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From War to Global Peace Strategist

George C. Marshall and the Fundamentals of International Peace and Security

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Abstract

The present article sets out to more thoroughly examine George Marshall's geopolitical reasoning on strategic peace-building and the fundamentals of a more viable and sustainable peace structure. In so doing, it shows that although Marshall had been mainly preoccupied with the military side of the United States' engagement in world affairs, he all the same developed a keen understanding of the strategic imperatives needed to fashion a more stable international order – particularly as concerned the methodical integration of America's various foreign policies on a global scale.

Keywords

George Marshall – foreign policy – grand strategy – Second World War – Cold War

Introduction

“The only way human beings can win a war is to prevent it.”¹

George Marshall's role as the principal military organizer of the United States' participation in the Second World War has been well-documented. So have his subsequent exploits as Secretary of State and Defence. Accordingly, Marshall's

¹ George Marshall quoted in Louis Fischer, *This Is Our World* (New York, 1956), 91.

thinking has mainly been analysed in the context of his war-time efforts to meet the material and organizational demands of different combat theatres or as part of his post-war attempts to respond to international crises and challenges.² By comparison, historians have accorded less attention to his distinctive geo-political reasoning at the critical juncture of war and peace, especially regarding the ideational fundamentals of a more viable peace structure. However, Marshall held very elaborate ideas about the future course of American grand strategy, and this not only with respect to the complexities of global warfare, but in particular on the pivotal issues of systemic conflict prevention and the establishment of a more peaceful, prosperous, and secure interstate order.

To be sure, historians have meticulously covered nearly every relevant area of Marshall's illustrious career both as an Army leader and diplomat. In so doing, analytical focus has been mostly put on Marshall's immediate involvement in a number of singular events and developments. In addition to his seminal contributions to America's military effort in the Second World War, notably Marshall's participation in such critical episodes as the failed attempt to prevent civil war in China, the economic and political restructuring of Western Europe as part of the eponymous Marshall Plan, or the reorganisation of the nation's armed forces during the early Korean War have been examined at great length,³ as has his gradual transition to soldier-statesman in the aftermath of the Second World War.⁴ On the other hand, there have been few systematic attempts to identify and synthesize the core tenets and principles of Marshall's over-all outlook on world affairs, nor to show how his own

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- 2 For notable works on Marshall's military and civilian career, see: Harold Faber, *Soldier and Statesman: General George C. Marshall* (New York, 1964); Robert H. Ferrell and Samuel F. Bemis, eds., *The American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy, Volume XV, George C. Marshall* by Robert H. Ferrell (New York, 1966); Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall, Vol. 2: Ordeal and Hope 1939–1942* (New York, 1966); Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall, Vol. 3: Organizer of Victory 1943–1945* (New York, 1973); Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall, Vol. 4: Statesman 1945–1959* (New York, 1987); Thomas Parrish, *Roosevelt and Marshall: Partners in Politics and War. The Personal Story* (New York, 1989); Mark A. Stoler, *George C. Marshall: Soldier-Statesman of the American Century* (Boston, MA, 1989); Ed Cray, *General of the Army: George C. Marshall, Soldier and Statesman* (New York, 1990); Charles Brower, ed., *George C. Marshall: Servant of the American Nation* (New York, 2011); David L. Roll, *George Marshall: Defender of the Republic* (New York, 2019).
 - 3 Daniel Kurtz-Phelan, *The China Mission: George Marshall's Unfinished War, 1945–1947* (New York, 2018); Benn Steil, *The Marshall Plan: Dawn of the Cold War* (New York, 2018); James I. Matray, "Fighting the Problem: George C. Marshall and Korea", in *George C. Marshall: Servant of the American Nation*, ed. Brower, 79–115.
 - 4 Rachel Y. Thompson, *Marshall: A Statesman Shaped in the Crucible of War* (Leesburg, VA, 2014).

experiences over the years progressively added to what he ultimately came to view as the fundamentals of international peace and security.

Given that individual aspects of Marshall's geopolitical thinking have for the most part been explored in relation to specific policies and occurrences – most recently in the excellent *George C. Marshall and the Early Cold War* edited by William A. Taylor⁵ – academic scholarship on Marshall would therefore benefit from a definitive overview of his general reflections on the intricate dynamics of war and peace in the modern age. Consequently, the present article intends to more thoroughly investigate Marshall's ideas on strategic peace-building as they emerged during the closing stages of the Second World War by not only distilling the essence of his political philosophy, but furthermore offering valuable insights into the key principles of a public servant who like few other statesmen of his time was to permanently shape the trajectory of both American *and* international history. More specifically, it will demonstrate that although Marshall had until then been preoccupied with the United States' military engagement in world affairs, he all the same developed a keen understanding of the strategic imperatives needed to fashion a more stable international order – particularly as concerned the methodical integration of America's foreign policies on a global scale. Above all, as this paper argues, Marshall was guided by the intent of combining the two determinative foreign policy precepts of military preponderance and deterrence on the one hand and proactive threat reduction on the other, recognising that in order to inaugurate and defend the global environment America aspired to have, the persistent improvement of the latter's structural and socio-economic foundations would be just as important as the retention of a redoubtable military position. As a result, Marshall should rightly be regarded as one of his country's foremost grand strategic thinkers, especially since he early on came to appreciate the need for pre-emptive initiatives in a variety of interrelated fields without which there could again arise detrimental developments to the United States' own vital interests. This tendency of always looking at regional situations as part of a consistent whole rather than addressing them disjointly on an impromptu case-by-case basis has been previously noted and touched upon,⁶

5 William A. Taylor, ed., *George C. Marshall and the Early Cold War: Policy, Politics, and Society* (Norman, OK, 2020).

6 See notably Paul L. Miles, "Marshall As Grand Strategist", in *George C. Marshall: Servant of the American Nation*, ed. Brower, 35–57; Ernest R. May, "1947–1948: When Marshall Kept the U.S. Out of War in China", *The Journal of Military History* 66 (4) (2002): 1001–1010; Mark A. Stoler, "George C. Marshall and the 'Europe First'-Strategy: A Study in Diplomatic as well as Military History", *The Journal of Military History* 79 (2) (2015): 293–316.

although not from a predominantly ideological standpoint incorporating the central themes and elements of Marshall's broader grand strategic reasoning and rationale.

George Marshall was in many ways the epitome of the modern civilian-military leader able to relate pressing military exigencies to the intricacies of foreign policy-making and the regional surroundings required for perpetuating a more rules-based international order. A number of people would later attest to his exceptional capacity of not only thinking in military but also geo-strategic dimensions, and this essentially not just with respect to the organisation and execution of war-relevant plans and operations, but likewise in terms of the different measures and initiatives needed thereafter for guarding against a sudden resurgence of transnational strife and upheavals. As his successor as Secretary of State Dean Acheson commented, "nonmilitary factors played a controlling part" in the reasoning of Marshall, an observation which led British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to hail Marshall as a "statesman with a penetrating and commanding view of the whole scene".⁷ Several years after the war, a letter by Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas moreover indicated that of all the people he had served with, President Franklin D. Roosevelt believed no one to be better qualified than Marshall to carry out the responsibilities of the presidential office.⁸ As Roosevelt before him, President Harry S. Truman likewise had nothing but praise for Marshall, both as a person of genuine integrity and as a far-sighted strategic thinker. After the war, Truman would even go so far as to call Marshall "the great one of the age".⁹ As such, these statements are indicative of the immense hopes, trust and expectations which both Presidents had put in Marshall for assisting the United States' government in the realisation of a national grand strategy capable of furthering America's long-range interests via comprehensive international efforts aimed at ongoing peace-building.

7 Dean Acheson, *Sketches from the Life of Men I Have Known* (New York, 1959), 163–164; Winston S. Churchill, *The Hinge of Fate* (Boston, MA, 1950), 813. These and other statements on Marshall's geo-strategic acumen are also quoted in Charles Brower, *Defeating Japan: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Strategy in the Pacific War* (New York, 2012), 1, 4.

