

4. When America Began to Change Into What It Is: World War I (1914-19)

- a) In 1914, yet another great European war began. (Those who know their European history—as the Founding Fathers knew it—know that it was just the latest episode in a long history filled with wars.)
- b) Reflecting the long tradition of political separation, American president Woodrow Wilson assessed the war as being one “*with which we have nothing to do, whose causes cannot touch us.*”
- c) Thus, in keeping with the Monroe Doctrine, the United States stayed neutral and apart from 1914 to 1917.
- d) President Wilson was celebrated for doing so. He won re-election as president in 1916 running on the slogan, “*He has kept us out of war.*”
- e) And yet America entered World War I in 1917.
- f) Many explanations have been offered for this dramatic reversal, but these are typically focussed exclusively on the past. What really matters is how America’s entry into the war set the stage for a complete transformation of America’s relationship to the world, which results in the reality we now find ourselves in.
- g) In that regard, only one thing matters. President Wilson articulated the reason for a profound shift in American’s relationship to the world. The United States must, he explained, use its growing power as a modern nation and embark on a new mission: “*The world must be made safe for democracy.*” The United States is the country that it is today, because it first accepted this responsibility in World War I, and has essentially accepted this responsibility as normal today.

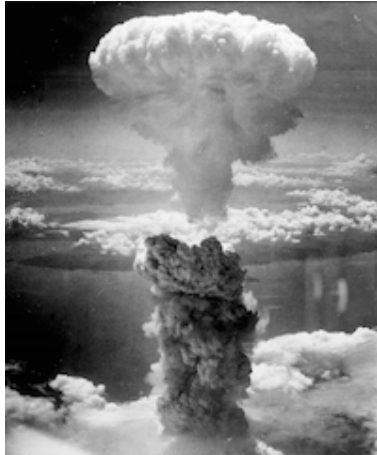


President Woodrow Wilson articulated a new basis for America’s relationship to the world: the mission of making the world “safe for democracy.”

5. Saving The World A Second Time: World War II (1939-45)

- a) 117,000 Americans died in World War I. It was profound shock, and Americans recoiled from the role that had been thrust upon them.
- b) In the 1920 presidential election, Americans repudiated Wilson’s concept of giving up their lives to a global cause. They opted instead to elect Warring Harding, who offered them a “return to normalcy”—which, at that time, meant a return to the “normal” policy of political separation.
- c) Thus as the world descended into its second horrible war of the twentieth century, the United States remained apart. It did not join World War II from 1939 to 1941.
- d) Then entry into the war was forced upon it. The military commanders of the empire of Japan anticipated America’s eventual involvement and decided upon a sneak attack on the American naval base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, with the goal of crippling America’s navy and preventing it from interfering with Japan’s imperial ambitions in Asia.

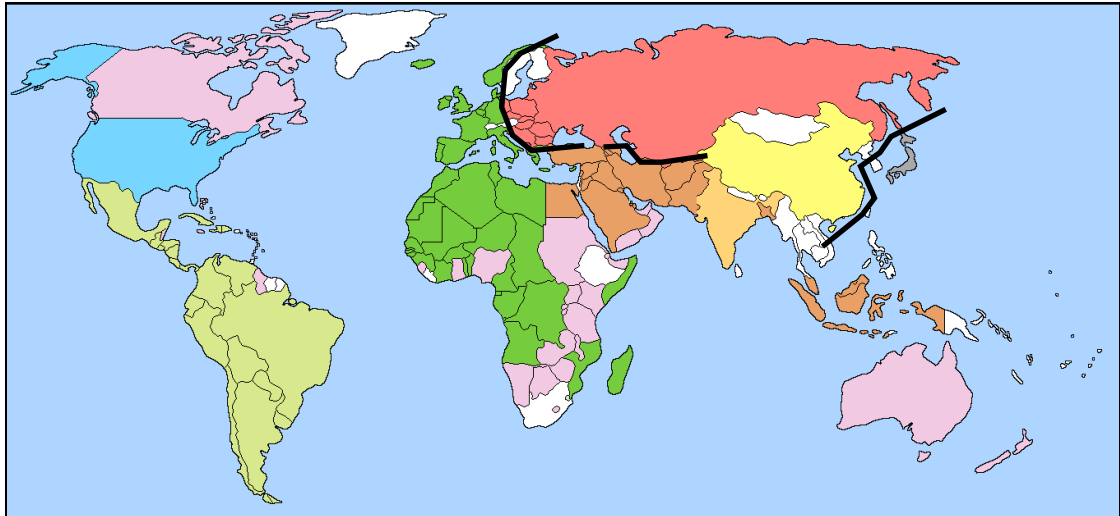
- e) The attack failed to achieve the desired outcome. United States entered the war and played the decisive role in this new and larger conflict just as it had in the previous war. Notoriously, the war ended in 1945 when the United States used the newly developed “atomic bomb” twice on Japan, destroying the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and forcing the empire’s unconditional surrender.



