The Enduring Significance of the Truman Doctrine

August 1, 2017

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Abstract: *The Truman Doctrine is seventy years old, which means it could easily be considered an artifact of history. In the age of Donald J. Trump, one might reasonably ask, what use is there for a doctrine that set forth the grand strategy of containment? Regardless of the Cold War, the doctrine's essential pieces—applying a combination of political, economic, and military strength; building regional and bilateral alliances based on collective defense; cultivating existing liberal democracies and future liberal democratic regimes; containing totalitarianism and promoting its demise; and fostering an American-built-and-led liberal world order—are still being or should be used. At the present, critical time when national security threats issue from revisionist great powers, lesser-yet-still-hostile state and non-state actors, and WMDs and cutting-edge technologies in the hands of all these entities, it is important to understand not only the Truman Doctrine's origins but also the reasons that the fundamental insights of this grand strategy should still inform U.S. foreign policy.*



On March 12, 1947 President Harry Truman gave a speech that outlined his ideas for containing communism in the world.

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doi: 10.1016/j.orbis.2017.08.001

The Truman Doctrine, first articulated in 1947, was rooted in a myriad of factors, including: the Cold War and the threat from Soviet communist totalitarianism, the geopolitical upheaval from World War II, economics, the decline of Great Britain as a great power, the U.S. rise as a new kind of superpower, and the welfare of Western civilization. For Harry Truman, the president who understood these issues, the United States was the only nation-state at the end of World War II and the dawn of the Cold War with the power, ability, and resolve to forge a new, necessary foreign policy. This policy would need to protect the national security of America and its allies, defend existing and potential liberal democratic governments, contain communist totalitarianism, and provide the best prospects in the long term for an enduring global peace.

"Great responsibilities have been placed upon us by the swift movement of events," said President Truman on March 12, 1947. These words, referring to the disintegrating situation in the Near East and the inability of Great Britain to safeguard the region's security, came toward the end of what was officially titled "Truman's Special Message to the Congress on Greece and Turkey." Within days, the speech was referred to as the Truman Doctrine. This doctrine was unprecedented on several levels of U.S. grand strategy and foreign policy. "I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures," as Truman himself put it. "I believe that we must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own ways."[1]

The Truman Doctrine was an unprecedented guarantee by the United States. Outside the boundaries of hot war, the United States intended to aid politically, economically, and strategically two threatened countries in a region that was not in its hemisphere. After his experiences with Europe and Iran, Truman also knew that the new strategy of containment would not end with Greece and Turkey. "I am fully aware of the broad implications involved if the United States extends assistance to Greece and Turkey," he explained, "and I shall discuss these implications with you at this time."[2] To his cabinet members a week before the speech, he disclosed "that he was faced with a decision more serious than had ever confronted any President."[3]

Iran served as prelude to Greece and Turkey and was central to the development of the Truman Doctrine. The series of crises in Iran in 1945 and 1946 was, in fact, a case study of Soviet intentions, capabilities, and goals. For over a year and a half, Moscow violated Allied wartime agreements, ran propaganda campaigns, and exploited its occupation of territory in order to gain control of the government in Tehran. The Soviets demanded oil concessions and supported Kurdish and Azerbaijani separatist movements in northern Iran. The Tudeh communist party, which became an instrument of Soviet policy by 1944, eventually dominated Iran. In

[1] "Special Message to the Congress on Greece and Turkey: The Truman Doctrine," March 12, 1947, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Harry S. Truman—Containing the Public Messages, Speeches, and Statements of the President, 1947* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office: 1963), pp. 180 and. 178-179.
[2] Truman, *Public Papers, 1947*, p. 178.
[3] Walter Millis, ed., *The Forrestal Diaries* (New York: Viking Press, 1951), pp. 250-51.

March 1946, the USSR sent 200 tanks into Tabriz in northern Iran. Over the next two months, the United States and United Nations forced the Soviets to withdraw their troops from the north, but this was not a foregone conclusion and the crisis was not resolved fully until the end of the year.

