An Act without Peer

The Marshall Plan in American-Dutch Relations

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ON june 5, 1947, during a commencement speech at Harvard University, Secretary of State George Marshall launched the European Recovery Program, rightly and better known as the Marshall Plan.

On April 13, 1948, President Truman signed the Foreign Assistance Act, the legal embodiment of the Marshall Plan.[1]

On April 20, 1948, *The Economist* wrote:

> This week it is fitting that the people o£ Western Europe should renew their capacity for wonder, so that they can return to the U.S. a gratitude in some way commensurate with the act they are about to receive. For a day or two, the Marshall Plan must be retrieved from the realm of normal day-to-day developments in international afïairs and be seen for what it is —an act without peer in history.

I will deal with my subject in three parts.

I. The political framework in which this act was conceived, with special emphasis on the American perspective.
II. The impact of the Marshall Plan on the process of European cooperation.
III. The impact of the Plan on the Netherlands, on American-Dutch relations, and some aspects of the role of the Netherlands in the execution of the Plan.

I

The attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 terminated 150 years of American isolationism. The future of the United States became inextricably bound with every part of the globe. Isolationism

disappeared both as an option and as a philosophy for the conduct of American foreign policy. Many elements of traditional U.S. foreign policy, however, remained in the attitude with which the United States conducted the war, in its policy at the meetings of the Big Three, and in the way it emerged from the war in 1945. It seems to me that in the period from 1945 till the launching of the Marshall plan in 1947, the change in American foreign policy was more radical than what the shock of Pearl Harbor brought about in 1941.

The policy with which the United States emerged from World War II as a country with a monopoly of political, economic, and military strength was based on the assumption that the wartime alliance between the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union would provide the basis of the postwar order. The United Nations would be the guardian of peace. Peace treaties would be concluded with the former enemy states. The world economic order would be restored after an initial period of readjustment. Thereafter, the Bretton Woods institutions and the proposed International Trade Organization would be instrumental in settling worldwide economic problems and in guaranteeing a free flow of trade and finance. The U.S. armed forces would be demobilized to an extent compatible with a normalized world situation.

This was in no way an isolationist program; on the contrary, this program required the full and active participation of the United States on an unprecedented scale. There was an almost pathetic urge to avoid the errors of 1919 and a repetition of political and economic events leading to World War II. On the other hand, there remained a strong urge to return to "normalcy." "The U.S. attempted to remedy the old mistakes of 1919 rather than assess the new problems of 1945."[2] The main remnant of traditional American foreign policy was the deep reluctance to use power in peacetime and in particular unilateral American power.

Between 1945 and 1947, the hopes of the United States for the postwar order were shattered, mainly by a combination of two factors: the collapse of its overoptimistic assessment of the nature of Soviet foreign policy and its underestimation of the near-total collapse of the political, economic, and social structure of most European countries.

> For decades massivc historical caravans had been observed moving slowly towards predictable destinations; Great Britain towards loss of Empire and inability to maintain the balance of power in Europe and order in Asia; Western Continental Europe toward instability and weakness; the United States toward economic and military preeminence in political isolation; and the Soviet Union towards a fundamental challenge of Western civilization.[3]

1. As to the first element—the wrong assessment of the nature of Soviet foreign policy—an analysis of the origins of the Cold War would reach beyond the context of this article. Just a few comments on this subject, so closely linked with the concept of the Marshall Plan.

The revisionist school in American history has—it seems to me—one and only one positive element. It forced us to rethink what might have become too easy clichés. For all the rest, I fully agree with Maddox's brilliant analysis of the work of the main revisionist authors and his conclusion that their view of American foreign policy during and immediately after World War II can only be sustained by doing violence to the historical record.[4] I also find myself in complete agreement with Arthur Schlesinger's conclusion that the most rational American policies could hardly have averted the Cold War.[5]

The events leading to the "great revolution" in American foreign policy between 1945 and 1947 are varied and in most cases particular to certain regions and countries. Iran, Greece, Turkey, and Poland are significant examples. What these events had in common was that they showed Soviet policies and actions to be the opposite of what the United States expected and hoped for. They were, however, overshadowed in importance by the total impossibility of reaching any agreement between the superpowers on the administration and the future of occupied Germany. Varied and particular as these events may be, they led the United States to the conclusion that it had to give up its hope for global stability and peace-keeping through the United Nations. It felt obliged to adopt an active unilateral policy—if necessary a policy of force—to contain the expansionist policies of the Soviet Union.

