

September 17, 1947

**George C. Marshall, 'A Program for a More Effective
United Nations: Address by the Chief of the U.S.
Delegation to the General Assembly'**

Citation:

"George C. Marshall, 'A Program for a More Effective United Nations: Address by the Chief of the U.S. Delegation to the General Assembly'", September 17, 1947, Wilson Center Digital Archive, The Department of State, 'Bulletin,' Vol. XVII, Publication 2929 (September 28, 1947): 618-622.

<https://wilson-center.drivingcreative.com/document/220067>

Summary:

Marshall speaks about Greece, Palestine, and Korea, as well as the international control of atomic energy and the role and structure of the United Nations.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Transcript - English

A Program for a More Effective United Nations

ADDRESS BY THE CHIEF OF THE U. S. DELEGATION TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY^[1]

Mr. President; Fellow Delegates:

I have been asked by the President of the United States to extend to you the cordial greetings of the Government and people of the United States, as well as his own warm personal welcome. We are happy to have you with us in this country. We trust that your stay will be productive of the far-reaching results which the peoples of all countries expect from this gathering.

Our point of departure for the deliberations of this Assembly might well be the annual report of the Secretary-General on the work of the organization. It is a noteworthy document.^[2] It records realistically the progress and development of the United Nations, and its failures. It reflects the diligent efforts of the Secretary-General and his staff to expedite the rapidly growing volume of United Nations business.

The situation we face today may be summarized by the statement that more than two years after the end of the war the fruits of peace and victory are still beyond our grasp. Men look anxiously toward the future, wondering whether a new and more terrible conflict will engulf them. We have not yet succeeded in establishing a basis for peace with Germany and Japan, nor have we restored Austria as an independent state. Reconstruction lags everywhere ; the basic requirements of life are scarce; there is desperate need throughout great areas. The complex economic machinery which was thrown out of joint by the war has not yet been put back into running order. In place of peace, liberty, and economic security, we find menace, repression, and dire want.

A supreme effort is required from us all if we are to succeed in breaking through the vicious circles of deepening political and economic crisis. That is why the United States has placed on the agenda of this Assembly the question of threats to the political independence and territorial integrity of Greece.^[3]

The history of the Greek case in the United Nations is well known in this Assembly.^[4] You are aware that the Security Council last December adopted a resolution establishing an investigating commission to inquire into the situation along the northern frontier of Greece and report the facts to the Security Council. You know that that commission and its subsidiary group, by large majorities, have attributed the disturbances principally to the illegal assistance and support furnished by Yugoslavia, Albania, and Bulgaria to guerrilla forces fighting against the Greek Government. The extent or effectiveness of such assistance to the Greek guerrillas is not the point at issue here. It is a universally accepted principle of international law that for one nation to arm or otherwise assist rebellious forces against another government is a hostile and aggressive act. Not only has this principle been upheld in a number of famous cases in international law, but it has also found expression in international agreements. The majority of the members of the Security Council have recorded their support of this principle by their action in this case. One permanent member of the Security Council, however, has three times vetoed the efforts of the Council to deal with the situation.

This Assembly cannot stand by as a mere spectator while a Member of the United Nations is endangered by attacks from abroad. If the United Nations should fail to protect the integrity of one small state, the security of all small states would be placed in jeopardy. The inability of the Security Council to take effective action in this case passes a grave responsibility to the General Assembly. I am confident that the General Assembly will not fail to meet this responsibility. It must do so if the

Organization is to carry out its fundamental purposes.

The United States Delegation will therefore submit to the Assembly a resolution which will contain a finding of responsibility; call upon Albania, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia to cease and desist from rendering further assistance or support to the guerrillas in Greece; establish a commission to assist in the implementation of these recommendations and to investigate the facts with regard to compliance therewith; and make other appropriate recommendations to the states concerned.

