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**The Truman Doctrine Redux: 21st
Century American Foreign Policy and the
Middle East The Geostrategic Rationale
for the Rationale for the Truman
Doctrine**

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The Genesis of the Doctrine

The geostrategic role of the Truman Doctrine in helping prevent the fall of the then Greek kingdom to communism during the late 1940s created a powerful design for American diplomatic and strategic planners that they then utilized throughout the Cold War. Its critical precepts continue in the current war against global terror under the Bush administration. This article analyzes the geostrategic and geopolitical significance of the Truman Doctrine, and its 21st century application to current American involvement in the Middle East. Moreover, since this specific policy combined the theoretical principals of realism and idealism, it is argued that Harry S. Truman created the foundations of American liberal imperialism in his readiness to fight Soviet/Slavic communism as an ideological menace in the Balkans and Greece's immediate geographic vicinity. Parallels will be drawn between the Truman Doctrine's resistance toward communism of the late 1940s, and the present Bush administration's focus on counter-terrorism.

Finally, the implementation and execution of strategies founded on the Truman Doctrine established a strong military presence in the southeastern Mediterranean area and the Middle East, which presence, with its strategic implications, prevails today. In a "Truman Doctrine *redux*," the Trumanesque Bush foreign policy strategy has expanded the American presence in the Middle Eastern region in the war on terror.

President Truman, influenced by his classical education, believed that in protecting Greece from communism, American military advisers defended the cradle of Western civilization, indeed of their own American civilization. Furthermore, Greece founded the glorious Byzantine Empire and the Greek Eastern Orthodox Christian faith. Without a doubt, Truman recognized that the modern Greek socio-political system was not as pure in democratic and cultural values as during the ancient times; nevertheless the United States, in Truman's interpretation, had an obligation to assist the country that provided the tenets of the American democracy. In addition, he realized that through Greece, American military power would significantly shape the region.

The Truman Doctrine opened a new page in American foreign policy. President Truman's reaction to the Korean military crisis in 1950 relied on his strong conviction that "this is the Greece of the Far East. If we are tough enough now," he declaimed, "there won't be another step." President Dwight D. Eisenhower perceived the ongoing military crises in Indochina and the Middle East through the geopolitical/geostrategic lessons of Greek Civil War (1947-1949), warning that if these strategic regions fell to Soviet communist influence, Europe and other regions could likewise collapse under Soviet totalitarian pressures. In the early 1960s, President John F. Kennedy and Adlai Stevenson argued forcibly that the Greek case provided an example for American military action in Vietnam.

Moreover, Walt Rostow, chair of the U.S. State Department's policy planning council, assured U.S. Secretary Dean Rusk that "there is no reason we cannot win as clear a victory in South Vietnam as in Greece, Malaysia, and the Philippines." Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., who had strongly supported the Truman doctrine in its infancy, declared in a 1964 speech that "We, of the Free World, won in Greece.... And we can win in Vietnam." In 1965, immediately after the first U.S. combat troops were dispatched to South Vietnam, President Lyndon B. Johnson alluded to the Truman Doctrine in reassuring the American public that the U.S. armed forces would win the war against communist aggression in the southeast Asian region as they had won in Greece in the 1940s. The following year, Rusk quoted Truman's 1947 address to U.S. Congress in justifying American military involvement in South Vietnam.

In the current war on terror, George W. Bush has used the basic foundations of the Truman Doctrine to combat Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups. The Bush Doctrine uses liberal imperialism to both fight terrorism and promote American democratic values globally, particularly in the Middle East. The Truman Doctrine indelibly influenced both past and present American foreign and defense policies.

An Analysis of the Truman Doctrine in a Historical-Political Perspective

There have been disparate interpretations of the Truman Doctrine since its inception and implementation. The Doctrine has been the focus of serious debate since its promulgation. Critics have called it the "first shot of the Cold War"; an American global license for liberal imperialism; an exaggerated response to an imagined communist threat that led to the monster of McCarthyism; a reactionary foreign policy placing the American government on the side opposite freedom, political and social reform; strong proof of an "arrogance of power" that continuously forced United States into other countries' domestic political quarrels.

