

The Historical Setting



Global Politics in Ancient Times

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Theoretical Perspectives on the History of Global Politics

Summary

Key Terms

The major purpose of *Global Politics* is to help readers understand world politics today and tomorrow. The process continues in this and the next chapter with a discussion of yesterday's world politics, for several reasons. First, today is, and tomorrow will be, unique. In fact, because of the end of the Cold War and the significance of international terrorism after September 11, 2001, one might get the impression that world politics has changed so fundamentally that the history of the global political system is irrelevant to an understanding of its future. It is true that the dramatic transformation of global politics since the 1990s produced events and trends that were unexpected even for professional observers. Still, even the revolutionary developments of the last fifteen years have not made the present entirely incomparable to the past. Although the statement that history repeats itself is an oversimplification, it is not completely false. Recurring patterns are clearly visible in the historical record of the global political system. History often provides situations that are comparable in important ways to those that create today's headlines. To achieve the best possible understanding of today's events—and tomorrow's—it is important to be knowledgeable about comparable past situations and any patterns that occur over time.

The second reason for a discussion of history is that in countries all over the world, official decision makers and other political leaders are steeped in the history of their respective countries and, to a lesser extent, of world politics. The decisions they make and the policies they formulate have been shaped, often in obvious and predictable ways, by the lessons they draw from history. Any fruitful attempt to understand their decisions and policies must draw on not only a knowledge of history but also a knowledge of how history has been interpreted by the most important scholars and leaders in the world.

A third reason for a brief historical analysis is that it provides a basis for interpretation and evaluation of later chapters that examine the various actors, organizations, and other social entities that play important roles in global politics. The discussion of the history of world politics in Chapters 2 and 3 provides a general background for examples that are referred to or discussed in more detail in those chapters. Thus, these two chapters present a thumbnail sketch of the evolution of global politics that will be elaborated throughout the book.

Finally, a review of history gives us a chance to better understand the theoretical perspectives presented in Chapter 1. Each perspective, such as realism and liberalism, draws on history to advance its propositions about the fundamental nature of global politics in the past, present, and future. In the final section of this chapter, we will see how each of these alternative perspectives views the history of global politics from ancient times to the end of the Second World War.

A review of global political history includes attention to who the important actors were and the changing nature and dynamics of international politics. The rise of the sovereign state and global, political, and

economic linkages are particularly important in this respect. As we will see, large international conflicts have a way of reorganizing the international system.

Global Politics in Ancient Times

Relations between different groups of people did not become “global” until technology allowed for those who lived in one part of the world to reach those who lived in other parts of the world. It was not until the early fifteenth century, when advances in math and engineering made it possible to design ocean-worthy vessels with the capability to sail across far distances, that relations become truly international. Prior to this time, relations between groups were isolated within small areas of the globe. The history of these international relations, albeit on a smaller scale, is nevertheless important because it gives an idea of how historical relationships differ from and resemble international politics today.¹

In the eastern Mediterranean in the first to sixth centuries B.C.E., political life was organized within and between small city-states (see Map 2.1). The ancient **Greek city-states**, such as Athens, Corinth, Sparta, and Thebes, consisted of a group of towns or a small city and were governed by a variety of types of political systems, including small oligarchies of the rich, military dictatorships, and limited democracies. The Greek city-state system of international relations is considered a precursor to the modern state system because the city-states related to each other in much the same fashion that countries relate to each other today. From Thucydides’ account of the Peloponnesian War between Sparta and Athens, we know that the city-states waged war against each other, formed alliances, bargained over peace treaties, and established trading relationships.² More important, the city-states were independent of each other, and there was no overarching authority that governed their relationships. Although the Greeks did not articulate a legal concept of sovereignty, they operated as if the city-states were sovereign: They had ultimate authority over their territory, and no higher authority interfered in their internal affairs.

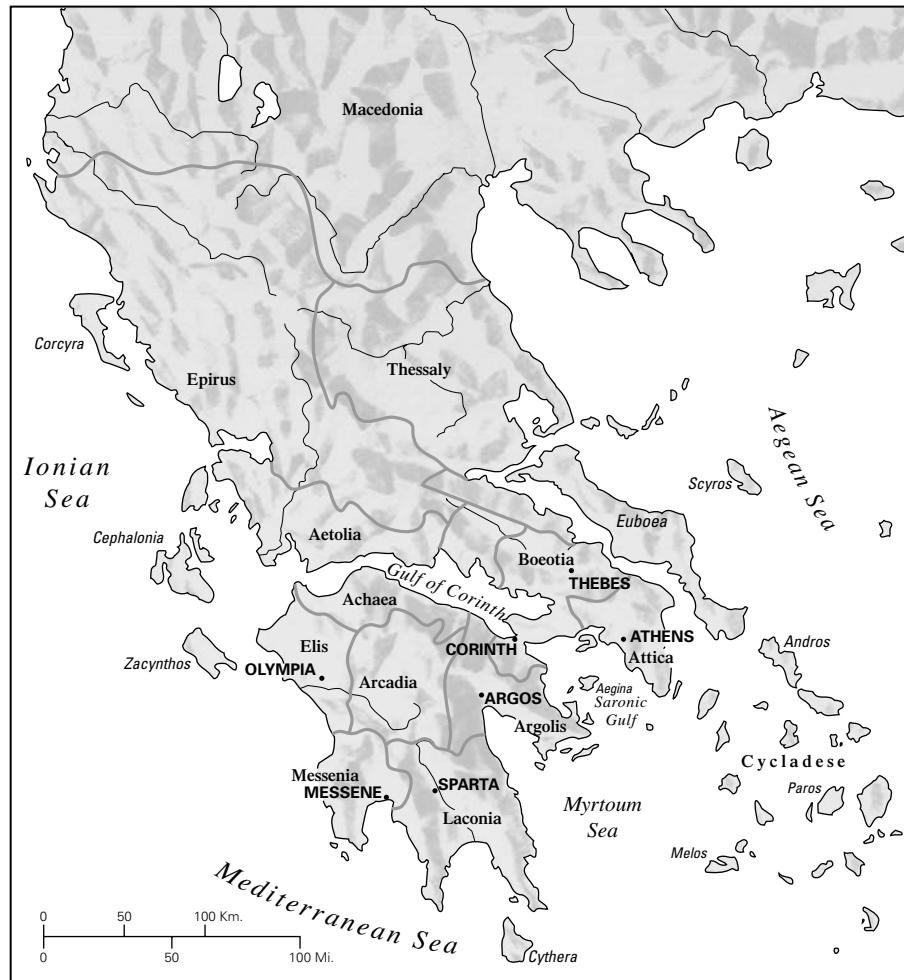
The Greek system of international politics was unusual. For most of history, the world has been organized under larger political units or **empires**, and the relations between political units did not adhere to the principle of sovereignty. Some of the great empires include the Persian empire (circa 600–100 B.C.E.), the Roman Empire (circa 44 B.C.E.–410 C.E.), the African Kingdoms (600–1200 C.E.), the Arab empire (630–1258 C.E.), the Chinese dynasties (circa 1000–1700 C.E.), and the Latin American empires such as the Mayans (circa 300–900 C.E.), the Aztecs (circa 1325–1520 C.E.), and the Incas (circa 1200 C.E.). Within an empire, ultimate power rested in the hands of the emperor or the imperial central power. Regions *within* the empire may have traded with one another or waged war against each other, but these relationships were sanctioned and governed by the

Greek city-states

Formed between the first and sixth centuries B.C.E., a group of towns or a small city governed by a variety of types of political systems including small oligarchies of the rich, military dictatorships, and limited democracy. Examples include Athens, Corinth, Sparta, and Thebes.

empires Large political units in which the ultimate power rested in the hands of the emperor or the imperial central power. Examples include the Roman Empire, the African Kingdoms, the Arab empire, the Mayans, the Aztecs, and the Incas.

