CHAPTER 2

Historical Context

'Happy is the nation without history.'

CESARE, MARQUIS OF BECCARIA, *On Crimes and Punishments* (1764)

PREVIEW

Politics and history are inextricably linked. In a simple sense, politics is the history of the present while history is the politics of the past. An understanding of history therefore has two benefits for students of politics. First, the past, and especially the recent past, helps us to make sense of the present, by providing it with a necessary context or background. Second, history can provide insight into present circumstances (and perhaps even guidance for political leaders), insofar as the events of the past resemble those of the present. History, in that sense, 'teaches lessons'. In the aftermath of 9/11, President George W. Bush thus justified the 'war on terror' in part by pointing to the failure of the policy of 'appeasement' in the 1930s to halt Nazi expansionism. The notion of 'lessons of history' is a debatable one, however; not least because history itself is always a debate. What happened, and why it happened, can never be resolved with scientific accuracy. History is always, to some extent, understood through the lens of the present, as modern concerns, understandings and attitudes help us to 'invent' the past. And it is also worth remembering Zhou Enlai (Chou En-lai), then Premier of the People's Republic of China, who replied, when asked in the 1960s about the lessons of the 1789 French Revolution, that 'it is too early to say'. Nevertheless, the modern world makes little sense without some understanding of the momentous events that have shaped world history, particularly since the advent of the twentieth century. What do the events that led up to the outbreak of World War I and World War II tell us about the causes of war, and what does the absence of world war since 1945 tell us about the causes? In what sense were years such as 1914, 1945 and 1990 watersheds in world history? What does world history tell us about the possible futures of global politics?

KEY ISSUES

- What developments shaped world history before the twentieth century?
- What were the causes and consequences of World War I?
- What factors resulted in the outbreak of the World War II?
- What were the causes and consequences of the 'end of empire'?
- Why did the Cold War emerge after 1945, and how did it end?
- What are the major factors that have shaped post-Cold War world history?

CONCEPT

The West

The term 'the West' has two overlapping meanings. In a general sense, it refers to the cultural and philosophical inheritance of Europe, which has often been exported through migration or colonialism. The roots of this inheritance lie in Judeo-Christian religion and the learning of 'classical' Greece and Rome, shaped in the modern period by the ideas and values of liberalism. In a narrower sense, fashioned during the Cold War, 'the West' meant the USA-dominated capitalist bloc, as opposed to the USSR-dominated East. The relevance of the latter meaning was weakened by the end of the Cold War, while the value of the former meaning has been brought into question by political and other divisions amongst so-called western powers.

MAKING OF THE MODERN WORLD

From ancient to modern

The beginning of world history is usually dated from the establishment of a succession of ancient civilizations in place of the hunter-gatherer communities of earlier times. Mesopotamia, located between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates in the area of modern day Iraq, is often portrayed as the 'cradle of civilization', with three major civilizations arising there from around 3500 to 1500 BCE (Before the Common Era, notionally determined by the birth of Jesus) – the Sumerian, the Babylonian and the Assyrian. The other early civilization developed in Ancient Egypt, along the course of the Nile, and this endured for around three and a half thousand years, only ending with the rise of the Roman Empire. The two key features of these early civilizations were agriculture, which allowed for permanent settlement and the emergence of urban life, and the development of writing, which occurred from around 3000 BCE (the earliest forms being Mesopotamian cuneiform and Egyptian hieroglyphics). The beginnings of Chinese civilization date from the establishment of the Shang Dynasty in around 1600 BCE, corresponding to the emergence of the Bronze Age. After the Warring States period, 403–221 BCE, China (see p. 251) was eventually unified under the Ch'in (from which the name comes). The earliest civilization in South Asia emerged in the Indus River valley, in what is now Pakistan, and flourished between 2600 and 1900 BCE. Ancient India, which stretched across the plains from the Indus to the Ganges, extending from modern-day Afghanistan to Bangladesh, began around 500 BCE with the birth of the 'golden age' of classical Hindu culture, as reflected in Sanskrit literature.

