This guide was written for the University of London International Programmes by Professor Michael Cox, Emeritus Professor of International Relations, London School of Economics and Political Science.

Professor Michael Cox is also director of LSE IDEAS, which, in 2015, was ranked third in the world of the best university-affiliated think tanks. The author and editor of over 25 books, he has held appointments at universities across the world. He is currently visiting professor at LUISS School of Government in Rome and the Catholic University of Milan. Professor Cox has also held several senior professional positions in the field of international relations, including director of the David Davies Memorial Institute for the Study of International Politics, University of Aberystwyth; chair of the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR); associate research fellow at Chatham House, London; and senior fellow, Nobel Institute, Oslo. He also serves on the editorial board of several academic journals and has been editor of several leading journals in IR, including: The Review of International Studies and International Relations. He is now editor of Cold War History, International Politics and two successful book series: Palgrave’s Rethinking World Politics and Routledge’s Cold War History. Professor Cox is a well-known speaker on global affairs and has lectured in the USA, Australia, Asia and countries in the EU. He has spoken on a range of contemporary global issues, though most recently he has focused on the role of the USA in the international system, the rise of Asia, and whether or not the world is now in the midst of a major power shift.

The alterations made to 2016 edition of this guide were spearheaded by Dr Richard Campanaro, based on feedback from past students of IR1011. Dr Campanaro currently splits his time between providing online educational support for the University of London International Programmes and lecturing in the Political Science Department of the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI), Canada. He is an adjunct faculty member of the UPEI Institute of Island Studies, and continues to work on a variety of projects in international relations and public education.

This is one of a series of subject guides published by the University. We regret that due to pressure of work the authors are unable to enter into any correspondence relating to, or arising from, the guide. If you have any comments on this subject guide, favourable or unfavourable, please use the form at the back of this guide.
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Introduction

‘Of all the students of the social sciences taught in universities, those concerned with IR probably encounter the greatest degree of misunderstanding and ignorance, and engage in more ground-clearing, conceptual, factual and ethical, than any other.’


Introduction to the subject area

As you begin your study of international relations – often referred to simply as ‘IR’ – it is worth asking some basic questions. What do students of IR study? What distinguishes international relations from the study of history, law, economics or political science? When did it emerge as an academic discipline, with its own university departments and publications? How has international relations changed over time? What does IR contribute to the sum of human knowledge? And why has it become one of the most popular 21st century social sciences, despite the fact that – according to Professor Fred Halliday – IR students have to spend more time than most defending and defining their subject?

The purpose of this course is to help you answer these fundamental questions. It will do so by familiarising you with key international relations issues and introducing you to some of the specialised IR topics that you may choose to study in the coming years. We will look in some detail at both the real-world problems that IR addresses, and some of the essential theories it uses to understand the international system. You do not need any specialised knowledge of international affairs to start this course. On the other hand, you do need to have a genuine interest in world events and a willingness to expand your knowledge of global history and geography. This subject guide will help you to take full advantage of *IR1011 Introduction to international relations*. Its chapters have been organised to introduce you to a wide range of international issues that have preoccupied writers and policy-makers for years, decades – even centuries. It will help you to think about international events in a systematic and critical fashion, coming to well-reasoned conclusions based on a combination of empirical observations and conceptual clarity. The aim, in other words, is to inform and stimulate – to get you to ask questions and reach conclusions that you may never have thought of before.

Route map to the subject guide

This subject guide is divided into 20 chapters, covering a range of topics in international relations. It begins by looking at the academic and philosophical foundations of international relations, reaching back to the 17th century for concepts that remain indispensable in the 21st century. Chapters 2 to 5 investigate key moments and developments in international history from the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 to the interconnected and highly uneven world in which we live in today. Chapters 6 to 11 are your gateway to the world of IR theories – models of international behaviour that answer specific questions about the world.
Each chapter will illustrate its ideas by analysing the causes and effects of the First World War – a decisive event in international history and a convenient laboratory for your theoretical experiments. Chapters 12 to 15 delve more deeply into the state, war, peace and power – four concepts that continue to shape world events in powerful and unexpected ways. Chapters 16 to 19 consider global governance, new security and the rise of China. Chapter 20 concludes the course by using IR's theoretical tools to think about the future, giving you a jumping off point for your next course in international relations.

Syllabus

This course introduces students to the study of international relations (IR), focusing especially on the international actors and systems at the heart of the discipline. In doing so it considers several topics of interest. These include the evolution of IR during the 20th century; the impact of key historical events on the development of the discipline, including the Peace of Westphalia, European imperialism, and the First World War; changes to the international system since the end of the Cold War; the history of globalisation and its influence on the evolution of the discipline's main theories and concepts; the meaning of anarchy and systems in IR's understanding of the world; some of the similarities and differences between mainstream approaches to IR – particularly Liberalism, Realism, and Marxism; alternative theories of world politics presented by some of IR's newer theoretical schools – particularly Constructivism, post-colonialism, and international political economy; the difficulties implicit in defining and limiting war between and within states; the contentious place of peace in international society; the role and responsibilities of the state as one actor among many in the international system; our changing understanding of international power; the impact of globalisation and the end of the Cold War on actors' definitions of security; the difficulties of global governance in an anarchic international society; and the likely impact of Asia's (especially China's) rise on the units, processes, and structures of the international system.

Aims of this course

This course aims to:

• explore the evolution of the discipline of international relations (IR) over the past century by examining our changing understandings of order in the modern world

• consider the impact of major historical events on the evolution of IR, including the treaties of 1648, Europe's imperial expansion, the First World War and the ongoing influence of globalisation

• introduce you to a range of theoretical tools that will help you to analyse the behaviour of international actors and the nature of international systems

• define and discuss some main concepts within the discipline, including war, peace, the state and power

• critically assess challenges facing contemporary international society, including security, global governance and the rise of East Asian actors.
Learning outcomes

At the end of the course, and having completed the Essential reading and activities, you should be able to:

• describe the evolution of international relations as an academic discipline
• explain the relevance of key terms in international relations
• identify the strengths and weaknesses of IR's various theoretical approaches
• analyse contemporary and historical international events from a variety of theoretical viewpoints.

The structure of this guide

Chapters in this subject guide follow a standard format. Each begins by listing its intended Aims and Learning outcomes. Read these carefully. Since international relations (IR) is too big a subject to cover in a single course, every chapter of this guide covers a very broad range of topics. The Aims and Learning outcomes will help you to focus on the most important parts of each lesson. After these, you will find a summary of the chapter's Essential reading. It is recommended that you do these readings when prompted by the Essential reading boxes in every chapter of this subject guide. Each Essential reading box includes a set of questions or activities designed to help you connect with the material, along with explanatory material before and afterwards. The vast majority of your Essential reading will be in the textbook for this course: Baylis, Smith and Owens' *The globalization of world politics: an introduction to international relations* (see Essential reading below), with a few selected journal articles that you will be able to access via the Online Library in the Student Portal (see Overview of learning resources below). Unless otherwise stated, all reading for the activities is taken from this textbook. Each chapter will also include a list of Further reading taken mainly from scholarly articles that address specific points raised in this subject guide. You can read one or more of these once you have worked your way through an entire chapter, including its Essential readings and Activities. The Further readings will give you additional sources from which to draw as you prepare essays and examination questions. You are not expected to do all of them, so make strategic choices about which will be the most useful when considering a key IR question.

Throughout this subject guide, you will find key terms highlighted in bold and listed in the Chapter vocabulary section at the end of each chapter. Note down these terms in a glossary and keep track of their definitions throughout the course. Many terms used in IR are heavily contested. That is to say, there is no single agreed-upon definition that you can memorise and apply every time a word is used. You have two ready-made sources from which to draw your definitions: your textbook and Griffith, O'Callaghan and Roach's dictionary of IR concepts (see Essential reading below). One purpose of your glossary is to keep track of how the meaning of a term changes as you become more familiar with the subject, so note down competing definitions and think about their strengths and weaknesses. Language is a powerful tool in IR and it is worth investing your time in understanding the multiple meanings of terms and concepts.
Every chapter in this subject guide includes several Activities designed to help you think through important ideas in international relations. These Activities should be completed as you work your way through each chapter. Every chapter concludes with a set of Test your knowledge and understanding questions. Try to answer each of these in a short essay of between 500 and 1,000 words. Your answers can be shared with peers and an academic moderator on the VLE, where the questions will also form the basis for a set of podcasts and discussions.

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**Overview of learning resources**

**The subject guide**

Part 1 of this subject guide provides a brief overview of how IR first came into being as an academic subject and its roots in political philosophy. One of the first things that you will notice is that IR is a relatively 'new' subject – only about 100 years old. That said, many of the questions that it tries to deal with are much older. IR therefore draws on much older ideas about human nature, society and power. Analysing international relations therefore requires more than a knowledge of current events, it also requires an understanding of history and some familiarity with important ideas about how the world works and why humans act the way we do.

Part 2 provides a thumbnail sketch of the history of contemporary IR, including the development of important concepts such as the state, war and human rights. Its chapters focus on key episodes in international history: developments in international society from around 1500 to 1914 (Chapter 2); the so-called ‘short’ 20th century that spanned the years between 1914 and 1991 (Chapter 3); the world that emerged from the Cold War after 1991 (Chapter 4); and the rising tide of globalisation that stretches back at least as far as Europe’s overseas imperial expansion after 1500 (Chapter 5). Part 2 plays a double role: contextualising the ever-changing world of IR, and providing you with a set of historical cases that you can use to support your later analyses.

In Part 3 we ‘go theoretical’ by examining key IR theories. Don’t be intimidated! Theories are just simplifying devices that we use in IR to draw general conclusions from a limited number of examples. Different theories answer different kinds of questions and emphasise different aspects of the world. This course will not waste your time arguing that any one theory is absolutely correct. Just as different problems around your house require different tools, different questions in international relations require different theories. Relying on one theory to the exclusion of all others is rather like a plumber arriving to fix a problem at your house armed only with a hammer! Chapter 6 looks at the English School – a broad approach to international relations that embraces the idea of an international society and the importance of history. Chapter 7 looks at what used to be the dominant theory of international relations: Liberalism. This focuses on ways in which we can manage international conflict and cooperation in a highly interdependent world. Chapter 8 discusses Realism, which focuses on why conflicts persist in international affairs. This single-minded focus has led to a compelling model of international behaviour, but one that ignores many aspects of IR that are not concerned with conflict and war. Chapter 9 introduces Marxist theories of international relations. Marxism focuses on the relationship between economic and political power, opening the way for new types of analysis that neither Liberalism nor Realism can achieve. Chapter 10 looks at Constructivism and gender theory, two newer theories of IR which focus on aspects of IR that mainstream
models like the English School, Realism, Liberalism and Marxism tend to ignore. Finally, Chapter 11 introduces international political economy, a relatively new sub-discipline of international relations that focuses on the relationship between politics and economics and includes – but is not limited to – ideas introduced by Marxism.

Part 4 looks at some of the key global concepts in international relations: the state, war, peace, power, global governance and new definitions of security. Each of these concepts has been central to the history of IR and continues to have a very real impact on current events around the globe. Chapters 12 to 15 will look at the state, war, peace and power in turn by tracing their historical development, defining them in the modern world and considering their impact on the world in which we live. Chapter 16 considers the best ways to manage the increasingly complex network of local, regional and global relationships that define modern IR. Chapter 17 turns to the new security threats facing international society, moving beyond state security to think about instability stemming from climate change, disease, energy insecurity and demographics.

Part 5 concludes this course by asking you to use your newfound skills to analyse IR literature, a set of ongoing territorial disputes and the overall order of international society. Chapter 18 features an essay by Professor Michael Cox, in which he argues that China’s rising power faces several constraints that may limit its rise as a great power. Chapter 19 asks you to analyse territorial disputes in the East and South China seas and recommend policy directions to manage the region’s Hobbesian form of anarchy. Chapter 20 concludes the course by reflecting on the various types of order that coexist in international society – from Realist polarity to Liberal interdependence and beyond.

**Essential reading**

The textbook for IR1011 Introduction to international relations can be purchased using the following bibliographical information:


As you work your way through the next 20 chapters, you will be prompted to read specific sections from this textbook. **Unless otherwise stated, all Essential readings for this guide come from the textbook.** All of the page numbers listed in the Essential reading boxes in this guide refer to the edition of the textbook listed above. A new edition may have been published by the time you study this course. You can use a more recent edition of the book by using the detailed chapter and section headings and the index to identify relevant readings. Also check the VLE regularly for updated guidance on using new editions.

You can deepen your understanding of specific themes and concepts by accessing the following book via the IR1011 Introduction to international relations page on the virtual learning environment (VLE):


Any Essential readings that cannot be found in your textbook will be available either in the Online Library (OL), the course’s VLE page or online. These include:

IR1011 Introduction to international relations


Further reading

Please note that you are not required to read all of these sources. Once you complete your Essential readings, feel free to use these sources to justify your claims and deepen your understanding of a given IR topic. To help you read extensively, you have free access to the VLE and University of London Online Library (see below).

General overview


Books


Strange, S. *States and markets*. (London: Pinter, 1988) [ISBN 9780861879922].


**Journal articles**


Ashworth, L. ‘Did the Realist-Idealist debate ever take place?: a revisionist history of international relations’, *International Relations* 16(1) 2002, pp.33–51.


Cox, M. ‘Another transatlantic split?’ American and European narratives and the end of the Cold War’, *Cold War History* 7(1) 2007, pp.121–46.

Cox, M. ‘Why did we get the end of the Cold War wrong?’, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 11(2) 2009, pp.161–76.


Ferguson, N. ‘Sinking globalization’, *Foreign Affairs* 84(2) 2005, pp.64–77.


Glaser, C. ‘Will China’s rise lead to war?’, *Foreign Affairs* 90(2) 2011, pp.80–91.


Ikenberry, G.J. ‘The future of the liberal world order internationalism after America’, *Foreign Affairs* 90(3) 2011, pp.56–68.


