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America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945 - 1996
Walter La Feber

Chapter 3: The Truman Doctrine and The Marshall Plan Two Halves of the Same Walnut (1947-1948)

On March 12, 1947 Truman finally issued his own declaration of Cold War, the **Truman Doctrine**. He asked Americans to join in a global commitment against communism. This doctrine became the guiding spirit of American foreign policy since WWII. Truman's immediate problem was not the threat of Russian invasion. Instead, Communist power was rising steeply in Europe (especially France), and chaotic conditions in former colonial areas were opening opportunities for revolutionaries. India and Egypt, the jewels in the British crown, were pressing for independence. Not surprisingly, in late 1946 and early 1947 increasing attention was paid to these newly emerging areas. Much of the motivation was economic, especially since Americans were dependent on them for raw materials and minerals.

On February 21, 1947, the British notified the US that, because of their own economic crisis, England could not provide the military and economic support needed by Greece and Turkey. Greece you will remember was bogged down in a civil war. On one side was a conservative-monarchical group supported by London. On the other was the **National Liberation Front (NLF)** with communist leadership. By 1947, the NLF was receiving support from Yugoslavia's **Tito** who hoped to annex parts of Greece into a large Yugoslav federation. Stalin was not directly involved.

As NLF strength grew, the US did become involved. The Truman Doctrine speech requested \$400 million in Greek and Turkish aid. The Truman administration appeared dramatically before Congress to request support for a global battle against communism. The threat was not posed as a war in Greece, but, instead, as a threat of Russian communism whose aim was control of the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa. The control was part of a communist plan to encircle and capture Germany and Europe. It was a struggle between liberty and dictatorship. By defending Greece and Turkey, Americans would be defending their own freedoms. So Truman won over Congress and the American people who were by now running scared.

George Kennan, the top State Department expert on Soviet affairs, objected to sending military assistance to nations such as Turkey that had no communist problems and bordered the Soviet Union. He felt that, unlike economic help, military help could be provocative. Kennan also protested the harsh ideological tone and open-ended American commitment. However, Truman insisted on a simple ideological call to action that all could understand.

The economic dimension to the Truman Doctrine was announced six days later when the President frankly declared that if the expansion of state-controlled economies (such as the communists) was not stopped, and an open world marketplace restored for private business, a depression would occur and the government would have to intervene massively in society. If Americans wanted to preserve their personal freedom, they had to rebuild the areas west of the **Iron Curtain** before these lands collapsed into anarchy, radical governments, or even communism.

The Truman Doctrine laid out the ideological and political reasons for the commitment. The President requested \$400 million for military and economic aid. He also argued that the

world must now choose between alternative ways of life. He urged Americans to commit themselves to helping free peoples and to opposing totalitarian regimes. After much discussion, Congress accepted Truman's definition of the crisis. Importantly, this marked the point in the Cold War when power in foreign policy formulation began shifting from Capitol Hill to the White House. Shortly thereafter, Truman announced a loyalty program to ferret out security risks in government.

The Truman Doctrine was a milestone in American history for four reasons:

- (1) It marked the point at which Truman used the American fear of communism both at home and abroad to convince Americans they must embark on a Cold War foreign policy.
- (2) Congress was giving the President great powers to wage the Cold War as he saw fit.
- (3) For the first time in the postwar era, Americans massively intervened in another nation's civil war. Intervention was justified on the basis of anticommunism.
- (4) Truman used the doctrine to justify a gigantic aid program to prevent a collapse of European and American economies. Later such programs were expanded globally.

The doctrine became an ideological shield behind which the US marched to rebuild the Western political-economic system and counter the radical left.

The President's program evolved into the **Marshall Plan** which concentrated efforts on Europe. **Secretary of State Marshall** was convinced that the Russians believed Europe would collapse. He assumed that the US must lead in restoring Europe and appointed George Kennan to help draw up policies.

The Soviet bloc was invited to participate but was discouraged from doing so by the demand that economic records of each nation be open for scrutiny and by the suggestion that Soviet goods be shipped to Europe. Still the Russians leaned toward participation and even

ordered their East European satellites to be prepared to join. They proposed that each nation individually establish its own recovery program.

The French and British, on the other hand, proposed instead that Europe as a whole create the proposal for American consideration. They also watered down demands that new controls be placed on Germany. The Soviets quit, warning that the plan would undermine national sovereignty, revive Germany, allow the US to control Europe, and divide Europe into two groups of states. Soon the Poles and Czechs who had expressed interest stated that they could not be involved because it might be construed as action against the Soviet Union.

While 16 European nations hammered out a program for Marshall to consider, the US determined to revive Germany quickly. The US and British zones in Germany were merged. Europe requested a four year program of \$17 billion of American aid. While trying to obtain Congressional support, Kennan summarized the central problem. Communist activities were not the core of the problem, he said. Instead, the major concern centered on the disruptive effects of the war on the economic, political, and social structure of Europe. The plan revolved around establishing a rebuilt and autonomous Germany. The plan tied the Germans to a general European program and then offered large sums to nations like France which would be reluctant to support reconstructing Germany without some sort of incentive.

The Marshall Plan now seems to have signaled not the beginning but the end of an era. It marked the last phase in the administration's use of economic tactics as a primary means of tying together the Western world. The plan soon evolved into military alliances. Thus, the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan are **"two halves of the same walnut."** The military aspects of the doctrine developed into the larger part.