8 Letter from Justice William O. Douglas to George C. Marshall, 11 December 1954, George C. Marshall Papers, Unpublished Correspondence, The George C. Marshall Foundation, Lexington, Virginia.

9 Parrish, *Roosevelt and Marshall*, 416–417; Harry S. Truman, Appointment Sheet 18 February 1947, in *The Private Papers of Harry S. Truman*, ed. Robert H. Ferrell (New York, 1980), 108–109. See also Harry S. Truman, *Mr. Citizen* (New York, 1960), 231, 236–237.

Peace with Strength

George Marshall was a life-long student of war and peace. More than that, he had been an active combatant, an US Army instructor, a military organizer, and, finally, a global strategist. As such, he excelled in each of these positions and so was rightfully remembered as someone who had carried out the burdens of war with that rare combination of humility, commitment, professional expertise, and intellectual finesse.¹⁰ Under Marshall, the United States had mounted the defence of the free world against the totalitarian forces of tyranny and oppression by mobilizing its vast resources and sacrificing its young men and women in uniform. That gigantic enterprise had led the United States to enter military alliances with both democratic nations as well as such which, although they practiced a decidedly non-democratic form of governance like the Soviet Union, were seen as indispensable partners in the defeat of their common enemies, regardless (for the time being at least) of what future disagreements might come up between them.¹¹ Still, the nearer that war was drawing to a close, the more profoundly Marshall began to think about the need of constructing a more peaceful world order than the one his generation had inherited. Universal peace, therefore, was the next big challenge which the American people would have to consecrate itself to with the same high spirit and initiative its citizens had shown in the crucible of war.¹² Specifically, Marshall was aware that if peace was to extend beyond the initial period of optimistic post-war partnerships, America would have to lead on an even grander scale than before, as anything other than a willingness to organize for

10 Winston Churchill had famously called Marshall the “true organizer of victory”, while Harry Truman also referred to Marshall as the architect of victory and one of his generation's greatest leaders. Pogue, *George C. Marshall, Vol. 3: Organizer of Victory, 1943–1945*, xi–xii; Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs by Harry S. Truman: Year of Decisions*, Vol. 1 (New York, 1955, 1965), 262; Harry S. Truman, Citation for Distinguished Service for George C. Marshall, 26 November 1945, in *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall, vol. 5, ‘The Finest Soldier’, January 1, 1945–January 7, 1947*, eds. Larry I. Bland and Sharon R. Stevens (Baltimore, MD, 2003), 365–366. See further Donald J. Farinacci, *Truman and MacArthur: Adversaries for a Common Cause* (Bennington, VT, 2010), 253.

11 On the build-up of the US Army under George Marshall, see Pogue, *George C. Marshall, Vol. 2: Ordeal and Hope, 1939–1942*; and Vol. 3: *Organizer of Victory*; Jonathan W. Jordan, *American Warlords: How Roosevelt's High Command Led America to Victory in World War II* (Berkeley, CA, 2015).

12 Marshall, Speech to the American Legion, 18 September 1944, in *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall, vol. 4, ‘Aggressive and Determined Leadership’, June 1, 1943–December 31, 1944*, eds. Larry I. Bland and Sharon R. Stevens (Baltimore, MD, 1996), 589–593.

peace as she had done for war would leave the world exposed once more to inter-state conflict and aggression.¹³

Accordingly, the question uppermost on Marshall's mind was how to achieve these noble aspirations most effectively in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, confessing not only that these hopes were as yet by no means certainties but also that America's responsibilities to these endeavours figured among the greatest of all nations.¹⁴ True to his modest and self-effacing nature, Marshall did not presume to have all the answers as far as global peace and stability were concerned. Thus he freely admitted that there "appear to be no short-cuts to a better world", yet he also trusted that "a formula for the better guidance of mankind" might nonetheless evolve if all nations made "an earnest and devoted effort in a spirit of good faith and of patience and tolerance".¹⁵ From his long years in the army Marshall knew how the rapid advances in science and technology – in particular the development of ever more destructive weapons systems – made it increasingly difficult for any one country to find adequate protection from foreign threats to its political independence and national integrity. As Marshall put it, there were no easy ways "to win wars when two opponents are even remotely well matched", nor to "safeguard the nation or preserve the peace".¹⁶

In Marshall's judgement, there existed no more important factor in the defence of global peace than the unbending resolve of the United States to assert its desire for peace with absolute power and strength. Hence what was valid in war was equally true for him in times of peace, namely to use every available means to so overwhelm an enemy as to "reduce him to a supplicant under the impact of aroused and determined democracies".¹⁷ As a general rule, it was imperative for Marshall not to give in to "the temptation to ease up after initial and relatively minor successes", a requirement which as such not only necessitated the continued application of massive military force in war but also an unmistakeable readiness to uphold the country's military strength in peacetime.¹⁸ Marshall regarded war as "the most terrible tragedy of the human race" and professed that it should not be conducted longer than was strictly

13 See also George C. Marshall, *Biennial Reports of the Chief of Staff of the United States Army to the Secretary of War, 1 July 1939–30 June 1945* (Washington, DC, 1996), 111.

14 Ibid.

15 Marshall, 'Responsibility of Victory' Speech before The New York Herald Tribune Forum, New York City, 29 October 1945, *Vital Speeches of the Day*, Vol. XII, 76–78.

16 Marshall, *Biennial Reports of the Chief of Staff*, 111.

17 Marshall, Speech prepared for the Governors' Conference, 21 June 1943, in *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, vol. 4, 25–28.

18 Ibid.

necessary, yet he also thought it critical that the United States never cease to display its formidable military prowess in order to discourage the various would-be tyrants of the future. Specifically, he deemed it pivotal that their enemies, both actual and potential ones, fully realise “the power of our great democracy and the willingness of its people to defend the great principles of freedom against the wanton destruction at the hands of European dictators or treacherous barbarians of the Pacific”.¹⁹

As most people who had been through the horrors of war and, in the case of the Chief of Staff, moreover had to deal with daily casualty lists and the agonizing pain of fallen soldiers’ loved ones,²⁰ Marshall would gladly have welcomed any other way of “defending one’s country except by the force of arms.”²¹ Yet in the absence of an alternative avenue it was vital to prepare for all eventualities, particularly for the prevention and early removal of emerging security threats. Marshall genuinely believed that the United Nations would devote their sincere energies to the effort of building a sustainable peace system, yet he also understood that the principle of the survival of the fit would continue to apply in international relations. Consequently, American statesmen needed to devise a diplomacy that was both wise and strong, as otherwise it would inevitably be forecast to failure:²²

We have tried to promote our love of peace by a display of weakness. This course has failed us utterly, cost us millions of lives and billions of treasure ... The world does not seriously regard the desires of the weak. Weakness presents too great a temptation to the strong, particularly to the bully who schemes for wealth and power.²³

In Marshall’s view, the main purpose of military preponderance was to possess suitable deterrence capabilities to “avoid war, not to provoke it”.²⁴ This demanded that the United States not fall back on the same short-sighted policies it had practiced after the last war by gradually reducing the size and firepower of its army.²⁵ Without questioning the guilt of Nazi Germany and

19 Marshall, Speech to the American Legion, Chicago, 18 September 1944.

20 Marshall, Draft of Speech to the Academy of Political Science, 4 April 1945, in *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, vol. 5, 119–126; Marshall, Speech to the Maryland Historical Society, 11 June 1945, *ibid.*, 220–227.