During and after World War II, the Soviets constantly sought to annex parts of eastern Turkey and to take control of the Turkish Straits. Through media outlets and covert means, they attacked the U.S. and British governments, attempted to oust various Turkish leaders, supported irredentist claims from Armenian and Georgian minorities, and threatened troop movements. In August 1946, Moscow issued a note to Turkey's foreign ministry on the Turkish Straits, demanding that a "new regime" govern the straits by "Black Sea powers" under the joint control of the USSR and Turkey. In effect, the Soviet note picked up where the Kremlin had left off in claiming the Turkish Straits through the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Truman and his advisors received reports that the Soviet Union would establish air and naval bases as it co-opted Turkey through the "new regime." Washington believed the USSR would then seek control over Greece and the rest of the Near and Middle East.[4] Truman said it was "perfectly clear" that the United States should take a firm position and "might as well find out whether the Russians were bent on world conquest now as in five or ten years."[5] While the U.S. response to Soviet aggression included working through the United Nations, Truman expected that the United States would have to do more on its own. He ordered a naval task force to the Mediterranean Sea.

How significantly the Kremlin backed policies of the three countries bordering northern Greece was unclear at the time, but the Truman administration saw the Soviet media propaganda campaign against Greece, as well as against British and U.S. policies toward Greece. The United States also recognized during and after World War II that Moscow was, at minimum, indirectly supporting Albania, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria in their efforts to communize Greek affairs. Wartime occupation promoted splits along ethnic, ideological, and class lines, and the communists exploited these schisms as the Greek people suffered from economic deprivations and government corruption. In 1946, the Soviets demanded a base for their merchant fleet in the Dodecanese islands, but they dropped the demand in June. Most likely, they expected Greece to fall into their orbit in the near future.[6] The birthplace of world democracy was imperiled.

Truman, from his lifelong study of the Bible, world history, and geography, and with thwarted Soviet designs in Iran a very recent memory, viewed Greece and Turkey as the gateway between West and East. This gateway meant that the two

[4] Howard Jones, *"A New Kind of War": America's Global Strategy and the Truman Doctrine in Greece* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 8.
[5] Millis, *The Forrestal Diaries*, p. 192.
[6] One of the best works on the Truman Doctrine (which the author has drawn on in this section) remains Bruce R. Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East: Great Power Conflict and Diplomacy in Iran, Turkey, and Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980; new epilogue, 1994). Also see Truman, *Public Papers, 1947*, p. 177.

countries were connected to Europe, to the Middle East and beyond to Asia. Obviously for the U.S. President, America's strategic interests were also threatened. If the United States failed to aid Greece and Turkey "in this fateful hour, the effect will be far reaching to the West as well as to the East." For Truman, the last obstacles to Soviet domination of the Balkans and the eastern Mediterranean would be removed, which would threaten not only these regions, but also the Middle East, the Suez Canal, and Western Europe.[7]

Although his doctrine was first applied to Greece and Turkey, Truman stressed the novel international position for the United States. Given the absence of an effective United Nations and the decline of British power, the United States was the only nation capable of defending freedom and establishing peace. "This is no more than a frank recognition that totalitarian regimes imposed upon free peoples, by direct or indirect aggression, undermine the foundations of international peace and hence the security of the United States," he said. Truman underscored that a primary objective was to create conditions in which the United States and other nations worked out "a way of life free from coercion." While no government was perfect, he added, one of the chief virtues of a democracy "is that its defects are always visible and under democratic processes can be pointed out and corrected."[8] The Truman Doctrine—in other words, the strategy of containment, which provided the new grounding for U.S. foreign policy in the circumstances of the Cold War—could protect and promote democratic governments by defending the conditions necessary for freedom.

The administration implemented the Truman Doctrine with impressive swiftness. Truman and his top advisors had known that the United States would need to present a new policy quickly, since the British had been saying for months that they could no longer be caretakers of the Middle East, but they could not lay the groundwork with Congress in advance. The British government sent its formal message to Washington in February 1947, as the communists in Yugoslavia, Albania, and Bulgaria continued to aid the Greek communist-led rebels in their civil war against the royalists and anti-communists. Greece's economy—which was still devastated by the effects of the Nazi occupation during the war—was plagued by budget deficits, inflation, and black marketeering. Within three weeks, U.S. policy was formulated and announced. By May 22, 1947, the Greek-Turkish aid program was enacted into law.