Krahmann, E. ‘National, regional and global governance: one phenomenon or many?’, *Global Governance* 9(3) 2003, pp.323–46.


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**Online study resources**

In addition to the subject guide and your Essential reading, it is important to take advantage of the study resources that are available online, including on the VLE and in the Online Library.

You can access the VLE, the Online Library and your University of London email account via the Student Portal at: [http://my.londoninternational.ac.uk](http://my.londoninternational.ac.uk)

You should have received your login details for the Student Portal with your official offer, which was emailed to the address that you gave on your application form. You have probably already logged in to the Student Portal in order to register. As soon as you have registered, you will automatically have been granted access to the VLE, Online Library and your fully functional University of London email account.

If you forget your login details at any point, please click on the ‘Forgotten your password’ link on the login page.

**The VLE**

The VLE, which complements this subject guide, has been designed to enhance your learning experience, providing additional support and a sense of community. It forms an important part of your study experience with the University of London and you should access it regularly.

The VLE provides a range of resources for EMFSS courses:

- **Self-testing activities**: Doing these allows you to test your own understanding of subject material.

- **Electronic study materials**: The printed materials that you receive from the University of London are available to download, including updated reading lists and references.

- **Past examination papers and Examiners' commentaries**: These provide advice on how each examination question might best be answered.

- **A student discussion forum**: This is an open space for you to discuss interests and experiences, seek support from your peers, work collaboratively to solve problems and discuss subject material.

- **Videos**: There are recorded academic introductions to the subject, interviews and debates and, for some courses, audio-visual tutorials and conclusions.
• Recorded lectures: For some courses, where appropriate, the sessions from previous years' Study Weekends have been recorded and made available.

• Study skills: Expert advice on preparing for examinations and developing your digital literacy skills.

• Feedback forms.

Some of these resources are available for certain courses only, but we are expanding our provision all the time and you should check the VLE regularly for updates.

Making use of the Online Library

The Online Library contains a huge array of journal articles and other resources to help you read widely and extensively.

To access the majority of resources via the Online Library you will either need to use your University of London Student Portal login details, or you will be required to register and use an Athens login: http://tinyurl.com/ollathens

The easiest way to locate relevant content and journal articles in the Online Library is to use the Summon search engine.

If you are having trouble finding an article listed in a reading list, try removing any punctuation from the title, such as single quotation marks, question marks and colons.

For further advice, please see the online help pages: www.external.shl.lon.ac.uk/summon/about.php

Examination advice

**Important:** the information and advice given here are based on the examination structure used at the time this guide was written. Please note that subject guides may be used for several years. Because of this, we strongly advise you to always check both the current Regulations for relevant information about the examination, and the VLE where you should be advised of any forthcoming changes. You should also carefully check the rubric/instructions on the paper you actually sit and follow those instructions.

Over the course of three hours, students must answer **any four** of the 12 essay questions provided. These cover the main topics in this syllabus, and test your ability to apply the theories and concepts of IR to a range of historical and policy-based questions. All answers should be written in the form of an essay, with a thesis statement and evidence organised in a series of paragraphs that support your conclusions.

As you will learn as you work through the subject guide, there are very rarely any definitive answers in IR. Theories, concepts, history and policy are contested by students, professors and practitioners. As discussed in the examination preparation materials on the VLE, your examiners look for well-crafted arguments that use IR concepts and theories to analyse real-world events. Before sitting your examination, be sure that you have worked through every chapter of this subject guide. You must be familiar with the Essential readings for each chapter. These can be supplemented with material from the news, the Further readings, various printed media and other literary sources. A Sample examination paper and Examiners’ commentary can be found on the VLE.
Remember, it is important to check the VLE for:

- up-to-date information on examinations and assessments for this course, and
- past examination papers and *Examiners’ commentaries*, which will give you advice on how to approach and answer examination questions in IR1011.
Part 1: Introduction
Chapter 1: The origins of international relations

The armistices has been signed and the statesmen of the nations will soon assemble to undertake the task of concluding the pact of Peace which we all hope will herald in a new world, freed from the menace of war... Old problems must be confronted in a new spirit; insular and vested prejudices must be removed; understanding and toleration need to be greatly developed. It is an immense task and a myriad of agencies will be required to discharge it. Among these must be our universities...

Major David Davies, MP, in a letter to Sir John Williams, President of the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, donating £20,000 for the establishment of the Wilson Chair in International Politics, 1920.

Aims of the chapter

The aims of this chapter are to:

• introduce the 20th-century origins of international relations as an academic subject
• highlight IR's deep roots in Western political philosophy, namely in the ideas of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Karl Marx
• use the ideas of Hobbes, Locke and Marx to analyse current issues in IR.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter, and having completed the Essential readings and activities, you should be able to:

• describe the influence of the First World War on the development of early IR
• discuss the political philosophies of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Karl Marx
• apply Hobbesian, Lockean and Marxist concepts to analyse aspects of the Syrian civil war.

Essential reading

Hobden, S. and R. Wyn Jones 'Marxist theories of international relations' in BSO, Chapter 9.
Scott, L. ‘International history 1900–1999’ in BSO, Chapter 3.

Further reading and works cited


### Chapter synopsis

- International relations emerged as an academic discipline in the years following the First World War.
- The tragedy of the First World War encouraged early IR thinkers to focus on finding ways to build a more peaceful world.
- Subsequent international conflicts, including the Second World War, have changed the way that IR thinkers view world politics and have expanded the range of their interests.
- IR can trace its intellectual roots as far back as the fifth century BC.
- Many in IR continue to be influenced by Thomas Hobbes’ views on anarchy, order and the state of nature, largely due to the absence of a world government.
- John Locke’s impact on IR comes from his belief in natural rights and his view that the relationship between an individual and a state is governed by a social contract.
- Karl Marx changed the study of political philosophy by emphasising the role of economics as a driving force in human history.
- The ideas of these political philosophers can be used to analyse various aspects of current events, such as the causes of and potential solutions to the Syrian civil war.

### Introduction: IR is born from the ashes of war

Compared to other academic subjects, like history or philosophy, international relations is a young discipline. Its first dedicated university professorship was not founded until 1920, when David Davis MP donated £20,000 to the University College of Wales at Aberystwyth. As you can see in the quotation that begins this chapter, the original goal of IR was simple: to ‘herald a new world, freed from the menace of war’. After four
years of slaughter between 1914 and 1918, David Davis, like many others, hoped that humanity had learned its lesson and that the First World War might actually be the ‘war to end all wars’.

Davis’s dream was not to be. Again and again since 1918, communities, states and regions have been bloodied and destroyed by organised political violence. Understanding the causes of – and possible solutions to – this violence remains one of IR’s main goals. Indeed, IR’s growth in Western universities is directly connected to the simple and terrible fact that in the first half of the 20th century, the world experienced two devastating and protracted global conflicts: the First World War (1914–1918) and the Second World War (1939–1945). These wars cost tens of millions of lives, led to revolutionary social change around the world, nearly eliminated entire human populations from the face of the earth, facilitated the rise of new great powers and led to the demise of others. The attempt to make sense of these hugely destructive wars has been at the heart of IR since it first emerged as a taught subject in 1920.

Stop and read: BSO, Chapter 3, Sections 1 and 2, pp.51–53.

Activity

Complete the table below by listing events from the first half of the 20th century that have influenced key topics in IR. This list will be useful when you prepare essays and examination answers related to these topics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IR topic</th>
<th>Associated 20th-century event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Causes of war</td>
<td>(Example: the unjust peace settlement of 1918–1919)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditions for peace</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effects of economics on international relations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human rights</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The interwar years (1919–1939): the twenty years’ crisis

If war gave birth to academic IR, the establishment of peace was its first mission. When David Davies funded the first permanent academic post in IR, he made it clear that the position was not to be used for vague theorising. Rather, it was to help scholars engage in practical thinking that would make the world a safer and more stable place. Many diplomats, politicians and scholars at the time imagined that war could be made obsolete by mutually agreed rules of behaviour and the creation of international organisations like the League of Nations. Instead, the treaties that ended the First World War settlement led to what E.H. Carr calls the **twenty years’ crisis** – a period of political, economic and social unrest that spanned the interwar years between 1919 and 1939. Carr argues that the peace settlements of 1918–1919 contained the seeds for an even greater conflict. He is especially critical of the idealistic US President Woodrow Wilson, whose Fourteen Points were the basis for many of the
treaties. As a seasoned British diplomat, Carr saw that powerful revisionist states like Germany and Japan were dissatisfied with the status quo created after the Great War and pushed hard to change the international system in their favour. Like many of his day, he hoped that German and Japanese ambitions might be contained through a strategy of diplomatic concession called appeasement. The status quo, he argued, was not sacred, and 'peaceful change' was preferable to war. In the end, Carr's policy proved to be unrealistic. Germany and Japan were not satisfied through appeasement. Instead, their policies of conquest and expansion continued, drawing Britain and France (in September 1939), the USSR (in June 1941) and the USA (in December 1941) into the most destructive war in history. As you will see in Part 2 of this subject guide, the Second World War and the Cold War that followed on its heels had an enormous impact on the development of international relations – stripping away much of the idealism that defined the subject in its earliest days and broadening the scope of its interests to include questions about human rights and weapons of mass destruction (WMDs).

Summary

- International relations emerged as an academic discipline in the years following the First World War.
- The tragedy of the First World War encouraged early IR thinkers to focus on finding ways to build a more peaceful world.
- Subsequent international conflicts, including the Second World War, changed the way that IR thinkers viewed world politics and expanded the range of their interests.

Standing on the shoulders of giants: international political philosophy before 1920

As the study of international relations grew in Europe and the Americas after 1920, it was able to draw on a much older tradition of Western political philosophy that stretches back to the fifth century BC. These thinkers and writers are too many for us to describe in any one course – much less one section of one chapter. However, three writers stand out from the pack and deserve special attention: Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), John Locke (1632–1704) and Karl Marx (1818–1883). All three pre-date the formal discipline of international relations. However, their ideas have played an important role in shaping the subject – laying the groundwork for many of IR's most important concepts and theories. What follows are three brief sketches of their main ideas and a glimpse of some of the ways in which they have had a direct impact on the evolution of international relations.

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1672)

Thomas Hobbes lived during the violence and instability of the English civil war (1642–1651). Though we need not go into its finer details here, the civil war was fought between supporters of King Charles II and the leaders of parliament – each of whom believed that they should represent the highest power in the land. Over nine years, the civil war cost well over 100,000 lives out of a total population of just over 5,000,000. Hobbes witnessed the immense suffering of the people around him. It was not unusual for bands of unpaid soldiers to wander the countryside, taking what they wanted and killing anyone who stood in their way. Chaos stalked the land and death was never far away. This experience gave
Chapter 1: The origins of international relations

Hobbes a particular outlook on the relationship between government and the individual – which is the focus of his most important book, *The Leviathan*, published in 1651. In it he claims that all humans are relatively equal in their ability to harm and injure one another. One might be a little stronger and one might be a little quicker, but even the strongest man must sleep and even the quickest woman must stop to eat and drink. This makes all humans vulnerable to attack by another human. In a world without a government to enforce order – a condition that Hobbes calls the *state of nature* – every human must be vigilant against threats to their survival. A world without government, he claims, forces humanity into a constant state of war because there is no way to trust in the good or peaceful intentions of others. We must always be on our guard lest we be attacked. This condition – in which there is no ruler or judge who can resolve disputes and establish security – is called *anarchy*. In an anarchic world, Hobbes argues that our lives must revolve around survival, leaving no time for agriculture, the arts, sciences or international relations! In conditions of anarchy, Hobbes says, ‘the life of man [is] solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.’

**Stop and read:** Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter XIII.

An online version of the text is available on the VLE.

**Activity**

Do you agree with Hobbes’ views on anarchy and the need for order in politics? Can you think of any situations in which anarchy is preferable to order? Post your responses on the VLE discussion forum.

The only remedy for this unfortunate situation is the establishment of a government capable of replacing the state of nature with *order* – a system of rules and laws. This, Hobbes continues, is best achieved by granting one ruler unqualified political, spiritual, economic and social power over a population. This ruler is the Leviathan of the book’s title, and is primarily responsible for replacing anarchy with order and, in so doing, replacing war with peace.

As you will see in later chapters of this subject guide, Hobbes continues to influence many IR thinkers. His ideas have remained particularly relevant in international relations because of the simple fact that there is no global government that can make and enforce decisions on behalf of the planet. Instead, the world is divided into smaller political communities – states – that pursue their own goals in international affairs. Hobbes’ powerful logic, combined with the continuing persistence of war between states, has led many thinkers to embrace Hobbes’ fear of anarchy and its effects on human development. As we will see in the later chapters of this subject guide, several strands of IR theory continue to embrace a deeply Hobbesian view of *human nature* and the world in which we live – fearing the absence of government, distrusting the motives of others and seeing almost any form of order as preferable to anarchy.

**John Locke (1632–1704)**

John Locke lived a generation after Hobbes. As a result, the defining experience of his life was not the civil war but the so-called Glorious Revolution of 1688. In that year, the English king – James II of the House of Stuart – was replaced in a largely bloodless coup led by Protestant members of parliament who opposed the monarch’s Catholic beliefs and alliance with France. The Glorious Revolution saw the last Stuart king
replaced by William and Mary of the House of Orange. As such, Locke's opinion of humanity and government is considerably less negative than Hobbes'. Whereas Hobbes sees human nature as essentially aggressive and greedy, Locke thinks of humans in a state of nature more positively. According to Locke, all humans have **natural rights** to life, liberty and property. These rights predate the formation of governments, so governments must uphold them if they wish to remain legitimate in the eyes of their subjects. Subjects, in turn, consent to government power only when their rights are being protected. Subjects withdraw consent when their rights are violated – as parliament did when it withdrew consent from King James II and invited William and Mary to take the English throne in 1688.