21 Speech to the Maryland Historical Society, 11 June 1945.

22 Marshall, *Biennial Reports of the Chief of Staff*, 111.

23 *Ibid.*

24 Marshall quoted in Cray, *General of the Army*, 645.

25 Draft of Speech to the Academy of Political Science, 4 April 1945.

Imperial Japan, Marshall contended that the failure of the American people to prepare against danger was partially to blame as well for why its army had suffered some very close encounters during the war, potentially even emboldening the Japanese Empire to embark on war against it in the first place. More concretely, as Marshall noted, the American people had been misled by its authorities into a false feeling of security due to the many victories it had previously recorded, a delusion which caused the nation to remain in a state of utter military unpreparedness and, in consequence, may only have further reinforced the prevailing Japanese conviction that American soldiers were supposedly “soft and unwilling to defend their country”. As Marshall concluded, it had been “a terrible thing to advertise this disgraceful weakness ... and tempt the highwayman to try for the kill”, a mistake which as such could never again be repeated.²⁶

What worried Marshall most was not so much that Americans yearned to return to more halcyon times free from the demands of a large and expensive military machine than the false assumption that the safety and well-being of the nation could indefinitely be secured without one. Marshall acknowledged that after an exhausting war the “extreme distaste for things military” was only natural, yet he also warned against “the prospect of another repetition in our history of an impractical idealism or a submission to ulterior motives or a frank avoidance of burdensome taxes ... regarding the military posture to be adopted by this country in the post-war period.” For Marshall, America’s future military strength and organisation were intimately intertwined with the quintessential question of how the nation could best position itself in the coming decades to avoid another succession of tragedies similar to those of the previous thirty years. While it was perfectly understandable that Americans did not wish to overly concern themselves with such matters when memories of recent terrors and privations were still all too fresh on everyone’s mind, this nonetheless did not dispense with the need “to take the nations of the world as they are, the human passions and prejudices of peoples as they exist, and find some way to secure for us a free America in a peaceful world”.²⁷

Time and again, Marshall would invoke the story of how much trouble it had cost the United States to field an army in the Second World War that could vanquish the armed forces of other nations. Drastic downsizing after the First World War had produced an inter-war army of poorly trained fighting units, inadequate instruction facilities, and outdated equipment that could project American power to only a few select regions and, as a result, had been unable

26 Speech to the Maryland Historical Society, 11 June 1945.

27 Draft of Speech to the Academy of Political Science, 4 April 1945.

to act as a reliable guarantor of worldwide stability and peace. Consequently, Marshall admonished that with the United States' unique geographical location, its resources and wealth, and its inherent courage, it would be a "tragedy to civilization if we should again be blindly stupid and expose the coming generations to a repetition of this grim business".²⁸

Of course it would be easy to characterise such thinking as typical of a military man who had a vested interest in receiving elevated funding for the organisation he ran. With respect to Marshall, however, this most certainly was not the case, as not only was he aware that he did not qualify as an unbiased individual in these matters but, more importantly, he also repeatedly saw to it himself that the Army's requirements did not interfere with civilian production any longer than was absolutely necessary for the successful pursuit of the war.²⁹ Besides, Marshall was in no way insensitive to the desire of the American people to spend their energies and treasure on more pleasant endeavours than a continuously inflated military budget. Still, he thought it unwise to accept a lower spending on national security for this reason alone, in particular if it prohibited authorities from taking precautions to safeguard the nation in the most efficient way possible. As Marshall laid out his rationale on the subject:

The year that France fell gate receipts for amusement and sporting events in the United States totalled a billion and a half, nearly as much as our entire outlay for the and Navy. We spent five and a half billion more on tobacco and alcoholic products - about three times the sum we devoted to our precarious national security, even in that most critical hour of world history. Do not misunderstand me. I have no quarrel with such expenditures. They are a part of our freedom of life that I myself enjoy. The point is that if we would cheerfully expend seven billion dollars in this manner as civilization crashed down in Europe we should at the very least be willing to accept the expenditures in normal times that are necessary to the peace and the security of our homes and our freedom.

Millions of men and women ... might be alive today had we faced the world in righteous strength instead of careless weakness. The enemy counted on us to go ahead with our pleasures, ignoring the threat to our

28 Ibid.; Speech to the Maryland Historical Society, 11 June 1945; Marshall, 'Responsibility of Victory' Speech before The New York Herald Tribune Forum, 29 October 1945, *Vital Speeches of the Day*, Vol. XII, 76–78.

29 Marshall, Draft Statement for the Secretary of War, 13 August 1945, in *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, vol. 5, 272–273; Marshall, Memorandum for Chiefs of all War Department and Special Staff Divisions, 15 August 1945, *ibid.*, 278–279.

lives and our very freedom. We proved them wrong but in the end it cost us a million casualties and astronomical sums of money to restore our security and rightful position in the world. Had we not had Allies to buy us time, our own efforts ... might easily have been too late.³⁰

Marshall never doubted that a better preparation in peacetime could have considerably reduced American fatalities in the ensuing war. This conviction was most visibly reflected by his unflagging advocacy for an extensive system of universal military training.³¹ Both during and after the war Marshall emphatically pushed this idea of a small regular army supported by a large citizen reserve which on the strength of an integrated training programme would put the United States in a far more advanced state of military preparedness.³² America had gone to great lengths to build a military force which together with those of her Allies had managed to bring back peace to the world. Under no circumstances could the American people therefore let this tremendous enterprise disintegrate, especially if the nation did not want to be confronted with the arduous and expensive task of having to recreate it again several years or decades into the future.³³

Preventive Engagement

In Marshall's estimation, freedom and power existed in an exceedingly intricate relationship with each other as only national power could ultimately ensure domestic liberties and freedoms while the latter, in turn, were indispensable for increasing that power within an anarchic international setting. Notably a grand strategic vision as sprawling and multifaceted as the one conceived by American policy-makers in the Second World War had to intrinsically rely on the proper development, enhancement, and application of the nation's various power tools if its underlying premises and aspirations regarding world peace and prosperity should come to fruition. Already in 1942 Marshall had

30 'Responsibility of Victory' Speech, 29 October 1945.

31 Marshall, Letter to William R. Arnold, 24 October 1945, in *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, vol. 5, 334–335.

32 Marshall, Statement on Universal Military Training, 16 November 1944, in *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, vol. 4, 671–673; Marshall, Notes on Discussions of Future Military Policy, 31 August 1945, in *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, vol. 5, 291–293; Marshall, Memorandum to General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower, 20 September 1945, *ibid.*, 305–306.

33 Draft of Speech to the Academy of Political Science, 4 April 1945.

informed West Point cadets that “we are determined that ... our flag will be recognized throughout the world as a symbol of freedom on the one hand and of overwhelming power on the other”.³⁴ Above all the possession of a formidable military power was something which he considered integral to the security of the civilized world on account of its inherent ability to not only destroy adversaries in war but to likewise deter presumptive aggressors.³⁵ Throughout the remainder of his life Marshall was to hold fast to his belief that a strong military posture or preparedness was fundamental in the modern age, yet he also readily conceded that it was “too narrow a basis on which to build a dependable, long-enduring peace”.³⁶ Marshall arguably delivered the most vivid exposition of his views on this topic in his acceptance speech of the Nobel Peace Prize in December 1953 when he assured his listeners that world peace could not rest on military strength alone:

For the moment the maintenance of peace in the present hazardous world situation does depend in very large measure on military power, together with Allied cohesion. But the maintenance of large armies for an indefinite period is not a practical or a promising basis for policy. We must stand together strongly for these present years...but we must, I repeat, we must find another solution ...³⁷

That solution, as Marshall had already admonished in 1945, would surely not come about by turning inwards and simply brushing aside the parlous state the world was in after years of incessant warfare and destruction. Although Americans at home were remote from the violent scenes of war, it was nevertheless important that they gain an accurate perspective on what would be required to cement the peace they had just acquired.³⁸ People all over the

34 Marshall, Speech to the Graduating Class, United States Military Academy, West Point, New York, 29 May 1942, in *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, vol. 3, *The Right Man for the Job*, December 7, 1941–May 31, 1943, eds. Larry I. Bland and Sharon R. Stevens (Baltimore, MD, 1991), 212–214. See also David Hein, “In War for Peace: General George C. Marshall’s Core Convictions & Ethical Leadership”, *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity* 26 (2) (2013), <http://touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=26-02-041-f> [accessed 17 October 2020].

35 Marshall, Notes for Talk to American Legion, Omaha, Nebraska, 21 September 1943, in *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, vol. 4, 131–134.