The period generally known as 'classical antiquity', dating from around 1000 BCE, witnessed the emergence of various civilizations in the area of the Mediterranean Sea. Starting with the growth of Etruscan culture and the spread of Phoenician maritime trading culture, the most significant developments were the emergence of Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome. Ancient Greece, often viewed as the foundational culture of western civilization, developed through the extension of Greek settlements throughout the eastern Mediterranean during the period 800–600 BCE, with colonies being formed in Asia Minor as well as in the southern parts of the Balkans. Ancient Rome flourished once the Roman monarchy was overthrown in 509 BCE, creating an oligarchic republic that developed into a vast empire, which extended from the eastern Mediterranean across North Africa and included most of Europe.

However, the classical world gradually descended into crisis, reaching its height during the fifth century. This crisis was caused by the eruption of mounted nomadic peoples into the great crescent of ancient civilizations which stretched from the Mediterranean to China, ushering in the so-called 'Dark Ages'. It affected not merely the Greeks and the Romans, but all the established civilizations of Eurasia. Only China coped successfully with the invaders, but even here their appearance saw a period of political fragmentation only ended by the Sui Dynasty in 589. Europe was affected by the 'barbarian' invasions, and later settlement, of the Germanic and Slav peoples during the fifth and sixth centuries, with a further wave of invasions coming in the ninth and tenth centuries from the Vikings, Magyars and Saracens. The most significant of these

primitive nomadic peoples were, nevertheless, the Mongols, who emerged from the depths of Asia to create, between 1206 and 1405, an empire of unequal scope and range. The Mongol Empire stretched from the eastern frontiers of Germany and from the Arctic Ocean to Turkey and the Persian Gulf. Its impact on world history was profound. The political organization of Asia and large parts of Europe was altered; whole peoples were uprooted and dispersed, permanently changing the ethnic character of many regions (not least through the wide dispersal of the Turkic peoples across western Asia); and European access to Asia and the Far East became possible again.

Rise of the West

In a process which commenced around 1500, a single, originally European-based civilization became the world's dominant civilization. Non-western societies increasingly came to model themselves on the economic, political and cultural structure of western societies, so much so that **modernization** came to be synonymous with westernization. This period started with the so-called 'age of discovery', or the 'age of exploration'. From the early fifteenth century and continuing into the early seventeenth century, first Portuguese ships, then Spanish and finally British, French and Dutch ships set out to discover the New World. This process had strong economic motivations, starting with the desire to find a direct route to India and the Far East in order to obtain spices, and leading to the establishment of trading empires focused on tea, cane sugar, tobacco, precious metals and slaves (some 8 to 10.5 million Africans were forcibly transported to the Americas). The rise of the West nevertheless had crucial political, socio-economic and cultural manifestations.

In political terms, the rise of the West was associated with the establishment, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, of sovereign states with strong central governments. This occurred particularly through the Peace of Westphalia (1648), which brought an end to the Thirty Years War, the most barbaric and devastating war in European history up to the two world wars of the twentieth century. The advent of sovereign statehood fostered in Europe a level of social and political stability that favoured technological innovation and economic development. The socio-economic dimension of the rise of the West lay in the breakdown of **feudalism** in Europe and the growth, in its place, of a market or capitalist society. This, most importantly, stimulated the growth of industrialization, which started in mid-eighteenth-century Britain (the 'workshop of the world') and spread during the nineteenth century to North America and throughout western and central Europe. Industrialized states acquired massively enlarged productive capacities, which contributed, amongst other things, to their military strength. The advance of agricultural and industrial technology also contributed to improving diets and rising living standards, which, over time, had a massive impact on the size of the world's population (see Figure 2.1).