Government, according to Locke's theory, is based on a **social contract** between rulers and their subjects. If kings, generals, prime ministers or theocrats fail to uphold their side of the social contract by violating the natural rights of their subjects, those subjects are immediately freed from their duty to obey government decisions. This means that subjects have the right and duty to rebel against rulers when the latter fail to uphold their responsibilities. While Hobbes sees government as something that needs to be imposed on humanity in order to save it from the dangers of anarchy, John Locke sees government as something that emerges out of agreements between a population and the rulers that claim leadership over them. A government that does not deal with its population justly will not survive once its subjects stop recognising its **legitimacy** and withdraw their consent from the social contract. This is how Locke explained the civil war and the Glorious Revolution. Thus, according to Locke, political order must be based on a ruler's respect for the rights of his or her people rather than being something that a ruler imposes unilaterally. In the short term, a ruler might be able to maintain an unjust order through violence and coercion. However, only an order that enjoys the consent of the governed can avoid constant rebellion and thereby remain stable over longer periods of time. According to John Locke, political **justice** is a precondition for any form of lasting political order.

John Locke continues to have a large following in international relations. His ideas about the social contract and the responsibilities of rulers towards their subjects have contributed to a number of the theories that you will study in Part 3, particularly Liberalism. Locke is also credited with popularising the idea of natural rights – today referred to as human rights and certainly one of the main interests of modern IR. Finally, Locke's view that human nature can be improved by the use of reason to learn from past mistakes has found a voice in regime theory, which seeks to solve international problems through cooperation between international actors. This will be discussed in greater length in Chapter 16.

**Activity**

Using the BBC's online resources, look into the events leading up to the Syrian civil war. Links to relevant articles are available on the VLE. Now think about the following questions:

- How would John Locke explain the collapse of support for the Assad government among certain segments of the Syrian population?
- What solutions might Locke propose for the continuing bloodshed?

Post your thoughts on the VLE discussion forum for feedback from your peers.
Karl Marx (1818–1883)

Karl Marx was born over a century after the death of John Locke. Coming of age during the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century, Marx was concerned with different questions to those that worried either Locke or Hobbes. In particular, he was interested in how the unequal distribution of wealth among factory workers and factory owners might impact on the political systems of the day. Marx interpreted the world through the lens of materialism — the belief that any understanding of political community must be based on the physical and economic conditions in which that community exists. Economics is therefore the key that Marx used to unlock his political analysis. He also believed that history is dialectical. That is to say, the story of humanity is shaped by clashes of opposing ideas and groups that produce new historical trends. Marx combines materialism and the dialectical approach by focusing on class conflict between modern society's two main socio-economic groups – the bourgeoisie, which controls the way goods are made and distributed, and the proletariat, which sells its labour to the bourgeoisie in return for a small portion of the profits resulting from their work. Politics, he concludes, is merely a vehicle used by the wealthy to protect their economic interests at home and abroad. Wars are fought to access new resources and markets or to protect existing ones. Trade is pursued to benefit bourgeois owners rather than proletarian workers. Governments are tools in the hands of the wealthiest members of society. According to Marx, the laws that they pass are intended to protect their own bourgeois interests against proletarian uprisings at home and against competition from other states' bourgeoisies abroad.

Applying Marx's political philosophy to international relations fell to Vladimir Lenin in the years before he became the leader of the Soviet Union. Lenin identified imperialism — the belief in the desirability of acquiring colonies and territories overseas — as the highest form of capitalism, the economic system that dominates global production and trade. According to Lenin, the race for African colonies among European states in the late 19th century was not a patriotic quest, but an economic one, one that would ensure access to Africa's natural resources for European industry and to open colonial markets to goods and services controlled by the British, French, German, Belgian or Portuguese bourgeoisie. For example, French Indochina (today Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos) was the key supplier of rubber to the French auto industry until countries in the region gained independence in the 1950s. Imperialism also allows a national bourgeoisie — be it British, Russian or American — to use colonial resources to reward loyal proletarians at home. The British were able to provide their workers with access to cheap tea and cotton from India, subsidised by the export of Indian opium to China. Thus, Indian and Chinese workers suffered in order to help the British bourgeoisie control proletarians at home — just one example of how imperialism served to stabilise capitalism at home while expanding it abroad.

Even though the end of the Cold War saw the collapse of many Communist regimes around the world, Marxism itself remained an important source of intellectual inspiration for IR writers of a critical disposition. His ideas have contributed to our understanding of the world around us. They have shone a light on the role of economic actors — including transnational companies (TNCs) — in international affairs. Marx's ideas also resonate with analysts looking at the relationship between the industrialised 'core' of the global economy and its much poorer 'periphery'. While the former produces high-value goods and services, the latter is largely limited to
producing low-value raw materials that are supplied to industrial interests located in or owned by bourgeois members of ‘core’ economies. This reinforces the periphery’s secondary status in the world capitalist system, creating a widening gap between the richest and poorest citizens of the world and leads to economic and political crises when the world’s poor rebel against their unequal position in the global economy. These points will be discussed much greater detail in Chapter 9 of this subject guide.

Stop and read: BSO, ‘Case Study 1: Occupy!’, p.149.

Once you have read the case study, consider the following question: how would Karl Marx explain governments’ decisions to bail out banks and financial institutions with taxpayers’ funds after the 2008 global financial crisis?

Application: using political philosophy to understand the world

The study of international relations engages with classical philosophers like Hobbes, Locke and Marx because their ideas teach us about the world we live in. Their theories highlight different aspects of IR. Without their theories, we are limited to simple narrative explanations of what happened first, then second, then third. Narrative explanations, though useful, do not explain why an event occurs or how it will influence events in the future. Theories such as those presented by Hobbes, Locke and Marx give you the chance to draw general conclusions from specific evidence. This common form of analysis allows you to make statements about the global political and economic systems based on a limited set of examples. For example, you may choose to answer a general question like ‘why do wars happen’ by studying the causes of individual conflicts. It is important to note that this type of reasoning produces probable instead of definite answers. This means that two general explanations for a specific instance of war can both be partially correct insofar as each explains a different aspect of the same phenomenon.

A lot of people find this very annoying. They would rather have definitive answers than long lists of possible ones. Unfortunately, the search for absolute truth in IR is an unrealistic goal. A definitive answer to any question requires complete and undisputed evidence. This is simply impossible in a subject as vast and contested as IR. You simply cannot know everything that is happening in the world, much less everything that has ever happened. Given our limited knowledge, we use theories in the same way that we use maps to navigate around the planet. They provide us with simplified models of the world in which we live, and highlight the parts of the world that we have to know about to get from Point A to Point B. Every theory of IR highlights and ignores different things about international affairs. Hobbes’ ideas of anarchy and order highlight the need for a supreme ruler to pass laws and settle disputes. Locke’s ideas highlight the contractual nature of the individual’s relationship with the state and explain why unjust orders tend to collapse into chaos. Marx’s ideas highlight the role of economic classes in political relations, explaining political power by reference to actors’ positions in a socio-economic hierarchy.

International analysis requires at least two elements: knowledge of the phenomenon being analysed, and a theoretical ‘map’ to focus your study on the phenomenon’s most essential elements. In Part 3 of this subject guide, you will use different IR theories to analyse various aspects of the First World War. For now, we will focus on a more contemporary issue to
Chapter 1: The origins of international relations

see what Hobbes, Locke and Marx can teach us. The Syrian civil war has been raging since street protests escalated into armed resistance to the government of Bashar Al-Assad in the second half of 2011. In the years since, this tragic conflict has provided ample opportunities for IR analysis.

**Thomas Hobbes**

Were Hobbes alive and doing political analysis today, he would likely focus on Syria's overriding need for a government capable of establishing and maintaining a system of order within the borders of the state. Where such a government does not exist, Hobbes would argue that one needs to come into being – regardless of its political agenda. After all, populations prefer some form of order – however unjust it is – to anarchy. Hobbes would find ample evidence of this in the history of the Syrian conflict. In regions where the Assad government cannot maintain its power, other governments have taken control of people and territories. Central Syria has fallen to the self-styled ‘Islamic State’ (IS). Most people would call their form of order – based on a reactionary and theologically dubious reading of Islam – unjust. However, they represent a form of order in an otherwise chaotic situation. Hobbes would maintain, therefore, that any attempt to rid central Syria of their influence must include a plan to immediately replace their form of order with one supported by another political hegemon. Otherwise, the people would be thrown back into the dog-eat-dog world of anarchy and would be even worse off than they are now. As the United States and its allies learned in Iraq after 2003, it is not enough to defeat an enemy on the battlefield and remove their government. Victory must be followed by the quick reestablishment of a powerful state or it will prove to be a mirage as populations and territories fall into Hobbes' state of nature, where the life of man is ‘solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.’

**John Locke**

John Locke's ideas focus on different aspects of the Syrian civil war. Instead of Hobbes' focus on the need for a powerful government to overcome the threat of anarchy, Locke's theory of natural rights and the social contract highlights the causes of the protests that led to the civil war. Protests began against the Assad government in March 2011 as part of a wider phenomenon in the Arab world – the Arab Spring. This movement sought to oust governments who failed to protect their people's natural rights to life, liberty and property. The Assad government's response to these protests was violent – opening fire on crowds of protesters, thereby increasing calls for Assad's removal at home and abroad. Locke would point out that this response actually strengthened the hand of those who opposed Assad's government by delegitimising the regime and thereby freeing the population from their obligation to accept the political order he had created. Locke would likely make a similar prediction regarding IS, whose system of order is likewise rooted in a system that regularly violates the natural rights of its population to life, liberty and property. Although IS may be able to maintain control through short-term coercion, Locke would argue that their long-term survival as a government is highly unlikely on the grounds that they have not established a social contract with their subjects. Only the Kurdish rebels in Syria's northeast have any claim to such a social contract, and they are therefore the most likely to form an effective and legitimate government that rules with the consent of its population. Thus, Locke would probably be pessimistic about the immediate chances for a restoration of effective government in all but one corner of Syria.
Karl Marx

Finally, Karl Marx's ideas highlight a completely different set of issues relating to the Syrian civil war. Instead of focusing on questions of order and justice, Marx would focus on the role of class conflict in Syria. He might argue that the battle for control of the Syrian state began as a struggle between two segments of the Syrian bourgeoisie – Assad's Alawites and their Shi'a, Druze and Christian allies against the economic leaders of the majority Sunni Muslim population – for control of the levers of government. Subsequent events have highlighted the importance of this sort of materialist analysis. After all, the only viable governments outside of the regions still controlled by the Assad regime are the Islamic State and the Kurdish assemblies of northeastern Syria. Each of these groups has been able to maintain itself through access to capital – defined as any form of wealth, including money, resources and labour. The Assad regime is supported by international allies with significant economic interests in Syria, particularly the Russian Federation. Apart from large military contracts with Assad's government, Russia is also his main international partner in infrastructure and tourism projects. This provides a materialist explanation for Vladimir Putin's support of Assad – that he is protecting the economic interests of the Russian bourgeoisie in the region. The Islamic State is an interesting case for Marx's ideas insofar as it claims to be founded on faith and belief, but is sustained by a combination of oil and gas revenues on the black market, the sale of antiquities looted from cultural sites, and foreign aid from governments hoping to cash in on its political influence when and if the Assad regime falls. Opponents of the Islamic State are now working to shut off these sources of capital – potentially the most effective way to undermine IS's ability to maintain domestic order within their territory and defend themselves against external aggression. Finally, the Kurdish assemblies of northeastern Syria receive the bulk of their capital from their ethnic allies in the Kurdish Regional Government of northern Iraq, which has access to substantial oil and gas reserves that it can trade legally on the international market. Thus, Marx's ideas provide for a novel analysis of the Syrian civil war – highlighting the importance of capital sources to each of the groups claiming governing authority over all or part of the country and recommending a strategy of economic disruption for international actors hoping to undermine one or more of them.

Summary

- IR can trace its intellectual roots as far back as the political philosophers of the fifth century BC.
- Many IR thinkers continue to be influenced by Thomas Hobbes' views on anarchy, order and the state of nature, partly due to the absence of a world government.
- John Locke's impact on IR comes from his belief in natural rights and his view that the relationship between an individual and a state is governed by a social contract.
- Karl Marx changed the study of political philosophy by emphasising the role of economics as a driving force in human history.
- The ideas of these political philosophers can be used to analyse various aspects of current events, such as ongoing Syrian civil war.
Conclusion

International relations is a relatively young academic subject. Its first departments were set up after the First World War and focused almost exclusively on the best ways to avoid another conflict as destructive as the one that raged across the planet between 1914 and 1918. Despite its youth, IR can trace many of its main ideas back to classical sources of Western political philosophy. This chapter has introduced three such sources: Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Karl Marx. The ideas developed by these men provided IR with a springboard for its later development – leading to many of the more developed theories that you will learn about in Part 3 of this subject guide. These ideas – be they Hobbes' rejection of anarchy, Locke's call for natural rights or Marx's critique of economic power – remain important today because they highlight aspects of the world around us. They allow us to look beyond historical narratives to ask why events unfold as they do and how events might develop in the future. This allows IR to analyse the world through inductive reasoning, drawing general conclusions from specific evidence and thereby telling us more about the global political, economic and cultural systems in which we live today.

The next part of this subject guide will introduce you to some of the main historical developments that have helped to define IR over the past four and a half centuries.

Overview of chapter

- International relations emerged as an academic discipline in the years following the First World War.
- The tragedy of the First World War encouraged early IR thinkers to focus on finding ways to build a more peaceful world.
- Subsequent international conflicts, including the Second World War, have changed the way that IR views world politics and have expanded the range of its interests.
- IR can trace its intellectual roots as far back as the fifth century BC.
- Many in IR continue to be influenced by Thomas Hobbes' views on anarchy, order and the state of nature, largely due to the absence of a world government.
- John Locke's impact on IR comes from his belief in natural rights and his view that the relationship between an individual and a state is governed by a social contract.
- Karl Marx changed the study of political philosophy by emphasising the role of economics as a driving force in human history.
- The ideas of these political philosophers can be used to analyse various aspects of current events, such as causes of and potential solutions to the Syrian civil war.