36 Marshall, Nobel Lecture: Essentials to Peace, Oslo, Norway, 11 December 1953. Available at: http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1953/marshall-lecture.html [accessed 2 May 2020].

37 Ibid.

38 Marshall, Speech to the Salvation Army, Kansas City, Missouri, 18 November 1945, in *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, vol. 5, 357–363.

world were looking for American leadership to forestall another catastrophe, yet they were also afflicted by more immediate and pressing concerns which the United States likewise needed to help them overcome. Evidently they all shared an earnest longing for peace and stability, yet that longing could only be fulfilled if they did not constantly have to struggle with meeting basic subsistence levels, in other words if they had enough food, shelter, and clothing to raise their standards of living above the abject poverty and destitution far too many of them were still languishing in. The successful resolution of these and other problems, Marshall declared, was key to underwriting inter-regional peace and security in subsequent years, all the more so since they were directly related to the attainment of America's own post-war objectives.³⁹

If history had taught Marshall one lesson above all others, it was that the seeds of war were often planted long before dictators decided to infringe upon the rights and freedom of innocent populations. Powerful nations therefore had to remain vigilant not to let conditions arise where such malevolent practices might again find fertile soil by preying upon the fears and desperation of ordinary citizens in war-ravaged communities. Accordingly, Marshall stated that in no other time had it been more relevant that "the people make a sober, common-sense survey of the situation and reach an early decision as to our policies with relation to the world and particularly with regard to the future maintenance of peace".⁴⁰ Even though some peoples might entertain an exaggerated conception of the United States' strength and capacities as a nation, that fact all the same did not negate the reality that, as Marshall reminded his fellow countrymen, America had virtually been "elected by the acclamation of the harassed and suffering people of the world to the leadership of the greatest and most beneficent movement in world history for the good of mankind".⁴¹

It was self-evident for Marshall that there must be specific causes for war as well as a way to eliminate them, so that the United States in consequence first needed to engage the preeminent question of what else could be done in that area that had not been tried before. For one, Marshall was convinced that no lasting peace could be obtained if Americans did not have a genuine appreciation of the peculiar troubles and sensitivities of other nations. The United States obviously had every right to object to the policies of foreign governments, but it also needed to have an idea where those policies originated from, above all whether they had been devised in a domestic and/or regional

39 Marshall, Statement Upon Receiving the Distinguished Service Medal, Washington DC, 26 November 1945, *ibid.*, 366–367.

40 Speech to the Salvation Army, 18 November 1945.

41 *Ibid.*

environment far less open and peaceable than the social order of the United States itself. In Marshall's view, this point bore such significance that even in his retirement he would still revert to it:

We are the most generous people under the heavens, but the great difficulty is for our people to understand ... the situation where countries are jammed up against one another, where they speak different languages, where they have jealousies that go back two or three hundred years. All of them try to get together despite all the differences that are almost ineradicable. But you have to deal with.⁴²

For these reasons, it was essential that American decision-makers undertook everything in their power to resolve these differences by adopting the necessary measures to avert future wars and creating the conditions under which these diverging points of view could finally be merged.⁴³ Especially against the background of the colossal ruin and depredations surrounding them was it crucial for Americans to remember that most of them could barely "comprehend the disruption of governments, and the complete destruction of cities and of homes, that has taken place in the world".⁴⁴ In every reach of the planet, victory in war had to be followed by the fortification of a peace so volatile and fragile that if unattended to by those strong enough to preserve it, it could all too easily give rise again to growing inter-state tensions and strife.

Accordingly, Marshall was aware that the United States could not deny its responsibilities to shore up countries which in the absence of external assistance would continue to pose a risk to systemic peace and stability. True to his maxim that it was better to decide problems right away instead of belabouring them indefinitely, Marshall felt that the United States must lose no time in devoting itself to the multitude of issues likely to undermine international peace and security.⁴⁵ In that context, there first of all existed the dangerous power vacuum left behind by a dictatorial government in Germany, a nation which flooded with hopeless and homeless people was about to witness an unparalleled "confusion of desires". In Asia, the problems of reconstruction meanwhile abounded as well. In addition to reintegrating a peaceful and

42 Marshall, Address to the Graduate Class of 1956, Virginia Military Institute, 12 June 1956, George C. Marshall Papers, Speeches of George C. Marshall, Marshall Foundation. Lexington, Virginia.

43 Speech to the Maryland Historical Society, 11 June 1945.

44 Speech to the Salvation Army, 18 November 1945.

45 Marshall quoted in Cray, *General of the Army*, 591.

democratic Japan into the family of nations, there notably remained the issue of achieving territorial unity in China, a country which “torn to ribbons by more than a decade of war and the rapine of the invader” was fast approaching outright civil war. Few, however, realised in what a truly precarious state that ancient culture was and how difficult it would be to “re-establish order and a return to normal ways of life”. Difficulties of the most perplexing nature were also presented by other Asian countries such as, for instance, in Korea, where local populations who had been dominated for decades by foreign rulers not only had to relearn how to direct their own affairs but where due to different political groups vying for control, Americans also had to help bring order out of the prevailing chaos. These and scores of other matters all demanded swift and extended action, at a time when the American government moreover had to cope with the domestic pressures of demobilization, labour disputes, and the reconversion of industries.⁴⁶

Particularly in the first years following the war, Marshall more frequently enlarged upon the ideational underpinnings of America’s post-war grand strategy, notably since he was very much disquieted by the fact that many of its defining aspects had by that point still not been satisfactorily implemented, most prominently in (western) Europe. Although the whole magnitude of reconstruction only became apparent after the war, progressive mid-century American statesmen had from the outset recognized that this issue was inseparable from their quest for lasting world peace, and, as such, in need of intelligent handling on a continuing basis. In so doing, Marshall assigned great value to the necessity of taking timely and comprehensive action in a number of interrelated fields. Cognizant of how hard won their victory had been, Marshall made no secret that “it will require a great deal of effort and sacrifice to fulfil our responsibilities of that victory, to achieve the future we recently talked about so freely”.⁴⁷ Above all, though, it was not something which the United States could do “in one step and then have done with it”. Even if America adopted an altogether sound programme in its relationship with other countries, that programme would ultimately be worthless if it was not backed up by a firm resolve “to support it year in and year out”.⁴⁸

If the United States really wanted to have a peaceful and prosperous world, it first of all had to identify where the greatest impediments to that objective lay and, following this, take whatever action was needed to unravel them. In particular, America had to lead the international community in restoring the world

46 Speech to the Salvation Army, 18 November 1945.

47 ‘Responsibility of Victory’ Speech, 29 October 1945.

48 Ibid.

economy from the material destruction of the war, not only so as to diminish the special relief requested from the United States but because it would otherwise not be possible to retain a decent level of prosperity in a broken world. Rehabilitation necessitated intensive work over lengthy periods of time, but that work could not be performed if a deficiency of food made it “impossible for a hungry person to work with the drive, the vision and the cooperative spirit that will be necessary”.⁴⁹ People ought to be free to choose the form of government and economic organisation they desired, yet Marshall also acknowledged that hunger and insecurity were often the worst enemies of freedom and democracy and that a person preoccupied with the gruelling demands of securing the next meal for his family is much more susceptible to “any system which he is told will relieve his desperate condition”. Hence it was in the humane, economic, and world political interest of the United States to eliminate this detrimental state of affairs, all the more so when taking into account that wars were not seldom bred by poverty and oppression and that, conversely, “continued peace was possible only in a relatively free and prosperous world”.⁵⁰

Arguably no other single endeavour better illustrated these points than the European Recovery Program (ERP). After his one-year stint in China, Marshall assumed the office of Secretary of State in early 1947 and was almost immediately confronted with some of the most consequential decisions in modern US history. Numerous academic works have since analysed the Marshall Plan in great detail, while only a few historians have undertaken meticulous studies of the broader strategic considerations underlying it.⁵¹ For Marshall, however, such strategic imperatives were of cardinal significance. In that context, there can be no doubt that the Marshall Plan was evidently closely related to the containment doctrine adopted by the United States’ government in the spring of 1947 against the growing menace of Soviet encroachment on European nations.⁵² Still, it would be too simplistic to state that the ERP was merely an outgrowth of that policy.

