
PERSPECTIVES

Marshall's Legacy: A Guide for Tomorrow

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Shortly after becoming Secretary of Defense just over two months ago, I was confronted with my first big decision: I had to decide which of my predecessors' portraits I wanted to hang on the wall of my office at the Pentagon. For me, it was not a hard call: I chose to retain the portrait of George Catlett Marshall, Jr., the third secretary of defense and someone who has long been a personal hero of mine.

Today, I can think of no better hero for outstanding young soldiers than George Marshall. Marshall's varied career—as soldier, chief of staff of the Army, secretary of state, secretary of defense and, finally, Nobel Peace Prize winner—provides a prism through which we can see the varied colors and best traits of the United States Army and, indeed, America itself. Marshall was a towering figure of the 20th century, and his life provides a legacy that can guide our military and our nation into the 21st century.

I want to focus today on three aspects of Marshall's legacy:

- His vision of a globally engaged America;
- His insistence on military preparedness; and,
- His example of leadership, both military and civilian.

Fifty years ago this June 5th, at commencement ceremonies at Harvard [University, Cambridge, Mass.], George Marshall, by this time secretary of state, received an honorary degree. The citation accompanying the degree called Marshall: "An American to whom freedom owes an enduring debt of gratitude, a soldier and statesman whose ability and character brook only one comparison in the history of the nation."

Most in the audience that day and, I am sure, Marshall himself must have assumed the citation was comparing Marshall to George Washington. Of course, any Virginia Military Institute alumnus would have told you that the citation must have been referring to Stonewall Jackson.

But the content of Marshall's speech that day—and the content of the remaining years of his career—would elevate the words of that citation from graduation day hyperbole to historical fact.

For on that June 5th, Marshall articulated the idea for which he is best remembered—the Marshall Plan to rebuild the economies of Europe following the devastation of World War II.

George Marshall offered assistance to all the nations of Europe, but Joseph Stalin slammed the Iron Curtain down upon the fingers of that helping hand and prevented Eastern Europe from participating in an unprecedented humanitarian effort.

In Western Europe, the Marshall Plan was phenomenally successful. It gave hope to millions. It helped rebuild the economies of these nations and is credited with saving half of the European continent from falling under communist domination. The Marshall Plan displayed a deep understanding of the vital link between prosperity and peace—that if you have hungry stomachs and idle hands, you are unlikely to have charitable hearts.

But the plan also displayed Marshall's deep understanding that America needed to be engaged in the world—not just because the world needed America, but because America needed the world. Marshall understood that America had become a European nation—that what happens in Europe affects American security. He understood that in the flush of our victory in the Second World War, the United States could not merely walk away from the mantle of world leadership—as we had done after the first. Instead, as he declared in his Harvard speech, America must “face up to the responsibility which history has placed upon our country.” Thus, the Marshall Plan was not just about helping others out of the kindness of our hearts. Instead, it was fundamentally about protecting American security through a strategy of *leadership and engagement*.

Today, in the flush of our victory in the Cold War, America must again shoulder the responsibility that history has placed upon us. We must accept that with the benefits of being the sole superpower come daunting responsibilities. And we too must understand that protecting American security requires an America that is actively engaged in the world. We must seek to shape world events in ways favorable to our interests instead of letting events shape us. Those of us responsible for our national security must not only ensure that we have the military capabilities to protect our national interests in the event of conflict. We must also seek diplomatic and security strategies that prevent future conflicts from erupting.

I'm familiar with the expression that if you have ideals without technique, you have a mess. But if you have technique with ideals, you have a menace. The same is true as far as diplomacy is concerned. If you have diplomacy without military power, you have a situation where you have endless conversation without decision; and if you have military power without diplomacy, you have the potential for arrogance and confrontation. So we need both.

In the Pentagon today we call this “shaping the security environment,” and we are practicing it around the world.

In Europe, the collapse of the Soviet empire has given us the opportunity to complete Marshall's dream of a continent united in peace, freedom, and democracy from the Atlantic to the Urals. Today, the United States and Europe are taking advantage of this opportunity.

NATO is reaching out to the east, preparing to take on new members, forging a new charter of understanding with Russia and conducting military exercises with the militaries of former Eastern Bloc nations as part of the Partnership for Peace program.

In Garmisch, Germany, at the aptly named Marshall Center, officers and senior defense officials from the East are studying at a school run by the U.S. European Command to learn about how militaries operate in a democracy and under civilian control.

In Bosnia, NATO and 17 other nations are bringing the hope of peace and reconstruction to people wracked by long years of war, privation and ethnic cleansing.

And in the former Soviet Union, America is assisting in eliminating the nuclear legacy of the Cold War by helping to dismantle missiles, warheads, and nuclear infrastructure.

In the Asia-Pacific region, from which I just returned last Friday, American leadership and American security policies are fostering peace, stability and prosperity—the product of our strong system of alliances with nations such as Japan, Korea and Australia.

It is also the product of approximately 100,000 American troops who serve forward-deployed throughout the region.

