

U.S. Foreign Policy

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3. The Soviet Reaction to the Truman Doctrine, 1947

The pathetic appeal of the Tsaldaris Government to the U.S.A. is clear evidence of the bankruptcy of the political regime in Greece. But the matter does not lie solely with the Greek Monarchists and their friends, now cracked up to American Congressmen as the direct descendants of the heroes of Thermopylae: it is well known that the real masters of Greece have been and are the British military authorities.

British troops have been on Greek territory since 1944. On Churchill's initiative, Britain took on herself the responsibility for "stabilising" political conditions in Greece. The British authorities did not confine themselves to perpetuating the rule of the reactionary, anti-democratic forces in Greece, making no scruple in supporting ex-collaborators with the Germans. The entire political and economic activities under a number of short-lived Greek Governments have been carried on under close British control and direction.

Today we can see the results of this policy—complete bankruptcy. British troops failed to bring peace and tranquility to tormented Greece. The Greek people have been plunged into the abyss of new sufferings, of hunger and poverty. Civil war takes on ever fiercer forms.

Was not the presence of foreign troops on Greek territory instrumental in bringing about this state of affairs? Does not Britain, who proclaimed herself the

guardian of Greece, bear responsibility for the bankruptcy of her charge?

... Truman did not even consider it necessary to wait for the findings of the Security Council Commission specially sent to Greece to investigate the situation on the spot.

Truman, indeed, failed to reckon either with the international organisation or with the sovereignty of Greece. What will be left of Greek sovereignty when the "American military and civilian personnel" gets to work in Greece by means of the 250 million dollars brought into that country? The sovereignty and independence of Greece will be the first victims of such singular "defence"...

Henry Wallace and several other leading American figures came out with a sharply negative response to Truman's message.

We are now witnessing a fresh intrusion of the U.S.A. into the affairs of other states. American claims to leadership in international affairs grow parallel with the growing appetite of the American quarters concerned. But the American leaders, in the new historical circumstances, fail to reckon with the fact that the old methods of the colonizers and die-hard politicians have out-lived their time and are doomed to failure. In this lies the chief weakness of Truman's message.

4. Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg, Jr., Justifies a Bipartisan Foreign Policy, 1947

May 12, 1947

You ask me whether there is any "precedent" for the action we are taking in Greece and Turkey. Of course, there are many partial precedents in respect to relief for stricken countries and even for "military missions." But I doubt whether there is any over-all "precedent." But I am afraid we cannot rely upon "precedents" in facing the utterly unprecedented condition in the world today.

Certainly there is no "precedent" for today's world-wide cleavage between democracy and communism. Perhaps, however, there is something of a

"parallel" in remembering what occurred prior to a similar cleavage between democracy and nazism when we surely learned that we cannot escape trouble by trying to run away from it and when "appeasement" proved to be a fatal investment. Of course, we shall never know whether history would have been different if we had all stood up to the aggressor at Munich. But at least we know what it cost to "lie down." Perhaps this is a "precedent" . . .

Greece must be helped or Greece sinks permanently into the communist order. Turkey inevitably

follows. Then comes the chain reaction which might sweep from the Dardanelles to the China sea. . . . I do not know whether our new American policy can succeed in arresting these subversive trends (which ultimately represent a direct threat to us). I can only say that I think the adventure is worth trying as an alternative to another "Munich" and perhaps to another war (against the occurrence of which every human effort must be made).

March 24, 1947

The trouble is that these "crises" never reach Congress until they have developed to a point where Congressional discretion is pathetically restricted. When

things finally reach a point where a President asks us to "declare war" there usually is nothing left except to "declare war." In the present instance, the overriding fact is that the President has made a long-delayed statement regarding Communism on-the-march which must be supported if there is any hope of ever impressing Moscow with the necessity of paying any sort of peaceful attention to us whatever. If we turned the President down—after his speech to the joint Congressional session—we might as well either resign ourselves to a complete Communist encirclement and infiltration or else get ready for World War No. Three. . . .

5. Mr. "X" on the Sources of Soviet Conduct, 1947

. . . [I]t will be clearly seen that the Soviet pressure against the free institutions of the Western world is something that can be contained by the adroit and vigilant application of counter-force at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points, corresponding to the shifts and maneuvers of Soviet policy, but which cannot be charmed or talked out of existence. The Russians look forward to a duel of infinite duration, and they see that already they have scored great successes. . . .

It is clear that the United States cannot expect in the foreseeable future to enjoy political intimacy with the foreseeable future to enjoy political intimacy with the Soviet regime. It must continue to regard the Soviet Union as a rival, not a partner, in the political arena. It must continue to expect that Soviet policies will reflect no abstract love of peace and stability, no real faith in the possibility of a permanent happy coexistence of the Socialist and capitalist worlds, but rather a cautious, persistent pressure toward the disruption and weakening of all rival influence and rival power.

Balanced against this are the facts that Russia, as

opposed to the Western world in general, is still by far the weaker party, that Soviet policy is highly flexible, and that Soviet society may well contain deficiencies which will eventually weaken its own total potential. This would of itself warrant the United States entering with reasonable confidence upon a policy of firm containment, designed to confront the Russians with unalterable counter-force at every point where they show signs of encroaching upon the interests of a peaceful and stable world. . . .

It would be an exaggeration to say that American behavior unassisted and alone could exercise a power of life and death over the Communist movement and of life and death over the Communist movement and bring about the early fall of Soviet power in Russia. But the United States has it in its power to increase enormously the strains under which Soviet policy must operate, to force upon the Kremlin a far greater degree of moderation and circumspection than it has had to observe in recent years, and in this way to promote tendencies which must eventually find their outlet in either the break-up or the gradual mellowing of Soviet power. . . .