The degree of bipartisan cooperation and agreement set the standard in postwar U.S. foreign policy. Through the hard work of key figures in the White House and on Capitol Hill, the bill passed both houses of Congress by votes of approximately three to one. Truman took the lead as president, and he depended on Republican allies in a GOP-majority Congress to secure passage. Senator Arthur Vandenberg of Michigan, who was chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, was indispensable in guiding the Truman Doctrine through the Senate in April 1947. Indeed, the apogee of executive-legislative cooperation and bipartisanship in the modern era occurred during two short years in 1947-1948, with

[7] Truman, *Public Papers, 1947*, p. 179.
[8] Truman, *Public Papers, 1947*, pp. 177-178.

passage of the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and the Vandenberg Resolution. And these actions paved the way for the North Atlantic Treaty (and, soon after, for NATO). The amount of money, and purpose for appropriating it, in so-called peacetime was also unprecedented. Although the more than $13 billion of the Marshall Plan would soon far surpass the Truman Doctrine's $400 million outlay, Truman Doctrine funds went to only two countries: Greece ($300 million) and Turkey ($100 million). Truman referred to Greek-Turkish aid as an "investment in world freedom and world peace" that would stave off totalitarian regimes.[9]

Truman was central to the doctrine that carries his name. Former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill's March 1946 iron curtain address, government documents such as the 1946 Clifford-Elsey memorandum, and U.S. diplomatic and strategic actions on Iran, Venezia Giulia and Trieste, the Turkish Straits, Germany, and waterway rights to the Danube were all important. But the Truman Doctrine publicly presented Truman's understanding of the Cold War and institutionalized the containment strategy. At the heart of Truman's understanding of international politics was the distinction between liberal democracy and communist totalitarianism. "One way of life is based upon the will of the majority, and is distinguished by free institutions, representative government, free elections, guarantees of individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from political oppression," he said in the Truman Doctrine speech. "The second way of life is based upon the will of a minority forcibly imposed upon the majority. It relies upon terror and oppression, a controlled press and radio, fixed elections, and the suppression of personal freedoms."[10]

Truman's critics expressed strong disagreement that adumbrates current views along the spectrum from progressive to realist. From the left, his former secretary of commerce, former vice president to Franklin Roosevelt, and editor of the *New Republic*, Henry A. Wallace, immediately sent a telegram to Truman: "The mode of today's speech was tantamount to a declaration of war."[11] In the following months, Wallace detailed a progressive critique, in which he reproached the president for supporting undemocratic governments in Greece and Turkey, supplying predominantly military aid, and, perhaps, fatally damaging the United Nations. Journalist Walter Lippmann echoed Wallace that Truman's approach "would take us to the destruction of the UN." Lippmann, like Wallace, thought that the Truman Doctrine would entangle the United Nations in the U.S.-Soviet conflict at a time when the international organization needed the protection of its member states—especially the great powers. "The Truman Doctrine," Lippmann wrote, "treats those who are supposed to benefit by it as dependencies of the United States, as instruments of the American policy for 'containing' Russia."[12] Although he favored

[9] Truman, *Public Papers, 1947*, p. 180.
[10] Truman, *Public Papers, 1947*, p. 178.
[11] Wallace telegram to Truman, White House Messages, Traffic, March 12, 1947, Classified File, Box 3, Robert L. Dennison Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
[12] Walter Lippmann, *The Cold War: A Study in U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1947), pp. 58, 54.

limited aid to Greece and Turkey on strategic grounds, he censured the globalism of the "so-called Truman Doctrine."[13]

From within Truman's own administration, diplomat George Kennan—credited with coining the term containment and too often credited with being its architect—objected to both the tone and content of the Truman Doctrine. At the time, lecturing at the National War College, Kennan conceded that Greece would succumb to communism and that the United States might act in a limited way to take over the British role. But he thought the communists, Moscow and Eastern Europe were ill equipped to govern Greece. He argued that the West could then exploit communist difficulties. Diminishing the strategic significance that he had granted Turkey in his 1946 Long Telegram, Kennan said American aid should go only to Greece, which, by proximity, would bolster Turkey's stability.[14] Along with Lippmann and other realists, Kennan found Truman guilty of globalizing the Cold War, and he faulted Truman for putting forth a new, misguided grand strategy. Yet, despite their many differences, both progressives and realists deprecated the Truman Doctrine as too much: militaristic, universalistic, ideologically provocative, destructive, and aggressive. They claimed that Truman and the United States were causing or aggravating, rather than responding to, the Cold War.

