

Effects of World War II

After WWI, Woodrow Wilson had tried to make the U.S. a major player in world affairs with the development of the League of Nations, but had been undercut by Congress and public opinion. As a great admirer of Woodrow Wilson, Franklin D. Roosevelt was interested in the idea of creating an improved version of the League to settle disputes before they turned into war. The term United Nations (UN) was first used in 1941 to include all the nations at war with the Axis. In 1944 top diplomats of the major Allied nations met in Washington to discuss the creation of a United Nations Organization to prevent threats to peace and develop friendly relations between nations. Roosevelt avoided Wilson's mistakes, by allowing members of the Senate, including Republicans, to attend the organizational meetings of the United Nations. This allowed the legislative branch to have input on the international organization.



Hope for a stable world after the war depended on the great powers cooperating with each other, but that hope faded quickly. Trouble between the U.S. and the Soviet Union actually began during the war, when Stalin suspected that the U.S. and England were ganging up on him. At the Yalta conference in February 1945, Stalin, Churchill, and F.D.R. discussed the postwar world. It was agreed that Germany and Austria would each be divided into four zones (U.S., England, France, Soviet Union), and that Germany's capital of Berlin would also be divided into four zones. By that time, the Red Army was already in eastern Europe (Poland, Czechoslovakia, eastern Germany), so Roosevelt was in a poor bargaining position; but Stalin did agree to allow "free elections" in Eastern Europe and to enter the war against Japan when the war in Europe ended. Two months later F.D.R. died of a stroke.

On April 25, 1945, the first formal meeting of the United Nations was held in San Francisco. The new organization would have a General Assembly comprised of delegates from all member nations (each nation would have one vote), and an eleven member Security Council. In order for policies to be sanctioned, the five permanent members of the Security Council (U.S., Britain, France, Soviet Union, and China) would have to agree. Any one of these countries could veto a motion they did not agree with. Problems came early to the UN when the Soviet Union began vetoing Security Council resolutions and, later, boycotting meetings.

Wars have a humpty-dumpty effect; once the egg breaks, its shell is never the same. Consider WWII's effect on EUROPE. In Eastern Europe, Communists replaced Fascists. Stalin wanted "friendly" governments in the region and used his power to force communist governments on eastern Germany, Poland, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria. The new president, Harry Truman, was angry that Stalin had not allowed free elections. So in July 1945, Truman, Stalin, met at Potsdam, Germany. It became clear to Truman that it did no good to appease Stalin. Soviet eyes were moving toward Greece and Turkey because it controlled the channel into the Black Sea. The United States responded to the threat with the Truman Doctrine, which offered military and economic aid to "support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures." The U.S. gave \$400 million to help Greece and Turkey withstand the communist threat.



In the western parts of Germany and Austria rebuilding began, but in the Soviet zones conditions were still very bad, and many began to flee into the Western zones. Then in 1946, the U.S., Britain, and France merged their zones in western Germany and allowed free elections. That move angered Stalin, who threatened to take West Berlin inside eastern Germany. When Winston Churchill spoke of an “iron curtain” descending on eastern Europe, it frightened many Americans about the Soviet Union’s intentions.

The rest of western Europe needed rebuilding, but its money had been spent on the war. The U.S. saw the need and began sending foreign aid. In 1947 a more systematic approach came with the Marshall Plan, which Secretary of State George

Marshall described as an attack on hunger, poverty, desperation, and chaos. The U.S. put \$13 billion dollars alone.

The same year that the Marshall Plan was adopted the U.S. made three important changes to deal with its active new role in international affairs. The War and Navy departments were merged into a new Department of Defense, and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the National Security Council (NSC) were formed to advise the president on foreign policy matters. Unlike the reaction after World War I, the U.S. realized it had a responsibility to play the role of world leader.

In the MIDDLE EAST a homeland for the Jews was established in Palestine, and the nation of Israel became a reality in 1947. Israel’s neighbors were hostile from the beginning, and wars and border clashes were common. Unfortunately, hostilities between the Israelis and Palestinians have persisted into the twenty-first century. Pro-Axis threats developed in Iran and Iraq during the war, and the British moved troops into Iraq. The Soviets and Britain moved into Iran. After the war the foreign troops were removed, and the shah was allowed to rule again.

ASIA. Japan went through major changes after the war. General MacArthur demanded some changes: women were given the right to vote, and Japan’s armed forces were limited to defense only. Japan built up its industrial power and in a few years was among the greatest in the world. China’s troubles were far from over, and the departure of the Japanese from their soil renewed the conflict between Chiang Kai-Shek’s nationalists and Mao Zedong’s communists. India became independent, and the Muslim regions of India separated to form Pakistan in 1947. The Dutch East Indies became Indonesia. Nationalism developed in French Indochina (Vietnam), and this led to war against the French and, in time, the United States.

The UNITED STATES came out of the war without the property damage and civilian casualty lists that affected most of the world north of the equator. The Depression era was gone, and Americans approached the future with a new self-confidence.