2. As to the second element leading to the 1947 policy—the threatening economic and social collapse of Europe—the prewar European economic pattern was nearly destroyed by the war.

a. Physical devastation and disruption in Western Europe and in the principal food- and timber-producing zones of Eastern Europe, combined with the dislocation of the European transportation system, caused a paralysis of production.

b. Wartime liquidation of foreign holdings, prolonged interruption of international trade which occurred simultaneously with the loss of income from merchant fleets and foreign investments, led to the exhaustion or diminution of dollar funds at a time when many vital needs could be met only from dollar funds.

c. The loss of millions of lives, human strain and exhaustion after nearly six years of war and enemy occupation, gravely affected the productivity of labor.

d. Internal financial disequilibrium, the inevitable result of a

long war, upset the monetary stability of almost all European countries.

e. A grave shortage in the supply of food and raw materials that were vital to the European económy, both for direct consumption and as earners of dollars, existed in Southeast Asia.

f. There was an abnormal increase in population in certain areas resulting from the wartime movement of people.

It was against this background that the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan were bom. The policy was formulated by President Truman when he said in his message to Congress on March 12, 1947: "I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures." The Truman Doctrine constituted the political-military tooi of the new American policy; the Marshall Plan was its main political-economic instrument.

A relatively short period of preparation by a supremely capable and imaginative group in Washington, with star performers like Acheson, Bonesteel, Kennan, Clayton, Lovett, and Harriman, enabled Secretary Marshall to make his historic speech at Harvard on June 5, 1947. In his speech one can clearly define two objectives. One was the economic rehabilitation and reconstruction of Europe. The second was to use American aid to foster, advance, and promote European cooperation.

I would like to conclude this first part of my introduction with two rather loosely connected comments.

1. Historically, it might be interesting to observe that Secretary Marshall extended his offer of American aid to the whole of Europe, including the Soviet Union. But at a meeting with France and the United Kingdom in June 1947, where the American initiative and the possible European response were discussed, Molotov not only flatly refused Soviet participation but pressed the Poles and the Czechs, who had already decided to respond positively to the American initiative, to cancel their acceptances. The Iron Curtain runs exactly along the line between those countries that participated in the Marshall plan and those that did not, either by their own decision or under pressure from the Soviet Union (with the exception of Spain, which was not invited).

The tragic events in Poland .have given rise to a totally distorted picture of the Yalta Conference. The Iron Curtain was not established in Yalta. Poland was not "assigned" to the Soviet Union in February 1945. On the contrary, one of the main bones of contention between the United States and the Soviet Union after Yalta was the way in which the Soviet Union flagrantly broke the agreement- on Poland after the Yalta Conference.[6]

2. In the presently fashionable exercise of debunking American foreign policy, it is often stated that the Marshall Plan was launched only because of American self-interest. In general this is an absurd argument. No country and certainly no major country can conduct a foreign policy which is not based on self-interest. The only relevant question is whether the interpretation of self-interest is narrow, egoistic, and geared only to short-term interest or whether the interpretation of self-interest is long-term, imaginative, and constructive. Whereas the first interpretation—the narrow one—was adopted by the European powers in the late 1930's, the Marshall Plan, it seems to me, was a shining example of constructive and imaginative self-interest.