Map 2.1 Ancient Greek City-States



central authority. The central authority also had the right to interfere in the internal affairs of the regions. Regions were not independent. There often was not much activity happening *between* empires, given the lack of technology to travel far distances for most of this historical period. When empires did interact with each other, however, there was also no notion of sovereign rights. Empires interfered in the affairs of others without any thought or justification, and victorious empires absorbed vanquished ones because there was no conception that empires had any right to continue to exist as an independent political unit.

This was true in medieval Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire. No political authority as strong as the former empire came to replace it. Europe was instead governed by small feudal units, principalities, dukedoms, and monarchies and was at one time only loosely linked under Charlemagne's

Holy Roman Empire of the ninth century. Yet the Catholic Church served as a religious authority that precluded the total independence of the feudal barons and the monarchs. During this time, the Catholic Church acted as an imperial central power in the area known as Christendom. Within this area, people were governed by both their local lords or kings and their local bishops representing the interests of the Catholic Church in Rome. Christian doctrine underlay the concepts of rights, justice, and other political norms, and even kings were theoretically and often in practice subordinate to the pope. When, in the fifteenth century, Spain and Portugal disagreed over their “discovered” territories in the Western Hemisphere, for example, it was the pope who settled the matter.³ Questions of war were also a religious matter. The Crusades against non-Christians, for example, were organized by the papal authority, and wars within Christendom had to be justified according to Christian doctrine: “A crusade was an enterprise of all Christendom and had to be proclaimed by the pope, preached and organized by the clergy as well as by lay rulers. It was not a matter for unilateral decision by a lay ruler for his own advantage.”⁴

The Emergence of the Modern State and the Contemporary International System

It was when monarchs began to centralize their power, taking it away from the local feudal rulers, and when philosophers and commercial elites alike began questioning the authority of the Catholic Church in particular and religious authority in general, that international relations in Europe began to transform. The first to break from the governance of the Catholic Church were the city-states of northern Italy. The Italian Renaissance of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries reintroduced to Europe the classic Greek and Roman concepts of justice, rights, and law, and the Italian city-states of the Renaissance period, such as Venice, Florence, and Milan, established themselves independent from papal authority, governing their own internal affairs and conducting their external affairs without interference from a higher authority. In many ways, the system of relations looked very different from medieval times: These city-states hired mercenaries to wage wars against one another and other foreign powers, they established a permanent diplomatic corps as a communication system, and they viewed war as a legitimate means to secure interests that did not have to be justified according to religious principles. As such, the Italian city-state system of Renaissance Italy was in part a return to the Greek city-state system of independent small states.

In the rest of Europe, the Protestant Reformation that challenged Catholic authority set the stage for conflict as the Catholic Hapsburgs tried to reunify a fracturing Europe. The Hapsburgs were defeated in the Thirty Years’ War (1618–1648), a devastating conflict that set the stage for the birth of the modern state and the contemporary international system.

Peace of Westphalia

Treaty signed in 1648 that is widely recognized as the dividing line between medieval European political institutions and a modern Europe where states became recognized as sovereign.

Thus, modern European states were born in violence. They arose from the destruction of the Thirty Years' War, in which about two-thirds of the total population had disappeared and five-sixths of the villages in the empire had been destroyed.⁵ These horrors made it obvious that the Christian community of medieval Europe was a fragile edifice indeed and was in need of replacement. The replacement that came out of the **Peace of Westphalia** was the sovereign state. The Peace of Westphalia, signed in 1648, is widely recognized as the dividing line between a medieval Europe dominated by small, localized political units under the comprehensive authority of the Holy Roman Empire and/or the pope and a modern Europe where states became recognized as sovereign. The Holy Roman Empire and the pope continued to exist, but their political power had been all but destroyed.

The concept of sovereignty, in the post-Westphalian period, extended beyond the dimensions described by Jean Bodin, the French legal scholar credited with making the first systematic presentation of the concept in his *Six Books on the State*, published in 1586. Bodin's work was a defense of the divine right of the French king to rule in an absolute manner, but Bodin's concept of sovereignty did not imply a right to rule arbitrarily or above the law. Nor did it originally imply that a state fell under no superior obligations in its relations with other states.⁶ But because of the urge to avoid catastrophes such as the Thirty Years' War, the concept of sovereignty came to imply that the state had an absolute power over its subjects and an absolute right to be free from interference by other states in the exercise of that power.⁷

The Peace of Westphalia did not, of course, immediately transform Europe from a large collection of small, local entities under one universal authority into a small number of parallel sovereign states. But the idea of states as hard-shelled, impenetrable units did develop relatively quickly after 1648. Shortly before 1648, scholars of international law considered it perfectly appropriate for one state to intervene in the affairs of another in order to protect citizens from oppression. But some fifty years later, legal scholars, writing with the benefit of the experience of the Thirty Years' War and the Peace of Westphalia, concluded that such interference by one state in the affairs of another was a violation of sovereignty.⁸ Thus, by the beginning of the eighteenth century, sovereign states—a notion only previously seen in isolated, small areas of the world—became the dominant legal principle governing relations among the major powers in Europe. This new Westphalian system was not only a product of religious developments; economic and technological changes also worked to reinforce the sovereign state.

It is possible that if the divisions in Christendom in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries had not been accompanied by changes in economic forces and in military technology, the Thirty Years' War and the Peace of Westphalia might have established impenetrable sovereign units that were nevertheless similar in size to the numerous small units that went into that war. But first, and possibly most fundamental, economic changes powerfully reinforced the strength of central political authorities in what were soon to become recognizably modern states. Feudal authorities tended

to restrict trade and commerce, making it almost impossible to conduct economic transactions across longer distances, or indeed anywhere outside the jurisdiction of typically quite small feudal political units. As merchants and entrepreneurs who wanted to conduct economic transactions became wealthier and more influential, they increasingly came to value political systems and leaders who could exert their authority over larger areas and enforce commitments to similar entities elsewhere.⁹

Dramatic changes in military technology reinforced evolutionary developments in economic forces. Around 1200 C.E., stone castles represented the ultimate in military defense, and they were scattered all over western Europe.

Military technology came to exert a strong force against this state of affairs. "The sudden maturation in 1450 A.D. of the cannon, after a long infancy, as the destroyer of castles made a further and large change in the art of war in favor of the centralized state . . . and in favor of the monarch over the feudal barons."¹⁰ The appearance of gunpowder on the battlefields accelerated the process of eliminating smaller political units in favor of larger units, such as states. Between 1400 and 1600, large numbers of the smaller entities lost their independence; the Thirty Years' War brought this process to a climax. After the Peace of Westphalia, fortified cities and castles increasingly gave way to fortresses lining the borders of states, at least partly because the cities and castles could no longer defend themselves against attackers equipped with the new military technology.

But how did the increasingly powerful monarchs at the head of territorial states acquire the ability to use this new military technology effectively? Changes in warfare favored larger and more expensive armies, which necessitated more taxation.¹¹ Sovereign states proved themselves more capable than city-states or city-leagues of providing this increased taxing power and rational government.¹² So the evolution and increasing importance of both economic transactions over large areas and innovations in military technology combined to allow territorial, sovereign states to prevail, first in Europe and eventually over the entire globe.