In cultural terms, the rise of the West was fostered by the **Renaissance**, which, beginning in Italy in the late Middle Ages, reshaped European intellectual life in areas such as philosophy, politics, art and science. This, in turn, helped to fuel interest in and curiosity about the wider world and was associated with the rise of science and the growth of commercial activity and trade. The **Enlightenment**, which reached its height in the late eighteenth century, imbued western intellec-

● **Modernization**: The process though which societies become 'modern' or 'developed', usually implying economic advancement, technological development and the rational organization of political and social life.

● **Feudalism**: A system of agrarian-based production that is characterized by fixed social hierarchies and a rigid pattern of obligations.

● **Renaissance**: From the French, literally meaning 'rebirth'; a cultural movement inspired by revived interest in classical Greece and Rome that saw major developments in learning and the arts.

● **Enlightenment, the**: An intellectual movement that challenged traditional beliefs in religion, politics and learning in general in the name of reason and progress.

CONCEPT

Imperialism

Imperialism is, broadly, the policy of extending the power or rule of the state beyond its boundaries, typically through the establishment of an **empire**. In its earliest usage, imperialism was an ideology that supported military expansion and imperial acquisition, usually by drawing on nationalist and racialist doctrines. In its traditional form, imperialism involves the establishment of formal political domination or colonialism (see p. 182), and reflects the expansion of state power through a process of conquest and (possibly) settlement. Modern and more subtle forms of imperialism may nevertheless involve economic domination without the establishment of political control, or what is called neo-colonialism.

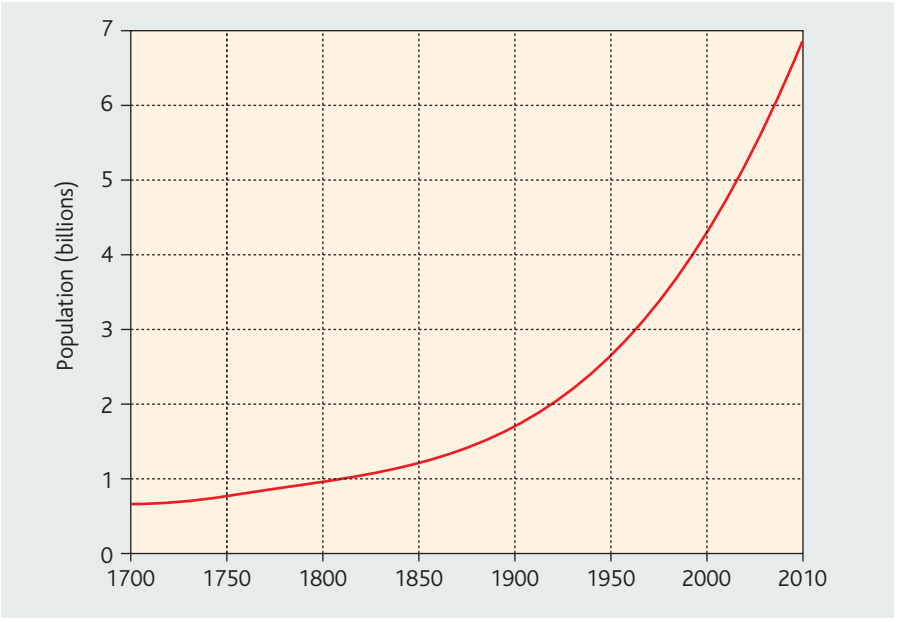


Figure 2.1 **Growth of world population since 1750**

tual life with a strong faith in reason, debate and critical enquiry. As well as encouraging the idea that society should be organised on rational lines, this contributed to the growth of scientific civilization and technological advance.

