

## The Faulty Premises of the Next Marshall Plan

The Marshall Plan. Few U.S. diplomatic efforts evoke such a nostalgic sense of pride and accomplishment. Proposed in June 1947 by President Harry Truman's secretary of state, George C. Marshall, the plan has been credited with helping Europeans recover after the devastation of World War II, preventing communism from gaining support among populations filled with despair, ensuring that Western Europe could become prosperous and strong enough to deter Soviet aggression, and creating a liberal postwar order that planted the seeds for U.S. economic and political dominance as well as for the creation of today's European Union. Although critics of the plan have argued that the financial assistance only marginally fostered the economic growth already taking place on the continent or that it was a tool for enriching U.S. capitalists by expanding markets, the Marshall Plan belonged to an era when it seemed that people all over the world loved the United States. Nearly six decades later, dramatic change is again unfolding on the world stage, marked by the emergence of new threats and the establishment of new rules and institutions. Faced with today's challenges in the Middle East and Africa, U.S. policymakers from across the political spectrum are championing the Marshall Plan as a model of successful foreign policy, an illustration of U.S. strategic foresight and economic as well as political benevolence that can be transplanted from post-World War II Europe to the Middle East and Africa today.

The bipartisan appeal of the policy is remarkable. Among Republicans, for example, President George W. Bush has highlighted the Marshall Plan's

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achievements in discussions on Afghanistan's reconstruction.<sup>1</sup> Former representative and 1996 Republican vice presidential candidate Jack Kemp has outlined ideas for a Marshall Plan for the Middle East and Central Asia,<sup>2</sup> and former House majority leader Tom DeLay (R-Tex.) has called for a Marshall Plan to help the Palestinians.<sup>3</sup> Political liberals at home and abroad have also adopted the Marshall ideal. Former president Bill Clinton invokes the plan as a way to win the war on terrorism.<sup>4</sup> Gordon Brown, the

British chancellor of the exchequer and Tony Blair's presumed successor as prime minister, has articulated the need for a Marshall Plan for Africa.<sup>5</sup>

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Such invocations and proposals reflect the belief and desire that a policy of Western assistance on a scale similar to what took place in Europe nearly 60 years ago can help foster peaceful, stable, and secure allies in the Middle

East and Africa; drain support for terrorism; and establish the foundation for a new world order based on prosperity and freedom. As is often the case with the use of historical analogies in policy debates, the Marshall Plan has taken on a kind of mythology, that of an all-powerful nation helping others in need to defeat a mortal enemy. It is understandable why the idea has become today's policymakers' favorite model. They can identify with two of the most esteemed U.S. statesmen, Truman and Marshall, to argue for a policy that reflects a United States (or West) that is generous, strategic, and successful.

Yet as the United States tries to think strategically about crafting an approach to help underdeveloped parts of the world, it is crucial to gain a deeper understanding of why the Marshall Plan worked and to disentangle myth from fact. When thinking about the prospects for a new Marshall Plan, few bother to consider the essential features of the original policy—including the plan's multilateral approach, which encouraged European countries that had just fought a brutal war against one another to work together, and its creation of an entity outside the government bureaucracy, the Economic Cooperation Administration, to deliver the assistance. These aspects of the policy are most commonly referenced, although four other critical issues related to the Marshall Plan should also be highlighted.

First, before there was a plan, there was a vision—a vision of a united Europe that would do for that continent what the creation of the United States had done for North America. If attempting to replicate the plan today, a regional vision of what the United States seeks to accomplish must come first. Second, the details of the Marshall Plan followed the economic practices of

the day, developed from the lessons that came out of the U.S. experience with the Great Depression and the New Deal. Any plan for assistance today should correspond to core contemporary political and economic lessons. Third, the Truman administration undertook a massive effort to sell the plan to the U.S. and European publics. Today, amid rampant anti-U.S. sentiment around the globe, public diplomacy and bipartisanship must be enhanced. Fourth, within a year of the plan's inception, the United States and its Western European partners formed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to provide the indispensable security umbrella under which many of the Marshall Plan's economic and political goals could be achieved. Without some guarantee of security for the states in today's vulnerable regions, countries will be ensnarled in instability and crises rather than focused on democratization and individual prosperity.

It is certainly laudable to seek to do for the Middle East or Africa what the Marshall Plan did for Europe. A better understanding of the Marshall Plan's features, however, will help shed light on what policymakers hope to replicate, facilitate a better understanding of today's challenges, and help determine whether the Marshall Plan is really the right model to address the challenges looming in the Middle East and Africa today.

