Marshall Testimony of October 21, 1949

THE NATIONAL DEFENSE PROGRAM—UNIFICATION AND STRATEGY

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FRIDAY, OCTOBER 21, 1949

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
Washington, D. C.

The committee reconvened at 10 a. m., pursuant to the recess, Hon. Carl Vinson (chairman) presiding.

The CHAIRMAN. Let the committee come to order.

Members of the committee, we are indeed fortunate to have with us this morning General Marshall. We all know the great service the general has rendered to the Nation. While the general is taking life quietly out at his home near Leesburg, like other great Americans in days gone by, when the clouds gather and difficult problems arise, we have to call him from his retirement to come back and give us his mature judgment and advice.

General, we welcome you here, are delighted to have you, and we would appreciate what you have to advise the committee and the Nation.

STATEMENT OF GENERAL GEORGE C. MARSHALL

General MARSHALL. Mr. Chairman and gentlemen. I was notified of the desire to have me appear before this committee while I was in New York, from where I returned yesterday evening. I have no prepared statement. I have not discussed the immediate issues with anybody. I can only bring to you my point of view as it was formed through my experience before and during the war and thereafter while I was Secretary of State.

In the first place, while it goes a little far afield, it might be best for me in elaborating my point of view to describe some of my first approaches to this issue. They occurred during my first tour of duty in Washington, when I arrived here with General Pershing on his return from France. I was with him here about 4 years, then I went off to China. I then saw rather intimately the situation among the armed forces, of which then there were only two: the Army and the Navy. Later on, of course, while I was farther afield, I obtained a pretty good idea of the difficulties of the situation in organization and in procedure both from the press and from the effects on the units with which I was associated.

Then, when I came into Washington and shortly thereafter was made Deputy Chief of Staff and on from that Chief of Staff I had a close-up view, with the war years as a background.

From the very first time I came to Washington in 1919, in the fall, I became convinced that something had to be done in order better to **[p. 597/598]** insure a respectable posture of national defense. It became evident to me then that the great problem—the real problem—was money. Almost everything else was related to that directly or indirectly. The more nearly we reached a condition of at least assumed profound peace, the more important that particular phase of the problem became because all forms of military appropriations—meaning Navy, Army, Air, Marine, and all—were not appealing at all to the public and were exceedingly difficult, I believe, politically to handle because they added nothing but complications to the budget which is always the great political factor in any campaign.

I saw the Army, beginning in the period of General Pershing's services as Chief of Staff, start rapidly on the downgrade to almost extinction as a consideration from the viewpoint of a world force or power. Later I inherited the problem which had resulted from those years of attrition and had a great deal of time in which to mull the matter over in my own mind.

The first impressive reaction that came to my attention after I came into Washington in 1938 was the Hepburn report, which I believe is a very complete report. It had to do with bases over a wide range: the coast from the Aleutians on down into the Caribbean.

Now, the remarkable part of that to me was that so far as I know, and certainly so far as the records of the office which I inherited were concerned, there seemed to be no discussion with the Army at all with relation to that and yet inevitably the Army was to be called upon to defend many of those bases. That seemed a wholly incomprehensible procedure to me.

There were many other examples on both sides of the same problem.

At the end of the war, the procedure was overlapped again by the financial question coming up for appropriations for four or five hundred thousand men, as I recall it, without any discussion with the Army in connection therewith.

So I became a firm advocate of some form of unification. What it might be would have to be worked out, of course, not only among the services but particularly legislatively with the Congress.

Again I would like to emphasize what, to me, was the major factor which gave rise to most of the discussions, though often it wasn't referred to at all, and that was money.

I had been very much interested when I came into Washington to find out just why the General Staff of the Army was so unpopular as it seemed to be with some Members of the Congress. The explanation, to my mind, was very easy to find. The appropriations were, in the opinion of the military judges of the situation and requirements, wholly inadequate and it was the disagreeable duty of the General Staff to cut. Not only did no one get what he wanted, or as much as he wanted, to put it more accurately, but a great many didn't get anything, and you had gifts for no one, which didn't make for any popularity. Quite the contrary. And with the Members of Congress, while collectively there might have been understanding, individually various Members who had certain particular desires at heart were defeated by General Staff recommendations which didn't conform to the desire of the individual members. That is a very ordinary manifestation which is not confined to Congress but also was reflected in the Army in

its own operations because each particular activity or each particular area commander was affected exactly the same way. **[p.598/599]**

So it became more and more evident to me that something should be done in the interest of national security, and, to put it more politely, in the interest of the taxpayer, to produce a more unified procedure which was calculated to give us the most for whatever number of dollars the Congress felt that it could appropriate for the national defense.