The General Assembly is also faced with the problem of Palestine. The Government of the United States intends to do everything within its power at this session of the General Assembly to assist in finding a solution for this difficult problem which has stirred up such violent passions, and which is now resulting in the shedding of blood and in great mental and moral anguish. The solution will require of each of us courage and resolution. It will also require restraint.

The Special Committee on Palestine is to be highly commended for its contribution to the solution of this problem.^[5] Although the members of the Committee were not able to agree unanimously upon a number of important issues, including that of partition, they have been able to find the basis for agreement on eleven recommendations to this Assembly. Their achievement in reaching unanimity on so many points represents definite progress.

We realize that, whatever the solution recommended by the General Assembly, it cannot be ideally satisfactory to either of the two great peoples primarily concerned. While the final decision of this Assembly must properly await the detailed consideration of the report, the Government of the United States gives great weight not only to the recommendations which have met with the unanimous approval of the Special Committee but also to those which have been approved by the majority of that Committee.

I turn now to the question of the independence of Korea. At Cairo, in December 1943, the United States, the United Kingdom, and China joined in declaring that, in due course Korea should become free and independent. This multilateral pledge was reaffirmed in the Potsdam Declaration of July 1945, and subscribed to by the USSR when it entered the war against Japan. In Moscow in December of 1945, the Foreign Ministers of the USSR, the United Kingdom and the United States concluded an agreement designed to bring about the independence of Korea. This agreement was later adhered to by the Government of China. It provided for the establishment of a Joint U.S.-USSR Commission to meet in Korea and, through consultations with Korean democratic parties and social organizations, to decide on methods for establishing a Provisional Korean Government. The Joint Commission was then to consult with that Provisional Government on methods of giving aid and assistance to Korea; any agreement reached being submitted for approval to the Four Powers adhering to the Moscow Agreement.

For about two years the United States Government has been trying to reach agreement with the Soviet Government, through the Joint Commission and otherwise, on methods of implementing the Moscow Agreement and thus bringing about the independence of Korea. The United States representatives have insisted that any settlement of the Korean problem must in no way infringe the fundamental democratic right of freedom of opinion. That is still the position of my Government. Today the independence of Korea is no further advanced than it was two years ago. Korea remains divided at the 38th parallel with Soviet forces in the industrial north and United States forces in the agricultural south. There is little or no exchange of goods or services between the two zones. Korea's economy is thus crippled.

The Korean people, not former enemies but a people liberated from forty years of

Japanese oppression, are still not free. This situation must not be allowed to continue indefinitely. In an effort to make progress the United States Government recently made certain proposals designed to achieve the purpose of the Moscow Agreement and requested the Powers adhering to that Agreement to join in discussion of these proposals. China and the United Kingdom agreed to this procedure. The Soviet Government did not. Furthermore, the United States and Soviet delegations to the Joint Commission have not been able to agree on a joint report on the status of their deliberations. It appears evident that further attempts to solve the Korean problem by means of bilateral negotiations will only serve to delay the establishment of an independent, united Korea.

It is therefore the intention of the United States Government to present the problem of Korean independence to this session of the General Assembly. Although we shall be prepared to submit suggestions as to how the early attainment of Korean independence might be effected, we believe that this is a matter which now requires the impartial judgment of the other Members. We do not wish to have the inability of two powers to reach agreement delay any further the urgent and rightful claims of the Korean people to independence.

For the achievement of international security, and the well-being of the peoples of the world, it is necessary that the United Nations press forward on many fronts. Among these the control of atomic and other weapons of mass destruction has perhaps the highest priority if we are to remove the specter of a war of annihilation.

The preponderant majority of the Atomic Energy Commission has made real progress in spelling out in detail the functions and powers of an international control agency which would provide a framework for effective atomic energy control.^[6] Two nations, however, have been unwilling to join the majority in the conclusions reached. This is a disturbing and ominous fact. In dealing with the facts presented by the advent of atomic energy, the majority has devised a system of control, which, while it is bold, is, in our view, essential for security against atomic warfare. The minority has evidently been unwilling to face these same facts realistically. The mandate of the General Assembly remains unfulfilled. Failure to agree on a system of control which can provide security against atomic warfare will inevitably retard the development of the peaceful uses of atomic energy for the benefits of the peoples of the world and will accelerate an atomic armaments race.