A reminder of your learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter, and having completed the Essential readings and activities, you should be able to:
- describe the influence of the First World War on the development of early IR
- discuss the political philosophies of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Karl Marx
• apply Hobbesian, Lockean and Marxist concepts to analyse aspects of the Syrian civil war.

**Chapter vocabulary**

- the twenty years’ crisis
- status quo
- appeasement
- state of nature
- anarchy
- order
- human nature
- natural rights
- social contract
- legitimacy
- justice
- materialism
- class conflict
- imperialism
- capitalism
- capital

**Test your knowledge and understanding**

1. What impact did the First World War have on the development of IR as an academic subject?
2. What solution does Thomas Hobbes’ thinking propose for the problem of anarchy in the modern international system?
3. Does John Locke agree with Thomas Hobbes’ claim that any form of political order is preferable to anarchy?
4. Why do many IR thinkers call Karl Marx a **dialectical materialist**?
Part 2: The history of international relations
Chapter 2: Empires and international society from 1500 to 1914

By 1900 the peoples of Europe and European stock overseas dominated the globe. They did so in many ways, some explicit and some implicit, but the qualifications matter less than the general fact... This was a unique development in world history. For the first time, one civilization established itself as a leader worldwide.


Aims of the chapter

The aims of this chapter are to:

• introduce you to key trends in international history from 1500 to 1914
• explain Europe's central role in the creation of global international relations
• outline the historical background of European imperialism, the ‘Long Peace’ and the First World War
• familiarise you with the use of important IR terminology.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter, and having completed the Essential readings and activities, you should be able to:

• explain some of the reasons why Europe emerged as the main driver of world politics by the end of the 19th century
• discuss competing explanations of the ‘Long Peace’ in Europe between 1814 and 1914
• evaluate different explanations of the causes of the First World War
• define the vocabulary terms in bold.

Essential reading

‘Hegemonic stability theory’ in GCR.
‘Imperialism’ in GCR.

Further reading and works cited

Chapter synopsis

- Europe's imperial expansion after 1500 marks the beginning of a truly 'global' system of international relations.
- The relationships established during Europe's imperial era (1500–1918) were structured to benefit European states at the cost of non-European political communities, reinforcing European hegemony.
- The independence of the United States and South America in the 18th and 19th centuries did not diminish the hegemonic position of Europe's great powers in global affairs.
- The period of European history from 1814 to 1914 is commonly called the 'Long Peace' because of the relative stability that characterised its international affairs.
- British hegemony played a key role in maintaining the Long Peace throughout the 19th century.
- The rise of Germany, imperial competition in the non-European world, and the advent of modern industrial technologies have all been cited as causes of the First World War.
- The changes brought about by the First World War reshaped international affairs, brought the Long Peace to an end and heralded the start of the bloody 20th century.

Introduction

Making sense of the modern world is a daunting business. From the Arctic to the Sahara and from Beijing to Brasilia, the number of events brought to us every day by the global media is overwhelming. Given the sheer volume of this information, it is important to step back in order to understand how we arrived at this point in international history. In this chapter, you will be introduced to a few key trends in the history of international relations from the beginning of the modern era around 1500 to the eve of the First World War. Needless to say, this chapter will exclude more than it includes.
Instead of attempting a broad survey of four centuries of world history, we will focus on a few events that will inform your understanding of the present. These will be divided into three broad topics: the growth of truly 'global' affairs brought about by European imperialism, the management of 19th century international society on the European continent, and the place of the First World War at the end of Europe's era of global hegemony. If you want to understand the state of the world today, it is essential to look at the present through the prism of the past. After all, to echo a sentiment normally attributed to the great American writer Mark Twain, 'History doesn't repeat itself, but it does rhyme.'

Empires and hierarchy: Europe's imperial expansion

We should be more than a little critical of the ways in which some writers have traditionally thought about international relations: largely through European eyes, and mainly as something that only became seriously interesting when states emerged as the main actors in world affairs. IR does not begin and end with the rise of European states. Students of world politics must nevertheless confront an incontrovertible fact: that at some point between the late 14th and the 16th centuries, Europe – initially around the Mediterranean and later in states bordering the Atlantic – began to evolve in ways that changed the course of world history. In a very important sense, there was no such thing as a truly interconnected world before 1500. Only after the discovery of the Americas and Australasia by Europeans could we really start to think in such terms. As one of the great historians of world history, J.M. Roberts, has argued, the age of a true world history started in the 15th and 16th centuries and continued for another 400 years, by which time European domination of the globe was complete. In many ways, the age of European imperialism marked the birth of global international relations.

Stop and read: 'Imperialism' in GCR.

The sources of Europe's dynamic expansion after 1500 have been hotly debated. Some explanations are technical: from Europe's medieval agricultural revolution to Renaissance innovations in shipbuilding and navigation that made oceanic travel more reliable. Other explanations are economic, attributing Europe's conquests to the rise of capitalism. According to historians like Eric Hobsbawm, it is no coincidence that Western Europe began to outperform other regions and push outwards just as feudalism began to break down at home and capitalism began to rise in its wake. Whatever the reasons, it is fair to say that after 1500 the states of Western Europe no longer waited for things to happen to them. Instead, they went out to make things happen to others.

The consequences for international relations were immense. Not only did imperial expansion make European states very rich, it also made their citizens feel distinctly superior to everybody else. It spawned a regular trade in West African slaves that spelled disaster for millions of chained souls and created immense fortunes for the few who lived and prospered from the unpaid labour of others. Like many historical processes that came before it, Europe's expansion simultaneously created wealth, poverty, technological progress and moral barbarity. It fostered invention and innovation, revolutionised communication, gave birth to modern geography and cartography, and was instrumental in the beginning of modern science. Its consequences were certainly not neutral from the point of view of global relationships. The world was refashioned by the European powers, sometimes for economic gain and

sometimes on grounds that made European conquest sound – at least to most Europeans – enlightened (in terms of ‘raising the level’ of ‘native’ civilisations), religiously necessary (in terms of spreading Christianity) or racially preordained (with ‘inferior’ groups and cultures being destined to be ruled by those of the supposedly ‘superior’ white variety). Significantly, few Europeans of the era opposed imperialism. Even liberals and socialists were counted among imperialism’s supporters, arguing that there was something distinctively progressive about an economically and culturally superior Europe helping those less fortunate to join the modern world. Whatever the reasons behind it, European imperialism was the driving force behind the creation of today’s global international society. It linked previously isolated political communities and economies through transoceanic networks of power, almost always to the benefit of the Europeans who dominated them. Imperialism and the empires it created did significant damage to societies and cultures around the world. It also provided the basis for modern globalisation, which links distant communities and expands the reach of power relations. Ironically, it was this very same process of globalisation that eventually led to the dissolution of these empires in the 20th century, as European ideas about statehood and national self-determination spread along globalised networks to encourage colonial liberation movements across the planet.

Stop and read: BSO, Chapter 2, Section 4, pp.41–45.

Activity

This reading introduces the concept of ‘international society’ to explain the development of international relations between 1500 and 1914. Using the glossary in BSO and the definitions in GCR, complete the table below by (1) defining the terms in the left-hand column, and (2) identifying one or more events in international history that have influenced their evolution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Norm, rule or practice</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Related historical events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diplomacy</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>International law</td>
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<tr>
<td>The balance of power</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sovereignty</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The assault on the world by Europe's rising states had, by the late 19th
century, created European world hegemony. There was opposition –
first when the 13 American colonies defeated and expelled the British
empire in the late 1700s, and again when most of Latin America expelled
the Spanish and the Portuguese empires in the 1800s. However, these
challenges did not upset Europe's global dominance. The USA made its
revolution in the name of European – even English – ideals, and only
welcomed immigrants from Europe into the 'New World' until the 20th
century. In Latin America, liberation from Spain and Portugal did not lead
to the end of Europe's influence over the continent. Indeed, its revolutions
left the old European ruling classes of Latin America intact and allowed
states like the USA and the UK to become even more deeply involved in
regional affairs than they had been before the expulsion of Spanish and
Portuguese power.

Dynamic imperial and commercial expansion made Europe the centre
of the world by 1914. This revolutionary transformation did not occur
without a great deal of organised violence, initially directed against those
who were being subjected to European rule and later directed against
competing European powers. Spain and Portugal may have been able
to come to a 'gentleman's agreement' over the distribution of colonial
possessions in the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), but no such agreement
was possible elsewhere. Instead, the great powers of Europe fought
a series of bitter and prolonged wars to establish who would control
the lion’s share of the non-European world. Great Britain and Spain, for
instance, were bitter enemies throughout the 16th century. Their long war,
which concluded rather dramatically with the destruction of the Spanish
Armada in 1588, was followed by struggle between the Dutch and the
English. This only ended when the Dutch Stadtholder – at that time the
Netherlands' head of state – was invited by Parliament to take the British
throne as King William III in the Glorious Revolution of 1688. The Anglo–
Dutch commercial conflict was superseded in the 18th century by a long
struggle between Great Britain and France. A series of Anglo-French wars
continued on and off for just under a century, were fought across three
continents, and only ended after the defeat of Napoleonic France at the
hands of a grand coalition made up of Britain, Russia, Prussia and Austria–
Hungary in 1814.

Summary

- Europe's imperial expansion after 1500 marks the beginning of a truly
  'global' system of international relations.
- The relationships established during Europe's imperial era (1500–
  1918) were structured to benefit European states at the cost of non-
  European political communities, reinforcing European hegemony.
- The independence of the United States and South America in the
  18th and 19th centuries did not diminish the hegemonic position of
  Europe's great powers in global affairs.

From the Long Peace to the First World War

The extended period of international competition from 1500 to 1814
continues to fascinate IR scholars. Many of the discipline’s most important
concepts such as balance of power derive from this extraordinarily
turbulent period. Following the defeat of Napoleonic France in 1814,
however, something equally extraordinary occurred: a form of 'great
power' peace broke out on the European continent. This lasted – with
a few interruptions – until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. Different explanations have been advanced to explain this period of relative calm, often referred to as the Long Peace. These have ranged from the diplomatic efforts of the major powers at the Congress of Vienna through to war weariness – a believable hypothesis given that at least five million died across Europe between 1789 and 1814 – to the notion that, whatever else might have divided them, the great powers after 1814 shared some common values and interests that drove them to resolve most of their differences through diplomacy rather than through costly wars.

A number of scholars have used the modern idea of hegemonic stability theory to explain the 19th century’s Long Peace. In this analysis, the key explanation for this period of extended stability is the structural imbalance that developed between Great Britain and the rest of the European powers, allowing Britain to establish a relatively stable system often referred to as the Pax Britannica, or the ‘British Peace’. Using its naval and industrial superiority, Britain established a set of rules and practices for international politics and commerce. Unlike Napoleonic France, or so the hegemonic stability argument goes, Britain never sought to conquer mainland Europe. Instead, it focused on increasing its influence in the non-European world through trade and imperialism. This was accomplished by doing what Britain did best: pushing ahead industrially, investing its capital in all corners of the globe, protecting the free movement of world trade through its overwhelming naval superiority, and teaching others the benefits of commerce and industry over more dangerous – and less profitable – pursuits of war and conquest.

Stop and read: ‘Hegemonic stability theory’ in GCR.

Activity

In a short paragraph, answer the following question: ‘Do you think that the presence of a hegemonic state makes international society more or less prone to war? What examples would you use to justify your argument?’

Post your answer to the VLE discussion forum for feedback from your peers. Once you have posted your work, take a look at one of your peers’ work. Did they reach the same conclusions you did? How does their analysis differ from yours?

How long the 19th century’s Long Peace might have lasted became a hypothetical question when it collapsed at the start of the First World War in 1914. Several different schools of thought exist to explain this development. One sees the First World War as an inevitable consequence of changes in the European balance of power following the unification of Germany in 1871 and its rapid emergence as a serious economic and military challenger to British hegemony. This remains a commonly held view in IR, and is still important insofar as the rise of new powers tends to increase tensions between existing great powers. The rise of states (like China today, discussed further in Chapter 19 of this subject guide) makes this a worrying observation. Other writers and students of IR have broadened this thesis by arguing that Germany’s less-than-peaceful rise on the back of Prussian Chancellor Otto von Bismarck’s three wars of German unification (against Denmark in 1864, Austria–Hungary in 1866 and France in 1870) made armed conflict between Europe’s states more likely by showing that war was an effective means by which to reach political goals.

Others in IR argue that the breakdown of the Long Peace could only have occurred within a larger set of changes that were taking place in the
international system. According to this thesis, we should focus less on changes brought about by the rise of new states, and more on the by-products of the global struggle for influence between the various great powers. In other words, the key to understanding the collapse of the old order may be found in the era’s key international processes: capitalism and imperialism. This remains the view of most Marxists, espoused in a pamphlet *Imperialism* (1916) by the great revolutionary V.I. Lenin. Lenin argues that peace had become impossible by the beginning of the 20th century because of capitalists’ determination to carve up the world through imperial competition. As states competed for more imperial power, they were increasingly likely to come into conflict. In some ways, this is also the view of more orthodox IR analysts like the so-called ‘Realists’. Realists, who will be discussed more in Chapter 7 of this subject guide, see politics as an arena in which the ‘winner-takes-all’. They reject Lenin’s economic explanation of the First World War, but agree that the odds of the Long Peace surviving under conditions of increased imperial competition were slim. The end of the Long Peace was therefore no accident. Rather, for Marxists and Realists alike, it was the tragic result of conflicts inherent in an international system which could not be contained by deft diplomacy, carefully worded treaties or states’ adherence to a shared set of practices and norms.