It was in the clear interest of the United States to help Western Europe to become strong again both for economic and for political reasons. But there also was a genuine element of generosity. Let me just quote a paragraph from the report of the Herter committee, the most important congressional committee, recommending the adoption of the Foreign Assistance Act in 1948:

> If we undertake the proposed European Recovery Program we are in effect assuming the rcsponsibility for the revival of Western Europe. Responsibility without power is a situation generally avoided by cautious people. But the alternative in terms of human lives, misery and slavery is perhaps too frightful to permit us the luxury of being cautious. We can only hope that the nations of Western Europe, who have the power over their economic destinies, will themselves realize the responsibilities of their predicament and by actively cooperating with each other, help themselves.[7]

II

The launching of the Marshall Plan initiated a priority in American foreign policy which would be consistently sustained for at least twenty years. lts central theme, supported by five administrations, both Democratic and Republican, was the active support for European unification. Secretary Marshall formulated this priority in his Harvard speech: "The program should be a joint one, agreed by a number of, if not all European nations." This was a muted statement compared to the depth of political and psychological feeling about the subject in American public opinion.

American thinking on the necessity of greater European cohesion was still in its infancy in 1948. Unity, unification, federation, integration, self-help, and mutual efforts were different and sometimes loose terms to express the same objective. This objective, however, was clear and it was there to stay as an integral part of U.S. foreign policy, supported not only by several administrations but also by a broad consensus in public opinion.

Even before the Marshall Plan was launched (during the congressional discussions on aid to Greece and Turkey in March 1947) the Senate adopted the following resolution:

> Resolved by the Senate (the House of Representatives concurring) that the Congress favors the creation of a United States of Europe.[8]

Practically without exception the media all over the country joined the Congress. A few examples:

> Like the famous advice Benjamin Franklin gave to the American colonies, for Europe it is a case of join—or die. (St. Louis *Post-Dispatch,* March 16, 1947.)
>
> Europe's unification is Europe's last chance. *(Wall Street Journal,* February 3, 1947.)
>
> Above all the U.S. out of her own wonderful experience of the Union of the States should support a European federation plan. Victory must be translated into new life and that means a Continental modern, political, social and economic system. (Dorothy Thompson in the Washington *Star,* February 11, 1947.)
>
> A United States of Europe could be the means of restoring a decent living to the part of Europe which represents the civilization of which we are a part. It may prove to be the only means. (Miami *Herald,* March 27, 1947.)
>
> But it is only too true, as statesmen have said so often in one way or another, that Europe must federate or perish. (Editorial, New York *Times,* April 18, 1947.)
>
> Only a federation holds forth hope of permanent peace and economic well-being in Europe. (Evansville *Courier and Press,* May 18, 1947.)
>
> The people in the ruins of Europe can take heart from the perils that beset Americans in 1787. (Buffalo *News,* May 22, 1947.)

Historically it is rare for a major power to make the creation of another major power one of its central foreign policy objectives. It is the reverse of the more common maxim of *"Divide et impera."* Without the Marshall Plan no OECD; without OECD no Schumann Plan; without the Schumann Plan no European Community. The process of European cooperation and integration, notwithstanding its slowness and its weakness and notwithstanding its structural and fundamental obstacles, would have been impossible without the active and full support of more than twenty years of American foreign policy, started with the conditions of the Marshall Plan on the issue of greater cohesion of the European countries.

The legitimate question arises concerning the motives behind this

The Marshall Plan — cartoon by Jo Spier (1900-1978)

very outspoken and consistent American policy. The motives were, it seems to me, a mixed bag.

There was the political judgment that only a strong and unified Europe could resist Communist internal and external pressures.

There existed a deep irritation about the fragmentation of the European nations, which had brought the United States twice into a world war.

There was the economic concept of the large, single market which in American eyes was indispensable for a better division of labor and a higher Standard of living.

There existed a genuine desire to transplant the blessings of the continent-sized, politically and economically unified state to the old mother countries with which the average American felt close sentimental bonds.

There also were more trivial but very understandable motives—for example, the U.S. administrations had to deal with many different interests and national problems and were desirous of replacing these endless and complicated negotiations with dealings with a single and strong partner.

These were the general motives behind the policy to support and foster European cohesion. There was, however, one particular problem which strongly preoccupied the American policy makers: how to bring Germany back into the Western system.