Eighteenth-Century European Relations

Following the Peace of Westphalia, the large important European states, such as Britain, France, the Netherlands, Austria, and the newly emerging Russia and Prussia, were ruled by centralized monarchies, and wars between the states were usually conflicts between royal dynasties. Typically, one royal family would object to an increase in the power of another royal family. These conflicts and the resulting wars would typically be resolved on the **balance-of-power** principle. This principle implied that it was dangerous for all states to allow any one state to become too powerful. Just what was too powerful was in constant dispute, of course, but in practice the balance-of-power principle usually served to preserve the existing

balance of power A principle that implies it is dangerous for all states to allow any other state to become too powerful.

distribution of power among the great powers. Any change in the status quo that worked to the detriment of a given great power made that state (or royal family) feel entitled to some compensation.¹³

The eighteenth century saw a series of balance-of-power wars, with the British and French being the major protagonists. The wars between kings were fought by soldiers of various nationalities employed for the purpose, and the diplomats who negotiated the peace settlements were virtually indifferent to nationalistic divisions.¹⁴ This cosmopolitanism applied throughout the diplomatic corps of European states.

Denmark used German diplomats, Russia employed Englishmen and Frenchmen, and Spain recruited diplomatic talent from Italy and Holland. Indeed, cosmopolitanism extended to heads of states. Britain had a German king, and the Spanish king was a grandson of Louis XIV of France.



Napoleon, pictured at the height of his power in 1812, revolutionized international politics by his heavy reliance on conscription to create armies infused with the spirit of nationalism.

(Jacques-Louis David, *Napoleon in His Study*, Samuel H. Kress Collection, © 1994 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington)

The Impact of the French Revolution

The new, modern, sovereign state, brought into existence at the end of the seventeenth century, and the balance-of-power system operating on the European continent would soon face a challenge that would transform the nature of the state, as well as the nature of international relations. This challenge came in the form of nationalism and expressed itself in the eighteenth century in the French Revolution.

The original aims of the revolution were liberty, equality, and brotherhood for the French people. The aims implied the end of aristocratic rule in France, but more important, they implied that the state belonged to the people. Kings could no longer say, *L'état, c'est moi* (I am the state). The acts of the government came to be viewed as acts of the citizenry, and the revolutionary French constitution of 1793 was ratified by a large popular majority. As popular will linked itself with the actions of its political representatives, tremendous support for the government arose. As a consequence, the government came to be regarded as the head of a national society of French people; not, as in the case of the old monarchy, the ruler of a mere geographical expression.¹⁵ Thus, in the context

nationalism The identification of a people to a social community that is often based on shared language, ethnicity, and/or religion.

of the French Revolution, **nationalism**, or the identification of a people to a social community that is often linguistically, ethnically, or religiously based, meant that the government of France, the state, was legitimate not because of religious authority, or the family dynasty of a monarch, but because it represented the nation of the French people.

If the French Revolution had been self-contained, its impact on international politics might have been less dramatic. But the revolution became expansionist. The French became convinced that their ideals were too good and too important to be confined in application to one state, and with Napoleon's leadership they set out to spread those ideas throughout Europe. To do this, Napoleon used the *levée en masse*, or conscription. Soldiers were no longer mercenaries, but patriots who fought in defense of or for the glory of the state. Eventually, the other states of Europe found they could not resist or defeat an army of patriots without copying its methods and its nationalism. France's enemies became nationalistic in self-defense. Even so, it took the combined forces of Napoleon's enemies almost two decades to finally defeat him at Waterloo in 1815.

Nineteenth-Century European Relations

Following the disruptive Napoleonic wars, the victors of the Battle of Waterloo sought to reestablish order in Europe. The leaders of the great powers met at the **Congress of Vienna** and signed agreements that they hoped would restore stability. The agreements solidified the notion of state sovereignty. States agreed to preserve territorial boundaries to prevent future disputes, create buffer states (such as the Netherlands and Belgium) as small allies, and return to the balance-of-power principle that had operated in the eighteenth century. Fearing a French-like revolution in their own countries, the monarchs were also anxious to quell the flames of nationalism and democracy, and thus monarchies were restored and reinforced across Europe, even in France.¹⁶

The goal of restoring stability among the great powers was successful, and the international political system of the nineteenth century was relatively peaceful, compared to previous centuries. During this period, known as the **Concert of Europe**, there was no conflict in which all five major powers—Austria, Britain, France, Prussia, and Russia—were involved at the same time. Wars between the states occurred, such as the Crimean War in 1854 and the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, but one or more of the major powers stayed neutral in each of these conflicts. One source of continuity during the Concert of Europe was the consistently important role played by Great Britain. If Britain was not always clearly the most powerful state, it was never very far from being so. Britain's power and security rested first on its navy, which dominated the seas the world over and made any attack across the English Channel unlikely to succeed. The second solid basis for Britain's nineteenth-century

Congress of Vienna
A meeting between the leaders of the great powers, following Napoleon's defeat in 1815, which resulted in agreements designed to restore stability and solidify the notion of sovereignty.

Concert of Europe
The nineteenth century period of relative peace, with no major conflict between the primary powers.

security was its manufacturing ability.¹⁷ The Industrial Revolution, the use of energy to drive machinery, began in Britain with the invention of the steam engine in 1769 and quickly fueled Britain's economic growth. Britain rapidly became the economic hegemon, the most powerful economy.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Britain's predominance facilitated a new era of international trade. Indeed, the second half of the nineteenth century saw the development of a truly international economy. Previously,

throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, almost all economic activity was conducted either at the local level or (in those few countries such as Great Britain and France that had succeeded in abolishing internal impediments to economic exchange) on a national wide scale. Where international trade did exist it was largely confined to distinct commercial regions defined by physical proximity.¹⁸

Thanks to the British promise that its currency was as good as gold, known as the *gold standard*, currency relations were fairly stable during this time, allowing countries to engage in considerable amounts of international trade.¹⁹ As a result, the major economies were highly integrated, depending on trade with one another to a degree that would not be seen again until late in the twentieth century.

The Age of Imperialism

At roughly the same time that Europe came to be dominated by states, processes were set in motion that led Europe to dominate the world and eventually helped set the stage for the emergence of sovereign states in all areas of the globe. The Europeans first sent explorers to stake claims. After the explorers, and sometimes with them, came traders and colonizers, who began exploiting the economic and human resources of conquered areas. Imperialism refers to the domination of a population and territory by another state, and the European imperial powers established colonies throughout the world from the sixteenth to the early twentieth centuries. The fact that post-Westphalian Europe was divided into independent states rather than united in an empire was probably crucial to its global pursuits. There can be no doubt that China in the early Middle Ages was a more advanced society than Western Europe economically, technologically, and scientifically.²⁰ But empires, such as those in Asia, were overcentralized, rigid, and relatively unproductive in economic terms. As a result, in this view, East Asia came to be dominated by Europe, which was more flexible.

The first wave of imperialism occurred in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when the British, Dutch, French, Portuguese, and Spanish established colonies in the Western Hemisphere. Most of these colonies

would gain their independence in the last part of the eighteenth century and the early part of the nineteenth century. This included the war of independence by the American colonies, aided by the French, against the British. The Europeans then turned their attention to the rest of the world, and in a second wave of imperialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the major powers began intensely competing for colonies in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Indeed, although the European powers did not directly engage in all-out war with each other back on the continent during the Concert of Europe, they nevertheless competed with each other in colonization outside Europe, and colonial possessions became part of their calculations of the balance of power among them.

