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## "Speech of Hope" 60 Years Ago Set Stage for Marshall Plan

### In historic address, U.S. backed unified Germany, promised long-term troops

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Washington -- September 6 marks the 60th anniversary of a landmark speech by an American diplomat in Stuttgart, Germany, which set the course for U.S. relations with Europe, laying the groundwork for the Marshall Plan and promising that the United States would remain engaged in the world instead of retreating to isolationism.

The half-hour remarks by James F. Byrnes, secretary of state under President Harry S. Truman, have become known in Germany as the "Speech of Hope," but also foreshadowed growing tensions that would lead to the Cold War.

Byrnes's words, broadcast live over radio with a simultaneous German translation, promised that Germany would be rebuilt and would not be divided economically and that Germans would be allowed to govern themselves democratically. Byrnes also said U.S. troops would remain in Germany "as long as there is an occupation army in Germany," a reference to the large number of Soviet troops in the Soviet zone of occupation that, three years later, would become communist East Germany.

"We have learned, whether we like it or not, that we live in one world, from which world we cannot isolate ourselves," Byrnes said September 6, 1946, at the Staatstheater in Stuttgart.

"It is the view of the American government that the German people throughout Germany, under proper safeguards, should now be given the primary responsibility for the running of their own affairs," Byrnes said.

The time and place of the speech were significant. Byrnes spoke almost a year to the day after Japan surrendered to the United States, ending World War II. But the U.S. role in the postwar world still was unclear. In Europe, American occupation troops suffered from low morale, while the Soviet Union -- a vital World War II ally -- maintained large numbers of combat forces and increasingly blocked attempts to restore democracy to Germany and Eastern Europe. Officials within the U.S. government were deeply divided over U.S. policy in Europe. The U.S. Congress was concerned about the high costs of maintaining a large overseas military presence. Many experts in and out of government sought to break Germany into pieces and dismantle its industries so that the country never again would pose a military threat. Some also favored splitting the Ruhr Area -- Germany's coal, steel and industrial center -- into a separate, internationally administered zone.

"We favor the economic unification of Germany," Byrnes said in his speech. "If complete unification cannot be secured, we shall do everything in our power to secure the maximum possible unification."

The speech was formally titled "Restatement of Policy on Germany." Many of its points were outlined in a secret July 19, 1946, cable sent to Washington by U.S. General Lucius D. Clay, the U.S. military administrator of Germany. Clay strongly recommended the economic reconstruction of Germany. After he persuaded Byrnes to make the speech, he assembled U.S. military personnel, journalists and leading German officials for the Friday evening address in Stuttgart. At the time, official Pentagon policy still called for harsh economic measures against Germany, a view echoed by many of Byrnes's State Department subordinates. So the Stuttgart speech was viewed as the forceful statement of a new U.S. foreign policy.

"It is not in the interest of the German people or in the interest of world peace that Germany should become a pawn or a partner in a military struggle for power between the East and the West," Byrnes said. Germany's democracy could be overseen by a relatively small force with limited combat capabilities, he said. "For enforcement [of peace terms] we could rely more upon a force of trained inspectors and less upon infantry."

However, he added: "Security forces will probably have to remain in Germany for a long period. I want no misunderstanding. We will not shirk our duty. We are not withdrawing. We are staying here. As long as there is

an occupation army in Germany, the American armed forces will be part of that occupation army."

In its edition of September 16, 1946, *Time* magazine, the U.S. news weekly, wrote that "Europe and Asia recognized [the Stuttgart speech] as America's boldest move yet towards leadership of the world."

Clay recalled in an interview years later: "Mr. Byrnes's speech was aimed at the Germans. It was an attempt to give them some hope. It was also aimed at Western Europe, to give them some assurance." After the speech, Clay recalled, Byrnes departed Stuttgart by train. When he made an unscheduled stop at another German city, he quickly was surrounded by hundreds of Germans asking for his autograph.

Less than two weeks later, on September 19, 1946, in Zurich, Switzerland, British statesman Winston Churchill spoke of "the re-creation of European family" with a "spiritually great Germany" working in partnership with other European nations.

Byrnes resigned as secretary of state in January 1947. Nine months after Byrnes's Stuttgart speech, the new secretary of state, George Marshall, was the featured speaker at Harvard University's commencement on June 5, 1947. He described a new European Recovery Program in which U.S. investments would help rebuild Europe. The program, known as the Marshall Plan, played a significant role in rebuilding European economies. In return for financial investments, the Marshall Plan required close economic cooperation between European nations, helping lay the groundwork for the European Union.

The U.S. Embassy in Germany maintains a [Web page](#) with extensive links on postwar U.S.-German relations, including the text of the Byrnes "Speech of Hope" in [English](#) and [German](#).

See also [The Cold War: A Test of American Power and a Trial of Ideals](#) and [The Marshall Plan: A Strategy That Worked](#).

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