Because of Cold War circumstances, Truman believed that it was only prudent to overhaul U.S. foreign policy. He had denounced Soviet violations of World War II agreements with respect to Poland, Germany, and the rest of Eastern and Central Europe. But now he saw a case where the Red Army did not already occupy the countries in jeopardy. The circumstances were such that American involvement would draw a line to stop the spread of communism and perhaps plant seeds for its eventual demise. Truman defended his position in April 1947 correspondence with Eleanor Roosevelt, who, although a member of the U.S. delegation to the United Nations at the president's special request, was highly critical of the new doctrine. To Mrs. Roosevelt's charge that Greece and Turkey should not be helped because they were not fully democratic, Truman responded: "if the Greek-Turkish land bridge between the continents is one point at which our democratic forces can stop the advance of Communism that has flowed steadily through the Baltic countries, Poland, Yugoslavia, Rumania, Bulgaria, to some extent Hungary, then this is the place to do it, regardless of whether or not the terrain is good." Truman told Mrs. Roosevelt that he had thought carefully before proposing the Truman Doctrine and that as, "the issues have developed here and abroad," he had a "growing feeling of certainty in the rightness of our step." To her concerns that he was forsaking liberalism in domestic and foreign policy, he contended that: "the American way of life cannot survive unless other peoples who want to adopt that

[13] Lippmann to Robert Waldo Ruhl, June 17, 1947, in John Morton Blum, ed., *Public Philosopher: Selected Letters of Walter Lippmann* (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1985), p. 496.
[14] George F. Kennan, *Memoirs, 1925-1950* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1967), pp. 315-17.

pattern of life throughout the world can do so without fear and in the hope of success."[15]



Eleanor Roosevelt speaking at the United Nations in July 1947.

Many thought that a system-shattering war could never happen again. Truman, however, having studied history and biography, fought during World War I, learned the tough lessons of the interwar period, and assumed the presidency in World War II, had no such illusions. He wanted peace. But he knew that the United States needed to be strong in order to deter war or, if necessary, win a war. He hoped world politics would return to at least the prewar level of "normal" after World War II, but he quickly understood that this dream would not be realized. For Truman, real peace would not be possible if the United States did not fight the Cold War; real peace would not be possible if the Soviets defined the terms.

Truman recognized that the United States and the free world faced a new type of war in the Cold War conflict. Radical ideology had been a factor in previous wars, notably in the French Revolution and in World War II. In some ways, the Soviets made these previous ideologies seem easier to confront. The Soviets engaged

[15] Eleanor Roosevelt to Truman, April 17, 1947, and Truman to Mrs. Roosevelt, May 7, 1947, Correspondence between President Truman and Eleanor Roosevelt, 1947, Documents, Harry S. Truman Library, https://trumanlibrary.org/eleanor/1947.html.

in cold war: they avoided head-to-head armed conflict whenever possible, but they still employed tactics of force, occupation, manipulation, and terror. They exploited their status as an ally in World War II for as long as possible. If their army occupied territory, they kept it. If they could stay or easily move into territory, they would. If they could influence the politics of countries outside their expanding empire through neighboring states' communist parties or local communist parties as well as agents and other covert means, they did. If an occasion called for more finesse, they employed sophisticated propaganda and wooed socialists, liberals, and sympathetic public intellectuals. They used most of these latter tools in Greece, France, and Italy after the war.

For Truman, his doctrine was the cornerstone of postwar U.S. foreign policy. And this cornerstone made subsequent building blocks of the containment strategy—such as the Marshall Plan, NATO, the expansion of the Voice of America and the establishment of Radio Free Europe, and NSC 68—both feasible and solid. Although the Cold War's residue persists in the five communist states left in the world, the end of the conflict is typically marked at Christmastime 1991, with the collapse of the Soviet Union. But there are key insights from the Truman Doctrine that should be part of the substance of current thinking about U.S. grand strategy and foreign policy.