As we went into the years immediately preceding our entry into the war and when the British, Mr. Churchill and British military representatives, arrived here in Washington in December 1941, there then grew up very informally the Chiefs of Staff organization, with the history of which I think you are all sufficiently familiar without my making any comments about it.

However, I should say this, that you can better understand me: It seemed to me that the set-up we had was not calculated to work as smoothly as would be highly desirable in the dangerous days we were then confronting because of the fact that I was the senior member of the Chiefs of Staff and I was not only the senior member and, therefore, the presiding officer, but the Air Force was under me and while I tried to accord to General Arnold all possible freedom of action—autonomy—nevertheless, under the law and organization, the Air Force was, in a sense, under me. Nevertheless, he sat as a member of the Chiefs of Staff organization, and to the largest extent possible, I refrained from restrictions of any kind on his procedure and his efforts.

I felt that under the conditions that then existed some better arrangement was necessary that was more calculated to make agreements easy to reach. I will ask you to pardon my frankness in this, but I have to be frank. I went to Mr. Roosevelt and recommended very gently to him that he bring Admiral Leahy back from France and make him Chief of Staff to the President and, therefore, Chairman of the United States Chiefs of Staff. I did that for the reason I first indicated, but I did it also for the reason that in my previous contacts with Admiral Leahy I formed a very high opinion of his integrity of action and judgment and especially because he was not only a naval officer, but he was held in very high esteem by the President personally. I thought the combination of all those various factors would make for the successful working of the Chiefs of Staff in the difficult days that would come.

Mr. Roosevelt, at first, was unwilling to take that action. He said several times that I was his Chief of Staff. I endeavored to explain that I was not his Chief of Staff, I was only Chief of Staff of the Army; that while I had a general staff to assist me, he had none to assist him in relation to his functions as Commander in Chief under the conditions of a great war, should we get into it.

I think about 4 or 5 months elapsed before I succeeded in persuading the President to go through with that appointment. Even then some time elapsed before the functions of Admiral Leahy became perfectly clear and accepted on all sides, and he rendered a very valuable service.

Now, I recite that because it had a great deal to do with our ability to function during the war. He was in a position to which I didn't think anybody in the Navy could object. It wasn't a question of the Army objecting to his appointment. The Army was insisting upon **[p. 599/600]**

his appointment. So we went ahead during the war years with Admiral Leahy as presiding officer of the Chiefs of Staff and with a vote, so far as votes were ever counted.

You can do a great many things in wartime under the emergency of war and the high state of patriotism of all individuals that you can't do in time of peace, as you well know. I felt it was very important that we find a working basis for the peace, because what we were all striving for war that day I referred to of profound peace, and when you reach that, you have the greatest difficulty in obtaining anything at all for the military forces. That is very natural. So I have always felt that the organization should be built to meet that issue more than merely what is the best organization, when you go to war, because you can find your compromises then under the great outpouring of patriotic effort on the part of everybody.

I felt all along there hadn't been enough emphasis given to that phase of the matter. I felt particularly here in the past 2 or 3 years that we have been misled as to the workability of what we are doing in some respects by the fact that we have a great stimulant toward military appropriations which I hope in due time will be completely lacking—that is our feelings regarding the Soviet Union. When that lapses and we do get to a better accord, then, immediately the military forces are in great difficulties to maintain themselves at a reasonable state of efficiency and a reasonable state to provide for prompt expansion.

Now, I have referred to my own views and actions I took in order to promote a procedure that would work under the stress of war. But during the war we had our difficulties. We got through them all but we got through them at times with a great loss of time and we got through them at times with overcompromise, which is a very serious business when it is connected with the national defense.

Our efforts were always complicated by statements made by this person or that person because of its effect on the public. In the light of what I have read in the papers about the discussions here, I might say that during a great deal of my tenure of office I was in the position of exercising great restraint on the air fellows. I was an ardent advocate of a full development of air power and at the same time I was opposed to undue expansion and overstatement of powers and understatement of limitations.