Finally, there are some in IR who insist that the Long Peace was only possible so long as military technology remained relatively primitive. The Industrial Revolution brought with it new naval technologies, improvement in munitions and a rapid acceleration in the destructive capacity of arms. It changed the way states fought wars, making new forms of war more and more destructive. This materialist theory claims that technology made war far more likely because it forced states into arms races as one state after another began to invest in these new weapons of death. Arms racing may not fully explain what finally happened in 1914. However, the rapid build-up of modern military technology in a world where war was still regarded as an effective route to political goals made armed conflict more likely, increasing the insecurity of states both great and small.

## The First World War

Some have even wondered whether the First World War need ever have happened at all. This approach – going under the broad heading of counter-factualism – makes one major theoretical claim: that just because things happen in international affairs does not mean that they are inevitable. Even as we look for the causes of certain events, we need to remain sensitive to the fact that we are doing so after the events in question have already happened. Inevitability only exists in retrospect, and any claim that history had to unfold as it has should be viewed with a highly sceptical eye. This issue has been raised in relationship to the First World War by Niall Ferguson, whose thoughts on the First World War have been especially controversial. Ferguson is highly critical of those who argue that the war was inevitable and suggests that the whole thing was an avoidable tragedy brought about by British miscalculations regarding the meaning of German actions in late 1914. Whether Ferguson is right or is just being mischievous cannot be settled here. However, he raises a crucial question that we will explore further in Chapter 13: how should IR explain the outbreak of war and what methods should we use to understand why wars happen?

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The First World War marked the end of one epoch in world politics and the beginning of another. As we saw in the first chapter of this subject guide, the First World War was only the first of three great conflicts that came to define the 20th century. In many ways, however, it was the most significant, not because it was the bloodiest – the Second World War lays claim to that dubious distinction, or the longest – the Cold War was 10 times as long, but because of the dramatic changes that it left in its wake. The list of these changes is long: the outbreak of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the creation of the Soviet Union on the bones of the old Russian empire; the emergence of the United States of America onto the world stage; the shift of financial and economic power from London to New York; the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires in central Europe and the Middle East; the first major stirrings of nationalism in Europe’s overseas empires; a bitter sense of betrayal in Germany that helped to bring Hitler to power 15 years later; new opportunities for Japan to expand its holdings in Asia; and a disastrous economic legacy that made it nearly impossible to restore the health of the world economy. The First World War unleashed a series of changes that brought the age of European global hegemony to an end and ushered in the world we know today. The First World War, more than any other event, was the midwife of modern international relations.

Summary

- The period of European history from 1814 to 1914 is commonly called the ‘Long Peace’ because of the relative stability that characterised its international affairs.
- British hegemony played a key role in maintaining the Long Peace throughout the 19th century.
- The rise of Germany, imperial competition in the non-European world and the advent of modern industrial technologies have all been cited as causes of the First World War.
- The changes brought on by the First World War fundamentally reshaped international affairs, brought the Long Peace to an end and heralded the start of the bloody 20th century.

Conclusion

International relations is a product of its history. If you want to understand the former, you have to understand the latter. Even though IR is a relatively new subject, the problems it grapples with are as old as human civilisation. Some of our earliest texts deal with war and diplomacy. The Amarna letters, found on clay tablets in Egypt and normally dated to the 14th century BC, record correspondence between the Egyptian pharaoh and rulers of other kingdoms and territories around the eastern Mediterranean and Near East. Other historical texts deal directly with issues relevant to modern IR, such as war, peace, government and trade. These include the Arthashastra of 3rd century BC India, The history of the Peloponnesian war by the 5th century BC Greek historian Thucydides, and The art of war by the 6th century BC Chinese writer Sun Tzu. In these early days of human civilisation, however, it wasn’t possible to speak about truly ‘global’ relationships. At least two major segments of the human species were isolated from the rump of Eurasia and Africa – the Americas and Australasia. Global political, economic and social relationships only became possible once these pockets were linked to the rest of the human world. This was made possible around 1500 by a series of European
voyages across the world's oceans, linking European states to new lands and populations. The results were often bloody and barbaric. All too infrequently, they were peaceful and mutually beneficial. Either way, they have had a major impact on norms, rules and practices that continue to influence IR today. These include diplomacy, international law, the balance of power and sovereignty. While it pursued imperialism abroad, 19th century Europe built a relatively stable system of international relationships at home. These were anchored by British naval and industrial power, which allowed the government in Westminster to shape the norms, rules and practices of international society. The First World War brought large segments of this society crashing down. It destroyed four major empires: the German, Russian, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman. It drew new borders that remain highly contentious today. It killed tens of millions of people, and gave rise to a renewed peace movement around the world that eventually led to the formal discipline of international relations. The world would never be the same again.

Chapter overview

• Europe's imperial expansion after 1500 marks the beginning of a truly 'global' system of international relations.
• The relationships established during Europe's imperial era (1500–1918) were structured to benefit European states at the cost of non-European political communities, reinforcing European hegemony.
• The independence of the United States and South America in the 18th and 19th centuries did not diminish the hegemonic position of Europe's great powers in global affairs.
• The period of European history from 1814 to 1914 is commonly called the 'Long Peace' because of the relative stability that characterised its international affairs.
• British hegemony played a key role in maintaining the Long Peace throughout the 19th century.
• The rise of Germany, imperial competition in the non-European world, and the advent of modern industrial technologies have all been cited as causes of the First World War.
• The changes brought on by the First World War reshaped international affairs, brought the Long Peace to an end and heralded the start of the bloody 20th century.

A reminder of your learning outcomes

Having completed this chapter, and the Essential readings and activities, you should be able to:
• explain some of the reasons why Europe emerged as the main driver of world politics by the end of the 19th century
• discuss competing explanations of the 'Long Peace' in Europe between 1814 and 1914
• evaluate different explanations of the causes of the First World War
• define the vocabulary terms in bold.
Chapter vocabulary

- imperialism
- international society
- globalisation
- great powers
- diplomacy
- international law
- the balance of power
- sovereignty
- the Long Peace
- hegemonic stability theory
- hegemony
- arms races

Test your knowledge and understanding

1. How did European imperialism after 1500 lead to the first truly ‘global’ international relationships?

2. Which element of modern international society is having the biggest impact on current events around the globe: diplomacy, international law, the balance of power or sovereignty?

3. Which best describes the current international situation: a balance of power or hegemonic stability?
Chapter 3: The short 20th century from 1919 to 1991

If I had to sum up the twentieth century, I would say that it raised the greatest hopes ever conceived by humanity, and destroyed all illusions and ideals.

Yehudi Menuhin

Aims of the chapter
The aims of this chapter are to:

• examine the decline of European imperialism in the 20th century
• describe the transition from a multipolar to a bipolar international system after 1945
• consider efforts after the First and Second World Wars to create international organisations for global governance.

Learning outcomes
By the end of this chapter, and having completed the Essential readings and activities, you should be able to:

• explain how the practice of national self-determination precipitated a transition from a world of empires to a world of states
• use the concept of polarity to discuss the changing distribution of power in international society from 1919 to 1991
• assess fundamental differences between the League of Nations and the United Nations
• define the vocabulary terms in bold.

Essential reading
Scott, L. ‘International history 1900–1999’ in BSO, Chapter 3.
‘League of Nations’ in GCR.
‘United Nations’ in GCR.

Further reading and works cited
Chapter synopsis

- The ‘short’ 20th century describes the tumultuous period from the beginning of the First World War in 1914 to the end of the Cold War in 1991.
- The end of the First World War ushered in new ideas to the field of international politics, including self-determination – the right of a political community to decide its own political future.
- By the end of the Second World War, the great European powers of the 19th century had been surpassed by the rise of two new superpowers: the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).
- International relations often describes an international society according to its polarity – a condition defined by the number of great powers that dominate a system:
  - a society with three or more great powers is multipolar.
  - a society with two great powers is bipolar.
  - a society with a single great power is unipolar.
- The Cold War was an era of bipolarity, in which the world divided into opposed blocs of states centred on the USA and the USSR.
- In a world of independent states, shared problems are dealt with through mutually agreed rules and organisations associated with global governance.
- The United Nations is an intergovernmental organisation (IGO) whose main purpose is to protect the sovereign independence of its member states.
- Unlike the League of Nations that preceded it, the UN balances the independence of its member states against the need to sanction and stop threats to international peace and security.

Introduction

Historian Eric Hobsbawm describes the twentieth century as the ‘age of extremes’ – defined by upheaval, war and revolution.1 In chronological terms, the 20th century began on 1 January 1901 and ended on 31 December 2000. In historical terms, however, it is often defined by a series of inter-related global conflicts: the First World War (1914–1918), the Second World War (1939–1945) and the Cold War (1947–1991). For Hobsbawm and others, these dates mark the historical boundaries of the ‘short’ 20th century: a period of violence and change that produced a deeply disturbed, economically fragmented and ideologically divided world before the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR between 1989 and 1991 consigned it to the dustbin of history.

This chapter will focus on three specific developments of the ‘short’ 20th century: the decline of European imperialism and the rise of self-
determination, the transition from a multipolar world to a bipolar world after 1945, and successive efforts to create international organisations like the League of Nations after 1918 and the United Nations after 1945. In doing so, the chapter will introduce several important concepts in international relations: self-determination, polarity and global governance.

**Self-determination and the decline of imperialism**

The First World War is a watershed event in international relations – an event that marks the end of one era and the beginning of another. The war and the peace treaties that ended it were directly responsible for bringing about the Russian Revolution and the establishment of the Soviet Union, for dissolving the multinational Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires, for humiliating a defeated Germany, for disappointing nationalist aspirations in Italy and Japan, and for weakening the financial and military capabilities of the two remaining great powers on the European continent – France and Great Britain. The United States had become a world power during the war, culminating in President Woodrow Wilson’s *Fourteen Points* – his plan to achieve a just and lasting peace settlement. Eight of the fourteen points dealt with specific territorial disputes between warring states. Five introduced new norms, rules and practices into diplomacy that President Wilson hoped would be the basis for a new kind of international relations. These were: treaties or agreements arrived at through open and public diplomacy instead of the secret ones that predominated before the war; freedom of the seas; free trade; reduction of armaments; and the adjustment of colonial claims based on the principles of self-determination. Wilson’s final point called for the creation of a new organisation – later the League of Nations – which would protect the sovereignty of states great and small.\(^2\)

President Wilson’s proposals were the main base for the idealism that typified international relations in the interwar years. He sought to make the world a fairer and more democratic place. Like John Locke, Wilson saw justice as the only basis for a sustainable order. Thus, he believed that the post-war international order could only be sustained when the peoples of the world lived in states that they created through a social contract, rather than being forced to live in states created and maintained through conquest or oppression. He summed this up in the concept of *self-determination* – loosely defined as the right of a national group to choose its own form of political organisation. States – governments, bureaucracies and the security services – should represent a political community composed of people sharing a common identity. This kind of political community is called a *nation*. Self-determination took hold in many colonial capitals, responding to the idea that governments need to represent the political will of the peoples they govern or risk losing their legitimacy. It was this idea of self-determination more than anything else that signalled the coming end of imperialism. As colonial peoples began to call for their own independent governments, the hold of imperial states over their far-flung territories declined. Furthermore, the weakening of great powers like France and Britain by the profligate bloodletting and expenditure of 1914–1918 limited their ability to suppress calls for independence. This dialectic process, in which the opposing ideas of imperialism and self-determination battled for supremacy, culminated in the decades following the Second World War (1939–1945) with the widespread collapse of European imperial power and the achievement of sovereignty by dozens of new states. This radically changed the composition of the international system by increasing the number of

\(^2\) *Wilson, Fourteen Points speech, 18 January 1918.*
small powers on the world stage and undermining the imperial systems that had constituted the backbone of the international order since the time of Christopher Columbus. Gone was the old order of European states competing for imperial possessions overseas while developing economically and trading extensively at home. In its place rose a new order dominated by two states – the USA and the USSR – whose power was so inflated by political, economic, technological, military and social influence that a new term had to be invented to describe them: superpowers.

Summary

- The 'short' 20th century describes the tumultuous period from the beginning of the First World War in 1914 to the end of the Cold War in 1991.
- The end of the First World War ushered in new ideas to the field of international politics, including self-determination – the right of a political community to decide its own political future.
- By the end of the Second World War, the great European powers of the 19th century had been surpassed by the rise of two new superpowers: the United States of America and the USSR.

Stop and read: BSO, Chapter 3, Section 3, pp.53–55.

Stop and read: ‘Self-determination’ in GCR.

Activity

When you have finished the readings, consider the impact of self-determination on the norms, rules and practices of international relations discussed in Chapter 2 of this subject guide. In particular, how does self-determination affect international rules relating to state sovereignty? Can a state remain the sole source of political authority within its territorial boundaries if one or more of the nations that inhabit it choose to form their own government?

Once you have considered these points, post your ideas in point form to the VLE discussion forum so that your peers can see and respond to your work.

Power and polarity from 1919 to 1991: from multipolarity to bipolarity

The years between the First and Second World War were dominated by international relationships between a large number of great powers: Britain, France, the United States, Japan, arguably Italy, and later, Germany and the Soviet Union. As you will see throughout this subject guide, one way to think about international relations is to describe the world in terms of how many great powers coexist in international society. There is some logic behind this simplistic assumption. Powerful states can use their influence to shape the norms, rules and practices that influence international behaviour. This means that very powerful states might be able to change the behaviour of international society itself. In an international society made up of many influential states – such as existed in Europe before 1945 – practices such as the balance of power may evolve to guard against the rise of anyone trying to dominate society's other members. In a society with a single hegemonic power – such as existed during the Pax Britannica in the early and mid-19th century – the rules and practices expected of a state will probably mirror the hegemon's own behaviour. In a society divided between two great powers, small states will
probably be drawn into one camp or the other – splitting the world into competing blocs with their own preferred norms, rules and practices. The distribution of power within an international society is referred to as its **polarity**, and normally falls into one of the three following conditions:

1. a society with three or more great powers is called **multipolar**
2. a society divided between two great powers is called **bipolar**
3. a society dominated by a single great power is called **unipolar**.

