

The Truman Doctrine (1947): official and unofficial reactions

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Abrégé : L'adresse présidentielle à partir du 12 mars 1947, également connu comme doctrine de Truman, est venue dans un moment où le concept de Roosevelt de la collaboration d'après-guerre est devenu seulement une illusion. Beaucoup de problèmes opposés à une telle possibilité et, entre eux, les crises grecques et turques tiennent des positions importantes. Notre papier est concentré sur l'impact mentionné ci-dessus d'initiative dans davantage ou moins de cercles de fonctionnaire, d'Américain, de Soviétique et de Turc. Tels analysent sont basés sur les documents édités, articles de journal, mémoires et se rappellent des participants ou des spectateurs au processus de élaboration de doctrine de Truman. Nous pourrions remarquer que le nouvel U. S. l'initiative a été intensément discutée, en cercles officiels et cercles d'opinion publique. Le programme de secours lancé par le Président Truman ne rassemble pas, sans quelques critiques, toutes structures de directeur et la pression. Quelques voix pourraient être entendues, avertissant que la nouvelle initiative est plus qu'une aide étrangère et pourraient des dommages sérieux facilement produits dans le nouveau contexte géopolitique. Dans le même temps, la pression américaine a soulevé quelques questions au sujet de doctrine de Truman mais, d'une manière générale, les commentaires étaient favorables. Évident, ce n'était le cas pour la « pression » soviétique qui, après des ordres de gouvernement, a condamné la doctrine de Truman comme geste hégémonique mais, à la fin, ni les critiques internes des Etats-Unis ni les réactions d'Union Soviétique ne change pas le nouveau programme.

I. Motivation

The Presidential Address from March 12, 1947, also known as *Truman Doctrine*, came in a moment when the Roosevelt concept of postwar collaboration became only an illusion. Many problems opposed to such a possibility and, between them, the Greek and Turkish crises hold important positions. Our paper is focused on the above mentioned initiative impact in the more or less official circles, American, Soviet and Turkish. Such analyze is based on published documents, newspaper articles, memories and remembers from participants or spectators to the *Truman Doctrine* elaborating process. Before proceeding we consider useful a brief presentation of the Greek and Turkish situations, as they developed in first postwar years.

II. Greek and Turkish crises

The *Greek* one is the result of a conflict between *E. A. M.* (a coalition of leftist factions, ruled by the communists) and the royalists, the Government forces, backed up by the British troops. In fact, the war itself was between *E. L. A. S.* (the armed branch of *E. A. M.*) and the Governmental and British troops. In December 1944, the last ones occupied Athens and the partisans revolt which broke out was suppressed (Duroselle, 2006: 343). In February 12, through Varkiza Agreements, *E. L. A. S.* was forced to demobilize and a royalist Government, lead by Nicolas Plastiras, was formed (Amen 1978: 20). After the spring

elections, won by the monarchists and the September referendum, through which a large majority accepted the King George II return, the war broke out again (Fontaine, 1992: 46-47). The Communist was helped by the Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Albania where find arms, food and training and recovery camps (Lafeber, 1980: 48). At the end of the year, the Greek Government informed U. N. Security Council that the rebels were aided from abroad and that Greek situation is very critical (*A Decade of...*, 1985: 528; *Summary Statement of the United States Position in the Security Council on the Greek Case*, 1946).

Turkey's situation was not so desperate; in the same time, a certain degree of tensions, between Moscow and Ankara, convinced the Turkish Government that country integrity and, even its independence, was in a real danger. In March 1945 Soviet Union denounce the 1925 *Treaty of Friendship and Neutrality* with Turkey (*Soviet Treaty...*, 1950: 313). In June, in two conversations, the Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Veaceslav Molotov, made known, to Turkish Ambassador, Selim Sarper, Soviet demands: the changing of Montreux Convention and Soviet military bases in the Straits and the East Anatolian territories, Kars, Ardahan and Atvin submitting (Plopeanu, 2005: 258). For the Turks, these were the very firm signs of a future war with Soviet Union.

