

Excerpt from Speech to the Ohio Society of New York

Robert A. Taft

Commentary

Congressional endorsement of Truman's proposal for aid to Greece and Turkey was only one application of the "containment" strategy. Economic assistance was given to Western Europe under the "Marshall Plan," and the U.S. led in forming a military alliance known as the "North Atlantic Treaty Organization" (NATO). A common thread running through the proponents' rhetoric in behalf of each measure was that it would strengthen our "friends" and "allies" against Communist aggression.

Many of Truman's actions were endorsed by Congressional legislation, but some were taken without the consent of Congress. The most noteworthy was when President Truman announced that U.S. troops would be sent under United Nations authorization to help South Korea resist the attack launched by North Korea on June 25, 1950. Calling this a "police action," Truman did not ask Congress for a declaration of war.

Senator Robert A. Taft (1889-1953) was one of Truman's most vocal critics. First elected to the U.S. Senate in 1938, Taft's reputation as the leading Republican spokesman led to his being called "Mr. Republican." He had opposed Roosevelt's foreign and domestic policies in prewar days. Although after the war he supported some "liberal" domestic policies, such as federal aid to education, he delivered a barrage of speeches in which he attacked Truman's foreign policy. His criticisms follow. (1) Many of Truman's actions, such as the Korean War, were taken without the Congressional authorization that the Constitution requires. (2) During the transition between war and peace, Roosevelt and Truman made secret (and therefore unconstitutional) agreements with the Soviet Union, especially those at the Yalta and Potsdam conferences, which permitted much of the Soviet expansionism that was belatedly recognized as dangerous. (3) By failing to support the Nationalist Chinese government (led by Chiang Kai-shek), Truman and his foreign policy advisers ensured its defeat by Communist revolutionaries and its resultant retreat to the island of

Formosa (now Taiwan). (4) By failing to state clearly U.S. vital interests in Asia, Truman and his advisers virtually invited North Korea's attack on South Korea. (5) Now that we were in the Korean War, the U.S. should insist on reunifying the peninsula rather than negotiating an agreement that would permit Communist North Korea to continue its existence. These criticisms were developed in detail in a book entitled *A Foreign Policy for Americans* that was published mid-way through the Korean War.

The book is too long to duplicate here, but Taft's foreign policy ideas were summarized in a speech he delivered to the Ohio Society of New York on January 15, 1951, shortly after he had been re-elected easily in a Senate race in which he had emphasized his objections to Truman's foreign policy. An excerpt was printed in the *Congressional Record* (January 23, 1951, 82nd Congress, 1st session, vol. 97, pt. 1, p. 562) and is reproduced below.

Speech to the Ohio Society of New York

The election in Ohio also showed a substantial lack of confidence in the conduct of foreign policy by the present Administration. Since the election it has been claimed that this lack of confidence played no part in the result. But certainly no voter had any doubt that I was opposed to the administration's foreign policy up to that moment. In every county in Ohio, I pointed out that the present threat of Russian aggression upon which our whole present national danger is based was brought about by the secret agreements of Tehran, Yalta, and Potsdam, and by our course since that time in the Far East. I pointed out that at Yalta and Potsdam, we set Russia up in a powerful position in central Europe, in Berlin, and Eastern Germany, in Prague and Czechoslovakia, in Vienna and eastern Austria, from which they dominate central Europe and threaten the safety of Western Europe and of the United States. I pointed out that these agreements had handed over Manchuria to Russia in violation of the open-door policy upon which our whole eastern policy had been based for 50 years. I pointed out that this agreement had been made without even telling Chiang Kai-shek, who had been our ally for 5 years, until months after it had been made. I pointed out that this had led to the arming of the Chinese Communists by Russia and the constant promotion of their cause, while we welcomed the Chinese Communists as agrarian reformers entitled to American support. I pointed out that General Marshall had insisted that Chiang take Communists into his cabinet and, when this fatal course was refused, cut off all arms from the Nationalist armies at the most crucial time. I pointed out that we failed to arm the South Koreans, although we said we would do so, giving them only small arms against tanks, planes, and heavy artillery furnished to North Korea by the Russians.

A war in Korea was morally justified as an international move against aggression. But the President undertook it without legal authority and in direct violation of the statute which specified that Congress must pass on the troops to be furnished the United Nations under the Charter.

The war in Korea has revealed the inherent weakness of the United Nations which I have pointed out from the beginning, and made it clear that because of the veto we cannot possibly rely on the United Nations as a weapon against Russian aggression. While it may still be a diplomatic weapon, we would only repeat the disaster resulting from the aggression of the Chinese Communists if we relied upon it in determining our military policy.

Since we can no longer rely upon the United Nations, it is obvious that we cannot for some years hope to resist Chinese aggression in Korea, and it seems to me that we should retire as we have already retired from Hungnam.

Instead of that, we are now contemplating the most complete appeasement since Munich. The acceptance by our confused State Department of the UN cease-fire plan is another tragic error in our far-eastern policy. We obtain nothing except the right to make a withdrawal, which we apparently could make ourselves if we decided to do so. Paragraph 3 of the plan provides that all non-Korean armed forces will be withdrawn by appropriate stages from Korea. In other words, we sneak away from Korea, leaving the Korean Communists in full control, by the gracious leave of the Communists. At the same time we agree to sit down with the British, the Russians, and the Chinese Communists to discuss the admission of Communist China into the United Nations, and also the disposition of Formosa.

To admit that an outrageous aggression such as that of the Chinese Communists can be the basis for admission into the United Nations is not only an abject acceptance of American defeat, but it destroys the whole moral basis of the United Nations. To discuss the surrender of Formosa to the United Nations is a weakening of our entire military position in the Far East, a betrayal of the Nationalist Government of China, and a surrender of the only considerable armed force in the Far East which remains to oppose further Communist aggression.

The proposal is even worse when we consider that the Nationalist Government is not to be represented in the conference, nor is the established Government of the Republic of Korea to be recognized, although it was set up under UN auspices and recognized by the UN. Of course, it would be far better to retire under our own power as at Hungnam to a defensible position in Japan, Okinawa, and Formosa, and retain complete freedom as to the admission of Communist China and the disposition of Formosa.

This cease-fire plan is the most complete surrender to which the United States has ever agreed. Of course, it encourages aggression, and it is only a question of time before the Communist armies, released by the cease-fire in Korea, and the hamstringing of Chiang's army, will march on down into Indochina and southeastern Asia. It has long seemed obvious to me that, if we wish to prevent the spread of communism, we must release Chiang's army from its present neutrality and furnish such arms as may be necessary for him to create a diversion against Chinese Communist advance in southeast Asia. If this brings war between the United States and the Chinese Communists, it is nothing different from what we now have—in fact, it would be a much less dangerous war to us, much less fatal to our men, and much less expensive in material.