

Truman Doctrine

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Truman delivering the Truman Doctrine on [March 12, 1947](#). Photo courtesy of the Truman Presidential Library and Museum.

The **Truman Doctrine** was a [United States](#) foreign policy announced by President [Harry S. Truman](#) on the [12 March 1947](#) that the U.S. would support [Greece](#) and [Turkey](#) with military and economic aid to prevent their falling into the Soviet orbit. The Doctrine shifted [American foreign policy](#) towards the [Soviet Union](#) from [détente](#) to, as [George F. Kennan](#) phrased it, a policy of [containment](#). It is often cited by historians as the start of the [Cold War](#).

History

The decision, supported by Senator [Arthur H. Vandenberg](#) and the Republicans who controlled Congress, came after the British urgently informed Washington that it was no longer able to support the Greek government's efforts to fight its civil war against Communist insurgents. Aid was given to Turkey because of the historic tensions between Greece and Turkey. It was an early response to aggression by the [Soviet Union](#) in [Europe](#) and the Middle East, illustrated through the [communist](#) movements in [Iran](#), [Turkey](#) and [Greece](#). The Truman Doctrine was the first in a succession of containment moves by the [United States](#), followed by economic restoration of Western Europe through the [The Marshall Plan](#) and military containment by the creation of [NATO](#) in 1949. In [U.S. President Harry S. Truman](#)'s words, it became "the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures."

President Truman made the proclamation in an address to the [U.S. Congress](#) on [March 12, 1947](#) amid the crisis of the [Greek Civil War \(1946-1949\)](#). Truman insisted that if Greece and Turkey did not receive the aid that they needed, they would inevitably fall to communism with consequences throughout the region.

Truman signed the act into law on [May 22](#), 1947 which granted \$400 million in military and economic aid to Turkey and Greece. It should be noted however that this American aid was in many ways a replacement for British aid which the British were no longer financially in a position to give. The policy of containment and opposition to communists in Greece for

example was carried out by the British before 1947 in many of the same ways it was carried out afterward by the Americans.

The doctrine also had consequences elsewhere in Europe. Governments in Western Europe with powerful communist movements such as Italy and France were given a variety of assistance and encouraged to keep communist groups out of governments. In some respects, these moves were in response to moves made by the Soviet Union to purge opposition groups in Eastern Europe out of existence.

In 1950, Truman signed [NSC-68](#) which shifted foreign policy from passive to active containment. The document differed from George F. Kennan's original notion of containment outlined in his "X" article, containing much harsher anti-communist rhetoric. NSC-68 explicitly stated that the Communists planned for world domination.

The Truman Doctrine also contributed to America's first involvements in the [Vietnam War](#). Starting shortly after the outbreak of the Korean war, Truman attempted to aid [France](#)'s bid to hold onto its Vietnamese colonies. The United States supplied French forces with equipment and military advisors in order to combat [Ho Chi Minh](#) and anti-colonial communist revolutionaries.

Metaphor

The "Truman Doctrine" has become a metaphor for emergency aid to keep a nation independent. Truman used disease imagery not only to communicate a sense of impending disaster in the spread of communism but also to create a "rhetorical vision" of containing it by extending a protective shield around noncommunist countries throughout the world. It echoed the "quarantine the aggressor" policy Franklin Roosevelt proposed in 1937. The medical metaphor extended beyond the immediate aims of the Truman Doctrine in that the imagery combined with fire and flood imagery evocative of disaster provided the United States with an easy transition to direct military confrontation in later years with communist forces in Korea and Vietnam. By presenting ideological differences in life or death terms, Truman's rhetoric increased the nation's feelings of insecurity and constrained future foreign policy decisions [Ivie 1999]

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