

Background Essay: The Marshall Plan and the Cold War



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The Cold War was fought with words and threats rather than violent action. The two nations at war were the United States and the Soviet Union.

Although the two superpowers had worked as allies to defeat Germany during World War II, tensions between them grew after the war. Feelings of mistrust and resentment began to form as early as the 1945 Potsdam Conference, where Harry S. Truman and Soviet leader Joseph Stalin met. Stalin was interested in expanding Russia's power into Eastern Europe, and the U.S. feared that Russia was planning to take over the world and spread the political idea of Communism.

Truman's response to the Soviet Union's sphere of influence and current conditions of war-torn Europe would become known as the Truman Doctrine. This doctrine proposed to give aid to countries that were suffering from the aftermath of World War II and threatened by Soviet oppression. The U.S. was especially concerned about Greece and Turkey.

Due to the slow progress of Europe's economic development following WWII, Truman devised another plan to offer aid called the Marshall Plan. The plan was named after Secretary of State George Marshall due to Truman's respect for his military achievements. Truman hoped that by enacting the Marshall Plan two main goals would be accomplished. These goals were:

- 1.) It would lead to the recovery of production abroad, which was essential both to a vigorous democracy and to a peace founded on democracy and freedom, and which, in the eyes of the United States, the Soviet Union had thus far prevented.
- 2.) It would support world trade, from which U.S. businessmen, farmers, and workers could benefit.

Truman also stressed the humanitarian intent behind aiding Europe's war-torn countries. The Marshall Plan was estimated to cost the United States approximately \$22 billion, but was later scaled down to cost \$13 billion after the plan was put into action. Secretary of State George Marshall presented the plan at Harvard University in June 1947, and it was met with acceptance by military leaders and political advisers.



Although the idea behind developing the Marshall Plan had good intentions of offering aid to people in postwar Europe, however, some people did not receive the Marshall Plan with the same perception as Harry S. Truman. As you read the following documents you will see multiple accounts of perspectives of the Marshall Plan. Take into account what you already know about the Cold War and the countries involved and apply that information to help you answer the following.

Document-Based Question: Did the Marshall Plan make the Cold War colder?

[Marshall Plan Map](#)

Cold War Timeline:

February 4th - 11th 1945	Yalta Conference	Meeting between Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin to decide what would happen at the end of the war. Topics discussed included -Partitioning of Germany, Fate of Poland, The United Nations, German reparations.
May 8th 1945	V E Day	Victory in Europe as Germany surrenders to the Russian army .
July 17th - August 2nd 1945	Potsdam Conference	The Potsdam Conference formally divided Germany and Austria into four zones. It was also agreed that the German capital Berlin would be divided into four zones. The Russian Polish border was determined and Korea was to be divided into Soviet and American zones.
August 6th 1945	Hiroshima	The United States dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima
August 8th 1945	Nagasaki	The United States dropped the second atomic bomb on Nagasaki.
August 14th 1945	V J Day	The Japanese surrendered bringing World War Two to an end.
September 2nd 1945	Vietnam Independence	Ho Chi Minh proclaimed Vietnam an independent republic.
March 5th 1946	Churchill's Iron Curtain Speech	Churchill delivers his 'Sinews of Peace' speech which contain the famous phrase "an iron curtain has descended on Europe."
March 12th 1947	Truman Doctrine	President Truman promised to help any country facing a Communist takeover
June 5th 1947	Marshall Plan	This was a program of economic aid offered by the United States to any European country. The plan was rejected outright by Stalin and any Eastern Bloc country considering accepting aid was reprimanded severely. Consequently the aid was only given to Western European Countries.
September 1947	Cominform	The USSR set up Cominform (Communist Information Bureau) which was the Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers' Parties responsible for the creation of the Eastern bloc.
June 1948	Formation of West Germany	The French, USA and UK partitions of Germany were merged to form West Germany.
June 24th 1948	Berlin Blockade	Russia's response to the merger of the French, USA and UK partitions of Berlin was to cut all road and rail links to that sector. This meant that those living in Western Berlin had no access to food supplies and faced starvation. Food was brought to Western Berliners by US and UK airplanes, an exercise known as the
May 1949	End of Berlin Blockade	Russia ended the blockade of Berlin.
April 4th 1949	NATO formed	The North Atlantic Treaty Organization formed with member states Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States



Source 1

Source Information: Letter from Harry S. Truman to Eleanor Roosevelt, March 16, 1948.
Correspondence between Eleanor Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman, Eleanor Roosevelt Papers,
Part II, 1945-1960. Roosevelt Library

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

March 16, 1948

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt:

I appreciated most highly your letter of the thirteenth enclosing copy of the one which you had written to the Secretary of State. I think all of us are in practically the same frame of mind and I, of course, am glad to have your ideas and viewpoint.

