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World War II in Global Perspective, 1931–1953

A Short History

ANDREW N. BUCHANAN



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World War II in Global Perspective, 1931–1953

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The British commander and Indian crew of a Sherman tank of the 9th Royal Deccan Horse, 255th Indian Tank Brigade, encounter an elephant on the road to Meiktila, 29 March 1945

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To Mary Nell

Young Alexander conquered India.
Was he alone?
Caesar defeated the Gauls.
Did he not have so much as a cook with him?
Philip of Spain wept when his armada
Went down. Did no one else weep?
Frederick the Second was victorious in the Seven Years' War.
Who else
Prevailed?

from "Questions of a Worker Who Reads"
by Bertolt Brecht

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Introduction

Matsushita Kazutoshi fought a very long war. Born in a fishing village on the Japanese island of Kyushu in 1923, Matsushita was conscripted into Japan's Kwantung Army in 1944. He took part in Operation *Ichigō*, the last and largest Japanese land offensive of the war in China. *Ichigō* dealt harsh blows to Chiang Kai-shek's Guomindang (Nationalist) army, but it also exhausted the Japanese. Matsushita deserted, only to be captured by the Guomindang, who enlisted him in their army. When civil war flared between the Guomindang and the Chinese Communist Party in 1946, Matsushita was captured again. This time, he joined the Communist-led People's Liberation Army (PLA). Matsushita was impressed by the way Communist fighters treated civilians, and he fought with the PLA until it defeated the Guomindang in 1949. Even then his war was not over. In 1950, Matsushita joined the Chinese People's Volunteer Force that crossed the frozen Yalu River to join North Korea in its war against the American-backed South. He fought in the brutal winter battles around the Changjin (Chosin) Reservoir and was eventually captured by the Americans in August 1951. He was a prisoner of war until the 1953 armistice. He finally returned home the following year, by which time his family had given him up for dead.

Matsushita's odyssey was truly remarkable. He was away for 10 years and served in three different armies before surrendering to a fourth. He fought in desperate battles, witnessed devastation on a vast scale, and participated in a world-changing revolution. Matsushita's journey was unique, but it also offers a concentrated reflection of the experiences of millions of people around the world. During the interlocking series of conflicts we know as World War II, "Burma Boys" from British-ruled West Africa fought with the British-Imperial

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Army in Southeast Asia, some of them led by Polish officers. Punjabis from British-ruled India served in North Africa and Italy. Spanish volunteers crossed Europe to join Germany's war against the Soviet Union, where they joined tens of thousands of Romanians, Hungarians, and Italians. Brazilians fought alongside Americans in Italy, and a Mexican fighter squadron flew with the US Army Air Force in the Philippines. Farm girls from the American Midwest served with the Women's Army Corps from Berlin to Tokyo. Africans, Arabs, and Berbers from France's North and West African colonies spearheaded Allied campaigns in southern France, only to be unceremoniously pushed aside as the French Army was "whitened" by the inclusion of Resistance fighters. Poles captured by the Soviets in 1939 ended up fighting with the British in Italy and with the Red Army in the final attack on Berlin; some settled in Palestine and many made homes in Britain. One American soldier – Joe Beyrle – was captured by the Germans and then rescued from prison by the Soviet Red Army. He joined a Soviet tank unit and fought his way into Germany from the east under the command of a woman he knew simply as "Major."¹

The fabric of this global conflict was woven from extended and entangled personal histories like these. Around the world, boys like my father imagined the interconnected story of which they were a part, studying the movement of armies by poring over maps in newspapers. Even under conditions of terrible persecution in the ghettos of German-occupied Poland, Jews like 18-year-old Dawid Sierakowiak followed the course of the war as best they could, piecing together scraps of information from clandestine British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) radio broadcasts, scrounged newspapers, and overheard conversations among German soldiers. They studied the morale of soldiers heading for the front and they counted the wounded returning. Within days of the Allied victories at Stalingrad and Alamein, the news reached Sierakowiak's ghetto in Łódź, prompting secret celebrations. In August 1942, Sierakowiak reported "an incredible uplifting of spirits" as news of Partisan advances in Yugoslavia arrived, but he also reported his fear that Germany would "finish off the Jews in Europe before losing the war."² Intimately *connected* to the wider war, ghettoized Jews calculated what these faraway Allied victories meant for their own chances of survival.