Britain's industrial and naval capability allowed it to establish the largest empire and prompted British imperialists of the time to boast that "the sun never sets on the British empire." Eventually, other growing powers would join in and acquire their own imperial possessions, as Japan did in East Asia, Russia in Central Asia, the United States in the Pacific and Caribbean, and Germany and Italy in the Middle East and Africa. (For the pattern of colonization, see Map 3.2 on page 62.) The result was a carving up of the world, and only a few areas, such as Iran and Siam, remained independent. Even in areas that had gained their independence from colonial powers, such as Latin America, the larger states dominated their affairs. In the early part of the twentieth century, the United States effectively controlled many countries in the Caribbean and Central America.²¹

In the areas that were still colonies, imperial powers mined natural resources such as gold, grew luxury crops including sugar, and acquired slaves, incorporating these geographic areas into the modern world system. As a result, Europe became increasingly advanced in economic terms, and the peripheral areas lagged far behind, becoming more and more dominated by Europe economically as well as politically.²² The Europeans saw themselves as spreading "civilization" throughout the world. If they benefited more from the emergence of the modern world system, this was, from their viewpoint, only natural, because they had started down the road to economic development earlier than other countries, the very regions they were now "assisting" in the effort to catch up. This process included instances of brutal exploitation, and the development of the slave trade is an example of European economic tactics no one defends today. Still, in the view of some, such as British economist Joan Robinson,²³ the misery of being exploited by capitalists is nothing compared to the misery of not being exploited at all. Incorporation into the Euro-centered international economic system created lots of problems, but people who remained isolated from that system did not live in a pristine paradise either.

In addition to the human and economic consequences of the imperial age, the colonization of the rest of the world was the means by which the European model of international politics based on sovereign

states was exported. Moreover, when the colonies eventually became independent,

non-European states were admitted as members of the [international] society . . . provided that they adopted its rules. . . . The great powers also insisted that all governments should observe certain European economic standards and commercial practices, particularly where they affected foreigners. Non-European candidates were judged not merely by how they conducted their external relations, but also by how they governed themselves. Communities that were culturally non-European had to learn these laws and practices and adjust to them, often at some cost to their own societies. The insistence on western values . . . played an important part in the integrating process which established the European-dominated global international society.²⁴

Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century, European politics was becoming global politics.

The Twentieth-Century World Wars

In retrospect, it is easy to see that the beginning of the twentieth century brought several developments that would be detrimental to the Concert of Europe. Probably the most important was the increasing power of three states. To the west, the United States was already superior to Britain in economic productivity and would soon surpass Britain in military strength as well. In the east, Japan was proving to be a major power in wars against China and Russia, making it very difficult for Britain to maintain its customary domination of the seas in that area. Most ominous, Germany began to challenge Britain's ability to preserve a balance of power on the European continent.

In addition, while the monarchs did their best to try to stave off the forces of nationalism, their efforts, in the long run, failed. Although none of the conflicts was great enough to seriously disrupt the system set up at the end of the Napoleonic era, wars of national liberation became commonplace. The Greeks fought for liberation from the Turks. The Poles rose up against the Russians. The Hungarians and the Italians rebelled against the Austrians. And so it went until Serbian nationalistic aspirations led to the First World War and thus helped to destroy the European system established a hundred years earlier by the major powers at the Congress of Vienna in 1815.

The Breakdown of the Nineteenth-Century Alliance System

For some time, the British were unconcerned about the rise of Germany. Otto von Bismarck, chancellor of the German Empire from 1871 to 1890,

Triple Alliance

The alliance between Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy established in the early twentieth century.

Triple Entente

The alliance between Britain, France, and Russia established in the early twentieth century.

had long followed a policy of keeping the German navy small, and as long as Germany maintained that policy, it did not seem threatening. In fact, at the beginning of the century, the British, because of colonial rivalries, tended to regard the French with more suspicion than they did the Germans. The suspicion was sufficiently strong that for a while, the British were inclined to come to an understanding with Germany and perhaps even to become aligned in some way with the **Triple Alliance** of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy.²⁵ But this inclination was wiped out by a combination of French conciliation and German belligerence. The French agreed to give the British a free hand in Sudan and Egypt in return for the British giving the French a free hand in Morocco. Meanwhile, the Germans made it obvious that they intended to build a navy that might challenge Britain's control of the seas. The result of these two developments was the Entente Cordiale between Britain and France in 1904. The agreement expanded into the **Triple Entente** with the addition of Russia. The entente was faced with the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy. With this development, the very fluid alliance system that had operated during the Concert of Europe, with Britain playing the key role as balancer, came to an end. In its place, Europe became divided into two rigid camps. (See Map 2.2 for the alliances.)

After a number of international crises over the next decade, that war was ultimately sparked on June 28, 1914, when a Serbian nationalist, apparently hoping for the liberation of fellow Slavs under Austrian rule, assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary. Austrian leaders had long been concerned about separatist movements in their empire, and they were determined to strike back at Serbia, a nation that, in the Austrian view, sympathized with and supported these movements. Austria's determination was heightened when Germany, on July 5, assured Austria of support if conflict with Serbia brought Austria into conflict with Russia. Austria delivered an ultimatum to Serbia on July 23, to which Serbia made a very conciliatory reply. Even so, on July 28, Austria declared war on Serbia. By August 6, 1914, France, Great Britain, and Russia were at war with Germany and Austria-Hungary. The Allies were later joined by Japan, Italy, and the United States, while Bulgaria and Turkey fought on the side of the Germans and the Austrians.

The First World War

Before the outbreak of the war, there was great optimism in Europe. After all, the nineteenth century had brought enormous benefits:

There were dramatic advances in material living standards, health and education, and also in the sciences and the arts. It was an age of industrial and technical revolution, and of great strides in man's mastery of the environment. The middle

class acquired an increasing say in most of the communities of Europe, with a new industrial working class crowding on its heels. The whole world seemed to become Europeanized. It became difficult not to believe in progress.²⁶

World War I shattered much of this optimism. The war would leave more than 15 million dead, and many of those who survived would long remember the horrors of trench warfare and mustard gas. This despite the expectation of leaders in 1914 that either war would not occur or that it would be a short one. Four years later, the Europeans looked around to see the devastating effects such miscalculations could bring.

One of the most important effects of the First World War on international politics was the weakening of Europe. The European states had been in unquestioned command of the global political system up to 1914. By 1917, one important European state, Russia, was on the verge of dropping out of the war, and the rest were locked in a seemingly endless stalemate. It took a non-European state, the United States, which did not join the war until 1917, to break the deadlock. By then, the Austro-Hungarian Empire had been destroyed and Germany, Britain, and France severely damaged.

The Russian Revolution of 1917, in which the Bolshevik Communist Party (led by Vladimir Lenin) came to power, was in no small part another effect of the war. It might have occurred in any case, but the war made the inefficient and outmoded aspects of the czarist regime more obvious and subjected the Russian people to such hardships that they became less tolerant of the government's inadequacies.²⁷ Alone among the major combatants, the United States emerged more powerful than it had been at the beginning of the war. It was, in fact, already the most powerful state in the world according to many tangible indicators. The First World War significantly enlarged the role of the United States in the global political system.

Another important impact of the war was in the realm of political ideas. The war had been fought, according to U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, the leader of its most powerful victor, to make the world safe for democracy. It had been won, as no one could fail to notice, by the more democratic states (the United States, Great Britain, and France), while the nondemocratic states (Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, and Russia) had fallen to pieces. The war served to enshrine the intertwined (but not synonymous) values of democracy and **national self-determination**—the right of a community that identifies itself as a nation to form a state to govern itself. These twin ideas delegitimized empires. Applying the principle of national self-determination, Wilson led the effort to break up the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires, creating new states such as Poland, Turkey, and Czechoslovakia. In the Middle East, former colonial possessions were placed under international control and would gain their independence after World War II.

national self-determination

The principle that a community that identifies itself as a nation has the right to form a state to govern itself.

