

The Compromises and Conflicts
of the
Truman Doctrine:
Potsdam, NATO, and the Birth of the Cold War

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In 1945, the compromise of peace conceived at Potsdam, a conference deciding the outcomes of World War II, temporarily held back the desirous advances of the USSR upon smaller countries. When the meeting lost its effect, President Harry S. Truman defended the defenseless countries from the Soviet Union's hungry eyes with the creation of the Truman Doctrine. Conflict over the doctrine birthed the start of the Cold War and kick started America's future foreign policy by founding the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

The year is 1945 and the Nazis have finally been defeated. America, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union met at a conference in Potsdam, Germany, to discuss the end of WWII, and the future of Germany¹. Only six days after this conference, two atomic bombs hit the Japanese cities of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, ringing in the end of the second World War. The main focus of the conference was to discuss relations with Germany, and other former Nazi inhabited countries, how to keep peace in the wake of WWII, and serve as a social contract between the U.S., Britain, and Russia². The peace that was discussed so heavily in Potsdam didn't last. Long before the Cold War, tensions between the USSR and the U.S. had been building. Russia had long ridiculed and fundamentally disagreed with the United States' and Britain's democratic governments, and only became allies due to Nazi Germany's invasion of Russia³. Stalin even wrote that he saw the U.S.'s role in helping a war torn Europe as oppressive,

¹ "GCSE Bitesize: Yalta and Potsdam - the Basics." *BBC*, BBC

² "GCSE Bitesize: Yalta and Potsdam - the Basics." *BBC*, BBC

³ Stalin, Joseph. "Stalin on the Inevitability of War with Capitalism." *Seventeen Moments in Soviet History*, 28 Sept. 2015

writing “Germany (Western), Britain, France, Italy and Japan, having fallen into the clutches of the USA, are obediently carrying out the US commands. But it would be wrong to think that things can go on well forever and ever, that these countries will tolerate without end the domination and oppression of the USA”⁴. Truman appeared to be relatively docile on the issue of Russia, saying in his diary, “I can deal with Stalin... He is honest, but smart as hell”⁵. The President also maintained relatively the same view in public saying that he “Liked him a lot”⁶. At the same time, however, Truman was watching Russia closely, identifying the country as a potential threat to the United States and other countries in Europe. Truman was right to observe the Soviets with an eagle eye, because soon after WWII, Russia started pushing for communist supremacy in smaller, impoverished and defenseless European countries⁷.

In February of 1945, President Franklin Roosevelt (who would later pass away between the time of the Yalta conference and the Potsdam Conference), Joseph Stalin and Winston Churchill met together in Yalta, Ukraine. This conference brought up the mandatory surrender of Germany and held talks of post-war world peace. One of the specifics discussed at the conference was Poland's postbellum government. The original talks at the Yalta conference centered around national unity, and trying to find a way to compromise the communist and non-communist political views in Poland⁸. The

⁴ Stalin, Joseph. “Stalin on the Inevitability of War with Capitalism.” *Seventeen Moments in Soviet History*, 28 Sept. 2015

⁵ “Truman Records Impressions of Stalin.” *History.com*, A&E Television Networks,

⁶ *The New York Times*, The New York Times, www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/0508.html.

⁷ Offner, Arnold A. “History - World Wars: President Truman and the Origins of the Cold War.” *BBC*, BBC, 17 Feb. 2011, www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwtwo/truman_01.shtml.

⁸ History.com Staff. “Yalta Conference.” *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 2009

compromise failed at the third meeting in Potsdam. The congregation in Yalta mirrored much of the Potsdam conference. Both held extreme, in depth conversations about what the Big Three wanted the world to be like after WWII, talks about the division of Germany, Poland's future government and how to keep the peace after the war⁹. Yalta was a stepping stone that lead to more detailed conversations at Potsdam. However, with the Yalta Conference failing to bring a final compromise with a plan of action, the countries would meet again in Potsdam, ready to resume talks on the pressing issues of the postwar world¹⁰.

Potsdam, Germany, 40 minutes east from Berlin, was the meeting point for the conference. Winston Churchill, Joseph Stalin and new U.S. President Harry Truman met at the conference. Many of the topics they discussed carried over from Yalta. Some of the most heated topics during the Potsdam conference was Poland's government and new borders and the future of Germany¹¹. Poland's future government had originally been intended to be a check and balance between the USSR's idea for a communist government, and the western leaders' want for a free and democratic system¹². Winston Churchill had originally held faith in Stalin's word, even telling his war-time cabinet, "Stalin I'm sure means well to the world and Poland. Stalin has offered the Polish people a free and more broadly based government to bring about an election"¹³. Despite the so