These narratives challenge us to think about interconnection over space and about the meaning of events in one place for distant and seemingly unconnected people. But Matsushita's odyssey also prompts us to think about time. When he joined Japan's war of conquest in China in 1944, that struggle had been raging since Tokyo's conquest of Manchuria in 1931. And, as Matsushita discovered, the formal end of World War II brought no peace to much of Asia. National liberation movements in India, the Dutch East Indies, Burma (Myanmar), Vietnam, and elsewhere battled for political power, while in China a short-lived coalition government gave way to civil war, revolution, and renewed fighting on the Korean peninsula. Some stability was finally established after an armistice suspended hostilities in

Korea in July 1953, but some parts of East Asia had suffered continuous war from 1931 to 1953. In Indochina, Vietnamese nationalists battled a succession of Japanese, French, and American occupiers: their war did not end until 1975.

Timeframes are equally elastic in Europe. Here the outbreak of World War II is conventionally pegged to the Anglo-French declarations of war on Germany on September 3, 1939. But this is a very Allied-centric perception. German armed forces had reoccupied the Rhineland in March 1936 and had been in action in Austria and the Czech Sudetenland in 1938. Fascist Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935 and Albania in 1939, while in Spain civil war between the elected Republican government and conservative army officers backed by Germany and Italy raged from July 1936 to April 1939. The surrender of Germany in spring 1945 ended major combat operations in Europe, but political stability was only consolidated with the solidification of the Cold War partition of the continent in the early 1950s. In North Africa, war loosened France's grip on its colonial empire, prompting wars for national independence that ended in Algeria in 1962.

This brief survey suggests that "World War II" was both a site of global interconnection *and* an event – or an intersecting series of events – that sprawled messily over more than two decades of the mid-twentieth century. It was not a unitary war with clearly delineated sides, and it resists being forced into the conventional 1939–1945 timeframe. Even the widely accepted title "World War II" was itself a carefully crafted product, fashioned by American leaders keen to impose their own narrative in the context of claiming global leadership in the postwar world. Nazi leaders also had a vision of *Weltkrieg*, or world war, but only the United States had the economic might, military muscle, and political vision to make it a reality. But alternative narratives exist, and the war continues to have different names reflecting different realities. In Russia, it is the "Great Patriotic War," while China fought the "War of Resistance to Japanese Aggression." Japan began fighting the Manchurian and China "Incidents," moved on to the "Greater East Asian War," and ended up losing the "Pacific War." The British toyed with a number of names before following America's lead in 1948: control of the naming rights, as British civil servant Llewellyn Woodward noted sourly, was yet "another American victory."³

Woodward had a point. Viewed from a global perspective, the single most significant consequence of the war was the establishment of American predominance within the capitalist world. The US helped destroy German, Italian and Japanese bids for regional hegemony and as it did so it eclipsed Britain as a global power. When the United States entered the war, it had long been the world's leading manufacturing power, and Wall Street was challenging "The City" (of London) as the world's premier financial center. But its army was small – the 18th largest in the world – and its navy, although nominally on a par with the British Royal Navy, was limited by its lack of overseas bases. By 1945, the United States was the world's predominant military power, and its global reach rested on over 2000 overseas bases.

America briefly enjoyed a monopoly of nuclear weapons, refusing in the short term to share them even with Britain, its closest ally. This unprecedented military might, buttressed by the tremendous productive capacity of America's wartime economy, allowed Washington to restructure the global capitalist economy, unleashing a protracted economic boom that continued into the late 1960s.

The story of this transformation in America's world position is central to a global history of this long World War II. It is a story that unfolds through an overlapping series of wars that eventually culminated in the defeat of America's enemies in Germany, Italy, and Japan; in the marginalization of its British ally; and in the "containment" of its Soviet rival. It is the story of the establishment of what magazine publisher Henry Luce referred to in 1941 as the "American Century," a project envisioned as an unprecedented surge of US-led economic growth wrapped in an ideology of American liberal internationalism. In the context of the entangled and transnational narratives touched on above, it is the story at the heart of this global history. There is, of course, much more to it than that. A global history must also include the efforts of radical nationalist regimes in Berlin, Tokyo, and Rome to establish their own colonial empires, with all their brutal and genocidal consequences. It includes the efforts of the old-school imperialists in London, Paris, and Den Haag to hold onto their empires – empires that had structured global politics and economics. It incorporates the successful war waged by the Soviet Union, a state founded in anti-capitalist revolution, against German invasion. And it highlights a building wave of anti-colonial resistance that brought decolonization and national independence to vast swaths of the world long ruled from the capitals of Europe.