It is the product of the Framework Agreement negotiated by the United States to freeze and dismantle the nuclear weapons program of North Korea—a hungry nation that still poses a dangerous threat to the region.

The peace and stability of the region is also the product of America's strategy to engage China—which seeks to build cooperation and understanding with that nation in areas where our interests overlap, even while we seek to modify its behavior in areas where they do not.

On the other side of the world, in the Persian Gulf, American engagement and leadership are essential to protecting lines of commerce and energy sources that are vital to our national interests. There, American air crews patrol the skies over Iraq, living in heavily fortified camps to protect them from terrorist attack. American ships patrol the murky waters of the Persian Gulf. Army units rotate in and out of the theater, falling in on pre-positioned equipment and conducting exercises. Together, they form a mighty military force that contains aggression and protects our interests.

In each of these regions of the world—Europe, the Pacific, and the Persian Gulf—America has made huge investments. But in each instance, the payoff is a demonstrably safer world and a safer America. And in each instance, we are bearing witness to the truth of George Marshall's insight that protecting America's security depends on our engagement with the rest of the world.

Marshall knew that we are not the world's policemen, but we can never afford to be a prisoner of world events.

The second aspect of Marshall's legacy I want to focus on this morning is his insistence on military preparedness. When Marshall assumed command of the Army in 1939, it was small, ill-trained, and ill-equipped. With just 200,000 in uniform, it was only the 17th largest army in the world. It was saddled with an officer corps that was grossly overage—captains were often in their late 30s or early 40s. And it was equipped with leftover weapons, materiel, and doctrine from World War I.

By the end of 1941, when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor—just over two years later—our Army was 1.4 million strong, new equipment was coming on line, and the Army as a whole was gaining experience in large-scale and corps-level operations, thanks to numerous training exercises, including the famous Louisiana Maneuvers, which brought together more than 400,000 soldiers to test new warfighting strategies and tactics.

By 1945, the United States Army and our military as a whole were the most powerful in the world.

Marshall was not the composer of all these achievements, but he was the maestro who brought them all together in harmony.

Today, America is carrying forward Marshall's legacy by insisting that our military forces are prepared for whatever challenges lie ahead. We understand that we live in a world where we will have even less time to prepare than Marshall had before World War II. Indeed, conflicts today often will be not only "come as you are," but "come as you are on a moment's notice."

That's why we are committed to keeping our forces in a very high state of readiness, and giving them challenging training where the scrimmage is tougher than the game itself.

That's why we are committed to equipping our troops with the modern weaponry that will give them not just an edge, but the dominant edge.

And that's why we are committed to developing the doctrine and the tactics to get the most out of today's high-tech weaponry.

One month ago, I was out at Fort Irwin in California, where the Army is field testing what it calls Force XXI. Force XXI harnesses the power of information technology. It has the potential to give our soldiers almost complete, real-time knowledge of the battlefield. If knowledge is power, then Force XXI is going to make our Army even more powerful and dominant than it is today—and that's saying a lot. Over 20 years ago, the futurist Alvin Toffler warned that "unless you tame technology, you will encounter future shock." Today, our Army is taming technology, and it is turning "future shock" into "future security."

The final aspect of Marshall's legacy that we can all profit from is the example of his leadership—both as a soldier and as a statesman.

As a military leader, Marshall understood the vital importance of matching strategy and resources. During World War II, America faced two powerful enemies: Germany in Europe and Japan in Pacific. We knew that we could not defeat both enemies simultaneously—even America did not have the resources for that. So we had to make a choice. Public sentiment undoubtedly favored fighting Japan first—after all, it was Japan that had launched the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor. But Marshall had studied the situation dispassionately and was an early advocate of the "Europe first" strategy that ultimately prevailed. It was a tough call, but it turned out to be the right call.

Today, we too have the challenge of matching resources and strategy. At [the] Pentagon right now, we are in the middle of what is called the Quadrennial Defense Review, or QDR. The QDR is nothing less than a comprehensive review of our national defense program. And it is forcing the Pentagon—and America—to ask ourselves very basic questions about who we are and who we want to be as a nation. Does America wish to remain a world superpower? What does that require in military terms? What kind of military forces do we need to guard against the very real dangers of today and the uncertain dangers of tomorrow? How ready should our forces be? And for what? What kind of weapons do they need and how many? Can we do everything we want under current fiscal realities? Or do we need to make tough choices and tradeoffs among desired capabilities?

The QDR report will say where I think we have to go, how we intend to get there, and how we can achieve that particular journey. But at the end of the day, I can guarantee to you that we will not be able to do everything that we would like to do. We will have a plan to do what we have to do, what we need to do.

And we will say to the Congress and the American people this is our plan, here are the potential tradeoffs, and here are the risks involved in each, because if we are being asked to do more with less, we say it's not possible. If we're asked to do the same with less, maybe that's achievable. But we might be forced to say we have to do less with less, and are the American people willing to accept that particular risk, because every time we talk about cutting back or downsizing or restructuring in order to achieve certain goals, it means that we must give something up. And when you give something up, it means you have to accept higher risks. And so the American people will have a choice at that point in terms of whether we are willing to accept higher risks in different categories.