The initial offer made by the United States on June 14, 1946, by which this country would give up its present advantage in exchange for an effective system of control, has found most gratifying acceptance by the majority of the nations represented on the Commission. They have worked earnestly together to hammer out specific proposals whereby such a system could be put into effect. All have made important contributions to the end product. The majority is convinced that its proposals provide the only adequate basis for effective control.

Since the United States realizes fully the consequences of failure to attain effective international control, we shall continue our efforts in the Atomic Energy Commission to carry forward our work along the lines of the majority views. We must state frankly, however, that in the absence of unanimous agreement on the essential functions and powers which the majority has concluded must be given to the international agency, there will necessarily be limitations on the extent to which the remaining aspects of the problem can be worked out in detail. If the minority persists in refusing to join with the majority, the Atomic Energy Commission may soon be faced with the conclusion that it is unable to complete the task assigned it under its terms of reference laid down in the General Assembly Resolution of January 24, 1946.

The United States also recognizes the importance of regulating conventional armaments. We regret that much more progress has not been made in this field.

From this rostrum it is very easy to pay lip service to the sincere aspirations of all peoples for the limitation and reduction of armed forces. This is a serious matter which should not be the subject of demagogic appeals and irresponsible propaganda. I say frankly to the General Assembly that it is the conviction of my Government that a workable system for the regulation of armaments cannot be put into operation until conditions of international confidence prevail. We have consistently and repeatedly made it clear that the regulation of armaments presupposes enough international understanding to make possible the settlement of peace terms with Germany and Japan, the implementation of agreements putting military forces and facilities at the disposal of the Security Council, and an international arrangement for the control of atomic energy.

Nevertheless, we believe it is important not to delay the formulation of a system of arms regulation for implementation when conditions permit. The Security Council has accepted a logical plan of work for the Commission for Conventional Armaments. We believe that the Commission should proceed vigorously to develop a system for the regulation of armaments in the business-like manner outlined in its plan of work.[\[7\]](#)

The effective operation of the United Nations Security Council is one of the crucial conditions for the maintenance of international security. The exercise of the veto power in the Security Council has the closest bearing on the success and the vitality of the United Nations.

In the past the United States has been reluctant to encourage proposals for changes in the system of voting in the Security Council. Having accepted the Charter provisions on this subject and having joined with other Permanent Members at San Francisco in a statement of general attitude toward the question of permanent member unanimity, we wished to permit full opportunity for practical testing. We were always fully aware that the successful operation of the rule of unanimity would require the exercise of restraint by the permanent Members and we so expressed ourselves at San Francisco.

It is our hope that despite our experience to date, such restraint will be practiced in the future by the permanent Members. The abuse of the right of unanimity has prevented the Security Council from fulfilling its true functions. That has been especially true in cases arising under Chapter VI and in the admission of new Members.

The Government of the United States has come to the conclusion that the only practicable method for improving this situation is a liberalization of the voting procedure in the Council.

The United States would be willing to accept, by whatever means may be appropriate, the elimination of the unanimity requirement with respect to matters arising under Chapter VI of the Charter, and such matters as applications for membership.²

We recognize that this is a matter of significance and complexity for the United Nations. We consider that the problem of how to achieve the objective of liberalization of the Security Council voting procedure deserves careful study. Consequently, we shall propose that this matter be referred to a special committee for study and report to the next session of the Assembly. Measures should be pressed concurrently in the Security Council to bring about improvements within the existing provisions of the Charter, through amendments to the rules of procedure, or other feasible means.