Finally, a word to American readers. Young Americans, most of them men, participated in large numbers in the transnational travel that was part of the global experience of war. Americans fought in the Atlantic and the Pacific, in Europe and in Asia. They witnessed the ruin of Japanese and German cities, they gazed at tourist sites in Italy, and they drank warm beer in Britain. But in many ways the American experience of war was radically different from that of people in other countries. As a 10-year-old girl, my mother hunkered down in an Anderson shelter – a flimsy piece of corrugated steel covered with garden dirt – as German bombs fell on the industrial city of Sheffield in Britain. She escaped injury, but her house was destroyed. Over 600 people were killed in Sheffield in just two nights of bombing in December 1940, and thousands more died in other British cities. Her childhood experience was shaped by the terrible certainty that young men in unseen – but clearly heard – bomber aircraft were trying to kill her. Hers was an experience shared by millions in cities from Hamburg to Tokyo and from Leningrad to Nanjing. In France, people faced the additional horror that it was their "liberators" who were doing the bombing, and more than 53 000 of them were killed by *Allied* bombs. Yet, while the scale of the slaughter expanded as the war went on, none of the millions of civilian casualties – with

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the sad exception of the six people killed by a Japanese balloon bomb while picnicking in Oregon – were Americans.

For many Americans, as Pulitzer Prize-winning author Studs Terkel noted, World War II was the “Good War.” For those not in uniform, war work was easy to come by and paid well. Millions of women entered the workforce for the first time, and many African Americans set out on a second “Great Migration” from the rural South to the booming war plants of California and the North. No American cities were bombed. No infrastructure was destroyed. Food was plentiful, and no one starved as a result of enemy action. These things all became foundational elements of the postwar American Dream. In the context of America’s overwhelming military victory, they shaped – and continue to shape – a very specific and American-centric view of the global World War II. It is a view of a war in which two clearly defined sides faced off against each other in a struggle defined by unambiguous moral clarity, and it is a war that takes place within a precisely defined timeframe. This is not a view that is widely shared in other parts of the world. Approaching World War II as a *global* event therefore demands a conscious effort to step outside of traditional American- (and Western-) centric frameworks. It does *not* require abandoning deeply held moral convictions, but it does ask that we view them in the context of comparative experiences that begin with the world as a whole and not with *any* particular country.

Notes

1. Taylor, T.H. (2002). *The Simple Sounds of Freedom: The True Story of the Only Soldier to Fight for Both America and the Soviet Union in World War II*, 256. New York: Random House.
2. Diary entry, August 17, 1942, in Sierakowiak, D. (ed. Alan Adelson, trans. Kamil Turowski) (1996). *The Diary of Dawid Sierakowiak*, 208. New York: Oxford University Press.
3. Quoted in Reynolds (January 2003), 38.

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Further Reading

- Cesarani, D. (2014). “The Second World War and the fate of the Jews.” Raul Hilberg Memorial Lecture, October 27. Available at: <https://www.uvm.edu/~uvmchs/?Page=HilbergLectures.html&SM=submenunews.html>.
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Bibliographic Note

The short reference and further reading lists at the end of each chapter are *not* designed to be an exhaustive guide to the literature on the events covered in that chapter; that would be a book-length project in itself. Instead, they list books that are particularly insightful, thought-provoking, or informative, and that will help to open up whole subject areas to interested readers.

The following two books provide an overview of World War II, primarily from the standpoint of military campaigns:

Mawdsley, E. (2009). *World War II: A New History*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
Millet, A.R. and Murray, W. (2000). *A War to Be Won: Fighting the Second World War*.
Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

The Crisis of the Old World Order

Before World War II, much of the world was still dominated by the imperial powers of Europe, with Britain and France foremost among them. World War I had ended with the overthrow of vast territorial empires of the Hohenzollerns (Germany), Habsburgs (Austria-Hungary), Romanovs (Russia), and Ottomans (Turkey), but both Britain and France had expanded their overseas empires, especially in the oil-rich Middle East. The British had consolidated their leading place in the world-system after the Napoleonic Wars in the early 1800s. It was based on the dynamism of Britain's industrial economy – the first in the world – and on the worldwide collection of semi-independent dominions, directly ruled colonies, protectorates, and island outposts that formed the British Empire. Britain's global trade networks and the wealth, resources, and markets of its empire were protected by the Royal Navy, by far the most powerful navy in the world.