Defenders of the Truman Doctrine argue that this specific policy illustrated American determination and ingenuity in the fight against communism. The Doctrine was representative of the American commitment to free world ideals and beliefs. When the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan were combined, magnanimous financial aid assisted first Greece and Turkey and later, other nation-states threatened by communism. Yet, in focusing on these important issues, historians have failed to credit the Truman administration with creating a foreign policy designed to protect freedom by helping embattled countries help themselves.

The tenets of the Truman Doctrine left their imprint on the seminal stages of an American foreign policy that was adaptable, restrained, and not necessarily based on military power. Later, when President Kennedy introduced "flexible response," Truman and his advisers (some advisers later joining Kennedy) adopted a foreign policy intended to fight the ever-growing political and strategic challenges to democracy with a broad-ranging arsenal of responses corresponding to the socio-political danger at hand.

Moreover, President Truman's Doctrine arguably anticipated the Nixon Doctrine of the 1970s, which called for partnerships based on the nation at risk sharing the burden of safeguarding itself by essentially providing the bulk of the manpower needed for its security. The Truman administration's approach to the Greek problem proved idealistic in purpose, but realistic in application. Its composite thrust was political,

economic, and military, allowing for adjustments and fine-tuning as the nature of the threat changed. The political facet included creation of a stable democracy in Greece; economic emphasis supported viable economic opportunities in the Greek population. The military focus was upon capable defense of Greek national interests by modern Greek armed forces, assisted by their American counterparts. The policy constituted a viable response to multifaceted threats against which real victory lay in convincing democracy's enemies that they could not win.

Although various historians have long debated the political and strategic reasons for the Greek government's victory, one observation has been especially stressed: American military aid was solely responsible. The Greek communists could have gone on indefinitely if they had not switched from guerrilla tactics to conventional warfare, and if they had continued to receive refuge and outside military assistance. Tito's defection from the Soviet bloc broke the guerrillas' resistance was considered crucial, enabling American firepower to forge a victory. Although these ingredients surely proved vital to the final outcome of the Greek civil war, the full explanation does not lie either in the Balkans or in American military assistance.

The Truman administration achieved its objectives in Greece because of a flexible American foreign policy that was global in theory but constrained by reality. White House advisers at that time had defined the nation's interests in Greece in relation to the rest of the world, developed a strategy with manageable goals, and operationalized it within the limitations of America's capacity to influence events and people. Most significantly, they cultivated a Greek populace rich in democratic values and traditions, staunchly nationalistic, who opposed communism and welcomed U.S. aid. America's foreign policymakers kept the struggle within the technical confines of a civil war, repeatedly refusing to permit the conflict to grow into larger war. After achieving the financial aid bill's passage, the administration toned down its rhetoric to avoid military confrontation with the communists, quietly persuaded the British to remain in Greece as part of a bilateral security effort, and thus gained time for the American strategy to reach fruition.

The Truman Doctrine provided the rationale for a global strategy that rested on equivalent and limited responses to carefully defined and continually changing levels of danger. During the Greek involvement, the Truman administration considered every option from outright withdrawal to direct military intervention. In 1947, the communist emergency in Greece necessitated strong military aid and operational advice; once that specific threat subsided in late 1949, the American focus shifted to long-range economic rehabilitation. Decisions resulted from recommendations and proposals presented not only by specialists in Greek and Turkish affairs, and others.

Vital information came from British and Greek analysts, the U.S. State and Defense departments, U.S. National Security Council, Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and other intelligence organizations, such as the Defense Intelligence Agency and U.S. Army Intelligence. The new foreign and defense policies emerged from serious considerations regarding their impact on Greece and neighboring nation-states, on America's allies and the nonaligned countries, and on Americans at home. Averting a unilateral and more dangerous involvement was crucial; the possibility of graceful de-escalation or even total withdrawal was debated, as were the effects of events in Greece on global strategy. During all this time, the Truman White House

sustained continual assessments of the Greek dispute to keep the American commitment flexible and under control.