We got along very well, however, because General Arnold is quite a remarkable person, not only in his knowledge of air developments in which he is a great pioneer, but, because he was wholly impersonal, and I was trying to be wholly impersonal, too, and I think between the two of us we succeeded and that had a great deal to do with being able to get ahead. I merely mention that, because the difficulties of the war involved restraints and limitations that probably were not appreciated at all by the public and never became public property. And they should not have become public property because we always reached a harmonious understanding.

I might add that for a period of 6 months, I, in a sense, commanded the Air Corps because General Arnold was sick, so I was intimately familiar with all that part of it.

Now it has been my experience, which was magnified during the war, that each activity, each area, particularly its commander, desires a great deal more for that activity or that area or that army than you [p.600/601] can afford to give him. That is inherent in the problem. Also

inherent in the problem is your staff. The reactions of a staff are necessarily quite different from the reactions of the individual. It takes on another color from the individual when he becomes a member of a staff. And that is as it should be. And a staff has to be very conservative in its propositions. And it falls to the individual who is placed as I was to make the general across-the-board decision which at times will seemingly be totally contrary to the recommendations of the Staff itself. That is not at all unusual. That is the way it inevitably will be, unless you proceed in a wholly negative manner.

I might say that when I left office as Chief of Staff, I had been very desirous of having the President accept my resignation some time before he did, for the reason that, my estimate of what would be possible in the years to come could not then take fully into account the trials and tribulations of the 2 years that were still to develop, and I did not think it a wise thing for me to use the influence that I could then exert to establish policies which my successor was to inherit. I thought it was much better for the President to bring in my successor and let him struggle with those problems. The more so because I was in disagreement with almost everything that was being proposed. And it all hinged on appropriations. My feeling was that on all sides—Air in particular, and Navy, and the ground forces, to a less degree—the, demands were entirely too high and that the country just couldn't stand it. Therefore, it was imperative that we find some method of doing what it was necessary to do that was within our financial possibilities for an enduring peace.

I have always felt that the proposal was evolved from a misunderstanding. It was based on the fact that the Germans were able to act with such tremendous impetus and power at the start of their war, particularly with air, because they had worked toward a definite date to start. But what we are striving to do, I assume, certainly what I was striving to do, was to see a system and an organization develop which would endure for years rather than be organized against a certain date for a war. We were trying to avoid war, but at the same time we carefully had to avoid a financial effect on our economy which would be as disastrous to us as a war might well be.

Now, my associates who differed with me did so, I felt, largely on the ground that they thought America had learned its lesson. When it comes to appropriations in piping times of peace, I don't think America will ever learn its lesson, because the political pressures are tremendous. In the next place, my associates haven't lived through the education I had had in the 1920's and the immediate problems I had inherited in 1938, 1939, and 1940, when our degree of poverty was very trying. I could well understand that. They just thought I under-estimated public opinion in the United States.

Well, I am a great respecter of public opinion, but, on the other hand, I am also a great respecter of the tremendous political influence of the budget and the fact that it almost gets beyond control when it relates to things that do not produce immediate results like good roads, agriculture matters, and such.

So I was all the more interested in seeing some form of unification adopted which would work. And that, of course, as you all well know better than I do because you have been sitting in with it, and I have not—I hunt for peaceful quarters' these days—is a very difficult thing.

All of this resolves itself, in my mind, to this: What we are striving for is the security of our country, the security of its influence in the world, because we can't evade the fact that at the present time it is the leading nation of the world. What we have to consider along with that is how we manage to meet the situation without financial tribulations resulting from it. That means several things. It means, I think, in the first place, that we have to, out of the cleverness of somebody's mind or the vision of somebody's mind, find more economical ways of doing some of these things that must be done. It also means very definitely that the money that we are given must be spent with great discretion. There you have the root of your trouble. How that is to be managed?

To get back a little bit, to the previous reference I made, each regional commander makes demands that you cannot meet. Your problem is not only to do the best you can for him, but in a sense to keep the peace, to keep him in a state of morale that is conducive to the general situation being maintained.

I struggled with that throughout the war. Then, as we got into the war years, the financial side was not such a problem because Congress was exceedingly generous in its appropriations, and we had to be very full in our estimates because no one could tell how much we might lose in the interim between an appropriation and the actual implementation of the money obtained from that appropriation. But once the materiel was obtained, which was limited by our shortages in various industrial fields by the slow build-up of the vast quantities which finally became available, we were under the insistent demands of various theaters and various services for more than we could possibly give them.