49 Marshall, NBC Radio Speech, 15 August 1947, in *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, vol. 6, *The Whole World Hangs in the Balance*, January 8, 1947–September 30, 1949, eds. Larry I. Bland, Mark A. Stoler, Sharon R. Stevens, and Daniel D. Holt (Baltimore, MD, 2013), 195–197.

50 Ibid.

51 Notably Michael J. Hogan, *The Marshall Plan: America, Britain, and the Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1947–52* (Cambridge, 1987); Melvyn P. Leffler, “The United States and the Strategic Dimensions of the Marshall Plan”, *Diplomatic History* 12 (3) (1988): 277–306.

52 On containment, see John L. Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War* (Oxford, 1982, 2005), 3–86; Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford, CA, 1992); Elizabeth E. Spalding, *The First Cold Warrior: Harry Truman, Containment, and the Remaking of Liberal Internationalism* (Lexington, KY, 2006). See also

To begin with, Marshall wholeheartedly subscribed to the view that it was not enough to meet potential threats solely by military means alone. Specifically, it became clear to him that barring a more systematic integration of (western) European nations, the continent as a whole might succumb to Soviet aggression and Communist infiltration. Central to this was the future development of an economically prostrate Germany whose coal and steel industries were key to the vitality of the entire European economy. Accordingly, Marshall appreciated that they not only needed to be reinvigorated as quickly as possible, but also more purposefully integrated with the economies of other European countries.⁵³ Marshall vividly remembered how some of the problems they presently faced had already been foreshadowed in late 1944 when then Secretary of War Henry Stimson vehemently opposed the so-called Morgenthau Plan intending to turn post-war Germany into a predominantly agricultural society.⁵⁴ Back then, Stimson had argued that hindering Germany from reaching again a decent level of industrial production was tantamount to removing the principal driving force of Europe's over-all economic life.⁵⁵ an assessment which led Marshall to redirect his attention towards initiatives aimed at bolstering the structural foundations of European nations.

Other factors naturally played a pivotal role as well, including the need of (re)creating outlets for American products and business, closing the world dollar gap, and increasing trade between not only the United States and Europe but with other regions as well.⁵⁶ Yet beyond such economic concerns, strategic calculations remained preeminent in Marshall's thinking. After all, their current problems were no less vital, perhaps even more critical than those during the days of active fighting. Lamenting a perceived indifference to the nation's long-time dangers, Marshall noted that despite a cessation of hostilities, a genuine peace still had not materialized. With power relationships being in a state of flux and fear and famine prevailing in both Europe and Asia, it mainly

Marshall, Statement to Congressional Leaders, 27 February 1947, in *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, vol. 6, 55–58.

53 Marshall, Statement on Reconstruction of Germany, 14 March 1947, in *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, vol. 6, 77–79; Marshall, Radio Address, 28 April 1947, *ibid.*, 113–122.

54 Marshall, Letter to Henry Stimson, 28 April 1947, *ibid.*, 111–113.

55 Henry L. Stimson and McGeorge Bundy, *On Active Service in War and Peace* (New York, 1948), 568–583; David F. Schmitz, *Henry L. Stimson: The First Wise Man* (Wilmington, DE, 2001), 166–169.

56 These and other aspects have been extensively covered in Scott Jackson, "Prologue to the Marshall Plan: The Origins of the American Commitment for a European Recovery Program", *The Journal of American History* 65 (4) (1979): 1043–1068; Alan Milward, *The Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1945–51* (Berkeley, CA, 1984); Greg Behrman, *The Most Noble Adventure: The Marshall Plan and the Time when America Helped Save Europe* (New York, 2007); Michael Holm, *The Marshall Plan: A New Deal for Europe* (New York, 2017).

fell upon America to yet secure that peace. Mindful of how American inaction had contributed to the international disarray of the preceding decades, Marshall realised how the fate of economically and physically exhausted countries directly impacted the United States. To restore democratic processes and the world's productive facilities, the "development of a sense of overwhelming importance of this country's acts, and failures to act, in relation to world order and security" was therefore crucial in the nation's foreign policies.⁵⁷

In that regard, nothing weighed heavier on Marshall's mind than how international order and security inherently depended upon Europe's economic rehabilitation. For Marshall, European prosperity was intimately intertwined with global developments, so that in light of the fact that there could be "no real security except on a world-wide basis", the United States had to shore up European countries while simultaneously "strengthen[ing] the influence of the United Nations".⁵⁸ The UN after all was "the rock upon which this nation has built its hopes for a stable world order"; however, voluntary and governmental action was needed to ease individual desperations which, if ignored, could "merge into a general desperation with consequences fatal to a lasting peace".⁵⁹ While the UN's agencies were undoubtedly helpful, primary responsibility for improving standards of living would continue to rest with governments and peoples themselves. As Marshall elaborated: "International action cannot replace self-help, nor can we move toward general cooperation without maximum mutual help among close neighbours."⁶⁰

Notably the difficulties of reconciling the views of major powers, underscored by the disillusionment over the Soviet Union's lack of cooperation during the Moscow conference of March/April 1947, convinced Marshall to seek more viable solutions to this increasingly strategic conundrum.⁶¹ As Marshall remarked, it was essential to appreciate the effect which the plight and consequent reactions of the long-suffering peoples of Europe might have not only upon America's economy but also on her efforts to promote global peace. Without the return of normal economic health, there could be "no political

57 Marshall, Speech at Princeton University, 22 February 1947, in *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, vol. 6, 47–50.

58 Marshall, Remarks to the President of France, 6 March 1947, *ibid.*, 63–67.

59 Marshall, Speech to the American Red Cross, 2 March 1947, *ibid.*, 58–59.

60 Marshall, Address to the United Nations General Assembly, 23 September 1948, *ibid.*, 553–560.

61 Marshall, Interview with Harry B. Price and Roy E. Foulke, 30 October 1952. Harry B. Price Papers, Oral History Interview File, Box 1, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Missouri; Marshall, Statement to the Council of Foreign Ministers, 31 March 1947, in *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, vol. 6, 86–89.

stability and no assured peace”, with the result that “the revival of a working economy in the world so as to permit the emergence of political and social conditions in which free institutions can exist” had to receive absolute primacy. Importantly, however, assistance should not be offered on a piece-meal basis as various crises developed; instead the United States needed to address the structural side of the problem by “providing a cure rather than a mere palliative”.⁶² Marshall especially worried about the ripple effects of the European situation on third countries, given that Europe’s once highly integrated economy had not just accounted for nearly one-half of the planet’s trade before the war, but its continued breakdown also stood to profoundly disrupt the world’s habitual trade patterns. This was why Marshall effectively regarded the American rehabilitation plan as a “world recovery program”. Notwithstanding the incalculable burdens which a downfall of the European community would impose upon the United States, the long-range implications for its own strategic objectives would be even worse due to the fact that such a development could dramatically curtail one of its most important freedoms, namely its “freedom of choice in both domestic and foreign affairs”.⁶³

Marshall had come away from the Moscow conference with a feeling that the Soviet Union was actively trying to create turbulence in Europe, a policy which in view of the dismal conditions on the continent might seriously derail America’s plans for a more peaceful international order. More concretely, by allowing European problems to fester, Marshall thought that this would only invite further chaos as well as more aggressive Russian policies, even if he himself had initially hoped to include the Soviet Union in the recovery program.⁶⁴ Naturally, Marshall did not act without valuable input from other State Department officials. Notably George Kennan, Dean Acheson, William Clayton, and Charles Bohlen had discerned the latent potentials for disaster as a result of Europe’s dire socio-economic predicament and thus made substantial contributions to the Marshall Plan.⁶⁵ As such, they were in particular highly instrumental in working out the technical details of how to best implement the ERP; still, it was Marshall who gave the decisive impetus and provided

62 Marshall, Speech to Harvard University Alumni, 5 June 1947, in *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, vol. 6, 147–150.