## **The Original**

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In a June 1947 commencement speech at Harvard University, Marshall outlined an idea—and a relatively simple one at that. (Later that summer, George F. Kennan, then director of policy planning at the U.S. Department of State, reportedly said, “Plan? There is no plan.”)<sup>6</sup> Europeans lacked the dollars to buy the U.S. supplies needed to rebuild their war-shattered economies. Truman, Marshall, and others in the administration feared that populations in misery would be more susceptible to Communist propaganda. As Marshall stated in his address, “Our policy is not directed against any country or doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation, and chaos. Its purpose should be 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.”<sup>7</sup>

The Truman administration saw a connection between what unfolded in postwar Western Europe and the health of the U.S. economy and, critically, the future of democracy. The policy was not about being magnanimous to former enemies and war-torn allies; as Truman and his team saw it, nothing less than the American way of life was at stake. The administration was concerned that, if Western Europe remained economically weak and eventually fell into Communist hands, it would force the United States to return to a war footing and, they feared, would demand tremendous sacrifices and could

threaten civil liberties at home. Europe's postwar decline would "require not only a costly readjustment of our political-military strategy," Kennan wrote in 1947, "but also changes in our domestic life."<sup>8</sup> Truman put a sharper point on the threat in a message to Congress, stating that Europe's failure to recover "might well compel us to modify our own economic system and forgo, for the sake of our own security, the enjoyment of many of our freedoms and privileges." To protect all of this, Truman argued, the United States had to help.<sup>9</sup>

The assistance that the United States offered was unique. Rather than dictate a solution, Washington placed the burden on Europeans to come up with the plan to create a system that was perceived as legitimate and consensual.<sup>10</sup> Instead of forcing the Europeans to change, the Truman administration used the policy to structure incentives in a way that made the Europeans see their own self-interest in having a strong relationship with the United States. They understood that their allies across the Atlantic were also politicians who had to justify their actions and satisfy their citizens. "It would be neither fitting nor efficacious," Marshall argued, "for this Government to draw up unilaterally a program designed to place Europe on its feet economically. This is the business of the Europeans. The initiative, I think, must come from Europe."<sup>11</sup>

Yet, as one official reflected later, the challenge Washington faced was one that was "surely unique in statecraft," transferring billions of dollars to countries "that had not asked for them, and would not ask for them."<sup>12</sup> Even though Washington thought it would be self-defeating to dictate solutions, government officials understood that they needed to structure their policy so that the Europeans would have only one real choice. With a large enough carrot of aid, Europe would evolve in a specific way and, eventually, be able to stand on its own as a partner of the United States. This latter objective was central to the Marshall Plan's purpose: policymakers wanted to create an international order that would be congenial to their interests and that was centered around the United States, but they did not want to be solely responsible for the costs of running that order. As political scientist John Ikenberry describes, the United States was a reluctant hegemon, all-powerful but unenthusiastic about assuming the burdens of leadership alone; or, as the Marshall Plan's first administrator, Paul Hoffman, put it, "[T]he idea is to get Europe on its feet and off our backs."<sup>13</sup>

Promoting European recovery was a tricky business, and it was not just the Soviet threat that needed to be deterred. It was also important to rebuild West Germany in a way that would not pose a threat to France and other neighbors. Developing West Germany in a nonthreatening way involved encouraging European countries to come together, to break down

trade barriers, think regionally, and begin a process of economic integration. The United States did not just want to help rebuild countries; it wanted to help construct “Europe.”<sup>14</sup> This vision for Europe was very much a product of the U.S. experience in the eighteenth century, when the establishment of the Constitution ensured the creation of a large market in which capital, labor, and goods could move freely across open internal borders. U.S. officials and key European visionaries wanted Europe to do the same. Yet, such notions were also infused with the lessons learned from President Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal. In that context, as historian Michael Hogan has written, “translated into European terms, [U.S.-style] federalism meant the fusion of separate economic sovereignties into an integrated market capped by supranational institutions of economic planning and administration.”<sup>15</sup> A central lesson of the Great Depression was that the government needed to be more involved in the economy.