Age of imperialism

Europe's influence on the rest of the world was substantially extended through the growth in imperialism, which intensified during the late nineteenth century with the so-called 'scramble for colonies', focused especially on Africa. By the outbreak of World War I, much of the world had been brought under European control, with the British, French, Belgian and Dutch empires alone controlling almost one-third of the world's population (see Map. 2.1). The ***belle époque*** was accompanied by the establishment of levels of economic globalization that are comparable with those of the contemporary period. International trade, expressed as a proportion of the world's aggregate GDP, was as great in the late nineteenth century as it was in the late twentieth century. Indeed, the UK, the world's foremost imperial power during this era, was more dependent on trade than any contemporary state, including the USA (see p. 46).

This period was also characterized by substantial cross-border migration flows that peaked in the period between 1870 and 1910. Immigration into the USA rose steadily from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, coming mainly from Germany and Ireland, but also from the Netherlands, Spain, Italy, the Scandinavian countries and Eastern Europe. Canada, Australia and South Africa also attracted large numbers of migrants from the poorest parts of Europe and some parts of Asia. These relatively rapid flows of goods, capital and people were, in turn, facilitated by technological advances in transport and communications,

● ***Belle époque***: From the French, literally meaning 'beautiful era'; a period of peace and prosperity in Europe between the late nineteenth century and the outbreak of WWI was seen as a 'golden age'.

notably the development of steam-powered shipping, the spread of the railroads and the invention and commercial application of the telegraph. These made the nineteenth century the first truly universal era in human society (Bisley 2007). However, this period of what Scholte (2005) called 'incipient globalization' came to an abrupt end with the outbreak of World War I, which brought the 'golden age of free trade' to an end and led to a return to economic nationalism and a backlash against immigration. In a warning for the contemporary global era, some have even interpreted the outbreak of World War I as a consequence of *belle époque* globalization, in that it brought the European states into conflict with one another as they struggled for resources and prestige in a shrinking world.