On the economic level, United States did the following:

- assisted in the creation, for the time in Greek history, of a national electric power system, designed by American engineers, modeled on the TVA, with a quasi-independent, public corporate entity interlinking new hydroelectric generating stations at various sites, with Athens Piraeus Electric Company (APECO) and a new thermal generating station based on the mining of lignite at Aliveri;
- supported the expansion and modernization of Greece's traditional industries (cement, textiles, fertilizers) while promoting new ones;
- helped re-open and re-equip the chromite, bauxite and pyrite mines, and to clear and re-equip the nation's ports and harbors, and the Corinth Canal;
- re-equipped the fishing fleet and agricultural processing and storage plants;
- helped develop village potable water supplies, completing an anti-malarial program;
- contributed to modernization of hospitals and clinics;
- provided for re-building and improving of highway and railway networks from Kalamata to Alexandroupolis;
- facilitated building and repair of museums, archeological sites and hotels to support the goals of future tourism.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture provided the following financial support:

- to create and train a Greek force roughly equivalent to America's county agents for Greek villages, including instruction in fertilizer and pesticide use, general land management and animal husbandry;
- to undertake large-scale land reclamation works;
- to supply the government's mechanical cultivation service and its well-drilling service with heavy equipment
- to construct farm-to-market roads and to link formerly isolated villages with trunk and highway systems and to market towns.

In military affairs, the American government created special programs to arm and train the Greek armed forces. Eventually, Greece and Turkey joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan helped create a self-sustaining and self-reliant Greek nation-state, ready to negotiate future military, political, or economic threats. The United States became a guardian of Greek democracy; without American military aid, it was likely, or at least plausible, that Greece would have succumbed to the Soviet communist expansion. If the Soviets had managed to control the Greek countryside, the survival of the free world would have been at risk.

Control of the Bosphorus Passage and the Dardanelles Straits was the *raison d'être* underlying the American posture and strategic actions within the region, due to ongoing Soviet aspirations and intentions for direct access to the Aegean. In 1945, during the Potsdam Summit meeting, Stalin openly claimed the right to create military bases in the

Thessaloniki or Alexandroupolis harbors as alternatives to bypass the Turkish Straits. Simultaneously, the Soviet regime exerted acute political pressure on the Turkish government to revise the Montreaux Convention to gain joint control of the Straits with the Turkish Republic (Proposals of June 22, 1946).

The Truman precepts buttressed the policy of containment and organized resistance against Soviet communist expansionism, and were the foundation of a long-lasting American foreign policy with global dimensions and implications. NATO, the American Joint Task Forces in the Mediterranean, and Atlantic and Pacific communication/surveillance installations and facility/military bases became and remain pillars of American global policy promulgated in the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan.

The American engagement in World War II (1939-1945) incurred a total loss of \$341 billion with 460,000 personnel casualties. It was the greatest investment in peace and military security any American administration had ever made. It demanded an everlasting guarantee. Containment doctrine was the appropriate answer to those concerns at that time, in locations distant from the American continent. Greece's and Turkey's military roles in the Marshall Plan and later in NATO would be key factors in the balance of power in the geostrategic system, along with other European nation-states strengthened by the American military presence on the Continent.

A full network of military bases and related facilities in Greece and Turkey was organized within the framework of various bilateral accords with the American government to support integrated security functions in the Eastern Mediterranean. (The current Bush administration has used these facilities to pursue the war in Iraq.) The Aegean islands area and the island of Crete are crucial to the necessary strategic breadth and depth to defend the straits and thereby, access to the Mediterranean Sea, and are under Greek operational responsibility as part of NATO's command structure. Greece also committed to American such as the critical Suda Bay naval base for the U.S. Navy Sixth Fleet. Currently, the U.S. Defense department is in the process of upgrading the Suda Bay naval base in order to accommodate more naval and Special Forces assets in the fight against Al Qaeda and other terrorist/insurgent operatives.