⁹ "GCSE Bitesize: Yalta and Potsdam - the Basics." *BBC*, BBC

¹⁰ Deutsche Welle. "Potsdam Conference Reshaped Germany | World| Breakings News and Perspectives from around the Globe | DW | 17.07.2015." *DW.COM*

¹¹ Jtalarico. "How The Potsdam Conference Shaped The Future Of Post-War Europe." *Imperial War Museums*, 3 July 2015

¹² The Historical Setting: The Polish People's Republic

¹³ "Winston Churchill: Secret Conversations Reveal Views on Stalin and Gandhi." *The Telegraph*, Telegraph Media Group, 19 Sept. 2008

called compromise on Poland, the allies reluctantly agreed to give Poland a socialist government despite their wishes. This was the first red flag that would hint at a later conflict between the U.S. and Russia. Despite the subtle butting of heads within the Cecilienhof Palace, where the conference was hosted, the public saw the meeting as a symbolic fresh start for the world after the horrors of WWII¹⁴. “The governments of the United Kingdom, the United States and the U.S.S.R. consider it necessary to begin without delay the essential preparatory work upon the peace settlements in Europe,” stated the official Potsdam documents¹⁵. Most of the public’s eyes were on the meeting’s ideas for Germany. The main talking point surrounding Germany’s future was the reparations that would be set for the country. “We are going to do what we can to make Germany over into a decent nation,” said Truman on a radio broadcast. Most of the decisions surrounding East Germany’s land and property fell onto the hands of Stalin and the Soviets. It was decided at Potsdam that each of the attending countries (the U.K, U.S, and Russia) would have a say over the specifics of the portion of the country they received, along with France. The three countries signed off on the Potsdam documents, and had made peace for Europe¹⁶.

By the end of the conference, the three leaders shook hands, and it seemed that the fate of the future world was sealed. Although no official peace treaties were signed

¹⁴ The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica. “Potsdam Conference.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 22 June 2017

¹⁵ “FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES: DIPLOMATIC PAPERS, THE CONFERENCE OF BERLIN (THE POTSDAM CONFERENCE), 1945, VOLUME II.” *U.S. Department of State*, U.S. Department of State

¹⁶ “FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES: DIPLOMATIC PAPERS, THE CONFERENCE OF BERLIN (THE POTSDAM CONFERENCE), 1945, VOLUME II.” *U.S. Department of State*, U.S. Department of State

or agreed upon, an overall agreement was made between Britain, America, and Russia to keep peace between themselves and other countries after the second World War. This consensus attempted to structure a social policy to make sure no major conflicts would start in the future¹⁷. This attempt would soon fail, as Russia loomed over disadvantaged countries. “We’re here today to raise the flag of victory over the capital of our greatest adversary... We are raising it in the name of the people of the United States who are looking forward to a better world, a peaceful world,” said President Truman during a press session after the end of the conference¹⁸. The future looked bright and hopeful for the postbellum world. However, that calm period was always going to result in a storm at one point or another.

The main conflict was waged in Greece and Turkey. Both extremely poor countries at the time, Greece and Turkey both had their gripes with the Soviets¹⁹. Greece had been ravaged by the Nazis during WWII, which crippled their government and country in multiple ways. Inflation killed their economy, their railways and transportation methods were sparse, citizens had been killed, and children were deathly sick²⁰. The Russian communists decided to take advantage of Greece at this time, giving birth to the Greek Crisis, also known as the Greek Civil War. The USSR had been fueling the fire of Soviets in Greece, pushing for complete communist control in the

¹⁷ Jtalarico. “How The Potsdam Conference Shaped The Future Of Post-War Europe.” *Imperial War Museums*, 3 July 2015

¹⁸ “Interview Truman, Stalin, Churchill in Potsdam Conference.” *YouTube*, YouTube, 26 Dec. 2013, www.youtube.com/watch?v=fYCr930RkZw.

¹⁹ “The Truman Doctrine.” *The Cold War*, 20 Mar. 2014

²⁰ Thule000. “Truman Doctrine - President Truman Speech on March 12, 1947: Giving Aid to Greece and Turkey.” *YouTube*, YouTube, 23 Oct. 2012

country, causing a civil war, which led to even more casualties²¹. This was another one of the many broken promises from Yalta and the disregarded compromises made at Potsdam, both of which had free European governments in mind. Since 1945, Turkey was pressured to allow Russian ships to travel through the Turkish Strait, which leads into the Mediterranean sea²². The Soviets, puffing up their chests, sent an entire naval fleet to try and intimidate them into submission. Turkey, not wanting to budge but not having the resources to do so, asked the US for help. Truman originally sent a naval ship to the Black Sea to show that the Turks were not alone, but the President knew this wasn't going to be enough²³. The Turkish Strait Crisis was a disgusting show of Soviet expansionism, and one of America's worst fears came true: the Russians disregarding the compromises made at the Yalta and Potsdam conferences. Truman would have to face his old 'ally', Stalin, once again. However, Truman, wanting to help in the Turkish Strait Crisis, couldn't dispatch aid without the approval from congress²⁴.