Insights from the Truman Doctrine

America needs to express and to explain its principles to its citizens and to the world. U.S. foreign policy is different from either that of a conventional great-power state or a totalitarian or authoritarian state. In the Truman Doctrine, the president put forth timeless organizing principles about freedom and the nature of the regime, and second-tier yet still essential policy principles. These principles include the need to help those fighting to maintain or to secure their freedom while the margin for action is open. The majority of Americans would have been happy to return and stay home after World War II, but the Cold War made that impossible. Truman's doctrine offered an approach for the modern, postwar world that is grounded in America's enduring principles.

From the start, the regime distinction is pivotal to—and distinctive about—U.S. foreign policy. Long before World War II and the Cold War, American statesmen understood the regime distinction. While many Americans initially cheered the French Revolution, over time they discerned that the French were headed in a perilous direction and that the Reign of Terror uncorked a dangerous, disordered ideology rather than a regime based on consent of the governed. Like the Founders, Truman respected sovereignty and understood that the rightly ordered regime ultimately gave legitimacy to a state. In his view, the Soviet state was illegitimate, because it was totalitarian, repressed its peoples at home, and aimed to spread both its tyrannical ideology and its strategic reach. At a time when the president and a growing number of experts seem to argue that regime type does not matter, Truman's emphasis needs revisiting.

The national interest needs to be properly understood. The American national interest is based on self-interest. But it is an enlightened interest, guided by

justice, and thus rooted in virtue. This point is meant in a practical, not idealist, way. In our modern, small world, the United States helps out in conventional humanitarian ways—such as after an earthquake or a tsunami on another continent, or rescuing and feeding children and other civilians displaced by war or terrorism. But when the U.S. government talks about deploying its combined strength for some length of time and at great cost, the majority of Americans want the action to be clearly in the national interest even as it helps those in direct danger. Truman offers a model of upholding the national interest without getting bogged down in abstract language. Within the context of the international politics of his day, he identified and communicated the immediate and long-term dangers if the communists controlled Greece and Turkey and, hence, the gateway between East and West. He also conveyed that the new policy was both essential and good for Americans and those they were aiming to aid.

In the standard levels of criteria for the national interest—what Americans are willing to pay for, what they are willing to pay and kill for, and what they are willing to pay, kill, and die for—Truman's doctrine provides a vehicle to assess the relationship between means and ends and to help distinguish peripheral, important, and vital interests. In the specific cases of Greece and Turkey, there was an opportunity to suppress a political and ideological flash point and to pay for what was clearly both vital and important to the national interest. If the United States had done nothing at the critical time, then the costs would have been much higher in the future: Americans would likely have been called upon either to fight directly and perhaps die on behalf of these countries or to let Greece and Turkey fall behind the iron curtain. The Truman Doctrine achieved solid political and strategic gains at the time and prevented higher costs in the future. In the current evaluation of challenges in both Asia and Eastern Europe, the U.S. government would benefit from reflecting on Truman's judgment.

Freedom, order, and justice are all important, but freedom is the antecedent to order and to justice—properly understood. In Truman's worldview, freedom must precede order, as freedom provides the first and deepest roots for peace. In grounding the meaning of the Cold War in freedom, free peoples, and regime distinctions, Truman remade liberal internationalism on terms that are different from either of his great modern-era predecessors, Franklin Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, and are superior to today's versions. He did not fall into the realist trap of saying that stability is supreme in international politics. Grasping the nature of World War II and the Cold War, Truman did not want a stable order that favored totalitarians such as Nazis or communists, who would not respect either freedom or justice. FDR's spheres of influence would have accepted this sort of order for the postwar world. Nor did Truman go out marching for justice first, because he knew it could be circumvented too easily without a proper understanding of freedom. Wilson expected a broadly democratic understanding of justice to dominate after the Great War, but Truman recognized after World War II that justice could easily be trod upon or twisted by its opponents, who would even use an institution like the United Nations to advance totalitarian ends.