The Truman Doctrine positioned the United States as protector of Greece and its respective regions, and continues to play a vital role even in the current global situation. During the twentieth century, Greece offered much and lost many in the battles for freedom and the democratic values. In no other period of its long history has Hellenism suffered such great upheaval and destruction. For years, the Truman Doctrine tenets have safeguarded the Greek culture and nation from a variety of exogenous threats.

The Contemporary Implications of the Truman Doctrine

The Truman Doctrine was born out of the American geostrategic and geopolitical perception of Greece as a key nation-state regarding security in the Middle East, crucial to protection of American national interests in the Mediterranean region. Greek and Turkish territory is a unified strategic area in the American view, with both of the countries operating as supplementary security elements. The consequence of this strategic outlook was the contemporaneous entry and integration of both nation-states into the NATO civil-military alliance.

During the Greek civil strife, the Truman Doctrine put into realistic practice what Alexander the Great said in the town of Opi in 324 B.C., “For me any good foreigner is a Greek, any bad Greek is worse than a barbarian.” In 1947, the “good foreigners” were the Americans. The “bad” Greeks were the Greek communists who attempted to destroy the values of the Greek culture. The implementation of Truman’s doctrinal concepts aborted this process.

Although history vividly indicates that the most convincing and powerful argument in international relations is inextricably tied to power, the greatest achievement of political human beings is the building of universal peace based on mutual confidence, and the consolidation of human rights and liberties. In recognition of the value of universal peace, the wall of bipolarity was demolished, and the world set on the road to peace. It is not only national and military power that has made the United States a global hegemon/a hyperpower; it is rooted in the trust of people and in human expectations for freedom and political and economic prosperity. The Truman Doctrine incorporated these realistic and idealistic norms and values.

Moreover, the Bush administration continued to deal with current geopolitical challenges based on the complex formulations so well developed by Truman. Present security threats include instability in the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the Middle East, due to local independence and irredentist conflicts, nationalism, terrorism, and Islamic fundamentalism. In addition, illicit proliferation of nuclear weapons and guided missile systems are serious dangers to U.S.-European, not to mention global, security.

Furthermore, the expansion of NATO and its inclusion of operational areas outside its traditional borders are important innovations emerging from the Truman Doctrine in support of the pursuit of freedom around the globe. Today’s NATO comprises a unique, organized multinational force, largely responsible for pan-European security. NATO continues to evolve in its capabilities relevant to the new geostrategic challenges of the 21st century.

The military execution of the Truman doctrine was based on realistic perceptions of how to apply hegemonic military power in times of crisis (much as Bush has done presently). Protecting democracy was based on the idealism of expanding and promoting democracy across the globe. The Truman principles coherently fused realism and idealism; this is the main rationale for their continue applicability in today’s increasingly complex geopolitical and geostrategic environment. Truman based his foreign policy on ideas from his classical education and precepts of classical liberalism. This eclectic and sophisticated educational/philosophical background assisted him in creating a cogent and cohesive foreign policy with an enduring effect on American decision-making processes, policies and outcomes. The Bush administration follows the tenets of classical liberalism regarding post 9/11 American foreign and defense policies. Finally, the Bush Doctrine, similar to the Truman Doctrine, has introduced a political, economic, and military evolution to Afghanistan and Iraq, for the purpose stabilizing and establishing democratic values and beliefs. In the current war on terror and in promotion of democracy, the Bush Doctrine clearly parallels the Trumanesque concepts for global security and democratic development. Finally, President Barack Hussein Obama decided to follow a similar path despite his promise to withdraw from Iraq and reexamine Afghanistan. It is evident that the U.S.A. is the last hope of liberty, freedom, and global justice. The U.S. armed forces are truly freedom fighters.