63 Marshall, Statement to a Joint Meeting of the Senate Foreign Relations and House Foreign Affairs Committee, 10 November 1947, Marshall Papers, VIII, Secretary of State, Speeches and Statements, Box 157, Folder 65, George C. Marshall Foundation, Lexington, Virginia.

64 Marshall, Interview with Harry B. Price and Roy E. Foulke, 30 October 1952; Marshall, Interview with Harry B. Price and Roy E. Foulke, 18 February 1953, Harry B. Price Papers, Oral History Interview File, Box 1, Harry S. Truman Library.

65 See notably Benn Steil, *The Marshall Plan: Dawn of the Cold War* (New York, 2018).

the necessary strategic guidance and direction.⁶⁶ On that score, he above all trusted that a European recovery would not only lead to a closer economic, maybe even political integration of European societies but likewise remove the destabilizing conditions which the leaders of contrary political systems and philosophies might seek to exploit for their own destructive ends.⁶⁷

In order to efficiently counter actual or presumptive threats, it was imperative to identify early on any developments which might facilitate them. That thinking was likewise at the heart of Marshall's approach to international alliances, warning that countries would try to find help elsewhere if America should fail to render their people the necessary assistance.⁶⁸ The United States had to accept the reality that it could not stand indifferent to the fate of nations attempting to recover from the disaster of the war but that it instead needed to act as the primary source by which to meet the manifold challenges ahead.⁶⁹ This also implied the idea of assuring international security collectively, if not initially on a global then at least on a regional scale. Marshall considered it important that states be "bound by the same standards of moral conduct we set for the individual", including, among others, fair dealing, honest cooperation, and freedom of intercourse.⁷⁰ To that end, the society of nations had "to reject encroachment upon the fundamental rights of the individual with the same determination that we reject any encroachment upon the fundamental rights of the state". As in her own hemisphere, America had to make sure that states would not only declare an attack by another state against one of them to constitute an act of aggression against all of them, but that they also provided for "collective sanction against the aggressor". By joint and resolute action to defend any member of a regional group against unprovoked violence or coercion, the principle of collective security as well as the rule of law in general would as a result be even further strengthened. Such regional arrangements, of which NATO was undoubtedly the most prominent expression in later years, would finally and unequivocally "demonstrate to all the world that peoples,

66 Marshall, Interview with Harry B. Price and Roy E. Foulke, 30 October 1952 and 18 February 1953.

67 Marshall, The Secretary of State to the Embassy in France, 19 February 1948, in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1948, Vol. 11, Germany and Austria (Washington, DC, 1948), 71.

68 Marshall, Testimony of the Inter-American Military Cooperation Act, 23 June 1947, in U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Hearings, Inter-American Military Cooperation Act, 80th Congress, 1st session (Washington, DC, 1947), 5–23.

69 Marshall, Speech to the Herald-Tribune Forum, New York City, 22 October 1947, in *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, vol. 6, 232–233.

70 Marshall, Speech to the Rio Conference, Petrópolis, Brazil, 20 August 1947, *ibid.*, 199–201.

and nations, who really want peace can have peace by living in an atmosphere of increasing cooperative action and good will".⁷¹

At the end of the day, military and political matters went hand in hand in Marshall's thinking.⁷² Accordingly, he remained adamant about not only assisting European nations with internal dislocations, but also protecting them against any form of external aggression from the Soviet Union.⁷³ As evidenced by his strong support of NATO, the Mutual Assistance Act of 1949 as well as the enhanced Mutual Security Act of 1951, Marshall believed that the intensification of alliances between like-minded societies was indispensable for ensuring their shared goals and security. Marshall perfectly realised that the United States could not commit its energies and resources in equal measure to different trouble spots simultaneously but that, on the basis of selective priority allocation, it first had to secure the stability of those regions most vital to America's own core interests. As Mark Stoler has shown, the premise of a 'Europe First'-Strategy had undergirded Marshall's reasoning not only during the war but also extended into the ensuing peace period, predicated on the assumption that if Europe should fall under hostile domination, America's long-term national existence would be greatly jeopardized as well.⁷⁴

The United States could never disregard any one region entirely; however, it also had to take caution not to spread itself too thinly by doing everything at once. For most of his later career, Europe therefore remained the focal point of Marshall's attention, constituting the one seminal pillar of international peace and security without which these positive conditions could never satisfactorily prevail elsewhere.⁷⁵ This was why Marshall usually gave precedence to the transatlantic alliance such as in 1947–1948 when he was hesitant to expand US aid to the Nationalist government in China for fear that such action might

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York, 1969), 441.

⁷³ Marshall, Meetings with various Foreign Ministers, 4–6 October 1948, in *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, vol. 6, 567–573.

⁷⁴ Mark Stoler, "George C. Marshall and the 'Europe First'-Strategy: A Study in Diplomatic as well as Military History", *The Journal of Military History* 79 (2) (2015): 314.

⁷⁵ Ibid.; Marshall, Statements on Mutual Security Act of 1951, 27 July 1951, in United States Senate, Mutual Security Act of 1951: Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations and the Committee on Armed Services, 82nd Congress, 1st Session (Washington, DC, 1951), 35–68; Marshall, Address at the University of Louisville, 13 May 1953, in *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, vol. 7, *'The Man of the Age', October 1, 1949–October 16, 1959*, eds. Mark A. Stoler, Daniel D. Holt, Anne S. Wells, and Mame Warren (Baltimore, MD, 2016), 761–766.

unduly detract from Europe's fundamental needs.⁷⁶ Both Marshall and the Truman Administration were later severely criticized for the subsequent 'loss of China', yet in Marshall's judgement it was simply a matter of grand strategic necessity.⁷⁷ Of course there were instances when the United States had to shift its focus to other disturbances of the peace such as during the Korean War, without, however, ever losing sight of Europe as the primary centre of strategic interest.⁷⁸ On balance, Marshall thus continued to espouse the principle that in order to achieve maximum returns in defending worldwide peace and security, America would inevitably be confronted with making hard strategic choices all while maintaining an over-all high level of engagement in international affairs and the favourable development of other nations.

The Fundamentals of Peace

After the Second World War not only the world but history itself stood at a seminal crossroads between war and peace, between a continuation of interstate enmity and distrust and the inauguration of a more beneficent order for all mankind. The greatest threats to peace, however, did not only emanate from revisionist states or corrosive political movements alone. They could just as well derive domestically from an insufficiently developed sense of purpose to solidify that peace whenever and wherever circumstances called for the strong and just to intervene on behalf of the weak and helpless. For Marshall it was clear that if "the United Nations organisation is to be effective, it will be because those who advocate it choose to make it so". By implication, it was also manifest that those who oppose it will not make it effective, and that the organization essentially stood no chance of success if it was not nourished by the strength and fibre of the United States. Hence it was imperative to realise that the political clout they presently possessed could soon again evaporate if

76 See Ernest R. May, "1947–1948: When Marshall Kept the U.S. Out of War in China", *The Journal of Military History* 66 (4) (2002): 1001–1010; Marshall, Statement to the House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, 20 February 1948, in *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, vol. 6, 371–380.

77 Perhaps most infamously, Marshall became a prominent target of Senator Joseph McCarthy's domestic Anti-Communist campaign. See Joseph R. McCarthy, *America's Retreat from Victory: The Story of George Catlett Marshall* (New York, 1954). See also Kurtz-Phelan, *The China Mission*, 335–357; Jeffrey M. Widener, "From General to Diplomat: The Success and Failure of George C. Marshall's Mission to China after World War II", *Chinese Historical Review* 27 (1) (2020): 32–49.