THE 'SHORT' TWENTIETH CENTURY: 1914–90

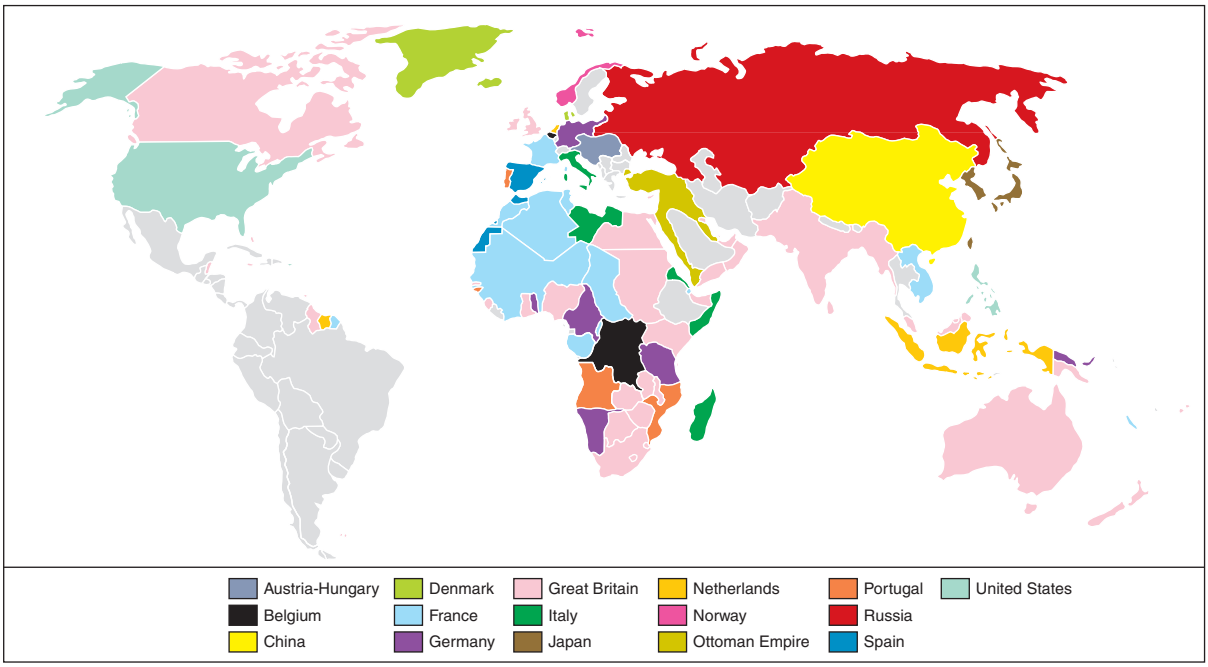
Origins of World War I

The outbreak of war in 1914 is often seen as the beginning of the 'short' twentieth century (Hobsbawm 1994), the period during which world politics was dominated by the ideological struggle between capitalism and communism, and which ended in 1989–91. World War I has been described as the most significant war in world history. It was the first example of **total war**, meaning that domestic populations and the patterns of civilian life (the 'home front') were more profoundly affected than by earlier wars. The war was also genuinely a 'world' war, not only because, through the involvement of Turkey, fighting extended beyond Europe into the Middle East, but also because of the recruitment of armies from across the **empires** of Europe and the participation of the USA. WWI was the first 'modern' war, in the sense of being industrialized – it witnessed the earliest use of, for example, tanks, chemical weapons (poison gas and flame-throwers) and aircraft, including long-range strategic bombing. Some 65 million men were mobilized by the various belligerents, over 8 million of whom died, while about 10 million civilians were killed in the war itself or perished in the epidemic of Spanish influenza that broke out in the winter of 1918–19.

WWI was precipitated by the assassination, in June 1914, of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, nephew of the Austrian Emperor, by the Black Hand, a group of Serbian nationalists. This precipitated declarations of war by Austria-Hungary and Russia (see p. 177), which, thanks to a system of alliances that had been constructed over the previous decade, led to a wider war between the Triple Alliance (Britain, France and Russia) and the Central Powers (Germany and Austria-Hungary). Other states were drawn into the conflict, notably Turkey (1914) and Bulgaria (1915) on the side of the Central Powers, and Serbia, Belgium, Luxembourg, Japan (all in 1914), Italy (1915), Rumania, Portugal (1916), Greece and, most significantly, the USA (1917) on the side of the Allied Powers. The eventual victory of the Allies was probably accounted for by their greater success, perhaps linked to their democratic systems, in mobilizing manpower and equipment; by their earlier and more effective use of mechanized warfare; and, ultimately, by the entry of the USA into the war. However, there was, and remains, considerable debate about the origins of the war. The main causes that have been linked to the outbreak of WWI are the following:

● **Empire**: A structure of domination in which diverse cultures, ethnic groups or nationalities are subject to a single source of authority.

● **Total war**: A war involving all aspects of society, including large-scale conscription, the gearing of the economy to military ends, and the aim of achieving unconditional surrender through the mass destruction of enemy targets, civilian and military.



Map 2.1 **Colonial holdings, circa 1914**

- The 'German problem'
- The 'Eastern question'
- Imperialism
- Nationalism

The 'German problem' draws attention to a phenomenon that has many and diverse interpretations. Realist theorists, who believe that the basic inclination of states towards the acquisition of power and the pursuit of national interest can only be constrained by a balance of power (see p. 256), argue that Europe's instability stemmed from a structural imbalance which had resulted from the emergence, through the unification of Germany in 1871, of a dominant power in central Europe. This imbalance encouraged Germany's bid for power, reflected, for instance, in its desire for colonies (Germany's 'place in the sun') and in growing strategic and military rivalry with Britain, especially in terms of naval power. Alternative interpretations of the 'German problem', however, tend to locate the source of German expansionism in the nature of its imperial regime and in the annexationist ambitions of its political and military elites. The most famous expression of this was in the writings of the German historian Fritz Fischer (1968), who emphasized the role of *Weltpolitik*, or 'world policy', in shaping Germany's aggressive and expansionist foreign policy during the reign of Kaiser Wilhelm II, 1888–1918. This view, in effect, blames Germany (or at least its political leaders) for the outbreak of WWI, something which the Allies expressed through the 'war guilt' clause of the Treaty of Versailles (1919).