To this situation we must add the constant military movements, developed by Soviet Union either in Romania and Bulgaria or Caucasus region hoping that Turkey would be incapable to resist to such a pressure and would accept above mentioned demands.

Soviet approach was resumed, in August 1946, when, through a diplomatic note, it was proposed, again, a multilateral control of the Straits (but only for the riparian states) and freedom of the passage for the Black Sea countries warships (Hurewitz 1958-1960: 269-270, *Soviet Chargé d'Affairs, Washington, to Acting Secretary of State*, August 7, 1946). Especially the idea of splitting Straits control was strongly rejected by the Department of State and, in the process of elaborating reply, the officials from State – War – Navy Coordinating Committee take into consideration even resistance by using force (Yergin, 1978: 234).

However, despite all of this, U. S. didn't show very eager to assume a protective posture though, from February 1946, George F. Kennan *Long Telegram* delivered a new ideological background, more coherent and conclusive, about Soviet Foreign Policy goals and U. S. methods to stand up against those. Only the British decision, publicly made in February 12, 1947, to abandon its role of strategic partner in Greece and Turkey and to withdraw any military and economic aid, due its own financial problems, left the U. S. with no solution other than that of massive involvement.

The Washington policy – makers response to those two crises was the 400 million dollars aid program, for Greece and Turkey, as it was announced by the President himself in the Congress, in March 12. But noticing the new initiative was not enough. The President Address was an ideological one and this particular characteristic was hailed or criticized by the officials and the press.

III. Official Reactions

We must underline, from the beginning that the idea of a massive implication, of the U. S., in areas in which the Soviet desire for hegemony was real, encountered some critics, between U. S. high ranking officials. On one hand, the reasons and timing for that kind of program and, on the other hand, the U. S. capability to take the stand, all over the world, was the main problems which appeared in the officials debates, before and after March 12.

Some of the correspondence and analyses are quite revealing. On March 7, George Elsey, Assistant of the Truman Special Counselor, Clark Clifford, send a letter to the last one in which show that the necessary time for Presidential Address preparation was too short and the public opinion wasn't ready to accept such a program, if some explanations are not given,

in advance. Such situation could lead, in Elsey's opinion, to a divided public. Moreover, Elsey emphasized the fact that, in recent past, no Soviet overt action, which could serve as an adequate pretext for the Presidential program, taking place. The only outcome of this move would be the failure of future Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers (from March – April) (*Letter from George M. Elsey...*, 1947: 1). Instead, Elsey suggested a message limited in scope, focused on American responsibility for general European reconstruction (Yergin 1978: 282 - 283).

The Elsey view wasn't isolate. Before him, in January and February, some Department of State analyses highlighted the fact that "Soviet Union encounter great economic difficulties" which "led to an international behavior less aggressive [...] in last weeks" (Lafeber 1980: 50). In private, even Dean Acheson remarked that "Russians would not go to war with United States unless they are absolutely mad" (Lafeber 1980: 51).

From the view of U. S. capability to take action, anywhere in the world, a revealing analyze came into our attention. In April 29, Joint Strategic Survey Committee sent a report to *Joint Chiefs of Staff (Containment...*, 1978: 71, *United States Assistance to Other Countries from the Standpoint of National Security*, April 29, 1947). This document proposed a hierarchy of various states and regions from Europe, Asia and Latin America, based upon two criteria: 1. *their significance for the U. S. security* and 2. *urgency of help*. According to first criteria, Turkey and Greece was placed on 9th and 10th position, after entire Western Europe and Canada (*Containment...*, 1978: 79, *United States Assistance to Other Countries from the Standpoint of National Security*, April 29, 1947). Taking into account the second one, first two places was occupied by those two countries (*Containment...*, 1978: 82, *United States Assistance to Other Countries from the Standpoint of National Security*, April 29, 1947). The J. S. S. C. report draw attention upon the fact that U. S. aid "must determine that nation to built a sound economy, to maintain army forces at a sufficient level for securing its independence and to be a real help for United States, in case of an ideological warfare" (*Containment...*, 1978: 83, *United States Assistance to Other Countries from the Standpoint of National Security*, April 29, 1947).