Truman addressed Congress on March 12, 1947. He spoke of the desperate situations in Greece and Turkey, and attempted to coax much needed support out of Congress. The millions of dollars the President asked for was not met with unanimous support. Truman gave a passionate and powerful speech, calling the Soviet Communists "terrorists", and telling Congress that the "peace loving nation" of Greece was in great need of help. Truman then talked about the Turkish Crisis. "I believe we

²¹ "History of Greece The Greek Civil War." *Civil War in Greece*

²² *Turkish Straits Crisis*,

teachingamericanhistory.org/static/neh/interactives/coldwareuropemap/data/info_10.html

²³ "Harry S. Truman Presidential Library & Museum." *Truman Library: "The Truman Doctrine", Ca. 1952. Truman Papers, President's Secretary's Files. Foreign Policy: Greek-Turkish Aid Program (Truman Doctrine)*

²⁴ "The Truman Doctrine." *The Cold War*, 20 Mar. 2014

must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way,” the President said to Congress in his heartfelt speech²⁵. Many congressmen were willing to give financial aid to Greece and Turkey, but a majority were wary about supplying military support. Despite the uncertainty that was felt throughout Congress, Truman’s speech was enough to fuel the necessary amount of support for the aid being dispatched to Turkey and Greece²⁶.

Thus, the Truman Doctrine was born. Over 400 million dollars (4 and half billion in today’s money) worth of financial and military aid was used to support Greece and Turkey in their fight against communist supremacy. The massive sum of money handed over to the two poor and defenseless countries would allow them to stand steadfastly against the greedy approach of Stalin and his Soviet supporters²⁷. Soon after the Truman Doctrine was put into effect, the Russian-influenced communists were flushed out of Greece, and the USSR’s ships retreated from the Turkish Strait. Not only was the Truman Doctrine an order for aid, but it was an ideology. The Doctrine would later dictate Truman’s actions during the Korean War, when he supported the South Koreans with military aid. The Truman Doctrine would become one of the most important foreign policies in U.S. history²⁸.

Naturally, the Truman Doctrine angered Stalin and his communist regime in Greece and Turkey. Truman was expecting for Stalin to be angry, noting that the “pig-headed” communists would condemn the federal aid being provided to eastern

²⁵ Thule000. “Truman Doctrine - President Truman Speech on March 12, 1947: Giving Aid to Greece and Turkey.” *YouTube*, YouTube, 23 Oct. 2012

²⁶ “Harry S. Truman Presidential Library & Museum.” *Truman Library, Truman Doctrine Activity*

²⁷ “Experts Support Truman Doctrine Of Aid to Greece | News.” *The Harvard Crimson*

²⁸ *The Truman Doctrine - The Cold War (1945–1989) - CVCE Website*

European countries. The anger extruding from Moscow was predicted in the “Long Telegram” from George Kennan, an American diplomat based in Moscow, Russia²⁹. The telegram sent to Truman detailed the Soviet’s plan to influence communist parties in destroyed European countries in the wake of WWII. This would then allow Russia not only to have a hand in a portion of Europe’s government, but also eventually integrate these countries into the Soviet Union³⁰. “Many foreign peoples, in Europe at least, are tired and frightened by experiences of [the] past and are less interested in abstract freedom than in security. They are seeking guidance rather than responsibilities. We should be better able than [the] Russians to give them this. And unless we do, [the] Russians certainly will,” The telegram stated³¹. Russia was seen as untrustworthy in the United State’s eyes, and they had multiple reasons to think so. The Truman Doctrine was escalating the tensions between the Soviets and the U.S, and the now distant and apparent firm declaration of peace made at Potsdam seemed long abandoned³².

Two years after the Truman Doctrine was administered, the friction between the USSR and the U.S. had reached an all-time high. Truman was wary of Russia, especially after their two-faced move of acting like allies, then forcing America to be their enemy. The strain had escalated beyond the standoff in Greece and Turkey, and Truman knew that if he wanted to stand against the Communist’s rising power, he had to do more than just what America was capable of³³. On April fourth, Truman announced

²⁹ “George Kennan Sends ‘Long Telegram’ to State Department.” *History.com*, A&E Television Networks

³⁰ “America, Britain & Russia : Their Cooperation and Conflict, 1941-1946.” *Find in a Library with WorldCat*, 23 Oct. 2017

³¹ “George Kennan Sends ‘Long Telegram’ to State Department.” *History.com*, A&E Television Networks

³² “Consequences of the Truman Doctrine.” *OUPblog*, 21 May 2014

³³ “Harry S. Truman Presidential Library & Museum.” *The Development of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)*

the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, otherwise known as NATO. This popular organization has its roots in the Truman Doctrine. The organization is still a staunch advocate for democracy and peace today, just as it was in 1949³⁴. NATO entered as a peace organization with members like Canada, Denmark, France, Italy, Great Britain and the United States. "By this treaty, we are not only seeking to establish freedom from aggression and from the use of force in the North Atlantic community, but we are also actively striving to promote and preserve peace throughout the world," said Truman as he announced his plan for NATO³⁵. Stalin saw the creation as "aggressive" and criticised the move. However, Congress ratified the proposition³⁶.