As I ponder some of the tough calls that are part of this QDR, I must tell you there are some evenings I look up at Marshall's portrait simply for inspiration. I also look to Marshall's portrait for guidance on another topic that's important in today's military, and that has to do with the need to ensure dignity and respect for each other. And I'm talking, of course, about harassment and hazing.

Throughout his entire career, Marshall demonstrated a commitment to the core values of honesty, humility, and respect for others, and he understood that the keys to military success, whether at the platoon level or at the national level, involve trust and teamwork. And whether based on sex or race or just general respect, harassment and hazing destroy trust. They break down morale and they break down the cohesion of the team.

And so I hope that everyone in the military and throughout the country takes inspiration from the example of Marshall's military leadership and rededicate ourselves to the core values that he sought to live by and to instill in others.

And I also hope that we can recommit ourselves to follow Marshall's civilian leadership examples. As a civilian leader, Marshall understood that the American security policies should not only be bipartisan, they really ought to be nonpartisan. In other words, they shouldn't be the result merely of compromise between two political parties, they should be above party politics all together.

After he retired as chief of staff of the Army at the end of 1945, Marshall and his wife were looking forward to a period of relative inactivity, if not actual retirement. And then one day just before her nap, Mrs. Marshall heard the phone ring and she heard her husband answer it, speak briefly, and then hang up. And she awoke from her nap to find that in a very short telephone call her husband had accepted an assignment from President Truman to act as his envoy to China. Marshall later said he didn't have the heart to tell her before her nap.

He also said that when the president asked him, it never occurred to him, not for a second, to say no. The president called, and he answered the call.

He answered the call again in 1947 when the president asked him to be his secretary of state and again in 1950 when Truman asked him to be his secretary of defense. And this sense of duty and service to country, it permeated Marshall's being, irrespective of party politics. In fact, I don't know if anyone, [retired Army Gen. Andrew J.] Goodpaster [former supreme allied commander, Europe] or anyone else in this audience, can tell you this day whether Marshall was a Republican or a Democrat at heart, because it really didn't matter to him. In his line of work, it didn't matter at all. His job as a soldier and a statesman was to do the very best for America.

But I must say unfortunately this tradition of nonpartisanship has been somewhat eroded over the past few decades, and as a Republican serving in a Democratic administration, serving as President Clinton's secretary of defense, I think I have a unique opportunity and, yes, a unique responsibility to try to reinvigorate that tradition.

. . . When he was at Virginia Military Institute almost a hundred years ago, he steeped himself in the institute's traditions and military lore. In Marshall's day, even then, there was an annual tradition to commemorate the deaths of the 10 young VMI cadets who died in the Civil War at the Battle of New Market [Va.], the so-called Baby Corps. And all the cadets were forced to learn something about that battle, about the heroism and the sacrifice that took place there. And Marshall sought to know everything about that battle, and it's been said that he would diagram for his roommates the positions of all the troops engaged in battle. He described every detail, every maneuver, and hound[ed] them for days on end about the battle's history and the tactics involved.

And one of Marshall's biographers described the roommates' reactions: "At first, astounded; then aghast; then dismayed. For years afterward, the mere mention of New Market was enough to make anyone of them look furtively for a route of flight."

I hope all of you in this audience will find some piece of history to feel as passionate about as Marshall felt about the Battle of New Market.

Another one of my heroes, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., once said that "life is action and passion and one must share in that action and passion at the risk of being judged not to have lived."

Well, of course, Marshall shared in the action and the passion of his times, and he has given great definition not only to his life but to this entire country.

The commencement speaker at Marshall's VMI graduation prophesied something. He said, "When the time comes that another Stonewall Jackson is demanded, the institute will furnish him." Well, he had no way of knowing that the institute would go one better and produce a George Marshall. And when the time comes that another George Marshall is demanded, I suspect that he or she will come from your ranks.

I'll tell you it's been a great honor for me, No. 1, to have been invited here to see so many fine candidates for the role of a future Stonewall Jackson or George Marshall.

Let me conclude with an observation made by Allister Cooke who wrote a book some years ago during our bicentennial. In that book called *America*, he had a chapter comparing us to Rome, the inevitable comparison to Rome. And he pointed out that . . . liberty is the luxury of self-discipline, that those nations, historically, who have failed to discipline themselves have had discipline imposed by others.

He said, "America is a country in which I see the most persistent idealism and the blandest of cynicism, and the race is on between its vitality and its decadence."

And then he paraphrased Benjamin Franklin . . . "We have a great country and we can keep it, but only if we care to keep it."

When I look out into the faces of the young people who are here today, I am reaffirmed in my belief that we have a great country and each and every one of you are going to see to it that indeed our spirit and our idealism triumphs and prevails over any sense of cynicism or decadence. . . .