78 Stoler, "George C. Marshall and the 'Europe First'-Strategy", 305–311.

they did not “take very positive and definite measures to give some degree of performance to the strength for which we have just spent so much of human life and money to develop”.⁷⁹ In addition to cautioning against a post-war demobilization of the United States’ armed forces, Marshall was keen to stress that America not lose sight of what the peace obtained by her soldiers ultimately signified not only for herself, but in a larger sense for human civilization as well:

We fought to prevent Germany and Japan from imposing their kind of order on the world. That certainly was but a negative return for our tremendous investment of blood and money. Did we win anything of a more positive nature? Well, to my mind we did. We won the healthy respect of the peoples of the earth and therefore a reasonable chance of negotiating a world order that would fit the ideals of decency and justice. Respect, it is true, is an intangible, but consider what it would have meant to us in tangibles had we commanded the military respect of Germany, Italy and Japan in 1939 ... On the day of final victory no such doubts existed anywhere in the entire world.⁸⁰

That respect, and with it the supreme opportunity to build a more peaceful world order along American visions and designs for inter-state cooperation would, however, like all intangibles remain a fleeting triumph unless “we bend our efforts to preserve it”.⁸¹ With people everywhere anxiously looking towards the future and the uncertainty of whether another war would once more engulf them or coming generations, the United States had a special obligation to assist the United Nations in formulating a basis for peace with Germany and Japan. Above all in preventing a revival of military and economic means of aggression in those countries, in restoring occupied countries as independent states, in fixing economies and making sure that the fundamental necessities of life were met, as well as in assuring that the economic machinery which had been thrown out of joint by the war was put back into order.⁸² As Marshall commented, the charter of the United Nations had been written “with the expectation that the solution of the problems before the United Nations would not be made more difficult by long delay in completing the peace settlements”.⁸³

79 ‘Responsibility of Victory’ Speech, 29 October 1945.

80 Ibid.

81 Ibid.

82 Address to the United Nations General Assembly, 17 September 1947.

83 Address to the United Nations General Assembly, 23 September 1948.

Already while the fighting was still going on, Marshall knew that the winning of the peace would be the predominant aspiration in the political life of American decision-makers after hostilities had ceased. From that moment onwards, as he later remarked, he became engaged in another kind of conflict to secure everlasting peace by “trying to eliminate war as a possibility, not merely as a probability”:⁸⁴

The attitude of the United States toward the whole range of problems before the United Nations is founded on a very genuine desire to perfect the Organization so as to safeguard the security of states and the well-being of their peoples. These aims can be accomplished only if the untapped resources of the United Nations are brought to bear with full effect through the General Assembly and in other organs. The Assembly cannot dodge its responsibilities; it must organize itself effectively, not as an agency of intermittent action but on a continuous basis ...⁸⁵

Initially, however, the real hopes, powers, and authority assigned to the budding United Nations largely remained a dream in need of realisation as many structural and organisational hindrances still had to be cleared before the UN could finally contribute to international peace and security in the manner American leaders expected it to. Always conscious of the ‘bigger picture’ in world affairs, Marshall has been described by General Hap Arnold as a man who “had more mature judgement [and] could see further into the future”.⁸⁶ This statement was not only valid in regards to cross-regional military operations, but arguably even more so in the area of grand strategy.⁸⁷ It was this profound sensitivity to challenges of global proportions which led Marshall to argue that if America truly desired peace and prosperity, her chief responsibility would rest

84 Marshall, Speech to the American Society of London, 27 November 1947, in *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, vol. 6, 275–277.

85 Address to the United Nations General Assembly, 17 September 1947.

86 On this issue, refer to Cray, *General of the Army*, 182–202, including the Arnold quote on page 182.

87 Marshall, Letter to Archibald MacLeish, 25 December 1944, in *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, vol. 4, 709–710. Marshall's strategic thinking was not just reflected in his appreciation of resource allocation during the war, but also when it came to global strategy on the geopolitical level. A vivid illustration of his grand strategic foresight was, as already mentioned, displayed in 1948 by the then-Secretary of State when he discouraged intervention in the Chinese Civil War after deeming America's limited capabilities more urgently needed to stabilize the equally sensitive situation in Europe. Marshall, Statement to the House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, 20 February 1948, in *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, vol. 6, 371–380.

with safeguarding an international order under which these conditions could flourish undisturbed. Ever since human beings had first associated in one or another form of civilization, they had tended to set down “rules of orderly conduct whenever such rules were a prerequisite of survival”. These rules of law laid down in national societies now also had to be extrapolated into the international sphere by instituting appropriate procedures to make them stick on the global stage as well. According to Marshall, the key problem in that respect derived from the inherent tension between those who sought to constitute world order by way of cooperation and those who attempted to do so by way of operation. As Marshall elaborated, aggressive and revisionist states such as Hitler Germany had preferred an order based on operation (by which he presumably meant that they forcefully tried to dictate the terms of international life single-handedly), whereas seasoned democracies typically opted to conduct their foreign affairs in an order built on cooperation. Since, however, one of these two diametrically opposed conceptions of international order might eventually prevail over the other and replace it for good, America before long had to choose under which kind of system she ultimately wished to pursue her national interests and goals.⁸⁸

Observations such as these attest to Marshall’s astute appreciation of how the allegedly never-ending cycle of international war and peace not only operated in general, but how through deliberate human action it might actually be reinvented or recast itself, if not even eliminated altogether. After all, a peaceful international order intrinsically hinged upon the extent to which individual nations themselves were able to determine definitive global norms and rules for the joint governance of that system. For Marshall, it was clear that the United States had “a powerful interest in the formulation of these rules”, so that one of its principal duties in the years to come consisted in ensuring that the world would indeed be going to see the creation of an order based on cooperation. The final outcome of that endeavour, however, still depended on whether the ‘co-operators’ or ‘operators’ would emerge as the stronger nations. As the primary representative of the former group, Marshall considered it an obligation of the highest national order that the United States utilize its full power and strength to advance “the structure of the United Nations Organisation as a vehicle to promote the cooperative idea of global order” and thereby secure the triumph of democracy over the lawless autocracies. Only the steadfast pursuit of this most important objective would permit Americans to live in a world where nations would no longer subscribe to the principle of establishing

88 ‘Responsibility of Victory’ Speech, 29 October 1945.

order “by conquering everybody else as Hitler did” or of controlling “for their own profit the domestic affairs of the peoples of the earth”, but in which they would freely submit to a specific set of rules for global conduct while agreeing never to use violence themselves save for the one and only purpose of enforcing these rules.⁸⁹

That international order could only materialize if America herself was prepared to defend it at any cost. Hence the United States had to make a “solemn and determined effort to secure the peace of the world” as only by “true strength, by determined leadership and in confidence that we strive for what is right” could America exert a determining influence on the future stability of the world. Recently, leaders of the Allied nations had proposed practical methods by which to achieve that goal, yet these united efforts could only be successful if “those who desire most to make them successful insure for themselves a quiet and righteous strength”. Such a strength, Marshall contended, was “absolutely necessary to nourish the new United Nations organization”, notably since America would court “disaster for herself and for the world if she again falls into a state of disinterested weakness and fails to fulfil her responsibility”. This was all the more true as the global community mainly looked to the United States “for leadership, for guidance in the practical business of vitalizing the influence, the power, of the United Nations Organization”.⁹⁰

For this purpose, however, it would not do for the United States to merely express its public support for the high standards of equal rights and self-determination of peoples; rather it had to measure up through its own untiring actions to these ideals as well as to its self-imposed role of the pre-eminent champion of global peace and national liberties. In that context, international obligations not only had to be respected, but relations between countries also needed to be founded upon mutual confidence and tolerance. Above all, the world had “to seek an accommodation by which different cultures, different laws, different social and economic structures, and different political systems can exist side by side without violence, subversion or intimidation”.⁹¹ At the same time, the international community could not “stand by as a mere spectator while a Member of the United Nations is endangered by attacks from abroad. If the United Nations should fail to protect the integrity of one small state, the security of all small states would be placed in jeopardy.”⁹² The political freedoms and independence of each single country after all formed the

