

# The Truman Doctrine: Preventing the Spread of Communism

Andy Ziemer

Historical Paper

Junior Division

Word Count: 2095

“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 outside pressures.” This was a famous quote from President Harry Truman’s<sup>1</sup> speech before congress arguing to support the people of Greece and Turkey in the fight against Russian inspired communism. The United States did not agree with communism because it would derail the country’s democratic views. In a democracy, decisions are made by the people of that country. In communism, the government says that everybody gets equal amounts and qualities of things and the government makes decisions. This communism threatened the United States when it became popular in Asia and Eastern Europe in the 1940s and 50s. A policy called the Truman Doctrine<sup>2</sup> was a response to this communism. The Truman Doctrine led to containment of communism<sup>3</sup> and the rebuilding of Western Europe via the Marshall Plan in the late 1940s and the early 1950s. This containment and rebuilding helped to secure the United States’ safety.

Russia in the early and mid 20th century was a communist country. Vladimir Lenin<sup>4</sup> enforced this communism in his ruling period from 1917 to his untimely death in 1924. After his death, two candidates fought for control of Russia: Leon Trotsky<sup>5</sup> and Joseph Stalin<sup>6</sup>. Both candidates supported a divine world of communism. At first, most people in Russia supported Leon Trotsky in the candidacy. They thought that he had better beliefs in communism and that

---

<sup>1</sup> Harry Truman: President of the United States from 1945-1953.

<sup>2</sup> Truman Doctrine: Policy giving military and economic aid to Greece and Turkey.

<sup>3</sup> Communism: Ideology that everyone in that country gets the same quantity and quality of things. In communism, there are no social classes.

<sup>4</sup> Vladimir Lenin: Ruler of Russia from 1917-1924.

<sup>5</sup> Leon Trotsky: Candidate for ruler of Russia after Lenin. He died when Joseph Stalin hired an assassin to drive a pickaxe through his head.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Stalin: Ruler of Russia from 1929-1953. Very harsh leader who caused millions of deaths during his time as ruler.

Trotsky would lead Russia to be a better communist country. Most people expected him to win. But eventually, Joseph Stalin came up with a plan to give him a favorable position in the candidacy. He made propaganda insulting Trotsky's ideas and saying that he would be a bad leader for Russia. He did this by hanging posters all around Russia where they could be seen by everybody. Trotsky eventually lost support from the Russian people, and Joseph Stalin won the candidacy and became the leader of Russia.

Joseph Stalin made Russia<sup>7</sup> a dominant superpower during his rule. He knew that all people were still living in poverty and communism wasn't producing enough supplies to adequately provide everyone with decent resources like food and material goods. He made sure that the Kulaks, wealthy Russian peasants that farmed for a living, were producing lots of materials such as grain and animals for eating. He wanted them to give most of their grain and animals up to the government to distribute them among the people. If the Kulaks failed to meet Stalin's expectations, they were often killed or exiled to Siberia. In 1936, 94% of Russia was used for agriculture. In response to Stalin's decision, many Kulaks burned their grain and killed their animals in a protest to not give their materials up to the government. The government still killed these Kulaks, and Stalin's plan to get food to everybody failed because of a lack of Kulaks.

Stalin moved Russia forward in a set of five year plans. The first five year plan was focused on heavy industry. Stalin wanted the economy to flourish. Propaganda made by Joseph Stalin encouraged people to go get a job at many factories. Many people who didn't have a job previously were now employed but with little pay and often dangerous working conditions.

---

<sup>7</sup> Russia: Country in northern Asia.

Many were hurt from malfunctioning machinery. Factories produced many things, such as carpets and rugs, to agriculture, to electricity. This executed plan made Russia become an industrial superpower within the first five year plan.

Although the economy did grow greatly after the first five year plan, the years of 1932 and 1933 were terrible for Russia. In the Great Famine<sup>8</sup> of 1932-1933, about six million people died because of starvation or diseases related to starvation. This was caused by the lack of Kulaks, who were being killed by the government. This was a dark period in Russia's history, and this contributed greatly to the numerous deaths in Joseph Stalin's ruling period in Russia.

After this period, Russia's economy, industry and the wellbeing of its citizens improved. Joseph Stalin became a harsher leader, but his country was flourishing, growing and thriving due to his five year plans. His ideas of communism began to spread to Eastern Europe, and other countries began to adopt the ways and ideology of a communist government. Two of these countries were the nations of Greece and Turkey. Some people in these countries wanted a communist government, and some people wanted a democracy<sup>9</sup>. Turkey was being invaded by Russian soldiers. One quote by Joseph Stalin proves that he thought that violence is the only way to run a country. Joseph Stalin said, "The only real power comes out of a long rifle." Russia desperately wanted Turkey because of its position in the world along the Mediterranean and Black Seas. Turkey also borders Middle Eastern countries and Eastern European countries. On the other hand, Greece was being taken over by communists inside their country. A civil war was going on in Greece at the time. These countries who were being taken over by communism needed help. This led to the Truman Doctrine.

---

<sup>8</sup> Great Famine: Russian famine from 1932-1933. Millions of people died from starvation.

<sup>9</sup> Democracy: Form of government where decisions are made by the citizens.

Before the support of the United States came, England was supporting Greece and Turkey in the fight against communism in their countries. The aftermath of World War Two<sup>10</sup> caused England to pull out of this agreement to help out Greece and Turkey. This occurred in February of 1947. They could not provide any more assistance after March 31, 1947. These countries desperately needed help to restore democracy as the way of government.