The explosion that destroyed Nagasaki is captured in this photograph. Atomic bombs are so powerful that a single bomb can destroy an entire city. The explosion produces a huge, characteristic “mushroom cloud” that extends far up into the atmosphere.

6. The World Police Power Emerges Once and For All: 1947

- a) The incomparable role that today’s United States plays in human affairs as the “world police power” was a long time in the making.
- b) The first major break with the early American tradition of political separation came in World War I, and despite an attempt to return to earlier ways, World War II catapulted America into the role of saving the world from itself yet again.
- c) Then, having done so, the United States found itself in a new situation to which it felt compelled to respond by *policing* the world.
- d) As part of the war effort against imperial Japan and its ally Nazi Germany, the United States had forged a temporary alliance with Russia. America and Russia had no basis for an alliance other than sharing a common enemy. (Russia had adopted a form of government called “*communism*,” a form of dictatorship in which no individual has the right to the “pursuit of happiness,” but rather all property is controlled by the government.)
- e) With Germany completely defeated in Europe and Japan completely defeated in Asia, the United States and Russia had achieved their common war aims, and their opposite priorities became clear. The United States had liberated western Europe; instead of liberating eastern Europe, however, Russia conquered its peoples and forced them to accept communist governments.
- f) At that point the United States was faced with a great dilemma. Having fought an enormous war to liberate the world from the empires of Germany and Japan, could America simply retreat back to its borders, and allow communist Russia to impose a different kind of empire on Europe, and possibly much else of the world?



This map of the major cultural blocks of the world at the end of World War II, shows the new reality in Europe at the time of Truman Doctrine (1947). The countries of eastern Europe are shown in red, because they became a part of a Russian communist cultural block. (This includes the country that was temporarily known as “East Germany.”) Neutral countries in Europe are shown in white. The three thick black lines represent the three segments of a cordon erected to contain communism. The United States intended to protect 1) Western Europe, 2) the Far East, and 3) the Middle East.

- g) Faced with this situation, president Harry Truman made a momentous decision: America’s military would begin a new mission: to police the world. It would be *permanently* stationed around the world, to prevent communism from being imposed by force anywhere else.

7. The Final Peace of the Puzzle

- a) TWWLI is one in which the United States no longer has to police the planet to stop communism. Russia has abandoned that form of government, and although China is a partly communist country, it does not seek to impose communism elsewhere. The threat of communism has abated. The most prominent threat to world peace today is the threat of Islamic terrorism.
- b) The transition from policing the world to stop the spread of communism to policing the world against terrorism occurred because the United States became entangled in the politics of the Islamic Middle East after 1947.
- c) The containment of communism was one of three motives that resulted in this entanglement. The other two were the desire to protect the democracy of Israel and the aim of securing access to the oil that is so plentiful in the Middle East.
- d) Having imposed a way of organizing the Middle East largely of its choosing has not endeared the United States to everyone in the region. Some people do appreciate America’s role in maintaining relative peace and stability in the region. Others disagree and protest, but in the end find they cannot do anything. Jihadism, however, revived in modern times in the form of terrorism has given a violent outlet to those who hate the idea of the world being run by America instead of Islamic culture.