Britain did not have a large land army, relying on soldiers recruited in India to police much of its empire, and on its diplomats and politicians to ensure that no single rival could dominate Europe. This combination of economic and military power enabled the City of London to function as the preeminent world center of banking, finance, and insurance. Its global hegemony rested not only on the “hard power” of economic and military might, but also on its ability to use “soft power” – free trade, liberal democracy, and a claim to be benefiting its colonial subjects – to assert moral leadership. And, while the military and diplomatic arrangements of this *Pax Britannica*, or “British Peace,” maintained Britain's global hegemony for over a century, there were few years in which its military was not in action to uphold its rule in some part of the empire.

Other European powers established sprawling colonial empires, although none rivaled the global scope of the British. The Dutch ruled the Netherlands East Indies (modern Indonesia), a legacy of its seventeenth-century reign as the world's leading commercial power. During the last decades of the nineteenth century, several European nations engaged in a frenzied "scramble" to establish colonies in sub-Saharan Africa, carving up almost the entire continent without regard for pre-existing boundaries and co-opting local elites into systems of "indirect rule." In Southeast Asia, France grabbed Indochina (today Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos) in the 1880s, while London ruled a vast crescent of territory running from northern Borneo and Malaya to Burma (modern Myanmar) and India, the "Jewel in the Crown" of the British Empire. Only Latin America escaped this pattern of direct colonial rule. Here anti-colonial revolutions had freed much of the continent in the early 1800s, although independent but relatively weak nation-states remained locked in circuits of trade dominated primarily by Britain and, increasingly, the United States, exporting raw materials and importing manufactured goods.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, this British-dominated world order was challenged by the newly unified nation-states in Germany, Italy, Japan, and the United States. These new states were the product of wars of national unification – including the US Civil War and the Meiji Restoration in Japan – and in all of them, with the partial exception of Italy, unification triggered sustained economic growth. By the end of the nineteenth century, America had become the world's top manufacturing power, and Germany had also surpassed Britain in key economic sectors. In Asia, Japan emerged as the major regional power after successful wars against China (1894–1895) and Russia (1904–1905). These states jumped into the scramble for overseas colonies in Africa and the Pacific, and they joined British and French efforts to open up new markets and spheres of imperial domination in China, where the Qing Dynasty was weakened by economic stagnation, peasant revolt, and regional fragmentation. Intensified international competition for empire destabilized Europe, where Franco-Russian concerns about the rise of Germany intersected with conflicts between Russia, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans. In August 1914 these overlapping European and imperial conflicts led to the outbreak of World War I.

World War I and the Postwar Settlement

These multilayered causes of World War I shaped the character of the war. Much of the fighting and most of the 10 million battlefield deaths took place in three European war zones, including a protracted attritional struggle between Anglo-French and German armies in the trenches of the Western Front; an equally

savage but more mobile war between Russia and the Central Powers (Germany and Austria-Hungary) on a front stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea; and an Alpine front between Italy and Austria-Hungary. These European war zones were connected to critical conflicts in other parts of the world. While far fewer troops were involved, fighting in colonial spaces was often fluid, fast-moving, and decisive. In Africa, Allied armies of Indian and African soldiers overturned German colonial rule in the modern-day states of Cameroon, Namibia, and Tanzania. In the Middle East, Arab rebels and Allied armies fought the Ottoman Empire for control of Iraq, Syria, and Palestine, and then from 1919 to 1923 the new nation-state in Turkey fought to defend its independence against Allied attempts to dismember it. Meanwhile Japan, then a British ally, rolled up German colonial outposts in the Marshall, Marianas, and Caroline islands and on China's Shandong Peninsula.