In the modern world, Pax Americana has served as a bulwark against a system-shattering war and as a means for strengthening liberal democracy and open markets. Yet, for different reasons, realists and liberals like to gloss over the Truman Doctrine. Bretton Woods and the Marshall Plan, they say, are really where and how the American-built-and-led liberal world order began. They forget or want to dismiss that Pax Americana has been premised on all types of strength—military included, and often first. There is no Pax Americana without the Truman Doctrine. Pax Americana did not build and has not sustained itself solely through economic or political institutions. American strength is best understood and used in a multi-faceted way. The Truman Doctrine was about military and economic aid, to be sure, but it was just as much political and even technical aid. Truman did not define strength narrowly, and he started with what he viewed as an ethical base that informed all aspects of strength. Peace through strength is most associated with Ronald Reagan's presidency, but Truman set down its deepest roots early in the Cold War. As China continues to rise in power and aims to reshape the world order, and other serious threats abound as varied as North Korea, jihadist terrorism, and cyberwarfare, most experts today refer to American primacy rather than Pax Americana. In a world of diversifying power and challenges, Truman's point about multi-faceted strength is as critical as, or even more critical than, during the Cold War.

Alliances are vital. Greece and Turkey are some of the original hub and spoke connections of the postwar era, in which these countries were independently bound with the United States. Along with U.S. partnerships with Japan and South Korea, these bilateral relationships are part of a larger alliance system that shows the ingenuity of the containment strategy for the Cold War and beyond. Based in collective defense, the Rio Pact and the Brussels Treaty—along with Senator Arthur Vandenberg—paved the way for NATO in specific regards, but they in turn were built on Greek and Turkish aid. The American alliance system has worked for 70 years, precisely because it is not a forced fit for all. The United States has seen the merit in *collective defense* over *collective security* and pursued it through formal and informal alliances, bilateral and regional arrangements, and the intersection of them all. Greece and Turkey are also notable examples because these countries fall in more than one category, as they went on to become members of NATO in 1952. Moreover, they helped confirm the direction of ongoing U.S. policies toward Japan and West Germany. It should go without saying that the various types of Truman Doctrine alliances, and their flexibility, should remain integral to U.S. foreign policy.

Collective defense typically has been arranged regionally. Through NATO, the West expanded the meaning of collective defense to include the regime distinction. The alliance was founded to oppose offensive actions on the part of a Soviet system that was rooted in Marxism-Leninism; NATO's members were united against a threat from an aggressive communist empire, not from an assertive generic hegemon. Since the Cold War, the alliance has been stretched at times but remains resilient. In today's world, NATO is as needed as ever in its original region. While not communist, Russia has all the markers of an authoritarian state, through its repression at home and its aggression militarily, politically, economically (including its natural resources), and technologically (especially through cyberwarfare). Russian

President Vladimir Putin famously referred to the collapse of the USSR as the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the [twentieth] century" and aims to reverse the Soviet-Russian losses of 1989 through 1991.[16] The Putin regime is not only authoritarian, but also nationalist, revisionist, and opportunistically expansionist. In February 2017, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov called for a "post-West world order," in which NATO is obsolete and might makes right. Some of Russia's neighbors already have had to limit or otherwise compromise their sovereignty within Moscow's sphere of influence. But given President Trump's mixed messages about the Western alliance in Europe on his first major trip abroad and German Chancellor Angela Merkel's response that the days when Europe could rely on others is "over to a certain extent" and that it "really must take our fate into our own hands," collective defense is the part of Truman's doctrine that is currently most at risk.[17] Yet, even though it is no longer the Cold War, collective defense through NATO remains essential.

Presidential doctrines carry weight. More than 100 years passed between the Monroe Doctrine and the Truman Doctrine. After Truman, nearly every Cold War president either announced or was accorded a doctrine. In every case, each is a response to Truman's words and actions. The hallmarks of Truman's doctrine feature: building and acting from situations of strength; harnessing a combination of political, moral, economic, military, and technical muscle; defending existing democracies; cultivating the seeds of future liberal democratic regimes; containing and combating communist totalitarianism; and promoting an American-built-and-led liberal internationalism rooted in liberal democracy as the preferred regime type, regional and bilateral defensive alliances, market capitalism, and international organizations based on human rights. In the post-Cold War era, doctrines have been attributed to Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, and debates continue about Obama and Trump doctrines. While the foe now is not Soviet communism, the Truman Doctrine's other main hallmarks remain compelling: the United States still stands opposed to aggressive totalitarian or authoritarian governments as well as substate or transnational actors of a similar ilk.