The scope and complexity of the problems on the agenda of this Assembly have

given rise to the question whether the General Assembly can adequately discharge its responsibilities in its regular, annual sessions. There is a limit to the number of items which can receive thorough consideration during the few weeks in which this body meets. There would seem to be a definite need for constant attention to the work of the Assembly in order to deal with continuing problems. Occasional special sessions are not enough. The General Assembly has a definite and continuing responsibility, under Articles 11 and 14 of the Charter, in the broad field of political security and the preservation of friendly relations among nations.³ In our fast-moving world an annual review of developments in this field is not sufficient.

The facilities of the General Assembly must be developed to meet this need. I am therefore proposing, today, that this Assembly proceed at this session to create a standing committee of the General Assembly, which might be known as the Interim Committee on Peace and Security, to serve until the beginning of its third regular session next September.^[8] The Committee would not, of course, impinge on matters which are the primary responsibility of the Security Council or of special Commissions, but, subject to that, it might consider situations and disputes impairing friendly relations brought to its attention by member states or by the Security Council pursuant to Articles 11 and 14 of the Charter and report to the Assembly or to the Security Council thereon; recommend to the Members the calling of special sessions of the General Assembly when necessary; and might report at the next regular session on the desirability of establishing such a committee on a permanent basis.⁴

In our opinion, every Member of the United Nations should be seated on this body.

The creation of the Interim Committee will make the facilities of the General Assembly continually available during this next year to all its Members. It will strengthen the machinery for peaceful settlement and place the responsibility for such settlement broadly upon all the Members of the United Nations. Without infringing on the jurisdiction of the Security Council, it will provide an unsurpassed opportunity for continuing study, after the adjournment of this Assembly, of the problems with which the United Nations must contend if it is to succeed.

The attitude of the United States toward the whole range of problems before the United Nations, is founded on a very genuine desire to perfect the Organization so as to safeguard the security of states and the well-being of their peoples.

These aims can be accomplished only if the untapped resources of the United Nations are brought to bear with full effect through the General Assembly and in other organs. The Assembly cannot dodge its responsibilities; it must organize itself effectively, not as an agency of intermittent action but on a continuous basis. It is for us, the Members of the Assembly, to construct a record of achievement in dealing with crucial problems which will buttress the authority of the Organization and enable it to fulfill its promise to all peoples.

The large Powers bear special responsibilities because of their strength and resources. While these responsibilities bring with them special advantages, the Great Powers must recognize that restraint is an essential companion of power and privilege. The United Nations will never endure if there is insistence on privilege to the point of frustration of the collective will. In this spirit we have indicated our own willingness to accept a modification of our special voting rights in the Security Council. In the same spirit we appeal to the other permanent Members of the Security Council, in this and in all matters, to use their privileged position to promote the attainment of the purposes of the Organization.

The Government of the United States believes that the surest foundation for permanent peace lies in the extension of the benefits and the restraints of the rule of law to all peoples and to all governments. This is the heart of the Charter and of the

structure of the United Nations. It is the hope of mankind.

[1] Delivered before the opening session of the General Assembly on Sept. 17, 1947, and released to the press on the same date by the U.S. Mission in New York and also by the Department of State in Washington. George C. Marshall is Chief of the U.S. Delegation to the General Assembly. Also printed as Department of State publication 2928, which is available for 10cents from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington 25, D.C.

[2] U.N. doc. A/315, July 14, 1947.

[3] U.N. doc. A/344, Aug. 21, 1947.

[4] For The United Nations and the Problem of Greece, see Department of State publication 2902 and also Bulletin of Aug. 10, Aug. 24, and Sept. 7, 1947.

[5] U.N. doc. A/364, Sept. 3, 1947.

[6] Two reports from the Atomic Energy Commission have been made: see Department of State publication 2737, and U.N. doc. AEC/2G, Sept. 8, 1947, which will be available as Department of State publication 2932, U.S.-U.N. Report Series 11.

[7] See The Establishment of the Commission for Conventional Armaments, Department of State publication 2823.

[8] U.N. doc. A/BUR 85, Sept. 17, 1947.