Finally, any discussion of the effects of the First World War would be incomplete without an emphasis on the extent to which it created conditions conducive to the next world war. In addition to the lasting hatreds it created (or reinforced), the First World War had several important effects on the international economic system that shaped the process leading to the Second World War. As mentioned, the United States emerged, by a considerable margin, as the most important economic unit in the world, and Great Britain, France, and Germany became dependent on it. Furthermore, the war (and perhaps the provisions of the peace treaty) devastated the German economy in a manner that paved the way for the appearance, and later the success, of Adolf Hitler.

Postwar Settlements and the Interwar Years

In the months immediately following World War I, U.S. President Wilson was anxious to move beyond the days of balance-of-power and sphere-of-influence politics, which he saw as dangerous principles that had led Europe to near total collapse. The major instrument through which such principles would be replaced was an international organization, to be called the League of Nations. As the president of the strongest victor in the war, Wilson provided the major impetus behind the creation of such an organization, but there was widespread agreement on the need for such a body. Many European leaders were of the opinion that the war came about largely by default, because the forces of negotiation and peaceful settlement marshaled against it suddenly collapsed.²⁸ In short, they believed that the war had occurred because the leaders had had no time or place to talk things over when the crisis began. The League of Nations would provide the opportunity for a cooling-off period and a forum for negotiations to avoid the next war.

Beyond that very general conception of the League, though, there lay important areas of disagreement among the victorious powers. One area became obvious when the disposition of Germany's colonies was discussed. Wilson wanted to make these colonies the common property of the League and have them administered by small nations. Britain wanted to annex the colonies outright. A compromise was accomplished whereby the British dominions obtained the territories they desired under a loose mandate from the League. In adhering to this agreement, based on old sphere-of-influence ideas, the British and the other European powers demonstrated that their view of how international relations should be conducted in the postwar era was perhaps not as revolutionary as idealists such as Wilson might have hoped.

The French were even less idealistically inclined than the British. In an important sense, France had been the real loser in the war. It had lost 10 percent of its active male population, the highest proportion of any of the major participants. Also, the largest and most dreadful battles had been fought on French soil. The additional deliberate German destruction

meant that fully a third of France was devastated. Almost 300,000 homes had been destroyed and some 3 million acres of land made unfit for cultivation.²⁹ Finally, France's war debts were staggering.

French leaders were absolutely desperate to assure their people that they would never have to battle the Germans again. Their major concern was that Germany be kept under control, and they were not willing to rely on Wilson's ideals without a solid base of concrete force behind them. France proposed the establishment of an international peace force to keep the Germans in check and wanted to take all of Germany's land west of the Rhine, an area containing some 5 million people, and create one or two republics that would be under French control. The United States, however, rejected both of these proposals.

Another, eventually crucial, disagreement between Wilson and Britain and France concerned the matter of reparations. Before the peace conference, Wilson had promised Germany that it would suffer no punitive damages. Germany had signed the armistice on condition that the Allies would ask for payment only for damages to civilians and their property. But the British and the French wanted to make Germany pay the whole cost of the war. This intent was understandable: the British and the French had suffered much more from the war than the Americans had. Realizing this, and despite his reservations, Wilson agreed to expand the definition of civilian damages that Germany had agreed to pay and an increase of about 100 percent in reparations resulted.

At the eleventh hour on the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1918, the armistice that ended the First World War went into effect. Three days earlier, a new German republic, known as the Weimar Republic, was proclaimed. It could not have been born at a less propitious time. Within a matter of seven months, the new government was faced with the responsibility of signing the **Treaty of Versailles**, the treaty to officially end the First World War. The publication of the treaty in Germany in May 1919 caused an outcry throughout the country. Mass meetings were organized, the provisional president of the republic called the terms "unrealizable and unbearable," and the German delegate to Versailles called the treaty "intolerable for any nation."³⁰

The German people considered the demands of the Versailles treaty unreasonable. It took land away from them. Seven million people were no longer living under German sovereignty. Germany was virtually disarmed. Article 231 of the treaty held Germany responsible for the war. But the provision of the treaty that had perhaps the most lasting impact concerned reparations. The exact amount was not stipulated in the treaty, but the Germans were to make a preliminary payment of \$5 billion between 1919 and 1921. That gave some indication of what was to come. Then in April 1921, the Allies presented Germany with a total reparations bill of \$33 billion. By that time, the German mark had begun to fall in value. It was normally valued at 4 to the U.S. dollar, but by the end of 1921 it had fallen to a value of 75 to the dollar. That was merely

Treaty of Versailles
Agreement, signed in 1919, that officially ended the First World War and established the terms for Germany's punishment.

the beginning of the most spectacular inflationary spiral in the history of the industrialized Western world. In 1922, the value of the German mark fell to 400 to the U.S. dollar, an inflationary rate of around 500 percent for one year. By the beginning of 1923, it took 7,000 marks to buy a dollar's worth of goods. When the French occupied the Ruhr Valley, the value of the mark dropped to 18,000 to the dollar. By July, it was 160,000 to the dollar; by August, 1 million to the dollar; by November, 4 billion. From then on, the value of the mark compared to the dollar had to be calculated in the trillions. It took a wheelbarrow full of money to buy a loaf of bread, assuming either was to be found.

This was the scene in Germany as Adolf Hitler made his first marked impression on the body politic, when he staged a ludicrously premature attempt to begin his ascent to power in Germany. He was arrested, tried, convicted, and sentenced to five years in prison on April 1, 1924.³¹ A normal man would have been discouraged, but Hitler was neither normal nor discouraged. He spent his time in prison dictating a book, *Mein Kampf*, that described in some detail his plans for the establishment of a thousand-year Reich, or empire, in Germany.

In time, Germany recovered from its economic problems, due in large part to a flow of U.S. capital, used to pay reparations and renew Germany's productive capacities. Unemployment dropped, wages rose, and neither Hitler nor his Nazi Party was prominent. But the importance of the U.S. economy to German prosperity was soon to become forcefully apparent. In fact, Great Britain and France as well as Germany had become heavily dependent on the United States economically. In the 1920s, U.S. investors and Wall Street banks poured money into Germany, which used much of it to pay reparations to Great Britain and France, which in turn used that money to pay their First World War debts to the United States. This interesting arrangement was perhaps harmless enough until the stock market crash in 1929, when the supply of money in the circular flow from Wall Street and other sources in the United States suddenly stopped. Then the Germans could no



In the early 1920s, inflation in Germany was so severe that people, such as this German woman, used their paper money for fuel in their stoves and fireplaces.

(© Bettmann/Corbis)

longer pay their reparations, which meant that Great Britain and France could not pay their war debts. The only possible alternatives for the Germans, the British, and the French were to default on their debts or increase their exports to the United States in order to accumulate dollars to pay the debts. President Herbert Hoover and the Congress moved to eliminate the second possibility (and to ensure the first) by putting the Smoot-Hawley Act into effect in June 1930, raising U.S. tariff rates to their highest point in history. "Over a thousand economists had pleaded with the president not to sign the bill, pointing out that higher rates would hamper foreign exports, block collection of the war debts, invite foreign retaliation, and embitter foreign relations. The predictions proved true."³² At least as important as the domestic impact was the international effect of the increased tariffs. "The atrocious Smoot-Hawley tariff of 1930 . . . more than any other act of policy, spread the Depression to Europe."³³

Great Depression A consequence of the 1929 stock market crash. The U.S. economic depression spread to other areas of the world, especially postwar Europe.

