions in both the Truman Doctrine speech and his Korean War rhetoric.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, Truman's style and delivery in the Truman Doctrine address complemented the content in many ways. He used simple language, straightforward structure, stumbled over his words in several places, and looked at his audience only occasionally, which gave him the appearance of one who was simply sharing the facts about the world because he felt compelled to do so. As he told the audience, "This is a serious course upon which we embark. I would not recommend it except that the alternative is much more serious" (50-51). In this respect, the Truman Doctrine address exemplified the rhetoric of realism where, as scholars Francis A. Beer and Robert Hariman describe it, the speaker relies on "brief, clear, and plausible accounts" to argue that the audience "must see things as they are rather than as we would want them to be."<sup>76</sup> The president's style and delivery, while often problematic for him in other contexts, actually may have enhanced the persuasiveness of the Truman Doctrine speech because they suggested that Truman was simply presenting a realistic, unadorned, and unquestionable appraisal of the world situation.

### *The Legacy of the Truman Doctrine*

In response to the president's address, the official Soviet newspaper, *Pravda*, charged that the Truman Doctrine was a "visible policy of imperialist expansion." Communist political figures in other countries expressed similar views. Conversely, Churchill and other anti-communist leaders abroad praised Truman's speech, while "middle-of-the-road groups" were "generally apprehensive" and expressed "fear of what may result."<sup>77</sup> In the United States, telegrams to the White House and media coverage tended to be favorable, but some public figures—from Wallace on the left to Republican isolationists on the right—explicitly rejected the president's call for action.<sup>78</sup> Other Republicans, such as Senator Robert Taft, were noncommittal and expressed apprehension. While they had no desire to abandon proposed tax cuts for increases in foreign aid, their own anti-communism made it difficult for them to reject aid to Greece and Turkey outright.<sup>79</sup>

Surveys undertaken for the administration showed that a majority of Americans approved of Truman's proposal, but many had concerns about its cost and unilateral character.<sup>80</sup> In response, the White House launched a major public relations offensive with administration speakers appearing in media venues and before civic organizations of various kinds.<sup>81</sup> Senator Vandenberg proved an invaluable ally in Congress by answering every question that legislators submitted and offering an amendment that allowed the UN to end U.S. aid if it decided that the UN could assume responsibility or that aid was no longer needed.<sup>82</sup> By doing so, Vandenberg helped win passage of the bill. On April 22, 1947, the Senate passed the bill by a vote of 67 to 23, while the House voted 287 to 107 for the bill on May 9.<sup>83</sup>

In the short term, the Truman Doctrine provided assistance—mostly military aid, including weapons and advisors in the field—to Greece and Turkey. Unfortunately, American aid also allowed the Greek government to clamp down on its opponents and to drag its feet further on needed reforms. Nevertheless, the combination of U.S. assistance, the communists' switch to less effective tactics, and the decision of Bulgaria and Yugoslavia to stop aiding the communist fighters within Greece contributed to the Greek government's victory. Stalin, as it

turned out, had supported neither the Greek insurgents nor Bulgaria and Yugoslavia's extension of help to them. In the case of Turkey, U.S. aid allowed for the training and reorganization of Turkey's military and gave the United States bases in that country in the event of a conflict with the Soviets.<sup>84</sup>

Truman's rhetoric also laid the groundwork for the Marshall Plan, which helped Western European governments rebuild without huge cuts to domestic programs that might have provoked political unrest. At the same time, however, the Marshall Plan, along with the establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), served to create two vast spheres of influence in Europe: one dominated by the United States and the other by the Soviet Union. Truman's decision to aid Western Europe provided a counterweight to Soviet influence, but it also aroused Soviet security concerns and led the USSR to crack down on dissent in Hungary and Czechoslovakia.<sup>85</sup> Because Stalin's insecurities and totalitarianism made some form of Soviet-American tensions almost certain, one cannot point to the Truman Doctrine as the sole cause of the Cold War.<sup>86</sup> Nonetheless, it certainly exacerbated the tensions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

In the United States, the anti-communism of the president's speech appeared to legitimize the charges of Senator Bridges and other rabid anti-communists. Truman's language thereby unleashed forces that he could not control. On March 21, 1947, the president reluctantly signed Executive Order 9835, which created a government loyalty program, despite his antipathy for the FBI's J. Edgar Hoover, who would run it. By April 1947, the House Un-American Activities Committee was already holding hearings on a bill to outlaw the Communist Party.<sup>87</sup> While anti-communism existed before the Truman Doctrine and would have existed even if the president had chosen not to speak, Truman's address reinforced such fears and may have contributed to the rise of Joseph McCarthy, who soon would set his sights on the Truman administration itself.

The Truman Doctrine left a legacy that was even more ominous for American foreign policy. Although the administration had no intention of applying the Truman Doctrine universally, it gradually began to see Soviet communism as a monolithic worldwide threat. In 1950, the president would comment that South Korea was "the Greece of the Far East." The Truman Doctrine speech, with its polarizing themes and fear appeals about totalitarian regimes, made it easier in the long run for Truman and his successors to talk about the world in such terms. John F. Kennedy would use language strikingly similar to that of Truman to discuss Vietnam, while Lyndon Johnson would explicitly compare his decision to escalate the Vietnam conflict with Truman's decision to aid Greece.<sup>88</sup>

In addition, Truman's appeals to protect free nations provided a rhetorical precedent for future presidents championing democracy. As rhetorical scholar Robert Scott asked, "If one can justify keeping Greece 'free,' should we not 'free' nations in captivity?" The Eisenhower administration engaged in such "liberation" rhetoric publicly, not only in appeals to domestic political audiences, but also to East European citizens listening to Radio Free Europe. After Hungarians apparently took the administration at its word, they rebelled against the Soviets and were crushed when the United States failed to come to their support.<sup>89</sup> In the years that followed, presidents were more careful not to upset the balance of power by advocating the liberation of nations long dominated by communists. However, following Truman, presidents

would continue to intervene militarily in countries such as Grenada and Panama in the name of defending freedom and democracy against totalitarian regimes.

One can even hear echoes of the Truman Doctrine in George W. Bush's rhetoric. The president's bifurcation of the world—"Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists"<sup>90</sup>—calls to mind Truman's division of the world into "alternative ways of life." Throughout his foreign policy messages, Bush has attempted to link the war in Iraq with the larger war on terrorism by making both part of a worldwide struggle between totalitarianism and democracy. Presidents after Eisenhower shied away from bald public calls for the military overthrow of other governments, but George W. Bush has embraced such appeals to "regime change." Even in the rhetoric of the war on terror, then, the legacy of the Truman Doctrine speech can still be heard.

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