**Before there was a Marshall plan, there was a vision of a united Europe.**

Given the different interests at stake among the 16 European nations that came together and the disagreements that inevitably arose, U.S. officials such as Kennan and Undersecretary of State Will Clayton ended up overseeing many of the initial planning efforts. Yet, it was not just the strategic vision and the planning that were important, it was also necessary to sell the plan domestically in Europe and in the United States. In Europe, the activities designed to sell the plan included more than 200 short films depicting what the aid was accomplishing. At home, the Truman administration sought to build a strong bipartisan domestic coalition by including a range of groups, including the American Bar Association, Americans for Democratic Action, and farming and labor organizations in its efforts. To convince Congress, the White House intensely courted Senator Arthur Vandenberg (R-Mich.), the influential chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and included him in the plan’s development, eventually leading the administration to scale back proposed funding levels. Describing Vandenberg’s role, Marshall said that they “couldn’t have gotten much closer together unless I sat in [his] lap or he sat in mine.”<sup>16</sup>

Congress passed the legislation establishing the Marshall Plan in early April 1948. At the same time, many grew concerned with the security situation in Europe, especially after the February 1948 Communist coup in Czechoslovakia as well as the increasing Soviet restrictions on Berlin, and looked to the United States for help. To provide a security umbrella, NATO was formed in April 1949 with the signing of the Washington Treaty. Within

NATO's protective zone, the European nations could rebuild without worrying about the need to confront the Soviet Union on their own. Perhaps more importantly, they could focus on economic integration without worrying about each other, particularly France and West Germany. U.S. security was the foundation of the postwar European experiment.

## **Back to the Future**

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Calls for new Marshall Plans today echo the original. In an April 2002 speech at Marshall's alma mater, the Virginia Military Institute, Bush made numerous references to the original plan in conjunction with Afghanistan's reconstruction. "The Marshall Plan, rebuilding Europe and lifting up former enemies," he said, "showed that America is not content with military victory alone."<sup>17</sup> Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice constantly compares the Bush administration's efforts to spread democracy in the Middle East with those of the Marshall generation and holds up her predecessor's effort as an example of the kind of transformational diplomacy that she is pursuing. To ensure that the point is not missed, a portrait of Marshall hangs in her office, and the framed original copy of Marshall's Harvard speech greets visitors in her seventh-floor waiting room. Andrew S. Natsios, administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), has also jumped on the Marshall Plan bandwagon, harkening back to his own experience visiting his grandfather in Greece after World War II and watching the income of his village rise during the 1950s.<sup>18</sup> He has stated, "One of my great heroes was George Marshall," adding that "the roots of [USAID] are actually in the Marshall Plan."<sup>19</sup>

The Bush team is hardly alone in calling for a new Marshall Plan for the greater Middle East. Kemp's calls have stressed the need for monetary stabilization, tax reform, free trade, and rural development.<sup>20</sup> Representative Jim Turner (D-Tex.), then ranking member of the House Select Committee on Homeland Security, proposed the Winning the War on Terror Act (H.R. 5291) in 2004, drawing on the Marshall Plan's lessons. Basing his proposal on the Marshall Plan's cost of 2.5–5.0 percent of U.S. national income each year (\$200 billion annually, in current dollars), Turner called for a multilateral "Renaissance Partnership," with the United States pledging \$100 billion over 10 years and other wealthy nations matching that effort. Drawing lessons from the original plan, Turner believes that recipient states must form a Middle Eastern Common Market open to all states in the region and modeled after the European Economic Community, the precursor of the EU.<sup>21</sup>

Across the Atlantic, the central features of Brown's call for a new Marshall Plan for Africa—one of the initiatives proposed by the United Kingdom as

part of its 2005 presidency of the Group of Eight (G-8)—were to double international assistance to the region and eliminate debt for the poorest countries. The British also proposed the creation of an International Finance Facility (IFF) that would, in Brown's words, "use future commitments of aid to leverage resources from capital markets for immediate disbursement to the poorest countries in the world."<sup>22</sup> Blair pushed these initiatives in the months leading up to the July 2005 G-8 summit in Gleneagles. Although Bush pledged to increase U.S. assistance for humanitarian emergencies and for combating HIV/AIDS and supported the call to eliminate debt, Blair was unable to sell him completely on the merits of the British proposals. Bush has argued that the United States cannot support the IFF because it is a multiyear program and Congress has an annual appropriations process. Furthermore, Bush has expressed concern that African countries lack the proper structures to use such aid effectively. The Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), which Bush proposed in March 2002, embodies these ideas about good governance and institutionalized structures to try to ensure that countries receiving aid are less corrupt, more market-oriented, and have invested in health and education.

**In the Middle East and Africa, it is not a matter of rebuilding, but of creating anew.**

All of these proposals have attributes that reflect the Marshall Plan's primary ambitions. They call for major multiyear initiatives; they each seek to support a fundamental transformation of struggling societies and economies; and they put the United States, along with its Western allies, at the center of the effort. Yet, in four significant ways these plans fall short of having anything near the potential and lasting impact of the original Marshall Plan.