Other members of Administration take position regarding the Presidential program. George F. Kennan (at that moment, head of the *Policy Planning Staff*, newly created in Department of State) resolutely opposed to sending military assistance to Turkey, which doesn't experienced an internal Communist movement and, moreover, bordered Soviet Union. In his opinion, unlike economic aid, the political one could be provocative. One of the first recommendations of the P. P. S. referred to the necessity that measures which must be taken do not give the impression that "*Truman Doctrine* is a blank check, supplying economic and military aid to any world area where communists show some signs of success" (Kennan, 1967: 316). Kennan developed his opinions in a lecture at the National War College, remembered in his *Memoirs*: "I pointed out that the situation of Turkey differed quite fundamentally from that of Greece. There isn't a serious Communist permeation in Turkey – or a comparable guerilla movement. Turkey had nothing to fear but fear [...] If the Turks do not lose their nerves, if they keep their internal political life relatively clear and orderly and refuse to become involved in negotiations with the Russians on a bilateral basis over questions such as that of the Straits, they will probably continue to enjoy a temporary and precarious immunity to Russian pressure" (Kennan, 1967: 316).

From the legislative side, many opinions gave little room for diplomacy. The Republican Senator, Robert Taft, accused Truman for dividing the world in Communist and Anticommunist and declared his main fear: "I don't want a war with Russia" (Fleming, 1961: 459). On his turn, Senator E. C. Johnson attacked one of the aid receiver: [...] there is nothing in Turkey history trustworthy for the Americans [...] a nation which choose Nazi against America, in last war, don't deserve this unselfish appreciation. No imaginative effort could

lead us to the opinion that Turkey are on the democratic course, even if Department of State approve, with kindness, the brutal savage and unmerciful dictatorship which control that nation. The military aid and assistance give it to this Government means assistance to a fascist military dictatorship” (Tamkoç, 1977: 28). More blunt, his colleague from Wisconsin stated that “this Bill is a war measure and from now on we move in. Hysteria has swept over us and we can look for a stiffening of our military situation (Fleming, 1961: 460).

Similar views expressed Henry Wallace (former Secretary of Commerce between March 1945 and September 1946 and, at the moment of his declarations, editor of *The New Republic Magazine*). In a European tour, through France, U. K. and Scandinavian countries, Wallace considered Truman initiative as a “reckless tendency” which would bring “a century of fear”. He proposed, instead, a fifty billion dollars program of aid to war devastated countries, a third of which would go to the Soviet Union. He urged that the problem of the Dardanelles be solved by internationalizing all the Great Straits of the world, including Suez and Panama Canals (Fleming, 1961: 459). In defense of the President, Senator Vandenberg call Wallace “a itinerary saboteur” (Lafeber, 1980: 56) and other congressmen, together with people’s from outside of the Legislative, demanded that Wallace be forced to return home, his passport revoked and he charged, under *Logan Law* form 1796, which forbidden to private citizens to carried out talks with a foreign Government (Fleming, 1961: 460).

An interesting position adopted General Dwight Eisenhower. In his diary, on May 15th, 1947, he wrote: “the best thing which we could do is to make available, for Secretary of State, five billions dollars, to use in supporting democratic movements, anywhere our vital interests ask for”. In the same time, “we don’t have any interest to save Greece and Turkey from Communism, if would fall” (*The Eisenhower Diaries*, 1981: 142).