As the Second World War came to an end, IR analysts were aware that a huge power shift was underway. Instead of the multipolarity that had typified European and international politics since around 1500, this new development pointed towards the emergence of a two-power, bipolar system. The emerging world order would be dominated not by a large number of European empires – though these still possessed considerable assets in 1945 – but by the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The chances of a return to the pre-war status quo were very slim. By 1945, the USA recognised that its own security required participation in international relations. This effectively ruled out any return to its pre-war isolationism. Indeed, the USA had become so powerful that it would not have been feasible for it to have 'retreated'. This is rarely, if ever, what rising powers do. In 1945, every other great power – winner and loser alike – was severely weakened by years of war that had left them in ruins. This included the USSR, which had emerged from the Second World War with the world's most powerful army, but at the cost of over 25 million of its citizens' lives. The USA, meanwhile, had never been in better economic and military health, accounting for nearly 60 per cent of the world's economic wealth, over 50 per cent of its research and development, 70 per cent of its naval tonnage and the lion's share of its agricultural surpluses. The USA also possessed the world's only atomic bombs – weapons of mass destruction that gave it an absolute military advantage over all other states until the USSR exploded its own atomic device in 1949. American self-confidence in this period meant that many of its policy-makers discounted any threat from the USSR, which had been economically weakened by its brutal four-year war of extermination with Germany and was now confronted by US atomic power. However, US hopes for a unipolar world were quickly dashed by the growth of Soviet power in the years after the war. The age of superpower rivalry had begun.

By 1945, military planners in Washington DC and Moscow were already wondering who the next enemy might be. The power of Europe's imperial states was in obvious decline. As their colonial empires achieved independence, the USA saw a need to establish a new economic and political order to maintain international peace and security. However, deep differences of opinion over the future shape of Europe, the status of Germany, the situation in China and even the future of capitalism soon divided the victorious allies. This division quickly became a full-blown divorce, punctuated by the USSR's attempt to blockade the American, British and French sectors of occupied Berlin in 1948. The origins of the ensuing 45-year long Cold War have been hotly debated. Some blame Soviet expansionism for causing the rift. Others blame the hegemonic political and economic policies of the USA. Whatever its causes, the Cold War can be viewed through the lens of polarity as a natural consequence of competition between the two superpowers in a bipolar international society – with the USA and its allies promoting capitalist norms, rules and practices, while the Soviets and their allies tried to spread those of state socialism.
Because of its importance to modern international relations, the Cold War continues to fascinate many in our discipline. Some writers believe that the wartime alliance between the West and the USSR was bound to fail – not just because of the Allies' political and economic differences, but because alliances between sovereign states tend to fall apart once unifying threats like Nazi Germany and imperial Japan are overcome. While both the USA and the USSR exaggerated the aggressive intentions of their opponent, the fact remains that the larger international system was in turmoil after the Second World War. Insecurity and distrust were the order of the day. Nowhere was this more visible than in postwar Europe, where economic recovery proved difficult and the pre-war balance of power had been completely overturned by the defeat and division of Germany into a western state allied to the USA and an eastern state allied to the USSR. This shift in the distribution of power on the European continent, combined with the territorial gains made by the USSR and the defeat of Japan on the Soviet's eastern border, made the Soviet Union more geographically secure than at any other time in the 20th century. Even so, a number of Soviet policies made it unlikely that US policy analysts would trust the government in Moscow. The USSR's repressive actions in Eastern Europe, its construction of a sphere of influence around its borders, its interference in the increasingly influential Communist parties of Italy and France, its closed economy, and the brutal domestic policies of its late Stalinist period were seen as evidence that the USSR and USA operated according to different sets of norms, rules and practices. This was certainly the view held by the USA and the UK by 1946, and by early 1947 the idea was embedded in Western perceptions of their one-time ally.

The outcome of this process led to what British writer George Orwell (1945) and US columnist Walter Lippmann (1947) called a Cold War. This new kind of war was conducted in a bipolar world where power was left in the hands of two superpowers armed with nuclear weapons. First Europe and later many other regions of the world were divided into blocs, one pro-Soviet and the other pro-American. The Cold War was to have all the features of a normal war except – it was hoped – for direct military confrontation between its main combatants. After all, a direct confrontation would spell nuclear disaster for the entire human species. This was avoided through nuclear deterrence – a practice employed by both superpowers and neatly summed up by the policy of mutually assured destruction, or MAD. This promised that any attack by a superpower would be met with an overwhelming retaliatory nuclear response. Thus, any attack by one superpower would bring about the destruction of both. This dangerous strategy is still employed by the world's nuclear powers, each of whom maintains a credible ‘second strike’ capability – often in the form of submarine-launched intercontinental ballistic missiles – should their homelands be attacked and destroyed.

Unsurprisingly, this state of affairs had a profound impact on the way people thought about IR. New IR thinkers saw themselves as living in dark and dangerous times, making them extraordinarily tough-minded. The vast majority of these thinkers, who branded themselves as Realists, continued to believe that diplomacy and cooperation were possible, even essential, in a nuclear age. Nevertheless, most were decidedly pessimistic. Having witnessed the outbreak of two global wars, one world depression, the rise of Fascism and now an expanded communist threat – often equated with fascism in US officials' minds – many analysts of world politics came to look at the world through a particularly dark prism born of harsh experience. Like Thomas Hobbes in 17th-century England, their world view may help
to explain many of the amoral – even immoral – decisions made by policy makers on both sides of the conflict between 1948 and 1991.

Summary

- International relations often describes an international society according to its **polarity** – a condition defined by the number of great powers that dominate a system.
- A society with three or more great powers is **multipolar**.
- A society with two great powers is **bipolar**.
- A society with a single great power is **unipolar**.
- The Cold War was an era of bipolarity, in which the world was divided into opposed blocs of states centred on the USA and the USSR.

Stop and read: BSO, Chapter 3, Section 4, pp.55–62.

Activity

In two paragraphs of no more than 250 words each, respond to the questions below. Your answers should include a one-sentence thesis statement that clearly states your position on a given question and historical evidence that justifies your position.

1. ‘How did the Cold War’s bipolar distribution of power affect the international relations of small and medium powers between 1948 and 1991?’

2. ‘How different were the international policies pursued by the USSR and the USA during the Cold War?’

Post your response to the VLE discussion forum so that your peers can see and respond to your work.

Once you have posted your work, take a minute to look at one of your peer’s answers. Did they reach the same conclusions as you? Why or why not?

**Global governance: building international organisations in a world of sovereign states**

The First World War (1914–1918) led to a desire among statesmen and citizens to create a new kind of organisation to maintain peace and security without the use of force. Although every state in the world was recognised as sovereign, there was an obvious need for them to coordinate their actions in the interests of the common good. This meant the creation of an organisation for **global governance** that could establish rules and practices for the sovereign states of the world to follow in their dealings with one another. It is important to differentiate global governance from global **government**. For a global government to exist, the states of the world would need to surrender their final decision-making authority to some sort of transnational actor. This is highly unlikely in the short or medium term, so a form of global governance may be the best we can hope for to address humanity’s shared problems. The result of the push for global governance following the First World War was the League of Nations. Founded in 1920 and based in Geneva, the League had a chequered history. It managed to survive the 1920s, doing much good work in the process. However, it contained flaws that could not be overcome. First, it did not include the United States of America – which refused to join after the Paris Peace Conference – nor the USSR – which was excluded on the grounds that it was considered a rogue state. Second, the League did nothing to deal with the grievances of states like Italy, Japan and Germany, who felt cheated or betrayed by the post-war settlement. These states
became revisionists – seeking to replace the status quo with a new order in which they held a hegemonic position. Given these issues, the 1930s proved disastrous. The decade began with the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and ended with the outbreak of the Second World War – a testament to the ultimate failure of the League to deal with international peace and security. Nevertheless, lessons had been learned and some of the same mistakes were avoided in the League's post-war successor – the United Nations.

The United Nations (UN) differed from the League in several respects. Its original membership included both the USSR and the United States. It formally recognised the privileged position of the five great powers in international society in 1945 – the United States, the USSR, the United Kingdom, France and China (then represented by the Nationalist government of the Kuomintang, and now by the Communist government of the Chinese Communist Party). The UN granted these states – called the Permanent Five (P5) – veto powers in the Security Council, the UN organ dedicated to preserving ‘international peace and security’. Designed to ‘save succeeding generations from the scourge of war’, the organisation continued to grow as new states were created through decolonisation and new UN agencies were created to deal with new international issues.

The UN’s critics often ridicule the organisation as a ‘talking shop’ without the power to alter states' behaviour. It is sometimes blamed for failing to carry out tasks for which it has never been given a mandate or resources, such as ending war and eradicating poverty. Others say that analyses of the UN should focus on its successes and failures ‘on the ground’: looking after refugees, keeping warring factions apart, feeding starving populations and delivering some kind of hope to people living in the world’s most underdeveloped countries. In each of its areas of responsibility, the UN's performance has been less than perfect. How much of this is the organisation's own fault depends on how much responsibility you place at the feet of its member states. After all, the UN is an intergovernmental organisation (IGO), organised by and for the sovereign states that make it up. Without their permission, there is little the UN can do to address the world's problems. Article 2.7 of the United Nations Charter – the founding document of the organisation – clearly places states' sovereign rights above those of the global community in all but the most dire of circumstances when it says;

Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state or shall require the Members to submit such matters to settlement under the present Charter; but this principle shall not prejudice the application of enforcement measures under Chapter VII. 3

Chapter VII of the Charter refers to the power of the Security Council – with the consent of the veto-wielding P5 – to act on behalf of the international community to ensure international peace and stability. This power ranges from the ability to sanction individual state leaders and businesses to declaring a state in violation of international law and authorising military action against it. Thus, Article 2.7 illustrates how the UN learned lessons from the League of Nations. The Charter gives the UN teeth that the League of Nations never had. At the same time, by giving the P5 veto powers over enforcement actions, it ensures that they will see their interests better served by active participation than by leaving the organisation and thereby placing its enforcement powers in the hands of their adversaries. Whether this proves to be enough to keep the organisation alive throughout the 21st century remains to be seen.

Summary

- In a world of independent states, shared problems are dealt with through mutually agreed rules and organisations associated with global governance.
- The United Nations is an intergovernmental organisation (IGO) whose main purpose is to protect the sovereign independence of its member states.
- Unlike the League of Nations that preceded it, the UN balances the independence of its member states against the need to sanction and stop threats to international peace and security.

Stop and read: BSO, Chapter 19, Sections 1 and 2, pp.305–10.

Conclusion

The Cold War finally drew to a close between 1989 and 1991. These years saw the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the states of Eastern Europe, the reunification of West and East Germany, and the collapse of the Soviet Union into its constituent republics. As you will see in the next chapter of this subject guide, the end of the Cold War had effects that continue to reverberate through IR. First, it left the United States as the only remaining superpower in the world, setting up a period of unipolarity based on US hegemony. This radically changed the international order on which peace and security was based, introducing a new set of dangers and opportunities into international society. Second, it left thinkers and policy makers across IR wondering why they hadn’t seen the end coming. The failure to predict the collapse of the Soviet Union was especially damaging for Realists – the group of thinkers and policy makers who dominated IR throughout the Cold War. This led to renewed interest in alternative IR theories that could account for this kind of major historical change.

With the end of the Cold War came the end of the ‘short’ but eventful 20th century. The period between 1919 and 1991 saw at least three major developments in the field of international relations. First, it saw the end of European imperial power as a major force on the world stage. Second, it contained important structural changes to the distribution of power as the world shifted from a multipolar to a bipolar international society. Finally, the era saw the first important attempts to establish formal organisations for global governance – charged with helping sovereign states coordinate their actions with the goal of addressing shared global problems. Whatever you say about the 20th century, it was short, it was bloody, it was insecure. It was very interesting.

Chapter overview

- The ‘short’ 20th century describes the tumultuous period from the beginning of the First World War in 1914 to the end of the Cold War in 1991.
- The end of the First World War ushered in new ideas to the field of international politics, including self-determination – the right of a political community to decide its own political future.
- By the end of the Second World War, the great European powers of the 19th century had been surpassed by the rise of two new superpowers: the USA and the USSR.
• International relations often describes an international society according to its **polarity** – a condition defined by the number of great powers that dominate a system:
  - a society with three or more great powers is multipolar.
  - a society with two great powers is bipolar.
  - a society with a single great power is unipolar.
• The Cold War was an era of bipolarity, in which the world divided into opposed blocs of states centred on the USA and the USSR.
• In a world of independent states, shared problems are dealt with through mutually agreed rules and organisations associated with global governance.
• The United Nations is an intergovernmental organisation (IGO) whose main purpose is to protect the sovereign independence of its member states.
• Unlike the League of Nations that preceded it, the UN balances the independence of its member states against the need to sanction and stop threats to international peace and security.

**A reminder of your learning outcomes**

Having completed this chapter, and the Essential readings and activities, you should be able to:

• explain how the practice of national self-determination precipitated a transition from a world of empires to a world of states
• use the concept of polarity to discuss the changing distribution of power in international society from 1919 to 1991
• assess fundamental differences between the League of Nations and the United Nations
• define the vocabulary terms in bold.

**Chapter vocabulary**

• Fourteen Points
• self-determination
• nation
• superpowers
• Cold War
• nuclear deterrence
• global governance
• United Nations
• intergovernmental organisation (IGO).

**Test your knowledge and understanding**

1. How did the First World War affect European imperialism?
2. Was Cold War bipolarity a more stable form of international order than the multipolarity it replaced?
3. How does state sovereignty limit attempts to create formal global governance organisations?
Chapter 4: The post-Cold War world

We will succeed in the Gulf. And when we do, the world community will have sent an enduring warning to any dictator or despot, present or future, who contemplates outlaw aggression. The world can therefore seize this opportunity to fulfil the long-held promise of a new world order – where brutality will go unrewarded, and aggression will meet collective resistance.