The effect of the **Great Depression** on German electoral politics was immediate and dramatic. In 1928, before the crash, the Nazis had received 810,000 votes and elected twelve of their members to the Reichstag, the German parliament. In the September 1930 elections, after millions of people had been thrown out of work and thousands of small businesses had failed, Hitler's party won almost 6.5 million votes and 107 seats in the Reichstag, thus becoming the second-largest party in the legislature. The Communist Party in Germany also gained as a result of the Depression. Although its gains were not as spectacular (from 3.2 million votes in 1928 to 4.6 million in 1930), its rise undoubtedly smoothed the way for Hitler's rise to power. By 1932, the Nazi Party was the largest political party in the country. In January 1933, Hitler was named chancellor. On March 27, 1933, the German legislature passed what was called the Enabling Act, which served as the formal basis for the establishment of Hitler's dictatorship. He never received a majority of the votes, but a single party rarely does in a multiparty system of the type Germany had at the time. The Nazis used terror and intimidation, there can be no quarrel about that, but they also attracted millions of uncoerced voters.

The expectations of many German voters that Hitler could help solve their economic problems proved to be warranted. The economic policies of Hitler, based on large-scale borrowing for public expenditures that were principally civilian in the early years, worked well and quickly. "The result," as one well-known economist has pointed out, "was a far more effective attack on unemployment than in any other industrial country. By 1935, German unemployment was minimal."³⁴ So Hitler came to power in part because many Germans hoped (correctly, as it turned out) that he could help them with their economic problems. He also appealed to Germans of all classes because of his denunciation of the Versailles treaty and his condemnation of Jews and because he was an alternative to the assumption of power by the Communists.

Challenges to the Status Quo

Scholars of international politics will always vividly view the 1930s as notable for the successful challenges to the international status quo mounted by Japan, Italy, and Germany. Let us take a look at the assertive policies that each of these dissatisfied major powers adopted.

The first challenge to the status quo was made by Japan when it invaded Manchuria in 1931. Japan was a rapidly growing power in the decades before 1931, taking advantage of the First World War to acquire several German colonial outposts and to extend its economic and political privileges in China. Perhaps even more important, Japan dramatically increased exports to the Asian markets that were cut off from their traditional European suppliers by the war. By the end of the war, Japanese strength had become so apparent that it was accorded great power status at the Paris Peace Conference.

Overall, the early 1920s were good years for Japan economically and politically. But in 1927, Japan began to have domestic economic problems that were soon exacerbated by the onset of the Depression. The reaction of all the industrialized states to the Depression, as we have seen, was to throw up high tariff walls to protect jobs. Japan, particularly dependent on international trade, was hit hard. At this time when Japan was feeling the pressure of the high tariff barriers around the world, China began an effort to counter Russian and Japanese influence in Manchuria, which China considered its territory. Japanese interests were quite extensive; Manchuria accounted for some 40 percent of Japan's foreign trade and investment at the time.³⁵ In reaction to the increased flow of Chinese people into the area, as well as anti-Japanese propaganda and incidents, the Japanese army took matters into its own hands. In 1931, manufacturing an incident involving the dynamiting of a Japanese-controlled railroad track, the army moved to clear Manchuria of Chinese troops and establish complete control.

The League of Nations urged China and Japan to restore normal relations. It took great pains to avoid taking sides on the issue, despite the rather obvious nature of Japan's aggression. Eventually, almost a year and a half after the Japanese invasion, the League called for an autonomous Manchuria under the control of China, as well as safeguards for Japanese interests there. When the report was adopted, the Japanese delegation walked out and announced that Japan was resigning from the League. The incident set an unfortunate precedent for the League, and the United States did not help the situation. Speeches were made and warnings were given, but it was obvious to the Japanese, especially since the United States had never joined the League, that American resistance to Japan's actions would go no further. Needless to say, words alone did not cause the Japanese to withdraw from Manchuria.

The next challenge to the League of Nations came from Italy. In 1922, Benito Mussolini came to power. He benefited almost immediately from

the general worldwide economic advance, and by 1929 he could claim that he had saved the lira, put an end to inflation, and reduced unemployment. However, Italy, like Japan, suffered during the Great Depression. The underlying immobility and rigidity of the Italian economy under fascism was to prove a matter of first-rate importance for the rest of the world. The international depression deprived fascism of its only real claim to material success, and Mussolini's regime was politically weak.³⁶

In 1935, Mussolini attacked Ethiopia, and the League of Nations responded initially with surprising forcefulness. Italy was officially branded the aggressor, and the League voted to institute an embargo of arms, ammunition, and implements of war against Italy. But this embargo was never effectively enforced, partly because the United States refused to cooperate with the League in imposing effective sanctions. Britain and France, the most important states within the League, were apparently motivated by the fear that strong action against Italy might drive Mussolini into the arms of Hitler. They still hoped at this point that Italy might be an ally against Germany if the need arose. So Britain allowed all the Italian military forces and equipment to pass unchallenged through the Suez Canal. By June 1936, Mussolini proclaimed Ethiopia an Italian province. In December 1937, Italy followed Japan in resigning from the League of Nations, and Mussolini continued his aggressive policies by annexing Albania in the spring of 1939.

If Mussolini killed the League in Ethiopia, Hitler buried it, along with the Versailles peace treaty. First, he violated the disarmament provisions of the Versailles treaty. Then, in March 1936, he occupied the Rhineland, which according to the peace settlement was supposed to be a demilitarized zone. At this early stage, Germany's military strength was quite modest, and it is clear that Hitler would have had to back down in the face of any substantial resistance. But he met virtually no resistance at all. The German troops simply marched in behind blaring bands; there was no battle order whatsoever.³⁷

In 1938, Hitler officially incorporated Austria into the Third Reich. Later that year, he began to demand a solution to the problem involving the people of German ethnic background who lived in a part of Czechoslovakia known as the Sudetenland. At a meeting in southern Germany in September, the British and the French gave in to Hitler's demands, under threat of military action. In the **Munich Agreement**, Czechoslovakia was forced to cede to Germany 11,000 square miles of territory containing all the fortifications in the Czech defense line. The loss of territory left the country helpless. By April 1939, Hitler had absorbed the rest of the Czechoslovakian state into his empire. Yet Hitler was still not satisfied. There was one more territorial change that he considered necessary. On September 1, 1939, Germany attacked Poland in an effort to bring about that change. Britain and France responded this time, having pledged to protect Poland from the same fate as Czechoslovakia. The Second World War was under way.

Munich Agreement

Negotiated settlement in 1938 in which Great Britain and France agreed to force Czechoslovakia to cede the ethnically German Sudetenland to Hitler's Germany.

The Second World War

The Second World War was the most lethal international conflict in the history of the world, and it set the stage for international politics for the rest of the twentieth century. One of the crucial turning points in the process that led to the war involved a contest between Germany and the Western democracies of Britain and France for an alliance with the Soviet Union.

From the beginning, the Western powers seemed to have a better chance than the Germans of obtaining the Soviets' signature on a treaty. Ideologically, the British and French democracies were hardly compatible with the Soviet Union, but neither were they so unremittingly hostile as Nazi Germany. And the Soviet Union had an old score to settle with the Germans. When the Soviets dropped out of the First World War, their departure was formalized by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which they signed with the Germans. Lenin was desperate to get out of the war at the time, and the terms of the treaty reflected his desperation. Russia gave up 32 percent of its population, or 56 million people. The territory Russia lost contained 73 percent of its iron ore, 89 percent of its coal, and 33 percent of its railway mileage. In addition, Russia agreed to pay Germany an indemnity of 6 billion marks. Thus, in the 1930s, the Soviets felt that some revision of boundaries



Germany's Hitler (here represented by German Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop, far left) and the Soviet Union's Stalin (middle) signed a nonaggression pact in 1939. Also present was the Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs Molotov (far right).