IV. Opinions from the press and private field

From the first day, the journals reactions were, without doubt, abundant. In *New York Time*, from March 12, it was predicted that Truman Address would “ring down the curtain on one epoch in America’s Foreign Policy [...] the age of isolationism and occasional interventions came to an end. It was replaced by an age of American responsibility” (Combs, 1986: 1986). According Arthur Krock, writer of leading columns from this newspaper, Truman “made up his mind that, when a fitting opportunity arose and one which Congress and the people would recognize as such, he would proclaim the new doctrine. On several occasions he thought the time had come, but some of his important advisers talked him out of it” (Fleming, 1961: 441 - 442). Over two days, in *New York Herald Tribune*, it was emphasized the fact that Truman initiative was “emphatically not a declaration of war with Russia” (Fleming 1961: 455).

More justifying reasons were debated in the next days. In March 13th number, *New York Time* bring into discussion the *appeasement* motive, showing that democracies involved in two World Wars because they failed to reveal, unmistakably, their “point of resistance” (Fleming, 1961: 454). This line or reasoning was continued, in he same newspaper, on May 11: “no one in his senses, and not deliberately misrepresenting the situation, would treat the *Truman Doctrine* as a military adventure” (Fleming, 1961: 454).

Of course, opinions little favorable to the new program was to be found in the main journals. In March 13th, in *Chicago Tribune*, it was stated that “Mister Truman made as cold a war speech yesterday against Russia, as any other President has every made. except on the occasions of going before Congress to ask for a declaration of war [...] He gave notice that Russian communism is regarded as an enemy which will be resisted wherever it is encountered and that, if he has his way, the United States will go out of its way to seek encounters [...] The result will be, inevitably, the war [...] The declaration of implacable

hostility between this country and Russia is one which cannot be tempered or withdrawn” (Fleming, 1961: 454).

On his turn, the very well known columnist, Walter Lippmann, ask, in an article published in *New York Herald Tribune*, on March 15, 1947, if the President launched a crusade. He write that the terms used by Truman in his Address “when are pronounced by the head of state, in a period of intense crisis and passionate confusions, are imprudent. The declarations of a powerful Government must be clear and exactly, otherwise may be taken as threatening and promising more than could do [...] A vague global policy, which sound as a alarm bell of a new crusade, has no limits. It cannot be controlled. Their effects cannot be anticipated” (A. M. A. E., fond 71/1946 – 1947, Turcia, Relații cu Statele Unite ale Americii). Following this line of argumentation, Lippmann warn that “heated generalities, which we loved so much when primary responsibility, for the world, wasn’t ours, aren’t for us anymore”(A. M. A. E., fond 71/1946 – 1947, Turcia, Relații cu Statele Unite ale Americii). In Lippmann view, the most serious shortcoming of the Presidential Address was the way in which U. N. was treated; U. S. action, through its unilateralism “seems to cut a hole in the Charter” (Fleming, 1961: 450). Lippmann favored applying military power in Dardanelles but only for the purpose of securing a treaty neutralizing the Straits, establishing of borders and distribution of oil concessions, which must not be reserved to the U. S. monopoly (Fleming, 1961: 451).

Anyhow, the great majority of the press backed up the new program warning, in the same time, that alternative would be dangerous. According to *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, from March 14th, “Truman had committed the honor and prestige of the United States. There is no turning back” (Fleming, 1961: 456).

The debate over the new foreign policy program get some contributions (quite critical, sometimes) from the private circles. James P. Warburg, banker and former deputy manager to the Office of War Information questioned the new initiative: “what is so urgent that we must act alone, without consultation, without knowing how far our first step will carry us and in such a way as to undermine the very structure of peace, which we have struggled so hard to erect?” He labeled *Truman Doctrine* as “the lineal descendent of our policy of expediency toward Franco, Pétain, Badoglio and King George of Greece” and ask whether the obligation to combat totalitarian regimes extended to Spain, Portugal and Argentina too (Fleming, 1961: 453).