6. A Critique of Containment by Walter Lippmann, 1947

. . . My objection, then, to the policy of containment is not that it seeks to confront the Soviet power with American power, but that the policy is misconceived, and must result in a misuse of American power. For

as I have sought to show, it commits this country to a struggle which has for its objective nothing more substantial than the hope that in ten or fifteen years the Soviet power will, as the result of long frustration,

“break up” or “mellow.” In this prolonged struggle the role of the United States is, according to Mr. X, to react “at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points” to the encroachments of the Soviet power.

The policy, therefore, concedes to the Kremlin the strategical initiative as to when, where and under what local circumstances the issue is to be joined. It compels the United States to meet the Soviet pressure at these shifting geographical and political points by using satellite states, puppet governments and agents which have been subsidized and supported, though their effectiveness is meager and their reliability uncertain. By forcing us to expend our energies and our substance upon these dubious and unnatural allies on the perimeter of the Soviet Union, the effect of the policy is to neglect our natural allies in the Atlantic community, and to alienate them. . . .

All the other pressures of the Soviet Union at the “constantly shifting geographical and political points,” which Mr. X is so concerned about—in the Middle East and in Asia—are, I contend, secondary and subsidiary to the fact that its armed forces are in the heart of Europe. It is to the Red Army in Europe, therefore, and not to ideologies, elections, forms of government, to socialism, to communism, to free enterprise, that a correctly conceived and soundly planned policy should be directed. . . .

We may now consider how we are to relate our role in the United Nations to our policy in the conflict with Russia. Mr. X does not deal with this question. But the State Department, in its attempt to operate under the Truman Doctrine, has shown where that doctrine would take us. It would take us to the destruction of the U.N. . . .

Judging by the speeches in the Greek affair of the British and the American delegates, Sir Alexander Cadogan and Mr. Herschel Johnson appear to be acting on instructions which treat the U.N. as expendable in our conflict with Russia. It is a great pity. Nothing is being accomplished to win the conflict, to assuage it, or to settle it. But the U.N., which should be preserved as the last best hope of mankind that the conflict can be settled and a peace achieved, is being chewed up. The seed corn is being devoured.

Why? Because the policy of containment, as Mr. X has exposed it to the world, does not have as its objective a settlement of the conflict with Russia. It is therefore implicit in the policy that the U.N. has no future as a universal society, and that either the U.N. will be cast aside like the League of Nations, or it will be transformed into an anti-Soviet coalition. In either event the U.N. will have been destroyed. . . .

7. George F. Kennan Recalls an Early Response to the Truman Doctrine, 1947

. . . I accepted the conclusion, to which many others in the government had arrived, that (and I use the words of the War College presentation) “if nothing were done to stiffen the backs of the non-Communist elements in Greece at this juncture the Communist elements would soon succeed in seizing power and in establishing a totalitarian dictatorship along the lines already visible in other Balkan countries.” . . . Communist rule, I thought, “would probably be successfully consolidated in the long run and might some day have most unfortunate strategic consequences from the standpoint of any military adversary of the Soviet Union.” And more important still were the probable repercussions which such a development would have on neighboring areas. . . .

So much for the reasons for our limited intervention in Greece. Why, then, approving this action, did

I take exception to the language of the President’s message?

I took exception to it primarily because of the sweeping nature of the commitments which it implied. The heart of the message and the passage that has subsequently been most frequently quoted was this:

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

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

This passage, and others as well, placed our aid to Greece in the framework of a universal policy rather than in that of a specific decision addressed to a specific set of circumstances. It implied that what we had decided to do in the case of Greece was some-

thing we would be prepared to do in the case of any other country, provided only that it was faced with the threat of "subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures."

It seemed to me highly uncertain that we would invariably find it in our interests or within our means to extend assistance to countries that found themselves in this extremity. The mere fact of their being in such a plight was only one of the criteria that had to be taken into account in determining our action. The establishment of the existence of such a threat was only the beginning, not the end, of the process of decision. I listed, in my presentation to the War College, three specific considerations that had supported our decision to extend assistance to Greece:

A. The problem at hand is one within our economic, technical, and financial capabilities.

B. If we did not take such action, the resulting situation might rebound very decidedly to the advantage of our political adversaries.

C. If, on the other hand, we do take the action in question, there is good reason to hope that the favorable consequences will carry far beyond the limits of Greece itself.

These considerations, I pointed out, did not nec-

essarily apply to all other regions. I doubted, for example, that any of them would fully apply in the case of China: the first most definitely would not.

Nevertheless, the misapprehension already conveyed was, as I see it, never entirely corrected. Throughout the ensuing two decades the conduct of our foreign policy would continue to be bedeviled by people in our own government as well as in other governments who could not free themselves from the belief that all another country had to do, in order to qualify for American aid, was to demonstrate the existence of a Communist threat. Since almost no country was without a Communist minority, this assumption carried very far. And as time went on, the firmness of understanding for these distinctions on the part of our own public and governmental establishment appeared to grow weaker rather than stronger. In the 1960s so absolute would be the value attached, even by people within the government, to the mere existence of a Communist threat, that such a threat would be viewed as calling, in the case of Southeast Asia, for an American response on a tremendous scale, without serious regard even to those main criteria that most of us in 1947 would have thought it natural and essential to apply. . . .

8. Joseph Stalin Eats Greek Crow, 1947

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Chapter 27:

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