Stalin had been feeling threatened by capitalism and democracy since before the second World War and through Potsdam. His fear came to a new high with the introduction of the Truman Doctrine and NATO. Although Harry Truman was simply trying to protect a country's right to freedom, Stalin saw it as a move to antagonize Russia³⁷. This angered him and migrated the tension into of conflict over values. Stalin sought to ensure the future of Russia. He saw America as unpredictable, and war seemed likely in the Soviet's eyes. This gave the Russian government the strike them before they strike us mentality³⁸. After everything was said and done, from the dwindling

³⁴ Nato. "Homepage." *NATO*, www.nato.int/

³⁵ "Harry S. Truman Presidential Library & Museum." *Truman Library - North Atlantic Treaty*, www.trumanlibrary.org/nato/nato.htm.

³⁶ "Revelations from the Russian Archives The Soviet Union and the United States." *The Soviet Union and the United States - Revelations from the Russian Archives | Exhibitions - Library of Congress*, 15 June 1992

³⁷ "Revelations from the Russian Archives The Soviet Union and the United States." *The Soviet Union and the United States - Revelations from the Russian Archives | Exhibitions - Library of Congress*, 15 June 1992

³⁸ "Harry S. Truman Presidential Library & Museum." *Truman Library - Constantine Tsaldaris Oral History Interview*

embers of the Truman Doctrine came the start of the Cold War. The task of handling Stalin and Russia's government would become the task of many administrations after Truman's. The Cold War caused years worth of damage, from it's birth in the Truman administration, to Kennedy and the Cuban Missile Crisis, the escalation of the nuclear arms race, to the end in 1991 with George H. W. Bush³⁹. The Cold War still affects the United States' relationship with Russia to this day, as with the recent revelations of the Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential election. The icy beginning of the infamous conflict between the U.S. and Russia had their roots in the Truman Doctrine, and it still impacts the United State's foreign policy today⁴⁰.

Potsdam, a conference establishing peace after WWII, temporarily hindered the spread of the Soviet's unwanted Communism. When the compromises no longer had an effect, President Harry S. Truman defended the countries the Soviet Union sought to exploit. Conflict over the Truman doctrine left a large legacy of creating one of the largest peace associations and creating the most tense non-violent conflict in American History. The Truman Doctrine still affects the U.S., Russia, Britain, Greece, Turkey and many more countries to this day. The Truman Doctrine not only saved free nations, but also paved the way for peace to be made for decades to come.

³⁹ "Start of the Cold War - The Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan (Article)." *Khan Academy*

⁴⁰ usnationalarchives. "The Truman Doctrine and the Origins of the Cold War (2017 April 19)." *YouTube*, YouTube, 19 Apr. 2017

Appendix A



41

Churchill, Truman and Stalin shaking hands at the Potsdam Conference.

⁴¹ *The Truman Doctrine - The Cold War (1945–1989) - CVCE Website*

Appendix B



42

Protesters of the Greek communist party lying dead in the streets after being killed by Soviet-influenced supporters, horrified citizens surrounding them.

⁴² "History of Greece The Greek Civil War." *Civil War in Greece*

Appendix C



43

President Harry S. Truman addressing Congress in support of the Truman
Doctrine.

⁴³ "President Truman Delivers Truman Doctrine Speech before Congress." *Truman Library Photograph: President Truman Delivers Truman Doctrine Speech before Congress*

Appendix D



44



45

Caricatures depicting the Truman Doctrine and its effects. The first drawing is a play on the fact that Stalin smoked a lot, but in this photo he is “choking” on the Truman Doctrine smoke. The second picture depicts Truman and Stalin weighing bombs, as if they were testing the waters of war.

⁴⁴ “The Cold War Era Timeline.” *Timetoast*, www.timetoast.com/timelines/the-cold-war-era-7faeb639-59de-48a0-898e-0fdd47b4540c.
⁴⁵ Nye, Joseph S. “Has Economic Power Replaced Military Might?” *US & Canada | Al Jazeera*, Al Jazeera, 7 June 2011, www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/06/20116713353508287.html.

Appendix E



46

Truman signing the NATO document, with the leaders of the member countries surrounding him.

⁴⁶ "Primary Source Documents." *We the Teachers Blog*

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