XI

The Truman Doctrine

MARSHALL assumed that his troubles in the new office would begin with his trip to Moscow in early March, but they came on February 21 with a call from the British Embassy to the State Department. Early that morning, Marshall and General Eisenhower had gone to New York by train to accept, in common with other World War II leaders, honorary degrees from Columbia University. Mrs. Marshall met him in New York and they continued on to Princeton for his first address as Secretary of State at a special convocation on February 22, marking Princeton's bicentennial.[1] Thus he was not in his State Department office on the afternoon of February 21 when someone from the British Embassy phoned that the Ambassador, Lord Inverchapel, had an important *aide-mémoire* to present personally to the Secretary. Under Secretary Acheson suggested that the message be conveyed unofficially to him, so that he would be prepared for discussion with Marshall on his return from Princeton.

The news was unpleasant but not wholly unexpected After six years of war, the liquidation of much of Britain's financial investments abroad, the loosening of imperial ties, the loss of markets in former colonies and elsewhere, and the steady drain on remaining funds for food and raw materials, Great Britain found its financial pressures intolerable. The situation was made worse by President Truman's abrupt suspension of Lend-Lease supplies at the close of the war in Europe, although it was eased when a British loan was authorized in 1946. But British attempts to continue imperial commitments strained the country's economy to such an extent that drastic remedies were necessary in 1947.

Not long before Marshall became Secretary of State, there were intimations that the British could not continue to bolster the governments in Greece and Turkey, but the immediacy of the crisis was not seen until the Embassy's call on that Friday afternoon. When Acheson was told that the messages dealt with the British need to abandon their role in Greece and Turkey, and with suggestions that the United States pick up the burdens, the Under Secretary immediately alerted Loy W. Henderson, Director of the Office of Near East and African Affairs, and other staff members. During the day, Acheson prepared a summary of messages coming in from Athens, to show Marshall. In retrospect he thought, incorrectly, that he had then discussed the problems of a possible crisis in Greece and Turkey with Marshall, who had instructed him to begin studies of the situation.[2]

The specific crisis did not figure in Marshall's February 22 speech, his first public address as Secretary of State. The speechwriter who had drafted a proposed address was unacquainted with Marshall's style and had written a speech full of scholarly allusions, which the writer had deemed appropriate for a leading university. Marshall made numerous excisions and changes, until the speech was almost completely rewritten, and sent the result over to Acheson as something "I scrabbled together." He wanted to know the Under Secretary's reaction.[3]

Speaking again at Princeton a year later, Marshall referred to his earlier speech there as "the first statement leading up to the subject in a speech at Harvard the following June." He was not outlining a plan for economic rehabilitation or a doctrine to assume responsibility for ensuring the strength of democratic government. He was repeating a thought mentioned in his farewell speech at the Pentagon on November 26, 1945, that Americans should learn of their past, of their relations with other powers, and of the new position of the United States in the world. His idea was a plea for the United States to assume the responsibilities of a world power He declared:

> You should fully understand the special position that the United States occupies in the world geographically, financially, militarily, and scientifically, and the implications involved. The development of a sense of responsibility for world order and security, the development of a sense of overwhelming importance of the country's acts, and failures to act in relation to world order and security—these, in my opinion, are great "musts" for your generation [4]

When Marshall came into his office on Monday, Acheson had a summary of reports from Athens and memoranda prepared by the State Department staff for him to read before the British Ambassador formally delivered his messages from London. Inverchapel brought two notes from Foreign Secretary Bevin explaining that, because of the serious economic situation in Great Britain, his country could no longer support the Greek and Turkish governments with economic and military aid. Greece would cost a quarter of a billion dollars for the remainder of 1947 and a smaller but equally important sum would be required for Turkey. Without help, Greek and Turkish independence would not last and all the Middle East would come under Russian control. The British asked whether the United States would be willing to assume the bulk of these burdens.[5]

Marshall asked that his State Department staff make a more detailed study of the situation as soon as possible. Acheson's summary of messages from U S. representatives in Greece had detailed consequences of a failure to support Greece and Turkey. The representatives recommended (1) unification of all Greek parties with the exception of the extreme right and the Communists, (2) domestic reforms in government and tax programs, (3) economic and financial aid, and (4) military aid. These were alarming reminders to Marshall of problems left behind recently in China.