As early as January 1947, John Foster Dulles, who was the Republican special adviser to Secretary Marshall, expressed the basic elements of this preoccupation. Without the reconstruction of German economic potential there could not be recovery in Europe. Reconstruction in Germany implied unification of the Western Zones of Occupation. But unification of the Western Zones implied unification of Europe. A German settlement should advance European unification, instead of rebuilding the structure of independent, unconnected sovereignties. The industrial potential of Germany should be integrated into Western Europe. It should not be left in the control of Germany. A statesmanlike solution to this political and economic problem, providing safety against German aggression and a more stable and prosperous life for the people in Western Europe, was a positive alternative to the Potsdam policy of imposed pastoralization.[9] "Not only Germans but neighboring people will eventually rebel at trying to cover with manure the natural industrial basis of Europe."[10]

The German problem was aggravated by the huge sums the U.S. occupation authorities had to pump into their zone in order to avoid total chaos and by the subsequent pressure to deal unilaterally with the German problem. The concept of large-scale aid to a unifying Europe solved the dilemma between a bilateral support for the

American Zone, which both domestically and internationally was hardly acceptable, and a complete collapse of the center of Europe.

I find myself in full agreement with John Gimbel when he stresses the vital importance of the German problem from the American perspective in 1947.[11]

In the context of American-Dutch relations it is worthwhile to observe that in all these objectives the United States found a staunch and loyal ally in the Netherlands, not only as the recipient of aid (there the Dutch were as a matter of course no exception) but very strongly in the concept of Europeah integration in general and the solution of the German problem in particular.

III

Under the Marshall Plan, the Netherlands was the recipient of more than $1.1 billion (and those were 1947 dollars). It was the fifth-largest recipient (after Britain, France, Italy, and West Germany). It received the largest amount of aid per capita. After a hesitant start on the repair of the almost unbelievable war damage to the country in 1945, it became clear in the winter of 1946—47 that the reconstruction had to be slowed down or even stopped because of the total absence of foreign currency in general and dollars in particular to finance the vital imports. Only a massive injection of dollars could prevent a sliding back to economic misery.

The Marshall Plan was the dream and the dream came true. Reconstruction could be not only resumed but accelerated through the combination of direct aid to the country and the liberalization of trade and payments in Europe for which Marshall Plan aid was an indispensable condition. Marshall Plan aid laid the foundation for a new industrialization that was essential for the densely populated Holland; it vitally contributed to the repair of the war damage; it was indispensable for the restoration of financial and social stability; it enabled the country to resumé its place in international trade, on which it was dependent more than any other European country; it brought its balance of payments into equilibrium; it heavily contributed to the restoration of the exhausted monetary reserves. For those who are interested in the quantification of these observations, I recommend the excellent book published by the Netherlands government as a token of gratitude to the American people.[12]

Allow me to draw attention to what I consider an important and underexposed facet of the execution of the Marshall Plan.

Heavy demands were made on the hundreds of Americans who worked in Europe to supervise the execution of the Plan. They were primarily responsible for what happened to the enormous amounts

granted under the aid program; they were responsible to Washington in all its executive and congressional branches. In addition, they were the people who in the countries concerned suddenly would be involved in a vital item of economic recovery and in such a way that they were simply the donors and we were simply the receivers: givers from a sovereign state versus receivers from a sovereign state. Their American responsibility brought them in touch with and made them co-responsible for almost every aspect of the economic, monetary, and social policies of the receiving countries. That also implied an understanding of the political situation in the country to which they were assigned.

This was totally different from our relation to traditional diplomatic representatives. It was not merely a mediating, listening, and reporting function. On the contrary, the Americans found themselves right in the middle of policy making, in spheres which belonged to the privacy of national sovereignty. What an opportunity for giving rise to conflicts, not only in the personal sphere but mainly in the relations between states! One unfortunate word, and it could be regarded as interfering in the business of a sovereign state. One word left unspoken, and it could endanger the responsibility toward the U.S. government. Authoritarian action could bring the reproach that "we do not want any proconsuls"; being too compliant could bring a complaint of slackness from the other side of the ocean. On the one hand, the irritation toward a donor, who in the nature of things is never popular, had to be avoided; on the other hand, one had to take into account that "the U.S. taxpayer's money may never be thrown away." What were needed, therefore, were people who possessed not only first-rate diplomatic qualities but at the same time an extensive knowledge of economics; people who combined wisdom and tactfulness with sufficient toughness and the ability to negotiate. They were the outposts of the new role of the United States in the world. On their behavior mainly depended whether that new and indispensable connection between the western and eastern parts of the Free World could be established and maintained.