(AP Photo/AP Images)

Nazi-Soviet Pact An August 1939 agreement between Germany and the Soviet Union in which both countries agreed to remain neutral toward each other, to divide up Poland, and to allow Soviet annexation of the Baltic states.



Map: European Theater in World War II, Atlas page 46

and spheres of influence was desirable. Hitler did not seem likely to allow such revisions; perhaps with the help of the Western powers, the Soviets could bring them about.

Despite the advantages the British and the French had, the Germans won the contest. In August 1939, the **Nazi-Soviet Pact**, in which the Soviet Union and Germany agreed to divide up Poland, was announced. What brought the two dictatorships together? In retrospect, Hitler's motives were quite obvious. Given his actions during the war, one may surmise that he never gave up his idea of acquiring *Lebensraum* (living space) in the east. And he knew that his planned attack on Poland might involve him in a war with Britain and France, especially if the two could count on a Soviet ally. Once the Nazi-Soviet Pact was signed, Hitler did not have to worry that his attack on Poland would lead him into a two-front war, and he could hope that without a Soviet ally, Britain and France would refrain from serious opposition to his Polish venture. Even as he signed the pact with the Soviets, Hitler almost certainly knew that he would someday violate it.

The motives of Joseph Stalin, who rose to power after Lenin's death in 1924, are not quite as easily discerned as Hitler's. It is clear that Stalin was reluctant to sign a pact with the Western powers because he was not at all sure that they would abide by it in the event of a German attack on the Soviet Union. He suspected that both Britain and France might be happy to see the Nazis and the Communists engage in prolonged blood-letting. Furthermore, France and Britain were unable to get Poland to agree to allow Soviet troops onto Polish soil if Germany attacked Poland. This heightened Stalin's suspicions that the pact proposed by the West was a ruse designed to bring about war between Germany and the Soviet Union. Finally, Stalin, like Hitler, was worried about a two-front war. Germany's ally, Japan, was much on Stalin's mind as he signed the pact with Hitler.

If Stalin's plan was to stay out of world war, it seemed to work for a while. By agreement, both the Germans and the Soviets moved against Poland, which ceased to exist as an independent entity. Despite their failure to obtain Soviet allegiance, the British and French decided that they could not tolerate another Hitlerian adventure and declared war on Germany. Hitler's initial successes in the ensuing months were spectacular. It took him a little over two weeks to defeat Poland. Denmark, Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands, and, most surprising, France fell in quick succession. After one year of fighting, Hitler seemed invincible and well on his way to adding Great Britain to his list of victims. But Great Britain's resistance proved more substantial than Hitler had planned and may have influenced him to make the decision that ultimately led to disaster: he decided to attack the Soviet Union.

To some extent, the decision was a strategic gamble on Hitler's part. His idea was that once he had defeated the Soviet Union, he could turn

the full force of his military might against the British, finally accomplishing the victory that so far had eluded him. But the importance of these more or less rational calculations can be overstressed. At bottom, Hitler's decision to forsake his attack against the British seems to have been an ideological one. Fifteen years earlier in *Mein Kampf* he had written:

And so we National Socialists take up where we broke off six hundred years ago. We stop the endless German movement toward the south and west of Europe and turn our gaze toward the lands of the East. . . . When we speak of new territory in Europe today we must think principally of Russia and her border vassal states. Destiny itself seems to wish to point out the way to us here. . . . This colossal empire in the East is ripe for dissolution, and the end of Jewish domination in Russia will also be the end of Russia as a state.³⁸

Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union, like Napoleon's on Russia in 1812, was a disaster. The Soviets managed to hold off the German onslaught until the harsh Russian winter became an ally of sorts to the Russian army, disrupting Germany's lines of supply and subjecting German troops to freezing temperatures and other weather conditions with which they were not equipped to deal. That alone might have been enough, in the long run, to be Hitler's undoing. But just about the time the German troops began to have trouble in the Soviet Union, one of Germany's allies took the step that ensured the premature dissolution of Hitler's so-called thousand-year Reich.

Pearl Harbor A 1941 Japanese attack that surprised and severely damaged U.S. naval forces, leading to the U.S. entry into World War II.

The Germans did not have previous knowledge of Japan's attack on **Pearl Harbor**, nor did they approve of it. Rather, they had hoped that Japan would be menacing enough to keep the United States out of the European war. They did give assurances to the Japanese government that if it became involved in a war with the United States, it would have the support of Germany. But these assurances were apparently calculated only to encourage the Japanese to assume a menacing posture toward the United States, not actually to attack it.

Japan's motives were largely economic. Japan needed a new source of oil, especially after the United States put an embargo on U.S. oil exports to Japan in August 1941. The most convenient alternative source for the Japanese was the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia), but to capture these oil fields, the Japanese fleet would first have to neutralize the Philippines, at that time a U.S. colony. The Japanese idea was to deliver a punishing blow to the United States at Pearl Harbor, then resist the U.S. counterattack so vigorously and persistently that the United States would tire of the struggle and allow the Japanese to keep the gains in China, Southeast Asia, and Indonesia that they felt were necessary to sustain their economy. From the Japanese point of view, the United States had expressed unreasonable opposition for years to their economic and political expansion in East Asia.



Map: Pacific Arena in World War II, Atlas page 67

The Japanese plan did not work. The productive and military power of the United States eventually overwhelmed Japan, especially when the Americans added nuclear weapons to their arsenal. Similarly, the Germans, having already suffered a grievous blow in the Soviet Union, found themselves totally unable to withstand the combined weight of the Russians from the East and the Americans from the West. By the end of 1945, both Japan and Germany were occupied countries. (Italy had fallen in 1943.)

The Impact of the Second World War

Aside from the total defeat of the three challengers to the international status quo, probably the most important impact of the Second World War on the global political system was the subsequent emergence of two **superpowers**, the United States and the Soviet Union. When Germany attacked the Soviet Union in 1941, there was a widespread expectation that Soviet resistance would be short-lived. When these expectations were proved wrong and the Soviets defeated the Germans, their true strength came to the light. The performance of the United States in the war made clear the identity of the other superpower.

superpowers After the Second World War, the two dominant countries in the global political system: the United States and the Soviet Union.

bipolar When most power in the international system is divided between two states.

The emergence of a **bipolar** world in which two states had the preponderance of power was especially dramatic in comparison with the fate of Europe. The fall of Europe had begun in the First World War, but this fact was at least partially hidden by the withdrawal of the United States into isolationism and the revolution in the Soviet Union. After the Second World War, the only European state with credible pretensions to great power status was Great Britain. The weaknesses of Germany, Italy, and France were apparent to everyone. But within two or three years of the war, Great Britain's pretensions were shown to be unwarranted. It was no longer able to fulfill its previous global responsibilities: By 1947 India had gained its independence, to be followed by Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and Burma (now Myanmar), and British withdrawal from Greece and Palestine. Europe, the center of world political power for at least three hundred years, gave way to a more global competition for power.

Theoretical Perspectives on the History of Global Politics

Each of the theoretical perspectives presented in Chapter 1—realism, liberalism, idealism, world economic system analysis, constructivism, and feminist perspectives—looks at the history of international relations through a different lens and hence focuses on different time periods and the meaning and importance of historical events to our understanding of global politics. Moreover, each perspective employs history as evidence to support its arguments.