Later that day, Henderson, as chief of the desk concerned with the Near East, presided over a group of State Department representatives, including Bohlen and Kennan. Most of them felt that the United States must assume the British responsibility; first accept it, then determine how to do it. The main dissenter was General James K. Crain, Deputy Chairman of the Policy Committee on Arms and Armaments, who declared that the United States would be compounding Britain's mistaken approach. The United States should withhold aid, while saving our arms for a strategic showdown with the Soviets. We should let the Russians know we would use force, if necessary, to prevent their takeover of Greece and Turkey.[6]

Henderson summarized the various views in a paper that he gave Acheson on February 25. Acheson approved the recommendations and took the paper to Marshall the next day. Later that morning, the two men discussed the situation and what they believed should be done with Secretary of War Patterson and Secretary of the Navy Forrestal, and in the afternoon Marshall and Acheson took all the recommendations to President Truman. Acheson made the presentation, summing up the general recommendation as urging "immediate action to extend all possible aid to Greece and, on a lesser scale, to Turkey." The President accepted in principle the proposal for immediate aid.[7]

The secretaries had agreed that Congress must be fully advised of the problem, the American people apprised of the situation, and all concerned made to realize the global issues involved The next morning, President Truman invited to his office the majority and minority leaders of the Senate, H. Styles Bridges and Alben Barkley; the ranking majority and minority members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Arthur Vandenberg and Thomas Connolly, Speaker of the House, Joseph Martin; House Minority Leader Sam Rayburn; and Charles Eaton and Sol Bloom, ranking majority and minority leaders of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. Marshall opened the meeting by reading the recommendations of his department.

Fourteen years later, Acheson said that Marshall had failed to put his case across, and Joseph Jones had indicated much the same in 1955. Acheson felt that his chief, "most unusually and unhappily, flubbed his opening statement."[8] Perhaps the Secretary read too calmly, but the words he read were frightening: "A crisis of the utmost importance and urgency has arisen in Greece and to some extent in Turkey. This crisis has a direct and intimate relation to the security of the United States." He read the growing warnings from our representatives in Greece of the danger of that country's collapse and possible loss of independence.

Contrary to Jones's belief that "he conveyed the over-all impression that aid should be extended to Greece on the grounds of loyalty and humanitarianism, and to Turkey to strengthen Britain's position in the Middle East," Marshall declared, "Our interest in Greece is by no means restricted to humanitarian or friendly impulses " He warned·

> If Greece should dissolve into civil war it is altogether probable that it would emerge as a communist state under Soviet control. Turkey would be surrounded and the Turkish situation . would in turn become still more critical. Soviet domination might thus extend over the entire Middle East to the borders of India. The effect of this upon Hungary, Austria, Italy and France cannot be overestimated It is not alarmist to say that *we are faced with the first crisis of a series which might extend Soviet domination to Europe, the Middle East and Asia* [Emphasis supplied]

He knew no power other than the United States that could prevent this crisis There was no assurance that even this aid would save this situation, but "the choice is between acting with energy or losing by default." A war of nerves by Russia had kept Turkey in a state of crisis and imposed a heavy strain on her economy. The maintenance of the integrity of Turkey "is essential to the entire independent structure of the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East." They could not permit inaction or delay.

> We are at the point of decision We cannot enter upon the first steps of policy without the assurance and determination to carry it through To do this requires the support of the Congress and certain legislation. I hope this legislation may be obtained with bipartisan support and without protracted controversy. Internal division and delay might gravely imperil the success of the program we are proposing [8]

His statement seems to have made an impression. Truman quoted from it in his memoirs and made no mention of remarks by Acheson; and the editor of the *Vandenberg Papers* speaks only of Marshall's statements. Senator Vandenberg's files show no diary entry regarding the February meeting but include two copies of the Marshall statement. However, in later years, Dean Acheson recalled that Marshall's poor efforts spurred him to ask if it was a private fight or if anyone could get in. Marshall asked the group to hear the Under Secretary. Acheson recalls a dramatic scene "Never have I spoken under such a pressing sense that the issue was up to me alone." His brief summary was in the tone of a lawyer working to sway a skeptical jury. His closing sentence was followed by a short silence, then by a shocked Vandenberg saying to the President that the problem must be presented to the American people as it had been presented that day.[9] The facts presented by Marshall and Acheson had not been different, but, in the words of an old story, about an energetic pulpit pounder, advocate Acheson had supplied "the rousements." Marshall always shied away from rhetoric, yet, some years earlier, his congressional appearances had been just as magnetic. He was now several years older and aware of different factors. Later, after the heat of battle for the Marshall Plan, Marshall apologized for strong anti-Communist blasts, remarking that it was easy to get too shrill. He did not believe at that time that the United States had the armed forces to back excessive rhetoric. When you don't have the strength, he often said, you don't hit a man across the face and call him names.