Another example of such point of view was offered by a letter from Professor Gilbert Macbeth, published in *New York Times*, on April 20th. In this article it was underlined that, from the perspective of democratic principles, a Communist regime was not more distasteful than any other highly undemocratic system. If “we intended consistently to fight communism, we would have to withdraw from United Nations or turn it into an anti – Soviet organization” (Fleming, 1961: 453).

The words of U. S. President aroused, of course, reactions from those two countries. Referring only to those from Turkey, we must mention the interview which Prime Minister Recep Peker gave it to the *Associated Press* and *New York Times* correspondents, on March 13th. The head of Turkish Government valued the great importance of the Truman Address, in the whole context of Greece situation and Turkish major difficulties provoked by the diverting of half of the country budget to the Army necessities. In the same time, Prime Minister underlined the readiness “of the whole Turkish nation to save honor, rights and country frontiers” (A. M. A. E, fond 71/1946 - 1947, Turcia, Relații cu Statele Unite ale Americii)

At the beginning of following month, Turkish Prime Minister showed more firmly, in a declaration in which call the tendentious rumors which says that “Turkish independence

would be hampered by the United States aid” as “having goals contrary to the real Turkish intentions” (A. M. A. E, fond 71/1946 - 1947, Turcia, Relații cu Statele Unite ale Americii).

On the other hand, as *France Press* related, there was, in Turkey, more reserved opinions. According to above mentioned agency, “the Turkish observers noticed that, probably, the need for an immediate help regard mostly Greece than Turkey. In present country situation, there are no apparent signs leading to an imminent threat against this country” (A. M. A. E., fond 71/1946 – 1947, Turcia, Relații cu Statele Unite ale Americii). Moreover, “the situation at the eastern borders of Turkey – from what is known here – is calm and, from the Bulgarian part, doesn’t seem that Soviet Union tried to take, during last period, military measures. The informations referring troops mobilization are pure inventions [...] You don’t have the impression that political and, especially, military situation seriously damaged, since the time of Russian claims, formulated last summer, regarding the Straits” (A. M. A. E., fond 71/1946 – 1947, Turcia, Relații cu Statele Unite ale Americii).

On its turn, the Soviet press dedicated large commentaries to the Presidential Address from March 12th. In an article published in *Izvestia*, titled *Doomed to failure* it was rejected U. S. allegations, according which Soviet Union threatened Turkey: “no one and nothing threaten, actually, Turkey’s integrity. The purpose of this assistance is to bring Turkey under United States control” (Lincoln, 1968: 21). *Truman Doctrine* was seen as “a smoke curtain for expansion” (Rubinstein, 1985: 58). In the same month, *Literaturnaia Gazeta* (quoted by *New York Times*) remembered the supposed culpability of Turkey in the war. It was stated that Turkey Government take into consideration joining to Axis, if Stalingrad fall (Sheehy, 1992: 88).

An entire anti – Soviet policy was “repudiated”, as in an article published by *Izvestia*, in May 6th, 1947. Under the headline *Letters from Ankara*, signed by someone called himself “A. Anatolyev” it was pointed: “[...] with weeks before Truman stated <<help>> for Greece and Turkey, the Governmental journal, *Ulus*, came with an offer for establishing a <<security zone>> which spread from Iran, through Turkey and Balkans, toward Central Europe. The goal of this proposal is absolute clear. Through this, the idea of a <<cordonne sanitaire>> against Soviets are revived” (Ulunyan, 1999: 6). In the same time, in *Pravda* it was emphasized that the new American initiative means “a new encroachment in other states affairs” (*Histoire de la Politique Extérieure de l’ U. R. S. S.*, 1971 – 1974: 208). This kind of allegations was resumed and widened, in analytic reports destined to those members of *Politbureau*, charged with foreign policy problems.