Recall that the Truman Doctrine kicked off the golden age of bipartisanship and executive-legislative cooperation. How can this model be applied again? Should it? The second question is, in some ways, easier to answer. Yes, it should, because the United States is a system based on the separation of and shared powers among its branches of government. Although the commander-in-chief is a single executive who must make many decisions on his own, he also needs cooperation from a diverse legislature (especially the Senate) to conduct foreign policy in a republic. In other words, Truman was carrying out grand strategy in a democracy, and the former is informed by the latter in the United States. Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger

[16] Excerpts from Vladimir Putin's State-of-the-Nation Speech, April 25, 2005, https://www.rferl.org/a/1058630.html.
[17] Michael Birnbaum and Rick Noack, "Merkel: Europe Must Go It Alone," *The Washington Post*, May 29, 2017.

are the modern intellectual masters of grand strategy, yet they ultimately forgot or refused to accept that grand strategy cannot be done in America without regard for democracy and the aim of preserving democracy. In order to commence a new grand strategy and Cold War foreign policy, Truman recognized that he needed Congress. From his time in the Senate, he felt this need instinctively, and he also knew it constitutionally and politically.

As for the first question, Truman's approach should serve as a model, which it did not during the last administration and has not, so far, in the current administration. In the last administration, Barack Obama seemed to do much more talking to than talking with those across the aisle in Congress, even though he had served in the Senate. Some will point to the contemporary partisan polarization of American politics as the answer. But polarization never prevents a president from talking with those of his party, as well as those across the aisle. In a time when his party was in the minority and he was still unfavorably compared with FDR, Truman met with leaders of Congress, especially his former Senate colleagues. In addition, he made sure that Secretary of State George Marshall, Under Secretary of State Dean Acheson, Under Secretary of State Robert Lovett, and others were also talking with members and their high-level staffers. Arthur Vandenberg was already moving toward a robust liberal internationalism for the postwar era, but his support of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, as well as his very personal investment in the resolution that bore his name and enabled the North Atlantic Treaty, were reinforced by his walks, informal meetings, and social engagements with White House insiders such as Marshall, Acheson, and Lovett. Truman went on to use intemperate language against the Republicans in the 1948 elections, although he pivoted back after his victory. And regarding foreign policy, he may have regretted the Congress's switch in power to the Democrats as a result of the elections, since members of his own party were not always as anti-communist as Republicans. Not long after, Vandenberg died, and Senator Joseph McCarthy made a name and an "ism" for himself. The golden era was fruitful but brief, even for its creators. Current and future presidents would do well to seek out and befriend foreign policy allies in both parties and aspire to the golden age of bipartisanship in executive-legislative relations.

The Truman Doctrine also displays the advantages of a president's good instincts. Truman was a smart, well-balanced, experienced, and well-read man, who wanted to serve his country more than he wanted to score personal victories. He did not call what he did grand strategy, even though it meets the criteria. He thought that his wide reading in history, biography, and the classics helped him understand human nature and politics. This base informed the political instincts of his statesmanship. Instinct is not meant in the low sense, but in the way that someone is admired for choosing well in the challenging circumstances of his moment. The good statesman may be blessed with a natural capacity or aptitude, but the great statesman does not stop there. Truman, in short, possessed and exercised prudence. Most statesmen—especially democratic statesmen—would want his success rate in grand strategy and foreign policy.