But the matter had become a strongly political one, since the assumption of a responsibility previously borne by the British in an area not regarded as within the U.S. sphere marked a clear shift in policy. The White House advisers were now concerned with the President's role and the way he announced the new "doctrine."

A preliminary draft of a presidential statement presented by Loy Henderson to the White House seemed too mild to the President's special counsel, Clark Clifford. Clifford was an able St. Louis attorney who had served in the Navy during the war and had been brought into the White House in 1946 by Truman's naval aide, John Vardaman, as his assistant When Vardaman received a higher position during the same year, Clifford became naval aide and soon began to help write presidential speeches. By 1947 he was Special Counsel to the President. He saw early the need to improve Truman's image as a decisive leader, and the time seemed ready for a strong stand in favor of countries menaced by the U S.S.R

Clifford had watched the growing distrust of the Soviet Union in the United States. In 1946, Truman had asked him to prepare a study on the number of unfulfilled Russian agreements. This report, drafted largely by his assistant, George Elsey, helped strengthen Clifford's conviction that the country should take a harder line with the Communists. In the problem of Greek-Turkish aid, he saw an opportunity for Truman to be spokesman for the free world. Elsey shared Clifford's wish to promote a strong presidential image and felt the need to draw a line in the international debate with Moscow, but he questioned whether this was the proper issue for an all-out challenge to the Russians. Clifford replied that this was the opening gun in a campaign to make the public realize that the war was not yet over. Some thirty years later, at a Truman Library symposium on Truman's foreign policy, Clifford admitted to former colleagues and a number of diplomatic historians that perhaps the rhetoric had been overheated. He observed that he had been accused of intensifying the cold war.

To give aid to countries threatened by Soviet Russia was not a new idea. No one in authority doubted that the United States should assume the burdens that Great Britain could no longer bear in Greece and Turkey. After Bevin's note of February 21 was given to Acheson, all State Department studies accepted the need for congressional action, as did Marshall, the service secretaries, and Truman. But it was the special decision to create from this situation a new doctrine challenging Communism, to invite all countries threatened by Russia to call on the United States for aid, and the sharpness of the rhetoric that led later critics to charge the White House with recklessness.[10]

After several revisions of Henderson's original draft in the State Department by Acheson, Joseph Jones, and others, Clifford modified the language to make some passages more forceful. Other points were deleted at Acheson's request. Marshall, busy with final arrangements for the Moscow meeting, played no part in the drafting of the text.

The final text of the President's speech announcing what was called the "Truman Doctrine" was completed after Marshall left for Europe. Bohlen, who was with his chief, says they received the copy in Paris and that he and the Secretary indicated that the rhetoric was too strong and that they protested. When the answer to their protest was that they could not get action without a strong statement to Congress, they did not insist.[11]

Truman's speech on March 12 stressed the danger of failure to aid Greece and Turkey and the importance of helping free people to work out their destinies in their own way. In a passage borrowed from a statement by the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (to become one of the most controversial parts of the address), he declared, "I believe 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." This statement had gone into the State Department draft that went to the White House, although George Kennan, then at the National War College, thought that it was too broad and that it invited almost every country with problems to turn to the United States for support. But it frightened Congress and gained bipartisan majorities in both houses. The Senate passed the bill to aid Greece and Turkey 67–23 on April 12; the House, 287–107 on May 8. Truman signed the bill on May 22.[12]

Before leaving for Moscow in early March, Marshall told Acheson to work on the Greek-Turkish aid program without consideration for the success of his negotiations with the Russians. A courageous act, thought Acheson, as if a commander had called down fire on his forward position to defeat the enemy.[13] But Marshall left for Moscow expecting a measure of success despite the effects of the President's words. At best the negotiations were a calculated risk. The message of the President would make the risk incalculable.