I think if you will go over the history of the relationship between Russia and us you will find that every effort was made by President Roosevelt and by me to get along with them. Certain agreements were entered into at Tehran and Yalta and so far as our part of those agreements is concerned we carried them out to the letter.

When I arrived at Potsdam for that conference I found that the Poles at the suggestion of Russia had moved into eastern Germany and that Russia had taken over a section of eastern Poland. The agreement at Yalta provided for free and untrammelled elections in Rumania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Poland. I found a totalitarian Soviet Government set up in Poland, in Rumania, in Yugoslavia and in Bulgaria. Members of our Commissions in Bulgaria and Rumania were treated as if they were stableboys by the Russians in control in those two countries. Russia has not kept faith with us.

I myself discussed the Polish situation with the Polish Government in Potsdam and got no satisfaction whatever from them - yet we made certain agreements in regard to the government of Germany which we have religiously tried to carry out. We have been blocked at every point by the Russians and to some extent by the French. The Russians have not carried out the agreements entered into at Potsdam.

The Russians are of the opinion that Henry Wallace and a depression are facing this country - they honestly believe that Wallace is going to be the next President. Of course, we all know that is absurd - we are much more likely to have the worst reactionary in the country for President than we are to have Wallace.

I shall go to the Congress tomorrow and state the facts. Beginning with my Message to the Congress on September sixth, 1945, I have constantly informed the Congress and the country of our needs in order to make the United Nations work and to arrive at a peace for the welfare and benefit of every country in the World.

Answer the following questions:

1. Is this a reliable source? Why? Why not?
2. When and where was this document created?
3. Why was this document written?

Source 2

Source Information: ELEANOR ROOSEVELT TO HARRY S. TRUMAN, FEBRUARY 27, 1947

Dear Mr. President:

I have carried on a lengthy correspondence with Secretary Acheson and I have seen a State Department representative sent by Secretary Acheson to explain the Greek-Turkish situation to me.

I went to see Averell Harriman the other day to try to get some enlightenment from him. I know that his appointment was very favorably received. Harry Hopkins thought highly of him but that was largely because he knew he could count on Averell to carry out directions. I have known him since he was a little boy. I like him very much personally but I came away from talking to him, feeling that there was not sufficient realization of the domestic situation we are facing and its tie-up with the foreign situation.

Our domestic and foreign policies are so closely tied together and the various moves made of late are so politically oriented, I feel some very clear-sighted thinking is needed.

Between the Pepper Bill and the Vandenberg Amendment to the Administration Bill, I hope that you might find some middle course. For that reason I am enclosing a copy of a wire which has come to me that expresses anxiety and makes some suggestions similar to those which have been made from other people. I am not sending it because it came from Aubrey Williams, but because it is comprehensive enough to be a good sample of a considerable amount of thinking which seems to be going on throughout the country.

I do not believe that the Democratic party can win by going the Republican party one better in conservatism on the home front. Nor do I believe that taking over Mr. Churchill's policies in the Near East, in the name of democracy, is the way to really create a barrier to communism or promote democracy.

I do not think your advisers have looked far enough ahead. Admiral Leahy as always, will think of this country as moving on its own power.

Both in Commerce and in Agriculture, we have not been far sighted enough to see that:

1. The safeguarding of food supplies for the world, even though it might mean keeping a little more than we need on hand, was a wise policy.
2. The getting of businessmen to work in Europe and Russia is the only way we can really hope to rehabilitate Europe and establish democracy.

Mr. Acheson is rather more sympathetic to the British point of view than I would be and what with Mr. Lewis Douglas, who will certainly be sympathetic to Mr. Churchill's point of view, I am afraid we are apt to lose sight of the fact that if we do not wish to fight Russia, we must be both honest and firm with her. She must understand us, but she must also trust us.

Please give my kind regards to Mrs. Truman and to Margaret. I hope the latter is feeling encouraged about her work. So many people have spoken to me favorably after hearing her on the radio.

Very cordially yours,

Answer the following questions:

1. Is this a reliable source? Why? Why not?
2. When and where was this document created?
3. Why was this document written?

Source 3

Source Information: Edwin Marcus. "[Can He Block It?](#)" ca. 1947



Answer the following questions:

1. Who created this document?
2. What language (words, phrases, images, symbols) does the author use to persuade the document's audience?

Source 4

Source Information: "Thanking America," June 5, 1972, pp. 1-2. Typescript. Averell Harriman Papers, [Manuscript Division](#), Library of Congress (14)

Marshall Memorial Convocation
Sanders Theatre
Harvard University
June 5, 1972

EMBARGO
Monday, June 5, 1972
11:00 EDT

THANKING AMERICA

Twenty-Five Years After the Announcement of the Marshall Plan

History does not too often give us occasion to speak of fortunate events. But here in this place a quarter of a century ago an event took place which could rightly be termed one of the strokes of providence of this century, a century which has not so very often been illuminated by the light of reason.