V. Is the *Truman Doctrine* a turning point?

This initiative was an important moment in U. S. foreign policy making process. It was a major departure from the prewar isolationist stand and from the Grand Alliance concept, which was forged in Second World War II. For Cold War historian, John Lewis Gaddis, the importance of the moment result from the *way* in which policy was formulated, not from the actual decisions that were take it. For the first time, in recent memory, “the State Department had actually done something, quickly, efficiently and decisively. This was the real revolution of 1947 – and the only one” (Gaddis, 1974: 390).

Despite of the Gaddis opinion, we may consider *Truman Doctrine* as a milestone in U. S. foreign policy. A universal and idealist vision, totally opposed to the old balance of power, was adopted by Washington policy – makers. U. S. became attached to a global mission. President Truman himself considered that “inactions, withdraw, <<Fortress Europe>>, cannot have, as result, anything else than giving up to Russia large areas of the world, who are forbidden to her in the present day. The time has come to align United States, firmly, on the

side and at the leadership of the free world” (Truman, 1965: 125). Moreover, the President carefully made, on April 6th, a historical analogy with recent past: “we know how the fire starts. We have seen it before – aggression by the strong against the weak, openly by the use of armed force and secretly by infiltration. And we know how it ends” (Fleming, 1961: 458). More conclusive, Henry L. Stimson (former Secretary of War between 1940-1945) stated, in *Foreign Affairs*, at short time after Kennan *Source of Soviet Conduct*: “foreign affairs are, now, our most intimate domestic concern. All people, good or bad, are now our neighbors” (Stimson, 1947: 7).

Finally, the U. S. public reaction, regarding *Truman Doctrine*, was very well described by the same George F. Kennan, and we quote a very elaborate and revealing opinion of his, in full length: “in many occasions, both before and after this Greek – Turkish episode, I have been struck by the congenital aversion of Americans to taking specific decisions, on specific problems, and by their persistent urge to seek universal formulae or doctrines in which to clothe and justify particular actions. We obviously dislike to discriminate. We like to find some general governing norm to which, in each instance, appeal can be taken so that individual decisions may be made not on their particular merits but automatically, depending on whether the circumstances do or do not seem to fit the norm. We like, by the same token, to attribute a universal significance to decisions we already found it necessary, for limited and parochial reasons, to take. It was not enough for us, when circumstances forced us into World War I to hold in view the specific reasons for our entry: our war effort had to be clothed in the form of an effort to make the world nothing less than <<safe for democracy>>. It was not enough for us, in World War II, that the Japanese attacked us at Pearl Harbour and that both Japanese and German Governments declared war on us; we didn’t feel comfortably until we had wrapped our military effort in the wholly universalistic – and largely meaningless – generalities of the Atlantic Charter. Something of this same compulsion became apparent in the postwar period, in the tendency of many Americans to divide the world, neatly, into *communist* and *free world* components, to avoid recognition of specific differences among countries and to search for general formulae to govern our relations with the one or the other” (Kennan, 1967: 322 - 323).

We could easily remark that the new U. S. initiative was intensely debated, in the official circles and public opinion circles. The aid program launched by President Truman doesn’t rally, without some critics, all the Executive structures and the press. Some voices could be heard, warning that the new initiative is more than a foreign aid and could easily produced serious damages in the new geopolitical context.

In the same time, the American press raised some questions about *Truman Doctrine* but, generally speaking, the commentaries were favorable. Obvious, this was not the case for Soviet “press” which, following Government orders, condemned *Truman Doctrine* as a hegemonic gesture. Of course, neither United States internal critics nor Soviet Union reactions doesn’t alter the new program.

We considered interesting to observe this process of applauding and opposing U. S. foreign policy initiative. Ultimately, this was the first great departure, from the prewar isolationism and from the very intense tendency to “withdraw from Europe”, after hostilities ceased. It was this particular feature that provoked those debates, which we try to illustrate in the rows above. The importance of the moment, and the specific way in which the decision was taken (as a result of a team work), the free environment in which the press spread its opinions, made more attractive the whole debate around *Truman Doctrine*.

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