The Truman Doctrine was a policy laid down by congress on March 12, 1947. This policy stated that \$400,000,000 was to be given to Greece and Turkey. This was to help Greece restore democracy and fight the communist KKE<sup>11</sup>. The KKE stands for the Communist Party of Greece. Greece was undergoing a civil war at the time the doctrine was announced. They were fighting over what type of government to have: Communist or Democracy. The United States supports countries that fight for the right that all people are created equal and that everybody should be free and have certain rights. Therefore, the United States supported the democracy and passed the Truman Doctrine.

Turkey was being invaded by Russia. Turkey is in a strategic position, because it has a border with Middle Eastern countries such as Syria, Iraq, and Iran. It also shares a border with Bulgaria and Greece. Russia aspired to control Turkey because of its position along the Black and Mediterranean seas, and the borders with the Middle East and Eastern Europe. This could allow Russia to be able to spread the ideology of communism south into Asia, North West into Eastern Europe, and maybe Southwest into Africa.

Dean Acheson, the Under Secretary of State at the time, realized this growing threat of Russian communism. He convinced President Truman that if Turkey was conquered and

---

<sup>10</sup> World War Two: Worldwide war from 1939-1945.

<sup>11</sup> KKE: Communist Party of Greece.

controlled by communism, this ideology could easily spread south into Iran and even as south as India. If that happened, and Russian communism controlled that much land and had that much power, the United States could soon be a communist country controlled by Russia. This led President Truman to propose what would be known as the Truman Doctrine to Congress on March 12, 1947.

The Truman Doctrine effectively reoriented American foreign policy. This doctrine led the way for other times that America has gotten involved in things. For example, in the Vietnam War, America got involved to protect the people of Vietnam against communism. Today, in Iraq, the U.S. is helping the people of Iraq return to their peaceful lives and to fight Islamic terrorists. The United States protects the free peoples of the world against ideologies or force that harms the democracy that America supports.

The Truman Doctrine was not supported by everyone in congress. Some argued, such as Senator Robert Taft, that they would be dominating Greece and Turkey by aiding their Army. Others, like Henry Byrd, was worried about the amount of money that would be required to effectively help Greece and Turkey. Eventually though, the Truman Doctrine passed on May 22, 1947.

After the Truman Doctrine money had been sent, along with military aid, the new policy was a huge success. The democratic party of Greece was edging out over the KKE, and democracy was being restored. In Turkey, Russian communist soldiers were being rivaled by the military aid provided via the Truman Doctrine. The fight in Turkey was being won by the Turkish-American forces. This and the success of Greece led the way for more work do be done to fight communism.

When Turkey and Greece had been restored to a state of democracy, both of those countries joined NATO<sup>12</sup>, a military alliance to protect them against other forms of hostility coming into their country. This has been very effective, as neither of these countries have been invaded or at war since the late 1940s.

After World War 2, Western Europe was in a state of chaos. Food, clothing, water, and other necessities were scarce. Post World War 2 Europe was a perfect place for communism to grow and thrive. If something wasn't done to help Western Europe rebuild their countries, they'd quickly turn to communism to prevent poverty.

The Marshall Plan<sup>13</sup> is named after George Marshall<sup>14</sup>, the Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense under President Harry Truman. Marshall knew that Western Europe could quickly turn to communism if rebuilding of Western Europe wasn't happening. In response to this, George Marshall travelled to Europe to see firsthand what the damage looked like. What he saw was horrendous. What were once buildings were now piles of rubble. The people there were starving and thirsty. George Marshall knew now that if something wasn't done, and Europe turned to communism, that the United States could be in danger of falling to communism as well. If Europe, Asia, and America were all ruled by Russian inspired communism, this could easily spread to other places. Eventually, if the spread of communism continued, the entire world could be communist

When George Marshall come back from Europe, he began a campaign arguing for money to rebuild Europe. A famous quote from him is, "The only way human beings can win a war is to

---

<sup>12</sup> NATO: The North Atlantic Treaty Organization provides collective defense to all in the group.

<sup>13</sup> Marshall Plan: Policy that sent 13 billion dollars to Europe to help rebuild their economy.

<sup>14</sup> George Marshall: Secretary of State from 1947-1949.

prevent it.” This shows that Marshall really believed that Europe needed to be rebuilt. This plan is also known as the European Recovery Program or the Economic Recovery Act. When Marshall got back, he argued for giving money to Europe to help rebuild. George Marshall argued at Harvard University that this “investment in peace was a bargain compared to communist takeover.” He reported also that Europe would definitely turn to communism to escape poverty and starvation.

On December 19, 1947, President Harry Truman sent Marshall’s plan to Congress to be discussed. It passed overwhelmingly. The vote was 329 to only 74. It was then sent to the President’s desk, where he signed it on April 3, 1948. This new institution sent a whopping 13 billion dollars to Europe. This policy wasn’t just a success for rebuilding European countries. This also helped the United States as well. The Marshall Plan was great for the United States because of the diminishing threat of communism.

With the combined policies of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, Russian inspired communism was rivaled by all of the money that was sent to Western Europe, Greece, and Turkey. This is because communism thrives in places with poverty. In communism, everyone is equal, and had the same amount and same quality of things as everyone else. In places that have a good economy, communism doesn't thrive. Because of the growing economies in these countries, communism stopped being a option as a government. Democracy was restored to these countries as well as the economy.

In conclusion, The Truman Doctrine and The Marshall Plan helped contain communism in the late 1940’s and early 1950’s. Even though countries like Greece, Turkey, and Western European countries received lots of money from these policies, the United States arguably gained



the most. The United States lost the threat of communism threatening their country. Without these policies, the world as we know it today could be much different. Russia could rule the world with a communist government. These policies were and are today very important in guiding us to help other countries out and to lead our standard of foreign policy.