Aims of the chapter

The aims of this chapter are to:

• examine the USA's unipolar moment from 1991 to 2001
• describe the impact of the end of the Cold War on Russia, China, Europe and the global South
• consider the consequences of the war on terror on the norms, rules and practices of modern international society.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter, and having completed the Essential readings and activities, you should be able to:

• explain how the United States’ position as the sole global superpower influenced IR in the first decade after the fall of the Soviet Union
• assess the position of Russia, Europe, China and the global South in the post-Cold War world
• explain the impact of the war on terror on the norms, rules and practices of international society
• define the vocabulary terms in bold.

Essential reading

Baylis, J. ‘International and global security’ in BSO, Chapter 15.
Best, E. and T. Christiansen ‘Regionalism in international affairs’ in BSO, Chapter 26.
Cox, M. ‘From the end of the Cold War to a new global era?’ in BSO, Chapter 4. ‘Hegemony’ in GCR.

Further reading and works cited


**Chapter synopsis**

- The decade following 1991 was one of US unipolarity.
- Between 1991 and 2001, US foreign policy focused on multilateral global governance, including the establishment of the WTO and the expansion of the EU and NATO.
- Democratisation was a key goal of US foreign policy in this period.
- Following 1991, European states of the former Soviet bloc joined IGOs like NATO and the EU, while multinational states broke up into their component nations.
- The Communist states of Asia took steps to avoid the fate of the USRR by opening their economies to the global capitalist system while maintaining their authoritarian domestic political systems.
- Europe’s largely successful transition away from bipolarity has been helped by the continent’s shared sense of identity and the strength of the EU and NATO.
- The end of the Cold War brought widespread change to the global South, including a widespread movement towards liberal economic policies and several examples of state collapse.
- The War on Terror has changed the rules of international society, increasing the likelihood of great power intervention.
- US foreign policy after 9/11 shifted from multilateralism to unilateralism, undermining norms associated with non-intervention, state sovereignty and territorial integrity.
- The US fight against violent non-state actors, including terrorists, has allowed it and other states to adopt behaviours that were previously against the rules of international society.
Introduction

The end of the Cold War ushered in a new era of international relations. Gone were the days of bipolarity, when the world looked on as two superpowers glared at each other across an iron curtain. In its place rose something quite different in terms of the international system: unipolarity. The United States of America ascended to dizzying heights of power after 1991, achieving a level of hegemony never seen before in international society. As the only superpower left on the planet, the USA had immense influence over the norms, rules and practices of international society – influence that it used to remake IR in its own image. Meanwhile, other great powers struggled to cope with the changes brought about by the fall of the Soviet Union and the bipolar order. The Russian Federation, the main successor state to the USSR, went through a decade of decline before starting to rise again on a tide of oil and gas. Europe also struggled with the legacy of the Cold War while building a European Union framework designed to deal with its political and economic challenges. In Asia, states like the People's Republic of China began to assert their positions on the regional and global stage, competing with US economic power and foreshadowing the political competition to come. In the developing world, the legacy of the Cold War remains mixed. Some states used the two decades that followed 1991 to establish themselves as rising powers in international society. Others found themselves torn apart by civil wars when their governments proved unable to contain the national aspirations of their populations. This period of US unipolarity was transformed by an unforeseen event: the terror attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001. The ‘War on Terror’ that followed radically altered US behaviour on the world stage, ushering in a new set of international norms, rules and practices. Several of these are of special interest, particularly the hollowing out of sovereignty as a principle of interstate relations on the world stage.

The USA’s unipolar moment: 1991–2001

When the USSR collapsed into its 15 constituent republics, the United States of America was left as the world’s only superpower. Although several other states possessed nuclear weapons – including the four other members of the P5 – and others also had highly competitive economies – including Japan and a newly united Germany – no state could match the USA for its influence across the political, economic and socio-cultural sectors. Its military was the most advanced, its economy was by far the largest, and its cultural industries filled movie screens and bookshelves around the world. Despite these massive advantages, the USA was remarkably restrained in its use of power during the first decade after the end of the Cold War. It avoided direct involvement in a number of regional crises around the world, and was criticised for inaction – as in Rwanda in 1994 – more often than it was for excessive interventionism. The presidency of Bill Clinton (1993–2001) was one in which the United States generally worked within the global governance organisations of the day. It was an active – if sometimes grudging – participant at the United Nations, and actively sought to reassure its allies and former adversaries of its good intentions. With only a few exceptions, its foreign policy focused on multilateralism as the preferred method of conflict resolution and problem solving – building alliances and broad coalitions even when it could have taken unilateral steps to address its international goals. As the global hegemon between 1991 and 2001, the United States had immense influence over the norms, rules and practices of international
society. Unipolarity encourages states around the world to mirror the actions of the global hegemon. This behaviour is called ‘bandwagoning’: the tendency of actors to mirror the behaviour of a dominant actor in a society. Think of all the parents who flock to buy whatever outfit they see the young Prince George wearing for a rather mundane example of the phenomenon at work. The United States used its influence in the 1990s to push several goals. The first was the spread of capitalism – its preferred means of economic organisation. With this goal in mind, the US government supported the creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) – a more muscular successor to the largely toothless General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) that had existed since 1947. It also used economic aid as a lever to remake developing states in Washington’s image by forcing aid recipients to sell off owned assets, remove government barriers to international trade and investment, and allow markets rather than governments to set prices and wages. Finally, the USA encouraged its allies to form more robust international organisations, supporting the eastward expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU). This, it was hoped, would bring a measure of unity to Europe’s historically fragmented politics, making the continent more peaceful and reducing the need for direct US involvement in European defence.

The 1990s also saw the USA encourage states, particularly those in the former Soviet bloc, to accept democratic forms of government. For reasons closely associated with Liberal IR and democratic peace theory – discussed in Chapter 8 of this subject guide – the US leadership believed that the spread of democracy would make the world a safer and more prosperous place. Although this goal was never as central to US foreign policy as its support for capitalism, the 1990s witnessed a high-water mark in the spread of democratic forms of political organisation, particularly in the Russian Federation.

**Summary**

- The decade following 1991 was one of US unipolarity.
- Between 1991 and 2001, US foreign policy focused on multilateral global governance, including the establishment of the WTO and the expansion of the EU and NATO.
- Democratisation was a key goal of US foreign policy in this period.

**Stop and read:** BSO, Chapter 4, Section 2, pp.67–68.

**Now read:** ‘Hegemony’ in GCR.

**Activity**

In a paragraph of no more than 400 words, answer the following question:

‘Was the unipolar international order created by US hegemony in the 1990s a more stable form of international society than the bipolarity and multipolarity that preceded it?’

Remember to include a thesis statement that summarises your argument in a single sentence and several pieces of evidence to justify your analysis.

Post your answer to the VLE discussion forum for feedback from your peers. Once you have posted your work, look at a post by a fellow student. Do you agree with their analysis? Why or why not? Be constructive with your feedback.
Great powers in post-Cold War international society

So far, this chapter has used the idea of polarity to focus on the most important single actor in the unipolar post-Cold War international society: the United States of America. After the fall of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, only the USA could claim superpower status. Other states – even nuclear-armed great powers like the People's Republic of China – could not compete with the scale of US power. However, the picture of international relations painted by polarity is problematic for three reasons. First, it ignores the influence of other states in global international society. Second, it only considers IR on a global scale, ignoring the fact that the norms, rules and practices of international society can differ from region to region. Third, by concentrating on states, polarity ignores the role of important non-state actors in international relations. All three concerns are valid. The following section will address the first two by looking more closely at some of the great powers that retained significant regional influence after 1991.

The communist world after communism

The immediate consequences of the end of the Cold War were felt first in communist states and varied widely from place to place. Some communist governments simply collapsed, most obviously the people's republics of Eastern Europe that had been set up by the USSR in the wake of the Second World War. These states, such as Poland and Hungary, elected non-Communist governments that reoriented their states' international relations westwards. Since 1991, most of the states of Eastern Europe have allied themselves with the United States and the states of Western and central Europe by joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU). Others states of the former Soviet bloc followed a more tragic trajectory. Yugoslavia – a multinational federation made up of ‘southern Slavs’ – descended into a series of bloody civil wars as each nation within the federation called for self-determination. Yugoslavia no longer exists. In its place are Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) – seven states where once there was one.

The initial breakup of the multinational Soviet Union generated a series of complex challenges. The Russian Federation emerged from the collapse of the USSR, with the majority of the latter's territory and population, as well as the Soviet seat on the UN Security Council and its nuclear arsenal. For most of the 1990s, it looked as if Russia was moving into the Western camp. With the election of President Vladimir Putin, however, it became clear that Russia's trajectory was not moving in the direction mapped out for it by the ‘Westernisers’. President, then prime minister, and then once again president, Putin has charted a different political course – interacting, and not always peacefully, with its neighbours in the West and the East. This may not lead to a ‘new’ Cold War with the USA and the European Union as some have speculated. Russia’s economic interdependence with the global energy market makes complete isolation highly unlikely. However, it has left their relationship in a delicate condition, subject to increasingly belligerent rhetoric and action. Meanwhile, the three Baltic republics – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – have anchored themselves within NATO and the EU. In doing so, they shrank the borders of Russia’s political authority. Belarus and Kazakhstan followed a different path, choosing to remain within Russia’s diminished sphere of influence instead of looking westwards. Still other republics, particularly Ukraine and Georgia, straddle the lines between the Russian and Western spheres.
of influence. In this sense, they are **buffer states** – states that exist between two rival international groups. This makes them vulnerable to international rivalry brought on by competition between the groups that border them. This rivalry has manifested militarily – as in Russia’s 2008 intervention in Georgia and 2014 intervention in Ukraine – or politically and economically – as in the Western-supported revolt against the government of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych in 2013–4 and the 2014 Ukraine–EU Association Agreement. Recalling your earlier readings on self-determination, it is interesting to note that the USSR’s multinational population meant that most of its constituent republics contained several important national groups. The states that emerged out of the USSR do not conform to the model of the pure **nation state**, which sets the stage for civil conflicts as different national groups use self-determination as a legal weapon to oppose the state that rules them. Initially, the collapse of the USSR led to several ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus and parts of central Asia. More recently, the issue of nationality has again become important with Russian President Vladimir Putin’s moves to reincorporate ‘historic’ Russian lands into the Russian Federation – a process most clearly illustrated in Moscow’s annexation of the Crimean peninsula, most of whose inhabitants are considered ethnically Russian.

The communist states of East Asia watched the collapse of the USSR with considerable concern. Not wanting to lose power themselves, their leaders chose a different path from the glasnost and perestroika of the late Soviet Union. Instead, many communist states reasserted authoritarian control over their people and territory. This is most obviously true in the People’s Republic of China (PRC), where the Chinese Communist Party crushed a student-led democracy movement during the bloody suppression of protests in Tiananmen Square, Beijing in 1989. Similar steps – though not as well publicised – were taken in communist states like Cuba, Vietnam and North Korea, where the grip of ruling parties has proved tenacious. This has had particularly disturbing consequences in North Korea. Whereas China and Vietnam – and more recently Cuba – have offset their political authoritarianism by integrating their economies with global markets, North Korea has sought security by purely military means: developing its own nuclear arsenal to deter international intervention. Thus, the end of the Cold War made North Korea more of a danger to international peace and security even while opening space for the partial integration of other communist states into mainstream international society. The PRC is unquestionably the most important of these semi-integrated states. The 20 years since the end of the Cold War have witnessed the PRC’s emergence as a great power. It now boasts the world’s largest economy. Though it still cannot provide the high per capita incomes enjoyed in the West, it can rightly claim to be the workshop of the world. It is also the second largest military power in the world after the USA, and arguably the single most important military power in the East Asian region. The PRC’s rise has been the main driver behind the many alliances formed between Asian states and the USA, which was once viewed very negatively in the region. Even Vietnam – which fought a decade-long war against the USA in the 1960s and 1970s but now faces Chinese pressure off its western coast – is now a US military ally. This process illustrates how IR can differ between regions of the world. Most of Europe has replaced its old regional international society based on the balance of power with one based on integration and interdependence. Meanwhile, the regional international society of East Asia resembles that of Europe before the bloody 20th century: filled with mutually suspicious states locked in society where military posturing and coercion remains a valid form of international behaviour.
Chapter 4: The post-Cold War world

Stop and read: BSO, Chapter 4, Sections 3 and 5, pp.68–69 and 71–73.

Europe

Although the end of the Cold War produced deeply ambiguous results in many parts of the world, its effects were generally positive for the states of Europe. Although we now take European peace for granted, it did not look like such a sure thing at the beginning of the 1990s. After all, Europe had been a bloody battlefield for much of the past 500 years. In the 20th century alone, it was the main front in two world wars and the prolonged existential crisis of the Cold War. Many of the ‘Realist’ IR thinkers of the Cold War predicted that it would quickly return to its old, warlike ways. The unification of Germany and the withdrawal of Soviet power would re-establish Europe’s old balance of power, leading to the interminable wars that have coloured the continent’s history. Realists’ predictions have largely failed to crystallise. Germany did not start acting like the Germany of old as some thought it must in order to balance US hegemony. Instead, the new Germany became one of the USA’s most important allies and was the driving force behind the integration of Eastern Europe into NATO and the EU. Outside of the former Yugoslavia and Soviet Union, Europe did not descend into the nationalist conflicts that had defined the first half of the 20th century. In spite of a rocky economic and political start, most of central and Eastern Europe peacefully transitioned to democratic forms of government, liberalised economies and the collective security of the NATO alliance and the European Union. How and why did Europe manage the transition out of Communism with such success? At least three answers have been suggested.