It then became necessary to be very stout in defending the policy that we had decided to pursue and in preventing its being sabotaged by ourselves. We had to see to it that when it actually came into functioning, it would prove sufficient for the plan and purpose that had been intended.

Those struggles with various theaters were very difficult to manage. The struggles with various services were very difficult to manage, because, as I say, it was not money so much then but it was materiel, manufacturing facilities and matters of that kind. But the general situation with which we had to struggle then as chiefs of staff was much the same as now. Now we are back to the time when the problem is money and I think the arguments have to be listened to with that always in mind.

I don't know, Mr. Chairman, what I might add to that, other than to say that unity is absolutely mandatory, in my opinion, and it involves, of necessity, an approach to the subdivision of funds which has only in mind the security of the country and what you can do that year or the next year. That, in a sense, is the view that I have always taken and which I hoped would have been smoothly worked out long ere this time.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. It is always a great benefit to the country to have your mature judgment and views. To sum it up, it might be said that the money or the budget question is the one that is more important than all these other differences that have arisen

and that is the cause of those differences arising.

Now, I just want to ask you this one question. Yesterday I stated that I thought the military budget should be not a fixed ceiling taken out of the air, but it should always be based, first, upon the potential **[p. 602/603]** strength of the enemy and upon the strategy and plans worked out by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, then reduced from that to meet any lower levels required by the national economy.

As I understand it today, the military budget is made up by merely a statement that a certain sum of money can be used for national defense. Then, when that is announced, the fuss starts in the Services, just as you said. That probably is the basic trouble of all of this—the budget distribution.

Why isn't it the correct way to write a military budget by taking into consideration the calculated risk and your potential enemy and write your military budget around that, then compromise with the Nation's economy and reduce it as necessary, instead of saying: "Out of the total income of the Government we will only allocate a certain sum for national defense"?

General MARSHALL. Mr. Chairman, I would say that that last line of your statement is what always happens to us. We are told that finally from the Budget Bureau. In my own experience, it has always started first with an estimate of the situation and then you get into your discussion of what is the best way to meet that situation. Then, that is reduced, at least in a flash estimate, to what it costs. Then, you come to your preliminary budget hearings.

The CHAIRMAN. But aren't we, General, putting the cart before the horse?

General MARSHALL. I don't think so, Mr. Chairman, because you must start with the estimate, and they always have started with the estimate. What I was trying to say was when we got through this procedure which you, as I understand, have been advocating the estimate of the situation—

The CHAIRMAN. Yes.

General MARSHALL. The military opinion as to what are the requirements of the situation, and then after that the estimates of the cost to implement that program, you then go to your budget and administration phase of the Government and have your first hearings.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes.

General MARSHALL. Then out of that generally comes back what sum you will get. Then, of course, the trouble starts.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes.

General MARSHALL. As to how you reduce yours to that sum.

The CHAIRMAN. Now, if the budget was based on the estimate of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, bearing in mind the calculated risks based on the capabilities of a potential enemy and our international requirements, then was submitted to the Bureau of the Budget, and then was reviewed and reduced, then you would always be taking into consideration your strength and obligations and your potential enemy. But, as I understand, the way it is being done, a statement

is issued that $12,000,000,000 will be the ceiling for the national-defense budget, and when that is stated, then the Joint Chiefs of Staff have to work out the defense program after the ceiling has been fixed. That is the reason I say it looks to me like we are putting the cart before the horse. It looks like the Joint Chiefs of Staff, charged with the responsibility, should say the potential enemy is such-and-such country. To properly give us a limited amount of security, we would have to have so much armed force, and then that should be pared down. But that is **[p.603/604]** not the way it is done. It is just said: "All we can allow for national defense is a certain sum of money. Then that is all you can get. Now, you gentlemen have to shape your defense around the ceiling." Now I think that is the wrong way to approach it. That is the reason I raised the question yesterday, and that, is the reason I am questioning you. I may be entirely wrong, but I wanted to get your comment.

General MARSHALL. I didn't get the last part.

The CHAIRMAN. I just want to get your comment.

General MARSHALL. The best comment I think I could make on that is that my original conception of the working of this unity was that it was desirable that the Congress, in the law, require once a year a report by the Chiefs of Staff on the requirements for the national defense.