Above all, they had to be conscious of the fact that this was not a matter of one bestowing a gift with a royal but dominating gesture and the other accepting timidly and thankfully. The fundamental principle of the Marshall Plan was something far beyond this. It was a joint attempt, a joint venture.

Washington of 1948 succeeded exceptionally well in creating a team which possessed the extraordinary combination of all the needed qualities. The Marshall Plan undoubtedly stirred the public imagination, which helped recruiting. But another reason for the quality of the team was that enviable American flexibility which facilitated the

smooth flow of personnel from industry, universities, media, and trade unions to government posts and vice versa. Very few top functions were manned by what one could call the "professional civil servant."

It should go on record that, considering the delicate nature of the task (and I especially refer to the Netherlands), our cooperation has always been characterized by frankness, an ever-growing understanding of our mutual problems, and, from the American side, undivided support for everything which could benefit the Netherlands. It has seldom been the case that foreign representatives had to acquire such complete insight into virtually all aspects of the economic position of the country in which they were serving. There was no end to details which they could demand, indeed had to demand, to be able to perform their duties. The Netherlands has been privileged to welcome Dr. Alan Valentine and Clarence Hunter as chiefs of the ECA mission. Both men have left an unmistakably personal mark on their work. Both, together with their staffs, were constantly in close touch with all branches of economic and political life in the Netherlands. Both have understood this country.

The United States was a generous giver; the Netherlands was an easy and constructive receiver. On all major points there was a great affinity between American and Dutch attitudes. There are—taking into account the huge differences between a major and leading power and a small or medium-sized ally—clear analogies between the historical backgrounds of their conduct and their concept of foreign policy. Both have a tendency to a moralistic approach to foreign policy; both have a missionary drive in their relations with foreign countries; both have a reluctance to employ the element of power in foreign policy; both often confuse the obtainable and the desirable; both had periods in their history when they thought they were too good for the world and other periods when they thought they were too bad.

When Secretary of State Cordell Huil reported to Congress on the Moscow meeting of the three Foreign Ministers and the Moscow declaration of October 1943, he said that "in the post-war period there would be no longer any need for spheres of influence, for alliances, for balance of power or any other of the special arrangements through which, in the unhappy past, the nations strove to safeguard their security or to promote their interests.[13] This "one world" concept without alliances and with the United Nations as the sole guardian of peace was exactly the world in which the Netherlands felt itself at home. Both countries emerged from the war with the same approach to the postwar world order. There was a complete parallel between the changes which took place in the United States between 1945 and 1947 and the turn Dutch foreign policy took in the same period.

After 1947 the United States found Holland at its side both in its

urge for greater European cooperation and in the solution to the German problem. In the Committee for European Economic Cooperation (the informal predecessor of the OECD), Holland was among the first in line to defend both issues, aided by the outstanding qualities of its main representatives in the committee, Dr. H. M. Hirschfeld and D. P. Spierenburg, and of course motivated by what it conceived as its interest. Historically, the violent discussions in the hot summer of 1947 in Paris between the Dutch and the French on the German issue are most interesting for a study of the period.

Are there any conclusions to be drawn? A few.

The first is that the Marshall Plan cannot be repeated. The United States' position has fundamentally changed. It is no longer the undisputed and sole source of strength, of political and economic power. It only has two traditions in its foreign policy: one is splendid isolation and one is benevolent hegemony. Both traditions simplified the world outside the United States. It now has to conduct its foreign policy in an immensely complicated world without being able to fall back on either of these traditions.

The Marshall Plan was a typical example of the period of benevolent hegemony. Furthermore, the Marshall Plan could succeed only in the specific area of the world—Western Europe—in which the human, social, financial, and educational infrastructure was uniquely suited to receive the massive injection of aid and use it successfully.

The second conclusion is that it would be understandable but unhelpful nostalgia to hope that anything like the very special circumstances of 1947 could reoccur. The world has fundamentally changed. The United States—still a superpower—has lost its preeminence in the economic, military, and political fields. In East-West relations superiority has been at best replaced by parity.