### **THE VISION THING**

Today's proposals lack the unifying logic that the original Marshall Plan embraced. They are plans, not visions. The rhetoric might sound the same, but if today's policymakers are serious about wanting to emulate the Marshall Plan, they must spend more time and energy debating and developing an overall goal. What is today's equivalent in the Middle East or Africa to the post-World War II goal of creating a united Europe? Until policymakers come up with such a vision, their earnest rhetoric will fall short. Historians will not remember a Rice Plan or a Bush Plan but rather, perhaps, a legacy of unfulfilled expectations.

The myriad differences between regions must be carefully considered when constructing any vision. This is certainly true when comparing Africa

and the Middle East to each other and to post–World War II Europe, particularly considering the significant contemporary challenges to U.S. influence in each region. The new plan must therefore develop a vision unique to each region as well as to today’s challenges and one that provides incentives for these countries to reform: to adopt the rule of law, attack corruption, and protect human rights.

### **DEVELOPMENT V. RESUSCITATION**

Calls for new Marshall Plans target regions and problems that differ significantly from the situation in Europe in the 1940s and 1950s. The European countries had been advanced industrialized societies destroyed by war and in need of reconstruction. As former German chancellor Helmut Schmidt

has argued, the Marshall Plan worked because “Europe possessed a long-standing entrepreneurial heritage, a base of business acumen, a high level of general education and technological knowledge as well as engineering capabilities. No Marshall Plan can succeed where such prerequisites do not exist.”<sup>23</sup> In contrast, the Middle East and Africa are regions that have suffered from persistent underdevelopment; large state-to-state assistance packages are not necessarily

the answer. As Stephen Ellis has written recently of Africa, “New infusions of aid would likely just perpetuate the kleptocratic regimes that have slowly strangled the continent since independence.”<sup>24</sup>

In these regions, it is not a matter of rebuilding but rather of creating anew. Africa has witnessed significant democratization in recent years, but the continent is overwhelmed by an HIV/AIDS crisis, and with a few notable exceptions, African countries have few resources to combat major health and environmental threats. Too much of the continent remains gripped by violence. In the Middle East, more so than money and resources, social equality is the problem. The challenges come in establishing governance, eliminating corruption, safeguarding private property, and protecting human rights. The Bush administration’s MCA is aimed at dealing with such problems and is therefore a step in the right direction. Yet, the program has not been a budget priority and has been consistently underfunded. In 2005, Bush asked for \$3 billion instead of the \$5 billion he had promised and has only disbursed a total of \$400 million to date. In fact, therefore, it has never been really tested.<sup>25</sup>

The Middle East and Africa can draw examples from other regions. Previously underdeveloped countries such as India and China have made dra-

**Many populations today would suspect a hidden agenda behind American assistance.**

matic, if highly unequal, economic gains in recent decades as globalization has spread. These countries have done so through a combination of cheap labor, technological transformation, and streamlined regulations that have attracted significant foreign investment. Yet, India and China have done more than provide major multinational corporations a business-friendly environment. Both countries have invested heavily in education, particularly in science and engineering, as a means to establish home-grown software industries to lead the next generation of technological development. The original Marshall Plan brought Western Europeans on study tours to cities in the United States to see how business was conducted. Perhaps initiatives geared toward Africa or the Middle East could establish similar exchange programs with Bangalore and Shanghai.

### **THE HOME FRONT: PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND BIPARTISANSHIP**

To its international audience, U.S. officials demonstrated the Marshall Plan's effectiveness by communicating its accomplishments in innovative ways. They relied on films, then still a relatively new medium, and outside interest groups. The films showed European populations how money was being used to rebuild their war-torn economies and sought to boost their morale. As has been well documented by numerous independent task forces and assessments, today's public diplomacy effort has a long way to go. In the summer of 2005, longtime Bush confidante Karen Hughes took over the State Department's public diplomacy operation, facing significant hostility from abroad over the ongoing war in Iraq and Washington's disinterest in international norms and institutions. U.S. aid faces significantly higher hurdles than it did under the Marshall Plan. The Europeans welcomed the American assistance; many populations today, however, would suspect a hidden agenda.