89 Ibid.

90 Speech to the Salvation Army, 18 November 1945.

91 Address to the United Nations General Assembly, 23 September 1948.

92 Address to the United Nations General Assembly, 17 September 1947.

basis of fair and unstrained relations among nation-states, so that it was not only appropriate that the charter of the United Nations adequately reflected these concepts but explicitly provided for their promotion and protection as well. Just as the association of free men within a free state was “based upon the obligation of citizens to respect the rights of their fellow citizens”, so too was “the association of free nations in a free world ... based upon the obligation of all states to respect the rights of other nations”.⁹³ This made it necessary for states to reaffirm that respect from time to time as well as to renew their determination to develop and defend those rights and freedoms whenever needed. Not only ethical or humanitarian concerns mandated such an approach, but also more immediate strategic and organisational considerations in relation to the stability of global order itself:

Systematic and deliberate denials of basic human rights lie at the root of most of our troubles and threaten the work of the United Nations. It is not only fundamentally wrong that millions of men and women live in daily terror of secret police, subject to seizure, imprisonment or forced labor without just cause and without fair trial, but these wrongs have repercussions in the community of nations. Governments which systematically disregard the rights of their own people are not likely to respect the rights of other nations and other people, and are likely to seek their objectives by coercion and force in the international field.⁹⁴

Upon receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 1953, Marshall reiterated some of the key governing principles which, informed by personal experience and historical developments, had come to define his basic outlook on international affairs. To begin with, he reckoned that one of the decisive factors would be “a spiritual regeneration to develop goodwill, faith, and understanding among nations”, in conjunction with economic imperatives and the need to secure a stable balance of power. Once again, Marshall emphasized that people must “first seek to understand the conditions, as far as possible without national prejudices, which have led to past tragedies and ... strive to determine the great fundamentals which must govern a peaceful progression toward a constantly

93 Marshall here notably had in mind “freedom of thought, conscience and religion, freedom of opinion and expression, freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention, the right of a people to choose their own government, to take part in its work, and, if they became dissatisfied with it, to change it, the obligation of government to act through law”. Address to the United Nations General Assembly, 23 September 1948.

94 Ibid.

higher level of civilization". Great single endeavours like the League of Nations and the United Nations were of huge importance; still, they were altogether but steps toward the desired end, so that without a willingness to apply wisdom in action, these institutions would ultimately not be able to accomplish their intended purpose.⁹⁵

Just as the conduct of war required continued sacrifice and dedication from every soldier, so too there was no question for Marshall that the preservation of international peace and liberty required a superior effort from all nations "to break through the vicious circles of deepening political and economic crisis".⁹⁶ To that end, it was paramount that the free and powerful nations no longer disregarded the plight of the millions of men and women who live under sub-normal conditions and gradually "come to a realisation that they may aspire to a fair share of the God-given rights of human beings". There was no denying that the need to lend aid and assistance to poorer countries presented a great challenge to the more favoured nations, yet such efforts were absolutely vital to the longevity of a just and durable peace. For not only was this a matter of national self-interest but also a unique opportunity to guide the yearnings of less privileged communities with wisdom and generosity to a richer and better life through democracy:

We must present democracy as a force holding within itself the seeds of unlimited progress by the human race. By our actions we should make it clear that such a democracy is a means to a better way of life, together with a better understanding among nations. Tyranny inevitably must retire before the tremendous moral strength of the gospel of freedom and self-respect for the individual, but we have to recognize that these democratic principles do not flourish on empty stomachs, and that people turn to false promises of dictators because they are hopeless and anything promises something better than the miserable existence that they endure.⁹⁷

Material aid alone, however, would not be sufficient to guarantee permanent peace and security. Instead the democratic nations also had to provide leadership in reaffirming "a feeling of good faith among men generally", given that many people were in sore need of the inspiration of great principles as a "rallying point against intolerance, against distrust, against that fatal insecurity

95 Nobel Lecture: Essentials to Peace, 11 December 1953.

96 Address to the United Nations General Assembly, 17 September 1947.

97 Nobel Lecture: Essentials to Peace, 11 December 1953.

that leads to war". In this search for a more fruitful and abiding peace, Marshall grasped that there could be no substitute for efforts in various fields. Specifically, nations had to act in friendship by striving "to help rather than to hinder", they had to seek out "the causes of war and the factors which favour peace and ... study their application to the difficult problems which will beset our international intercourse", and they had to "initiate and sustain those great undertakings, whether military or economic, on which world equilibrium will depend". If the world proceeded in this manner, Marshall had every confidence that there would soon "develop a dynamic philosophy which knows no restrictions of time or space". As such, that philosophy would in many respects be akin to the deep-rooted pioneering creed which had turned America into a global vanguard of human rights and personal liberties, ideals which Marshall believed had the power not only to inspire but impel action in all the nations now joined together in the cause of peace.⁹⁸

In the end, an efficient grand strategy commanded states to defend their safety and prosperity along global rather than only national lines by likewise striving to enhance the specific nature of their international surroundings or, as Marshall put it: "we are now concerned with the peace of the world."⁹⁹ Universal peace after all was a long-term project that called for more than merely stop-gap solutions to already existing problems; rather it could succeed only if nations were intent on placing it on a much sounder structural foundation that would be further strengthened along the way. Consequently, that peace stood to remain a vain and unfulfilled hope for as long as states refused to actively shape international order and, crucially, if they neglected to prevent an aggressive nation from violating commonly accepted norms through the unwarranted use of military pressure. This idea of a truly universal peace had first been embodied during times of war in the United Nations' founding charter, yet it was – as Marshall understood – during times of peace that its underlying goals and aspirations had to be realised in the first place.

Conclusion

George Marshall exemplified the paragon of a modern strategist able to incorporate the demands of advanced military strength into the larger grand strategic picture of a multi-tiered defence policy predicated on preventive

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Marshall quoted in George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower. U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776* (Oxford, 2008), 598.

engagement in a plurality of interconnected fields. Specifically, Marshall knew that if Americans wished to enjoy the fruits of uninterrupted peace and prosperity, they had to realise that the seeds of future threats were constantly being sown the world over whenever the strong and reckless preyed upon the rights of the innocent and helpless. In the face of such wanton disregard for individual liberties, inaction on the part of the self-professed defenders of global peace and stability not only posed a danger to the fragile operating modes of an imperfect international system. At the worst, an insufficient commitment to adequately address – though preferably pre-empt – regional turmoil could also set the stage for America's own casualty lists of the future.

America could neither impose her will on other countries by force, nor excessively disengage from them without reaping in due course the costs of her failure to uphold peace and justice. For Marshall, policy-makers had to approach the making of peace with the same rigor, resource expenditure, and strategic vision that they approached the waging of war, only that that 'fight' nowadays also extended into the (geo)political, economic, and humanitarian sphere. In other words, they have to continuously adapt, consolidate, and defend the foundations of the established order *before* local upheavals and injustices are allowed to morph into cross-regional threats by slowly yet steadily empowering those out to undermine or destroy it. As such, this altogether represents more than 'merely' a struggle for the hearts and minds of ordinary human beings. More important still, Marshall viewed it as a struggle for the unique opportunity to ultimately not just set but perpetuate the rules under which the destinies of different cultures may eventually be merged free from the fear of war and, in so doing, reach the full scope of their unlimited cooperative potential.¹⁰⁰

Author bio

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¹⁰⁰ While Marshall only outlined the broad avenues for achieving this admittedly lofty, teleological end, his line of thought may altogether be linked to the idea of a 'liberal hegemony' in which the United States would play an instrumental role in creating the post-conflict conditions of peace. On liberal internationalism, see John G. Ruggie, *Winning the Peace: America and World Order in the New Era* (New York, 1996); G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major War* (Princeton, NJ, 2001); G. John Ikenberry, "Getting Hegemony Right", *The National Interest* 63 (2001): 17–24; Andrew J. Williams, *Liberalism and War: The Victors and the Vanquished* (London, 2006).

strategic vision for a post-war world peace. He is currently pursuing a research project at the University of Trier on American ideas for post-war European integration and rehabilitation.

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