The tenacity of the nation-state proved to be much greater than those who dreamed about European unity in the fifties and the sixties expected. The welfare state—the *"état providence"*—is a national animal and the nation-state has become, more than we expected, the natural framework of loyalty and dependence of the average citizen.

The North-South issue is, if not preponderant, at least a major factor in international relations.

The near-consensus about the main elements of foreign and domestic policy from the fifties and the sixties in the policy-making establishment has broken down.

It would be unrealistic to hope again for a stable and structured Western world built on two pillars—the United States of America and the United States of Europe. The maximum we can achieve and hope for is what Miriam Camps has called a reasonable management of interdependence.[14]

Finally, in American-Dutch relations the two main questions are whether in the United States wisdom and long-term interest will prevail over fully understandable short-term irritation, and in the Netherlands whether sensible and active participation in the Western system will prevail over an irrelevant neutralist-pacifist tendency, so intimately linked to our history.

Nostalgia is neither a political nor a historical category. I feel it, however, when I think of 1947.

NOTES

1 Full texts of both are in *In Quest of Peace and Security: Selected Documents on American Foreign Policy, 1941-1951* (Department of State Publication 4245, 1951).
2 Barbara Ward, *The West at Bay* (London, 1948), p. 85.
3 Joseph M. Jones, *The Fifteen Weeks* (New York, 1955), p. 9.
4 R. J. Maddox, *The New Left and the Origins of the Cold War* (Princeton, N.J., 1973), p. 164.
5 Arthur Schlesinger, "The Origins of the Cold War," *Foreign Affairs,* XLVI (October 1967), 52.
6 See, among others, M. C. Brands's excellent analysis of the Yalta Conference in *NRC Handelsblad,* January 13, 1982.
7 *What Western Europe Can Do for Itself,* Preliminary Report No. 14 of the House Select Committee on Foreign Aid, February 13, 1948.
8 *Congressional Record,* 8oth Congress 1st session, pp. 2418, 2425.
9 John C. Campbell, *The United States in World Affairs, 1945-ZP47* (New York, 1947), p. 471.
10 *Ibid.*
11 John Gimbel, *The Origins of the Marshall Plan* (Stanford, Calif., 1976), pp. 267-80.
12 *Road to Recovery. The Marshall Plan, Its Importance for the Netherlands and European Cooperation* (The Hague, 1954).
13 Campbell, *The United States in World Affairs,* p. 28.
14 Miriam Camps, *The Management of Interdependence* (Washington, DC, 1974).

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American-Dutch Political Relations since 1945

What Has Changed and Why?

ALFRED VAN STADEN

AN account of the evolution of the political relations between the United States and the Netherlands since World War II is much like the story of two disappointed lovers making a sentimental journey. To be sure, at this moment, both partners are still together, tied by undeniable military and economic bonds, but the former marriage of the heart has broken down and turned into one of convenience, if not a case of living-apart-together. Indeed, mutual feelings of solidarity and attachment have weakened and given way to coolness and reproaches to and fro. Looking at recent, sharp disputes on important security issues, one is almost tempted to think—not for the children's sake but out of a desire not to besmirch the parents' memory—the two parties have decided not to part. Of course, the American-Dutch estrangement, grown since the late sixties and particularly perceptible at the level of political opinion leaders, is being muted and disguised by the polished language of official diplomacy. Nevertheless, it is but too real and, I venture to say, potentially dangerous for the future relationship between both countries.

It is the purpose of my lecture to explore the nature and dimensions of the changes which have taken place, as well as to shed some light on their causes. At the outset I must make two preliminary points. First, the subject under discussion has a built-in imbalance of some sort. Postwar U.S.-Dutclr political relations are inherently asymmetric, because they are about the interactions of a superpower and a small country. Nobody would argue the contrary. This means, among other things, that what is important or even vital from a Dutch point of view may be rather marginal or insignificant in American eyes. Second, as I was born, bred, and socialized in Holland, the perspective of my observations is inevitably a Dutch one, and rather than deal with