Although Truman, Marshall, and others often invoked humanitarian concerns when discussing the plan, this is not how they sold the policy at home. Rather, they explicitly argued that a failure to help rebuild Europe would increase threats to U.S. national security, make it more difficult for the U.S. government to refocus its efforts on domestic priorities, and threaten the future of U.S. democracy itself. Today, selling any plan is also easier if it has bipartisan support, but the U.S. approach toward the Middle East and, to a lesser extent, Africa does not have enough of that support today. As much as Truman cultivated the opposition party, Bush has dismissed it altogether. This is demonstrated by the administration's initial reluctance to establish bipartisan commissions, whether on the September 11 attacks, the intelligence failure regarding Iraq's weapons programs, or the response to Hurricane Katrina. There has been no effort to cultivate a relationship with a

modern-day Vandenberg. The more partisan the policy, the more skeptical many will be about its intentions. If the Bush administration truly wants to implement a major initiative that will transform another part of the world, it will have to reach out to Democrats in a meaningful way to build a larger

**M**arshall Plan objectives cannot be met without providing security.

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base of support, and the Democrats will have to be prepared to accept such an offer. The nostalgia that Rice and others are trying to recapture by invoking Truman and Marshall does not come simply because of their success in crafting new rules and institutions. The sentiment comes from a period when it truly did seem that politics in the United States stopped at the water's edge.

### **THE NEED FOR SECURITY**

Finally, the Marshall Plan objectives cannot be met without focusing on security, which was not formally part of the original initiative but was a critical component of U.S. policy in the 1940s and 1950s. In fact, it has been at the core of all U.S. democratization efforts since World War II. The major success stories of the past 60 years, such as Germany and Japan in the earlier period or South Korea, Taiwan, Poland, and Estonia more recently, have been underpinned by the achievement of political and economic freedom. In all these cases, however, such freedoms were made possible thanks to the provision of security by the United States, whether through NATO in Europe or through bilateral security arrangements with U.S. partners in Asia.

The recent cases of central and eastern Europe are illustrative. It took the newest EU members 15 years to meet the criteria that enabled them to join. During that time, NATO, using its Partnership for Peace programs and Membership Action Plans, made it possible for these countries to focus on democracy and economic development without fear that their neighbors would harm them. These initiatives also made it easier to carry out civilian control of the military and assure the protection of minorities' rights. Initiatives such as NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue, which promotes consultation and cooperation among countries in the Mediterranean region, are a good start, but for any massive assistance plans for the Middle East and Africa to succeed, NATO and the EU will have to do more. NATO does not need to station huge numbers of troops in these regions. Indeed, the organization cannot do so. It should, however, develop the expeditionary and deployment capabilities necessary to respond to budding crises immediately, enabling those governments that do choose reform to focus on politics and economics.

## A New Marshall Plan, or Something Else?

Although it is politically appealing for leaders to call for new Marshall Plans to address the threats and challenges in the Middle East and Africa, it does not seem that financial assistance, even on the scale that was delivered to Europe after World War II, is what is most essential to address today's security challenges. Perhaps the model accurately captures the level of bipartisan and popular commitment needed, but it does not address the kinds of assistance required. Aid to Europe helped reduce despair and thereby helped decrease communism's appeal, but similar assistance packages may not fundamentally make those attracted to Islamic fundamentalism less susceptible to becoming suicide bombers. At a minimum, a vision for the region and a way to provide security are needed before such assistance could be effective. Even then, the Middle Eastern and African development challenges are fundamentally different from those of post-World War II European reconstruction.

The billions of dollars that the United States has spent on Egypt since the 1978 Camp David accords has not prevented it from becoming a hotbed of anti-U.S. and anti-Western extremism. Washington should work with governments on establishing the rule of law and combating corruption, but the targets of assistance should be mainly private actors who can foster civil society. The plethora of nongovernmental organizations, actors that did not exist to anywhere near the same extent in the 1940s, are the entities that can help develop health care centers in Africa and new programs at universities designed to train the next generation. The United States should encourage assistance to new or existing foundations to provide scholarships and visa support for Arab and African youth to study engineering and computer science in the United States. If, in the case of Africa, basic health care and infrastructure needs cannot be met and security is not assured, governments will lack the incentives to allow civil society to thrive, and programs will fail. In the 1990s, it was not just technical assistance that did the trick in central and eastern Europe; it was the incentives provided by the prospect of joining the EU and the security granted by NATO.

Walt Rostow, President Lyndon Johnson's national security adviser, once warned to "beware of historians bearing false analogies."<sup>26</sup> The same should be said of today's policymakers. The current challenge for leaders is to resist the notion that simply evoking the Marshall Plan constitutes a strategy to confront today's challenges. In fact, using the analogy tends to confuse the kinds of policies that are actually required. It is true that, whatever policy course is chosen, perhaps the most important legacy from the Marshall era lies in the genuine U.S. commitment to make a significant part of the world

a better place because it was the right thing to do. Moreover, the Marshall Plan achieved its goal in a way that earned bipartisan support and, critically, the enduring, long-term commitment of the U.S. public. Although the answer to today's challenges in the Middle East and Africa might not be to re-create a Marshall Plan, the solution certainly requires a healthy dose of the Marshall spirit.

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