Realism, for example, uses the history of relations among the Greek city-states as portrayed in Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War in its proposition that the pursuit of power is a constant feature of international relations. The Peace of Westphalia and the development of sovereign states is the time period that is most important for realism, as the anarchical system it established is what leads states to follow their interests by maximizing their power. Because of the modern state system that developed at this time, the great powers of the eighteenth century engaged in balance-of-power politics. This balancing continued in the nineteenth century, and realists point to the relative peace that was maintained in the Concert of Europe in their argument that balance-of-power politics is not only natural but can produce stability. The age of imperialism is also important for realism as it extended the European system of sovereign states to the rest of the globe. In the early twentieth century, realists point to the failed experiment with the League of Nations in the interwar years as evidence against idealist notions that value-based institutions can constrain states from pursuing their interests. Finally, realism sees the changes in the distribution of power following World War II and the dramatic changes that resulted in international politics as furthering the argument that power and the balance of power are the critical concepts for understanding international relations.

Although liberalism argues that the most important developments in international history occurred in the second half of the twentieth century (the subject of the next chapter), there are some parts of earlier times that are relevant to the liberal perspective. The French and American revolutions, for example, championed the idea of political democracy, which, for liberalism, is important in that it allows substate actors to constrain states from engaging in conflict and push states into entering cooperative agreements. The growth of world trade under the British gold standard and the age of imperialism are also important for liberalism as they laid the seeds for economic interdependence that would mature in the twentieth century. Finally, liberals often point to the history of the 1930s as evidence that economic conflict, in the form of tariffs and other trade barriers, can create the conditions, such as the rise of Hitler in Germany, that lead states to war.

The democratic ideals that spawned the French and American revolutions in the eighteenth century are also important to idealism. The political and social rights articulated in the constitutions and other writings of that period are the historical origins of modern conceptions of human rights. The heyday of the idealist perspective came later, between the wars of the early twentieth century. Blaming balance-of-power politics and the Concert of Europe alliance system for the horrors of World War I, idealists including Woodrow Wilson called on states to pursue values such as democratization and national self-determination. Even

though realists would blame idealist thinking for World War II, idealists use World War II as a historical example of the need for values to guide states' behavior. Using only interest-based calculations, modern idealists argue, might lead states to ignore the genocidal acts of leaders like Hitler.

The history of international relations is most important for the world economic system perspective, which is more consciously historical in its view of global politics. This perspective argues that it is impossible to understand the nature of the current world economic system without an account of the historical development of the global capitalist system, beginning in the age of imperialism. According to advocates of the world economic system approach, this integration into the global economic system dominated by Europe was disastrous for the long-run future of the peripheral areas outside Europe. They became trapped in a role in the international division of labor that was fraught with difficulties. Thus, according to this perspective, the historical events of the sixteenth to early twentieth centuries created the economic and political dependency that continues today in the former colonies.

Constructivism and feminism are not as connected as the other theoretical perspectives to the history of global politics. They do, however, offer alternative interpretations of historical events and developments. Since constructivism is focused on society, important historical turning points involve dramatic changes in the nature of international society. As different actors communicate with one another, they begin to develop different ideas and discourses that construct the nature of international relations. The relative isolation of the Greek city-states, for example, provides for a very different social context than does the relative interdependence associated with the modern era. As each international society constructs both actors and interests, international relations will depend on the exact nature of that society. Indeed, constructivists might argue that historical changes in international relations have really been less about the distribution of power than the distribution of ideas. Take, for example, the idea of a "state." Clearly, territory, armies, wealth, and resources existed prior to the Treaty of Westphalia and the formal development of things called "states." Yet the creation, modification, and reinforcement of the concept of states through time by the society of international actors dramatically changed the course of international relations. States were constructed, and international relations were transformed.

The feminist perspective analyzes any given historical event and development by asking two questions: What role did women play that traditional historians have ignored, and what effect did this have on women? The rise of the modern state and capitalism, for example, had powerful effects on how gender was conceived and on gender relations:

In the transition from feudalism to early states, smaller household/
domestic production predominated and . . . "production and

family life" for most people were inseparably entwined. . . . In this context of social production within patriarchal households, wives were subordinated but hardly "dependent"; their work was essential to the survival of the unit and to that extent respected. Gradually, the industrialization process removed labor and resources from the household, and the site of "production" shifted to the factory. The structural and ideological separation of "family," "economy," and "politics" was clearly a gender differentiated process with far-reaching consequences including devaluing "women's work" and shaping gender conceptions to associate women with "homemaker" and men with "worker."³⁹

In this way, the rise of the modern state and modern economic relations would affect the way women would be allowed to participate in global politics and how global politics would be understood.

SUMMARY

- It is important to begin the study of global politics with a review of contemporary history for several basic reasons. The first is that understanding the past is a key to understanding the present, as well as cultivating an ability to anticipate the future. The second is that key decision makers in the global political system are often affected by their perceptions of history. Third, the historical knowledge will enable readers to evaluate the ideas on international politics presented in the chapters that follow. Finally, an understanding of history helps us better grasp the alternative theoretical perspectives that use history to advance their claims about world politics.
- In ancient times, international relations operated very differently. For much of the world's history, empires dominated relations between various actors. Within empires, there was an overarching authority: the imperial center. Between empires, there was little notion of independence and noninterference. A notable exception occurred in ancient Greece, where city-states related to each other in much the same way that sovereign states relate to each other today.
- The modern state and the modern international system emerged after the Thirty Years' War with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. With this agreement, the overarching authority of the pope in Christendom was replaced by the notion of sovereign states, and in the eighteenth century, European states operated on the balance-of-power principle.
- States came to dominate the international system in a process marked in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by religious divisions and the evolution of long-distance economic transactions, as well as related

technological developments that provided central governments with greater power. The French Revolution introduced nationalistically inspired armies to international politics.

- Nineteenth-century European relations were relatively stable. The period known as the Concert of Europe was absent of total war between the major states, partly due to Britain's rise as the most powerful state and its policy of playing the balancer between other states.
- From the sixteenth to the early twentieth centuries, the major European states and eventually other powers colonized and in other ways dominated much of the rest of the world, making the capitalist economic system as well as the system of sovereign states global.
- The foundation for the modern international system was laid in the First World War, which arose out of a confrontation between Germany and Austria-Hungary, on the one hand, and Russia, France, and Great Britain, on the other. The war served to enshrine democracy and national self-determination as values in international politics. It weakened the major powers of Europe.
- In the interwar period, France was intent on crippling Germany so that it could never rise again. This effort failed, partly because terrible inflation at the beginning of the 1920s, coupled with the Great Depression in the late 1920s and early 1930s, helped create conditions favorable to Adolf Hitler's rise to power. Italy and Japan joined Hitler's Germany in an assault on the international status quo in the late 1930s. This assault was halted only by the Second World War, which weakened Europe further and led to the emergence of the United States and the Soviet Union as twin superpowers.
- Each of the major political perspectives uses different parts of the history of international relations to advance their claims about global politics. Realism concentrates on the development of the sovereign state and the anarchical international system. Realism also points to the balance-of-power principle that seemed to operate among the ancient Greek city-states and the major powers in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe. Liberalism focuses on the historical origins of democracy and economic interdependence, and idealism on the failure of the balance-of-power system and the recognized importance of international institutions designed to further the value of peace. The world economic system perspective focuses on the development of the international capitalist system and its division of labor with a core and a periphery; constructivism, on important historical turning points involving dramatic changes in the nature of international society; and feminism, on the effects of the development of the modern political and economic structures for women and conceptions of gender.

KEY TERMS

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