The mobilization of colonial labor, food, and raw materials enabled Britain and France to fight a long attritional war. French colonial troops from West and North Africa fought on the Western Front, while the Indian Army and other colonial forces sustained British-led campaigns in the Middle East and Africa. These imperial mobilizations drew colonized peoples into the maelstrom of world politics, and overseas military service exposed them to new experiences and ideas. These factors contributed to a mounting tide of anti-colonial agitation. When Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian National Congress stepped up their campaign for Home Rule, the colonial authorities responded with harsh repression, shooting over 1000 unarmed protestors in Amritsar in 1919. In Ireland, the forceful suppression of an armed uprising against British rule at Easter 1916 boosted support for the nationalist cause, leading to a war for national independence and the establishment in 1922 of the Irish Free State in the southern part of the country. In other colonies the impact of war was less dramatic, but it nevertheless spurred the emergence of anti-colonial movements that became increasingly important over the following decades.

During World War I, the major combatants mobilized the totality of their national resources for war. Governments directed workers into military service or into key industrial jobs, reorganizing industry to maximize the output of weapons and munitions. Denied access to overseas trade by the British naval blockade, the strain of this effort was particularly acute in Germany. Berlin managed to produce the military matériel necessary to sustain a long two-front war, but by the winter of 1916–1917 Germany's civilian population was going hungry. With its slender industrial base, the Russian Empire was also hard hit, and as the war progressed economic breakdown and military defeat combined to produce a deep political crisis. Britain and France, with their economies sustained by their empires and by massive inflows of American funds, food, and military supplies, were better placed to meet the demands of total war. Nevertheless, for three years, and despite the commitment of millions of men

and massive quantities of matériel – including tanks, airplanes, and poison gas – neither side achieved a decisive military breakthrough.

The first cracks in this military deadlock emerged in 1917 as the grinding social consequences of total war produced political crises in Russia and then in Germany and Austria-Hungary. In 1917, the Tsarist regime in Russia was toppled by two popular revolutions, the first led by liberal democrats in February and the second in October led by Vladimir Lenin's Bolshevik Party. Acting on their slogan of "Bread, Peace, and Land," the Bolshevik government took Russia out of the war. In the short term, Russia's exit benefited Germany, which quickly annexed a broad swath of former Imperial Russian territory in Poland, Ukraine, and the Baltic States. German conquests were formalized at the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918, where the Bolsheviks traded land for the time they needed to consolidate their socialist state. Germany's victory in the East allowed Berlin to redeploy troops to the Western Front in preparation for a major offensive in spring 1918. After three years of deadlock, a German military victory suddenly seemed possible.

These events overlapped with the second major political development of 1917, the formal entry of the United States into the war. American money and matériel had sustained the Allied war effort since 1915, but under President Woodrow Wilson the United States remained neutral. Wilson's decision to join the war in April 1917 was triggered by the resumption of German submarine attacks on neutral shipping in the Atlantic, but it was fundamentally driven by the desire to block the emergence of a German-dominated Europe – a development that was rightly seen as a threat to the rise of American power. America joined Britain and France as an "associate power" (rather than a formal ally), and US troops began arriving in France in time to come to support Allied armies reeling in the face of Germany's 1918 spring offensive. By the fall, there were one million American soldiers at the front, poised for an advance into Germany.

As it turned out, revolution arrived in Germany before the Allied armies. The German government was overthrown in November 1918 by a popular insurrection that began with a naval mutiny and spread to working-class districts in Berlin and throughout Germany's industrial heartlands. As in Russia, workers and soldiers formed revolutionary councils that functioned as organs of popular political power. Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicated, and an alliance of moderate socialists and military leaders signed an armistice with the Allies on November 11.

The armistice ended the war, but it did not stop all the fighting. Civil war raged in Russia until 1922, as military expeditions from Britain, France, Japan, and the United States boosted counter-revolutionary efforts to overthrow the new Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. In Turkey, nationalists led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk fought until 1923 to prevent the new Turkish nation-state from being carved up by the victorious allies. Revolutionary uprisings shattered the Habsburg Empire in 1918, establishing short-lived socialist regimes and laying

the basis for the creation of new nation-states in Austria, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. In Germany, the moderate socialist leaders of the new Weimar Republic – named for the city where the constitutional assembly met – used gangs of nationalist *Freikorps* to crush waves of communist-led working-class rebellion that rolled through Berlin, Bavaria (the Munich Soviet Republic), and the Ruhr industrial region between 1918 and 1923. In 1920 strikes and popular protests derailed the Kapp Putsch, an attempted right-wing military coup.