Truman's Grand Strategy

Definitions of grand strategy are legion. Traditionally, grand strategy meant using forms of national (especially military) power to subdue an opponent and win a war; that is, how statesmen think about and carry out the political objectives of war. But reflecting on increasingly complicated intertwinements of war and society in modern times, Edward Mead Earle interpreted grand strategy as "an inherent element of statecraft at all times."[18] Most experts now accept a definition such as that put forth by Hal Brands, which ties grand strategy to war, peace, and mixed conflicts such as the Cold War. According to Brands, grand strategy is "the intellectual architecture that gives form and structure to foreign policy." A grand strategy "is a purposeful and coherent set of ideas about what a nation seeks to accomplish in the world, and how it should go about doing so." At its best, argues Brands, a grand strategy represents an integrated scheme of interests, threats, resources, and policies.[19] By this definition, the Truman Doctrine is thoroughly a grand strategy. Further, the Truman Doctrine is an example of a successful grand strategy. Even allowing for the stalemate in Korea, the Truman Doctrine prevented the loss of South Korea to communism, shielded both Greece and Turkey from direct and indirect communist attacks, firmly shored up Western Europe as part of the free world, contributed to the rehabilitation of Japan and Western Germany as part of that same free world, informed the rationale for the Berlin airlift, made the Marshall Plan possible, and laid the foundations for NATO (arguably, the most successful alliance in history).

Truman aimed for proportionality between means and ends as he developed his grand strategy. His ultimate goal was to support liberal democracy where it already was thriving, prevent the loss of any more countries to communism, keep open the possibility for liberal democratic governments where beleaguered regimes were battling communists, and contain communism, and, where prudent, sow the seeds for its end. But Truman knew that he lacked unlimited means. Aid to Greece and Turkey was targeted and well-timed, as was covert assistance to counter the communists in Italy's 1948 elections. The Marshall Plan prudently offered recovery aid with the expectation of a tangible return for America's investment. The Berlin airlift was a multi-faceted strength response to the Berlin Blockade, in which Truman recognized that the defense of West Berlin was the key to keeping the West free, deterring the communists without a hot war, and showing the East that they could be free one day. Although the United States would take the lead in NATO, the collective defense organization would not only protect each member state but also make them stronger together than the United States could be on its own. The Voice of America was expanded, and Radio Free Europe was established; both offered

[18] Edward Mead Earle, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1943), p. viii.
[19] Hal Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), p. 3.

good value for money spent and risks taken. U.S. action in the Korean War called for and received a drastically increased defense budget. Before then, Truman had husbanded his defense resources as much as possible so that the United States was spending less than World War II (the largest hot war to date) and more than prewar peacetime (since the Cold War was indeed a type of war). The classic image of the ship of state holds. The statesman must still make many important, often life-and-death, decisions in the moment.

The moment now is Donald Trump's, not Harry Truman's. But Trump could learn much from Truman. Coming after Obama rather than FDR, Trump is perhaps at a disadvantage. There was some uncertainty about America's global role and involvement after World War II, but the world is more unsettled now because its primary power, which until recently had also been the stakeholder of a world order defined by regime distinctions, liberal democratic governments, and open markets, retrenched under Obama. Believing his approach corrected what he perceived as George W. Bush's overreach, Obama produced excesses of his own (through a combination of retrenchment and aspirational foreign policies). He left in his wake unsure allies who wonder if the United States remains committed to collective defense and confident adversaries who believe they can overstep with impunity.

Trump has an opportunity. He does not have to aspire to his own doctrine; he can draw on what is essential, even timeless, from the Truman Doctrine. Andrew Jackson, whom Trump has noted others say he most resembles, did not have his own doctrine. Nor is Trump the first president to start his term without much prior background in international politics. In the modern era, Jimmy Carter (even with his Naval Academy education and military service), Clinton, Bush 43, and Obama (despite his cosmopolitan upbringing) come to mind. But like most of them, Trump has broad experience in the world, and he outweighs them all in terms of international business skills. He should understand that America has and must have a primary role in the world, which redounds to U.S. and allied interests, even as he keeps in mind the nationalist, Jacksonian voters who gave him his margin of electoral victory. It is time for Trump to appreciate that the United States needs to promote the national interest rather than America first. The latter did not work in the 1930s and early 1940s, and it is highly unlikely to work today in a world with ever more threats and interconnections. As the Cold War began, Americans were unsure about their part in international politics, and Truman's doctrine prudently set forth purpose and policy. At another critical time when Americans are questioning their position in the world, Donald Trump should consider Harry Truman.