The first involves identity. For decades after the Second World War, the peoples of Eastern Europe were compelled to live under the control of states that did not represent their political communities. Many saw the people’s republics set up after the Second World War as Soviet puppets. This alienated Eastern Europeans from the USSR and gave their admiration for the West more political justification. When the Cold War finally ended, former Soviet satellite states saw their realignment with the West as a return ‘home’ to Europe – from whose institutions they had been separated since 1945. This sense of a common European identity was reinforced by the fact that only a few of the USSR’s former satellites had been fully and completely isolated behind the iron curtain. East Germans, for example, clearly knew what life was like in West Germany. Yugoslavs travelled widely. Hungarians maintained contact with other groups up and down the Danube basin. Eastern Europeans were aware of – and attracted to – what they imagined life to be like in Western Europe. At times, their fascination with all things from the West bordered on the naive. Still, it meant that when they finally had the chance to join the Western world, they did so enthusiastically.

The second reason given for Europe’s successful transition is the strength of its organisational embodiment: the European Union. Formed after the war as a means of reconciling the aspirations of previously warring states – Germany and France in particular – Europe’s common market gradually evolved from a narrowly defined economic body into something like a genuine political community. As its membership grew numerically, the EU expanded its functions. By the time the European Community (EC) became the European Union (EU) in 1992, it had the support of the overwhelming majority of Europeans, who associated their prosperity and democratic rights with the existence of an integrated Europe. Gorbachev himself was much impressed with what had been achieved in Western
Europe since the late 1940s, and was a great admirer of the European Community (EC) – particularly the central part it played in integrating the once fragmented continent. The role the EC/EU played in persuading the USSR to give up its hold over Eastern Europe is an important, though understudied, part of the story of 1989. Regardless, the organisation played an enormous role: holding the European states together at a time of great turmoil and facilitating the economic and political transition of the post-Communist East. There is no way of knowing what might have happened without the EC/EU, but it is not unreasonable to suggest that the end of the Cold War would have created many more problems for Europe and the wider world.

Finally, a third argument can be made that Europe was especially fortunate in that it is home to the world’s most successful collective security alliance: NATO. Formed in 1949 with what its first secretary-general termed the triple purpose of ‘keeping the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down’, NATO was critical in holding the West together through the Cold War and in helping Europe negotiate its way through the security problems that followed 1991. Throughout this era of turmoil, NATO ensured that the USA remained a crucial player in maintaining European security. After all, the USA remains by far the biggest contributor to NATO forces and is an indispensable partner in the alliance. It is easy to be critical of the USA’s foreign policy during and after the Cold War. However, during the critical years of transition it successfully reassured allies and former enemies alike. Hegemons are not always popular. In Europe – especially in France – many dreamed that the continent would soon be able to look after its own security needs without US assistance. However, as the Cold War gave way to the 1990s, one thing became abundantly clear: the USA remained an indispensable part of Europe’s security architecture.

Stop and read: BSO, Chapter 4, Section 4, pp.70–71.

Now read: BSO, Chapter 26, Section 4, pp.411–13.

**Whatever happened to the global South?**

The **global South** includes most of the world’s population and territory. Unlike East Asia, the former Soviet Union or Europe, it is not a geographically defined region. Rather, it includes a wide variety of states with a single shared characteristic: economic underdevelopment. Like the concept it replaced – the **Third World** – the global South stretches from South America to Asia and from Africa to Oceania. Outside Latin America, most of it was under European imperial control until the second half of the 20th century. Its states therefore tend to be quite young. They often lack the economic and political resources to provide their populations with prosperity or security. This makes many states in the global South problematic insofar as they do not truly fulfil Locke’s idea of a social contract – protecting citizens’ life, liberty and property. In extreme cases, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, they do not fulfil a basic requirement of statehood: a government capable of projecting power over a clearly defined territory and population. These failed states are important sources of global insecurity in the post-Cold War world.

Stop and read: BSO, Case Study 1 in Chapter 15, p.232.

The end of the Cold War had a number of effects on the states of the global South. In some cases, ‘socialist’ states abandoned Soviet-style planning in favour of far-reaching market reforms. In India, this produced
impressive socio-economic results. In other states, the end of the Cold War led to socio-economic disaster when regimes that had justified their actions in the name of Marxism were no longer able to protect their citizens’ lives, liberty or property and melted away in the face of banditry and national division. This process has been especially brutal in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly around the Horn of Africa – Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, southern Sudan and northern Kenya. With the end of the Cold War, long-standing rivalries that had once been masked by Cold War bipolarity percolated to the surface of international affairs. In some cases, this ended with a victory for one of the factions fighting to control the state. In Angola and Mozambique, former Marxist rebels defeated their opponents and became the new rulers of their respective governments. In places like Somalia, however, the state simply imploded with terrible consequences for local populations and the international community alike. Each must now face down immense challenges posed by this implosion: rampant poverty, piracy, terrorism, hopelessness and hunger.

Political change after 1991 was accompanied by far-reaching economic reform throughout the global South. While the end of the Cold War was not the only driver behind the new global economy that emerged in the 1990s, the collapse of the Soviet model of economic development made the case for market-oriented reforms almost irresistible. After all, how could one argue for a non-capitalist, planned road to economic development in less developed states when that very model had just fallen apart in Eastern Europe and the USSR? Prior to 1991, it could be claimed that, whatever its many faults and weaknesses, central government planning was a viable approach to development. After 1991 it was no longer possible to make this case with any degree of seriousness. The alternative to capitalism had been tried and it had failed, leaving former Communist states to implement liberal economic reforms at home by opening up their once closed economies to the wider world market. This required money and resources – both of which could be found in development organisations like the World Bank. The Bank’s international aid came at a price, however. **Conditionality** attached to its loans forced developing states to accept the capitalist economic model by reducing the government’s role in the economy and opening up domestic markets to international trade and investment. The human costs of this process were high. Conditionality often undermined states’ ability to pay its own way, much less maintain control over their people and lands. The consequences were certainly problematic. But, at the end of the day, there seemed to be no other way.

**Summary**

- Following 1991, European states of the former Soviet bloc joined IGOs like NATO and the EU, while multinational states broke up into their component nations.
- The Communist states of Asia took steps to avoid the fate of the USSR – opening their economies to the global capitalist system while maintaining their authoritarian domestic political systems.
- Europe’s largely successful transition away from bipolarity has been helped by the continent’s shared sense of identity and the strength of the EU and NATO.
- The end of the Cold War brought widespread change to the global South, including a widespread movement towards liberal economic policies and several examples of state collapse.
International society and the war on terror

The attacks on New York’s World Trade Center and Washington’s Pentagon on 11 September 2001 changed the way that the United States used its position in the unipolar international society of the day. This was partly due to the perceived nature of the threat facing the USA immediately after the attacks. These had not been carried out by the agents of a state. They were the work of a group of non-state militants – trained and funded by individuals not directly answerable to any government – who sought to effect political change through the use of violence against a civilian population. The war on terror that ensued could not be fought like any other interstate war. Al-Qaeda, the group that claimed responsibility for the attacks, had no capital city to bomb or territory to occupy. This presented the United States and its allies with a novel set of problems whose solutions have altered the norms, rules and practices of post-Cold War international society.

The most important change brought about by the war on terror was increased intervention in states’ domestic politics by the great powers. Prior to 2001, the United States was reluctant to deploy its armed forces into conflict areas in the Middle East and Central Asia. This did not remain the case for long after 9/11. Less than a month later, US forces were directly supporting rebel forces against the Taliban government of Afghanistan, which allowed al-Qaeda to train its operatives and plan its operations on Afghan soil. This began a commitment of soldiers to Central Asia that, as of 2015, has not ended. Although some international organisations have been involved in the Afghan war, including the United Nations and NATO, it was initially an Anglo-American operation without the legal authority normally provided by the UN Security Council. This set a precedent for later US and allied action, most notably the 2003 invasion of Iraq. From the invasion of Iraq to Washington’s ongoing use of drones to assassinate enemies in Yemen and Pakistan, the war on terror has regularly ignored the right of sovereign states to non-intervention. The impact of this change is magnified by the USA’s hegemonic position in international society. As discussed earlier, unipolar international societies tend to mirror the behaviour of their most powerful actor. It is therefore no surprise that other states have since used the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq to rationalise their own interventions. This has most notably been the case with the Russian Federation, which points to US precedents to excuse their 2008 invasion of Georgia and their ongoing interventions in Ukraine. At the same time, the rise of interventionism and the decline of respect for state sovereignty has had knock-on effects for other rules of international society, particularly respect for the territorial integrity of sovereign states.

The war on terror has also influenced IR by forcing states to adopt new strategies to fight the influence of non-state actors in international society. For now, let’s focus on those non-state actors who exist outside of international and domestic legal systems. These include terrorists, transnational criminal gangs and guerrillas. Each of these groups suffers from a gross power disadvantage when compared to the states they oppose. States, after all, enjoy the right to use force in their own defence and in support of allies and international society. Non-state actors have no such right in domestic or international law. Terrorists are particularly
interesting examples in this regard. **Terrorism** is the use of force to effect political change by attacking civilians or symbolic targets. It is not a new phenomenon. The term was first coined to describe the use of violence by the French government against its own people during the French Revolution’s ‘Reign of Terror’ (September 1793 to June 1794). In the late 1800s, terrorism became associated with non-state actors when anarchist groups in Europe and North America carried out a series of attacks and assassinations against targets ranging from Russian Tsar Alexander II to US President McKinley. Twentieth century nationalists, who identify themselves as liberation movements rather than terrorists, use similar tactics to fight what they see as oppression by imperial masters. From Ireland to Israel to India, terrorism has been a strategy by which relatively weak non-state units promote political change. Fighting terrorism is a particularly difficult job that requires states to use non-traditional means. One of the most important and controversial has been the use of unmanned aerial vehicles, commonly known as drones, to carry out targeted assassinations of individuals on foreign soil. Assassination – particularly on another state’s territory – has historically been frowned on by international society. Sovereignty, after all, requires that states refrain from intervening in one another’s domestic affairs. The use of drones to kill individuals on foreign soil therefore violates one of the main norms of international society. However, because the party responsible for the assassination is also the unipolar hegemon, there is little that can be done to curtail the practice. It is a risky strategy. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, actors in a unipolar system often mirror the behaviour of the hegemon. Bandwagoning is to be expected. The USA therefore runs the risk of their actions being used to give another power a legal precedent to act in a similar manner – assassinating their opponents, even on another state’s sovereign territory. Such is the danger of hegemonic bandwagoning in a unipolar society.

**Activity**

Go the VLE and take a look at ‘The Crimea crisis and the Iraq precedent: Realpolitik and hypocrisy’ by Campbell Craig.

Do you agree with the author’s claim that Russia has used the US 2003 invasion of Iraq as a legal precedent for its actions in Crimea? What does his argument tell you about the effects of the 2003 invasion on international society’s ability to oppose threats to states’ territorial integrity?

**Summary**

- The war on terror has changed the rules of international society, increasing the likelihood of great power intervention.
- US foreign policy after 9/11 shifted from multilateralism to unilateralism, undermining norms associated with non-intervention, state sovereignty and territorial integrity.
- The US fight against violent non-state actors, including terrorists, has allowed it and other states to adopt behaviours that were previously against the rules of international society.
Conclusion

Post-Cold War international society has evolved from the bipolarity of the late 20th century to an increasingly problematic unipolarity centred on the United States of America. Increasingly challenged in many regions of the world, particularly in East Asia and the former USSR, US political hegemony remains a defining feature of IR. This has had important effects on international society. First, it has led to the creation and enlargement of international organisations that mirror the USA's own international goals – the World Trade Organization, NATO and the EU to name a few. More recently, the war on terror has introduced new norms into international society. The most important of these is the spread of interventionism brought about by the fight against global terrorism. Interventionism has diminished states' abilities to rely on the principle of sovereignty to defend them against foreign intervention. This encourages states like North Korea to seek military deterrents against aggression. The post-Cold War world is arguably both more orderly and more fragmented than its bipolar predecessor. How this affects international relations going forward depends very much on how the United States and rising powers such as the People's Republic of China choose to use their influence over the norms, rules and practices of international society.

Chapter overview

- The decade following 1991 was one of US unipolarity.
- Between 1991 and 2001, US foreign policy focused on multilateral global governance, including the establishment of the WTO and the expansion of the EU and NATO.
- Democratisation was a key goal of US foreign policy in this period.
- Following 1991, European states of the former Soviet bloc joined IGOs like NATO and the EU, while multinational states broke up into their component nations.
- The communist states of Asia took steps to avoid the fate of the USSR – opening their economies to the global capitalist system while maintaining their authoritarian domestic political systems.
- Europe's largely successful transition away from bipolarity has been helped by the continent's shared sense of identity and the strength of the EU and NATO.
- The end of the Cold War brought widespread change to the global South, including a widespread movement towards liberal economic policies and several examples of state collapse.
- The war on terror has changed the rules of international society, increasing the likelihood of great power intervention.
- US foreign policy after 9/11 shifted from multilateralism to unilateralism, undermining norms associated with non-intervention, state sovereignty and territorial integrity.
- The US fight against violent non-state actors, including terrorists, has allowed it and other states to adopt behaviours that were previously against the rules of international society.
A reminder of learning outcomes

Having completed this chapter, and the Essential readings and activities, you should be able to:

• explain how the United States’ position as the sole global superpower influenced IR in the first decade after the fall of the Soviet Union
• assess the position of Russia, China, Europe and the global South in the post-Cold War world
• explain the impact of the War on Terror on the norms, rules and practices of international society
• define the vocabulary terms in bold.

Chapter vocabulary

• multilateralism
• World Trade Organization (WTO)
• European Union (EU)
• democracy
• non-state actors
• buffer state
• nation state
• integration
• identity
• global South
• Third World
• conditionality
• intervention
• non-intervention
• territorial integrity
• terrorism.

Test your knowledge and understanding

1. How has US unipolarity affected the structure of international society?
2. Describe the impact of the end of the Cold War on any two (2) regions of the world.
3. Has the war on terror fundamentally changed the norms, rules and practices of international society?