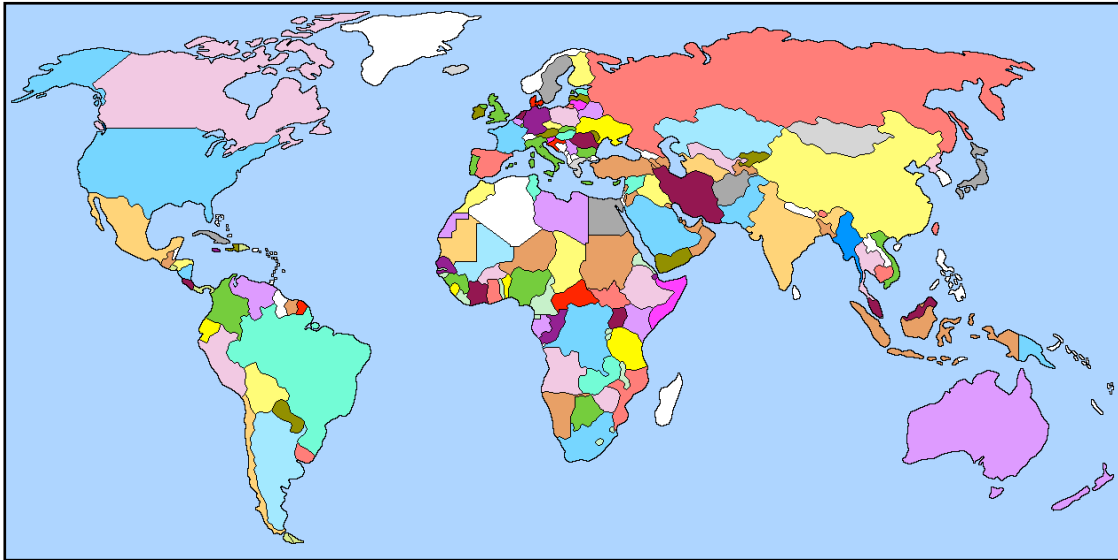


B. The Challenge of Connecting Past and Present

1. One of the challenges of seeing how history explains the present is that the world we live in is organized into *countries*, but if we try to use that as a starting point for studying history, we find that it is far too complex.

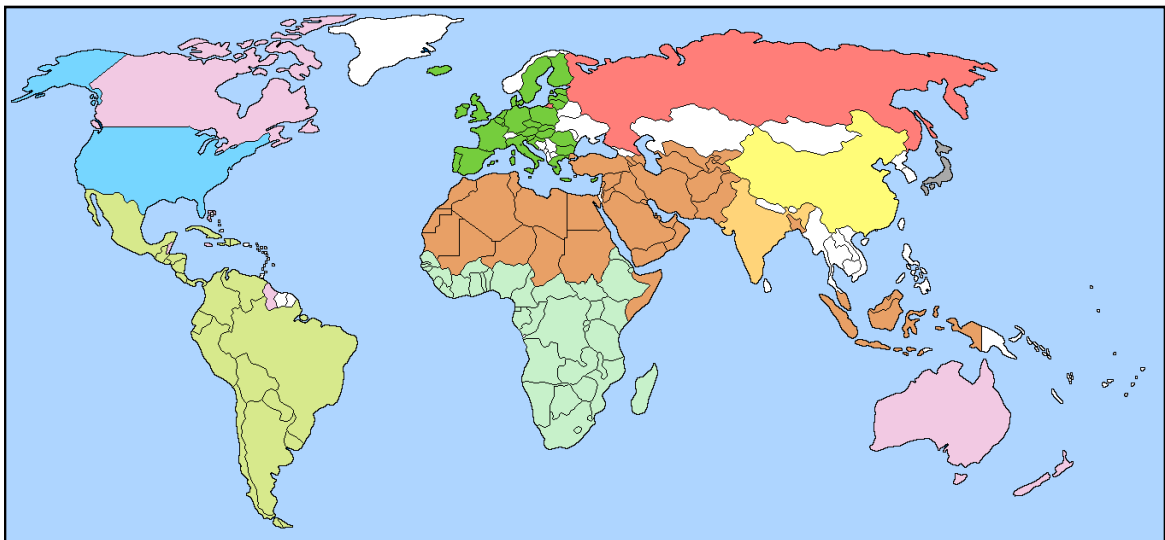


The pattern of the world's countries today is too complex to use as a base for learning about history. We need to learn to see the world in terms of its most important historical building blocks.

C. An Integrated View

1. Very few countries are important enough to affect the course of history today as individual nations. In fact, there are only five:
 - a) **The United States** - the world's greatest military superpower by far, and also collectively the world's richest and most influential country
 - b) **China** - an ancient nation that is very populous and now important because so much is "Made in China"
 - c) **Russia** - a large former communist country that is anti-American and has a very large military
 - d) **Japan** - an island nation that once tried to create a massive empire, but was stopped by the United States and is now an American ally
 - e) **India** - a very populous nation following its own religion called "Hinduism"
2. Most countries, like most people, do not change history. They simply live in it. However, most countries do exert some influence on history by participating in alliances or associations where they can achieve more together than they could apart. We can call these "cultural blocks," of which there are five major ones:

- a) The **European Union** includes Germany, France, and Britain, who used to fight wars against each other, but now have no border controls between them and use the same money (the “Euro”) because they follow the idea of “supranationalism,” which means they are trying to place the peace of Europe *over and above* the importance of their nations.
- b) A large swath of northern Africa, the Middle East, and southern Asia makes up the **Islamic World**. None of the countries in this block have sufficient military power or a *national* culture that impacts the world beyond their immediate neighborhood. But all the people in this block follow the religion of Islam, and they are struggling to decide how to live side by side with the other cultural blocks. Most want peace, but others want “jihad” (“holy war”) against non-Muslims, and use terrorism.
- c) Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (along with a few smaller countries) make up the non-American, non-British **Anglosphere**. They are allies with the United States.
- d) Another group of former European colonies that is now independent is the **Ibersphere** (or, as it is sometimes known, “Ibero-America”). Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina are the main members of this block of nations once controlled by their mother countries, Spain & Portugal (together known as “Iberia”). These countries try to stay independent from their overbearing neighbor, the United States.
- e) The final major cultural block in the world is **Sub-Saharan Africa**. Its nations are poor and still struggling to develop stable governments. They are distinct from northern Africa by the wide acceptance of Christianity and European culture.
- f) Not all the countries of the world fit into a model with ten major blocks. This does not mean they are of no interest. It simply means that they do not affect history on the same scale. We must always be mindful of the role they might play in affecting how the major blocks act and interact.



Thinking of the world in terms of historical building blocks gives us a much clearer picture. Some of the cultures that direct the course of history today are countries. Some are collections of countries that affect the world in combinations that can be called “cultural blocks.”