In July 1947, a **long telegram** written by George Kennan (writing as **Mr. X**) explained Soviet behavior. The telegram was later published as an article that gave the administration's view of what made the Russians act like **Communists**. Stalin's policy was said to be shaped by a combination of **Marxist-Leninist ideology** which advocated revolution to defeat capitalist forces. **Capitalist encirclement** was the rationale used to regiment the Soviet masses.

Mr. X believed that Stalin would not moderate communist determination to overthrow the Western governments. Any softening of the Russian line would be a diversionary tactic designed to lull the West into complacency. Soviet aggression would have to be contained by counterforce as a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points. The US would have to undertake this containment alone and it could do so without weakening its prosperity and political stability. The Soviet party structure would undergo a period of immense strain climaxing in either "the break-up or the gradual mellowing of Soviet power."

The article provoked tremendous debate. **Walter Lippman**, an influential journalist, argued, for example, that Soviet policy was molded more by traditional Russian expansionism than by communist ideology. He viewed the Soviet advance as a traditional quest for national security. In the end, American officials assumed that the "**one world**" of the UN was no longer valid and that we were facing a division into two worlds. Economic development could not occur until security was established. Consequently, by late 1947, there was increasing concern with things military.

The quest for military security also transformed US policy in Asia. With **Chiang Kai-shek's** decline the State Department searched for a new partner. The obvious candidate was Japan which from the 1890s until 1931 had worked closely with the US. It was also the potential industrial powerhouse of the area. In 1947-1948, the State Department reversed its post-1945

policy and decided to rebuild Japanese industry and develop a sound export economy. At the same time, American bases on the islands were to be expanded and maintained. As in Europe, economic development and security moved hand in hand.

There was some interest, also, in Latin America. American nations convened in Rio de Janeiro in late summer 1947 but there was no discussion of economic aid because European recovery took precedence over Latin American development. The conference instead was to initiate steps toward a **collective security** arrangement. This was spelled out in the **Rio Treaty** whereby each nation was expected to take some action against aggressors military or otherwise. No nation, the US argued, could remain truly neutral. On September 2 the treaty was signed, the first such treaty under **Articles 51 and 52 of the UN Charter**. The treaty provided that an attack against one American nation would be considered an attack against all and that when 2/3 of the hemispheric nations agreed to resist such an attack all states must cooperate by contributing either troops or supplies.

In March 1948 the Ninth **Inter-American Conference** convened at Bogota, Columbia. Out of this meeting came the **Charter of the Organization of American States** which established administrative machinery for hemispheric consultation and an Advisory Defense Committee for military strategy. The Latin Americans, despite US objections, insisted on adding a section (**Article 15**) that said “no state or group of states has the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, in the internal or external affairs of any other state.” They also added a section (**Article 16**) that said “no state may use or encourage the use of coercive measures of an economic or political character in order to force the sovereign will of another State and obtain from it advantages of any kind.” The US Senate ratified the charter.

To step back for a moment, Truman had also pushed the **National Security Act** through Congress in July 1947. This bill provided for a single Department of Defense to replace three independently run services. It established a Joint Chiefs of Staff, a **National Security Council** to advise the President, and a **Central Intelligence Agency** to correlate and evaluate intelligence activities.

In July 1947, too, the Russians began to focus on Germany. Rebuilding Europe threatened Stalin. He believed (correctly) that the Marshall Plan aimed to break up Soviet control of Eastern Europe by tying that region into a general multilateral capitalist reconstruction of all Europe. A series of moves tightened Soviet control of the bloc. A program of bilateral trade agreements (**Molotov Plan**) began to link the bloc countries and Russia. The final step came in January 1949 with the establishment of **COMECON, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance**. This was the Soviet response to the Marshall Plan, a centralized agency for stimulating and controlling bloc development. The Cominform, the Communist Information Bureau was formed as an instrument for increasing Stalin's control. It included communists from Russia, Yugoslavia, France, Italy, Poland, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Rumania.

At a **Cominform** meeting in Warsaw an influential Soviet named **Zdanov** formally announced new Soviet policies. He argued that American economic power was organizing Western Europe and other countries that were politically and economically dependent on the US into an anticommunist bloc. The Russians and their "friends" formed another bloc. He thus announced the rebirth of the **two-camp view** which had dominated Russian policy between 1927 and 1934. All members were ordered to instigate the necessary strikes and internal disorder for the elimination of independent socialist, labor, and peasant parties in their countries.

Americans took this to mean that they were winning the eight month Cold War. But soon the fall of Czechoslovakia (February 1948) changed that perception. The Czechs had been trying to coexist with Russia by trying not to offend the Soviets while keeping doors open to the West. Since Hungary in 1947 had been the victim of a similar but less dramatic squeeze, Truman now argued that the Marshall Plan was not enough. Europe had to have more protection against internal and external aggression. He also asked for Universal Military Training, the resumption of Selective Service, and the speedy passage of the Marshall Plan. Within twelve days Congress had given its approval. This accelerated a change in American policy. (Later we learned that much of the March 1948 crisis was invented, and the scare was designed to push neutral-minded Europeans into seeking the protection of a US dominated military alliance).

The next effort was the North **Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)**.