We are gathered here at this ceremony to commemorate the speech with which George Marshall announced 25 years ago that plan which was to become one of the most formidable and at the same time successful achievements of the United States of America. I have no authority to speak for any country other than my own, but I know, and I want the American people to know: our gratitude, the gratitude of Europeans, has remained alive. What we give in return is our growing ability to be a partner of the United States and in addition, apart from regulating our own affairs, to assume our share of responsibility in the world at large.

To go back to the beginning: if happiness is a concept in which mankind perceives an objective, then in our epoch it has for long stretches remained in the shadow. The era of my generation was a concentration of more darkness, more bitterness and more suffering than nations have ever before brought upon themselves. Against this background the act we are commemorating here today shines brilliantly.

Two world wars, which were first and foremost civil wars in Europe, plunged our civilization into the abyss of self-destruction. Ten million times in the first, more than fifty million times in the second catastrophe, one individual and irreplaceable human life was destroyed -- on the battlefield, in air-raid shelters, in camps, by firing squads, in the gas chambers, or by sheer starvation.

And the most depressing part of it is that this century is laden with the stigma of names that have become the ciphers of ruin, names denoting the nameless ravaging of souls, and that tell us that hell on earth was a reality. We have known since then that man is capable of revolting collectively against any moral commandment and of surrendering that quality with which he was born: his ability to be human.

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Source 5

Source Information: The Cold War and The Marshall Plan 1947-1952

Narration: On April 3, 1948, Congress approved \$5 billion of Marshall aid. The Marshall Plan was born from the need to feed the hungry, and to prevent communism spreading over Europe. Twenty percent of the aid were loans; 80 percent grants. The first shipments were foods and fertilizers. Next, machines to improve agricultural efficiency. In the four years of the Plan, the Marshall agency spent \$13.5 billion in 16 countries.

Interview: Professor Theodore Geiger, economist, U.S. State Department "Fewer people spent more money in that agency than ever before or since in the United States government. It was an extraordinary performance."

Narration: Europe's purchase of American goods and machinery redirected many Marshall aid dollars back into American industry, fueling a postwar boom.

Interview: Professor Marianne Debouzy, Paris student "Most people I knew felt that the generosity of Americans was a self-serving one, in the sense that they thought of Europe as an outlet for their goods, as a market to export stuff and we thought that we could see that in the types of things that they wanted us to buy with the money that they lent us."

Answer the following questions:

1. Whose viewpoints are represented in this source?
2. What differences between those viewpoints?
3. What conclusions can you draw about American motives behind implementing the Marshall Plan using this information?

Source 6

Source Information: Letter from Harry S. Truman to Bess W. Truman, September 30, 1947.

Dear Bess:

Yesterday was one of the most hectic of days, as I told you. I'm not sure what has been my worst day. But here is a situation fraught with terrible consequences. Suppose, for instance, that Italy should fold up and that Tito then would march into the Po Valley. All the Mediterranean coast of France then is open to Russian occupation and the iron curtain comes to Bordeaux, Calais, Antwerp, and The Hague. We withdraw from Greece and Turkey and prepare for war. It just must not happen. But here I am confronted with a violently opposition Congress whose committees with few exceptions are living in 1890; it is not representative of the country's thinking at all. But I've a job and it must be done--win, lose, or draw.

Sent letters to Taber, Bridges, Vandenberg, and Eaton requesting them to call their committees together as soon as possible. Had my food committee together and will make a radio speech Sunday. To feed France and Italy this winter will cost 580 million, the Marshall Plan 16.5 billion. But you know in October and November 1945 I canceled 63 billion in appropriations--55 billion at one crack. Our war cost that year was set at 105 billion. The 16.5 is for a four-year period and is for peace. A Russian war would cost us 400 billion and untold lives, mostly civilian. So I must do what I can. I shouldn't write you this stuff but you should know what I've been facing since Potsdam.

Bill Helm's book is a great disappointment. It is a buildup of Bill and not a biography of me. Too bad. The Potomac has a bad effect on all of 'em.

Hope you have a nice time, a good party at the Muehlebach. I'm sure you will. I haven't resumed my walks yet but will in a day or two. Too much to read. General Bradley made a report to me today on his European trip and he remarked on my having had to make more momentous decisions than nearly any other President. He's right, and I hope most of 'em have been right.

Edward Arnold came in to see me this afternoon and brought me wonderful pictures of all the Presidents. He told me and the office force some good stories about Sam Goldwyn, Harry Warner and Syros Skourus, imitating them in their manners and voice. It gave me sore sides from laughing.

Tell the baby I'll write her soon. Hope Frank doesn't get another boil.

Lots of love Harry.

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3. Why was this document written?

Source: List the full title of the Document.	Perspective: Whose perspective does this document take into account?	Opinion: What was their opinion on The Marshall Plan?	Textual Evidence: What statement(s) in the document verifies your figures perspective on The Marshall Plan?	Answer to the Document-Based Question: Did The Marshall Plan make the Cold War colder?

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