These events showed that great modern wars bring with them the possibility of economic and social collapse and, particularly for the losers, popular insurrection. As in Russia, popular revolutions could lead to the formation of governments determined to overturn the economic foundations of capitalism. For ruling elites everywhere, this terrifying prospect would weigh heavily on their political thinking in the years after World War I. The postwar revolutionary wave in Germany and Central Europe was finally contained, but the existence of large communist parties in many countries meant that the possibility of a working-class challenge for power had not gone away. It is impossible to understand either the post-World War I settlement or the course of World War II without understanding how large this issue loomed in the minds of contemporary policymakers.

The Rise of American Power

Britain and France won World War I, but at a crippling cost: an entire generation of young men had been slaughtered, their economies were exhausted, and their governments had gone deeply into debt to fund the war. The United States, on the other hand, had only entered the war in 1917, and while its military presence on the Western Front had established it as a major player in European politics, its military ranked behind that of Britain and France. At the same time, American industrialists and financiers supported the Allied war effort from the beginning, generating an economic boom at home and transforming the United States from a debtor nation into a global financial superpower. To some British observers the United States appeared as a new type of “super-state,” and they were acutely aware that while American aid had allowed them to prevail over Germany, the price tag was a dramatic shift in economic power westwards across the Atlantic.¹ Nevertheless, America’s late entry into the war meant that its economic predominance did not translate directly into overwhelming military power and political influence. As a result, while World War I shattered the old world order, it did not immediately produce a new one.

Allied leaders approached the 1919 Paris Peace Conference in Versailles with different and contradictory goals. Woodrow Wilson hoped to establish a new US-led world order based on free trade, national self-determination for selected

European countries, and a League of Nations capable of settling international disputes by negotiation. In contrast to this liberal internationalist vision, British and French leaders were intent on punishing Germany by dismantling its military, imposing huge reparations payments, and redrawing its borders in favor of new or expanded states in Eastern Europe. Given the relationship of forces on the ground in Europe, the Anglo-French approach won out, and at Versailles Germany was saddled with a massive reparations bill and the loss of 25 000 square miles of territory, much of it given to newly independent Poland. France was assigned the coal production of Germany's Saar Basin for 15 years, during which time the region would be administered by the League of Nations.

These punitive measures were offset to some degree by the Allies' desire to contain the Soviet Union. Although deprived of tanks and heavy artillery, the Allies wanted the German army to be strong enough to resist both domestic insurrection and Soviet expansionism. For similar reasons, Wilson's principle of self-determination was applied primarily to the creation of a chain of new nation-states stretching from Finland through Poland to the Balkans in an extended buffer zone or *cordon sanitaire* designed to contain Germany and to isolate the Soviet Union. The Allies' contradictory goals at Versailles thus produced a contradictory treaty. The punitive aspects of the Versailles Treaty – not least the loss of seven million citizens – angered all shades of German opinion, but the settlement was not so harsh as to preclude the possibility of German recovery.

After Versailles, the United States Congress voted against joining the new League of Nations. Many lawmakers feared that League membership would take critical foreign policy decisions out of their hands. Nevertheless, while their rejection of the League indicated that American elites were not yet willing to embrace fully the political consequences of their new global standing, it did *not* reflect a generalized American retreat into "isolationism." During the 1920s the United States remained deeply engaged in international politics, trade, and finance, functioning as the world's major economic power but not, as yet, as its fully fledged hegemon.

This contradictory relationship was underscored by the 1921 Washington Naval Conference. Often described as a disarmament conference because it led to a 10-year moratorium on battleship construction, its key accomplishment was to regulate the relative sizes of the world's major navies by fixing the battleship tonnage of the United States, Britain, Japan, Italy, and France in the ratio of 5:5:3:2:2. This formula recognized America's claim to parity with Britain. The Royal Navy had been the world's dominant navy for over two centuries, but London accepted this tectonic shift in global power out of fear that America's shipbuilding capacity would allow it to surge ahead in a naval arms race. The conference also registered the rise of Japanese power. Tokyo was rewarded for its wartime services to the Allies by securing approval for a navy capable of