Mr. Stimson and I had long discussions on that, because I felt that that should be made entirely outside of, we will say, civilian control. It is only a statement and nothing more. Now, the minute such a statement is made it would then pass into, we will say, the control of the civil powers of the Government. It would be, I would assume, a Cabinet discussion with the respective Secretaries as they were then, but now with the Secretary of Defense probably taking the lead. That statement would have to carry with it a statement of requirements—and the flash budget estimate—which would be obtained right back in the various services from which the Chiefs of Staff came themselves, just as we did during the war.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes.

General MARSHALL. Then it would be into the field of the political heads of the Government, before the President and his Cabinet.

I would assume that the Commander in Chief, the President would, in connection with these discussions, talk with the leaders in Congress. He would tell them, here is what these military men say is needed: Now, here is our situation economically. Here is our situation politically. They reach a decision that we can't go that far. We will assume we can only go a part of the way. Then, that conclusion goes back to the chiefs. And they make a recast: if it is cut to this, our situation will be so and so, with whatever arguments against the cut as may be carried. Then, the entire matter goes again into the hands of the civilian heads of the Government. Finally, they arrive at a figure which is submitted to the Congress, and with the knowledge of the Congressional leaders. It finally works back to the various forces in the service.

There was quite a bit of difference between Mr. Stimson and myself. He was such a wise chap that I was very hesitant about opposing his views. But what I was after was that period in time of peace when it is very difficult to get a correct expression from the military authorities so long as the expression is controlled politically before it is rendered.

Speaking very intimately, I saw General Pershing in the position where his views didn't count at all. He never could get them up for consideration. And yet he was a man of great prestige in this country. But the cuts, and cuts and cuts came despite what he felt. The main reason for this was that he had no opportunity to give public expression without being in the position of disloyalty. Of course, he never would have done that. **[p. 604/605]**

The CHAIRMAN. Now, in that very connection I have raised the same type of question in this hearing. I thought it was highly important, when the budget is submitted to the Congress—it makes no difference whether it is submitted like it is now or whether it is submitted in the way that is running through my mind—but when the budget is submitted, there should at least accompany the budget a statement from the military authorities—the Joint Chiefs of Staff—as to what in their view the security of the country requires. Then the Congress and the President will have something or, at least, the Congress will have something—besides the one final figure from the Budget Bureau. Now, if that were done—and I think it should be done—the country could say: Now, our military men say that we can afford to take a certain calculated risk in our defense, but we can't afford to go beyond a certain calculated risk, and we can't afford to sacrifice this security. If a sacrifice is to be made, it must be made in civil functions of the Government. Then, that lets the Congress know. But today, why, the budget comes up with so many billion dollars for this item and so much for that item. We don't know and the country doesn't know, except by probing out, what the Joint Chiefs of Staff have said.

Last year in appearing before the Appropriations Committee by direction of this committee to present the views of this committee with reference to the 1950 budget, it took the committee's staff here months to work out item by item what the Joint Chiefs of Staff thought was necessary. I had it printed. I had a speech made on it. It cost me $75 to distribute it to my colleagues, to let them know two things: let them know what the responsible military men thought was necessary and then let them know what the President and the budget thought was necessary. That makes the issue. That gives the country the information. And I am hoping that after these hearings, something along these lines can be worked out, because that is what the country should know. Our military security is what the Joint Chiefs of Staff are charged with; we should know their frank views.

Now, of course, it is a most difficult thing in peacetime to satisfy all services or all in any service. I am a great convert to unification. I am going to fight for it. I am going to fight for it to work. And I was interested in your illustration of what convinced you of the wisdom of unification. I passed through the Congress that Hepburn Board report. Then we were just thinking about, one service. But we have to think about all three services now. We have to treat them as a team. We have to legislate for them as a team. We can't have one service, out of step because another is more popular, if it has a military role or mission to perform, but we have to recognize the fact that unification is here.

And I want to congratulate you, General. While I wasn't a unification convert at first, I became a Saul of Tarsus after many days and much tribulation. I am an advocate of it now. I am going to use everything in my power as long as I am in Congress to see that the spirit of it works and see that it works as it should—as a team, instead of for the advancement or the

aggrandizement of any particular service.

Thank you very much, General. It is a pleasure to have had you here. And I know the country and the committee has benefited from your profound conclusions. Thank you very much. **[p. 605/606]**

General MARSHALL. Thank you.

[Applause.]