The fact that WWI broke out in the Balkans and initially involved declarations of war by Russia and Austria-Hungary highlights the significance of the so-called

APPROACHES TO . . .

HISTORY

Realist view

Realists believe that history tends to have an enduring character. From their perspective, similarities between historical eras are always more substantial than the differences. In particular, power politics, conflict and the likelihood of war (though, by no means, endless war) are inescapable facts of history. History, if you like, does not 'move forward'; rather, it repeats itself, endlessly. This happens for at least three reasons. First, human nature does not change: humans are self-interested and power-seeking creatures, given to lusts and impulses that cannot be restrained by reason or moral considerations. Changes in terms of cultural, technological and economic progress do not change these 'facts of life'. Second, history is shaped by self-interested political units of one kind or another. These political units may take different forms in different historical periods – tribes, empires, city-states, nation-states and so on – but their basic behaviour in terms of rivalry (potentially or actually) with other political units never changes. Third, anarchy is an enduring fact of history, an assumption sometimes referred to as 'anarcho-centrism'. Despite long periods of domination by various civilizations, empires, great powers or superpowers, none has managed to establish global supremacy. The absence of world government (see p. 457) ensures that every historical period is characterized by fear, suspicion and rivalry, as all political units are forced, ultimately, to rely on violent self-help.

Liberal view

The liberal view of history is characterized by a belief in progress: history marches forwards as human society achieves higher and higher levels of advancement. The assumption that history moves from the 'dark' to the 'light' is based, above all, on a faith in reason. Reason emancipates humankind from the grip of the past and the weight of custom and tradition. Each generation is able to advance beyond the last as the stock of human knowledge and understanding progressively increases. In international affairs, progress involves a transition from power-seeking behaviour, in which aggression and violence are routinely used as tools of state policy, to a condition characterized by cooperation and peaceful co-existence, brought about by economic interdependence, the emergence of an international rule of law and the advance of democracy. Such thinking has a utopian dimension, in that it emphasizes the possibility of 'perpetual peace' (Kant) and suggests, following Fukuyama (see p.513) that the worldwide victory of liberal democracy would amount to the 'end of history'. However, the scope and degree of liberal optimism about the future has fluctuated over time. Whilst liberalism flourished both in the period after WWI and following the collapse of communism in the early 1990s, it was distinctly muted in the post-1945 period and also became so in the aftermath of September 11.

Critical views

The most influential critical approaches to history have developed out of Marxism. The Marxist theory of history – often portrayed as 'historical materialism – emphasizes that the primary driving forces in history are material or economic factors. In Marx's view, history moves forwards from one 'mode of production' to the next, working its way through primitive communism, slavery, feudalism and capitalism and eventually leading to the establishment of a fully communist society, history's determinant end point. Each of these historical stages would collapse under the weight of their internal contradictions, manifest in the form of class conflict. However, communism would mark the end of history because, being based on common ownership of wealth, it is classless. Although orthodox Marxists sometimes interpreted this as a form of economic determinism. Frankfurt School critical theorists, such as Robert Cox (see p. 120), have rejected determinism in allowing that, in addition to the material forces of production, states and relations among states can also influence the course of history. Nevertheless, such essentially class-based theories have been rejected by poststructuralists, social constructivists and feminists. Poststructuralists have often followed Foucault (see p. 17) in employing a style of historical thought called 'genealogy', attempting to expose hidden meanings and representations in history that serve the interests of domination and exclude marginalized groups and peoples. Social constructivists criticise materialism in emphasizing the power of ideas, norms and values to shape world history. Feminists, for their part, have sometimes highlighted continuity, by portraying patriarchy (see p. 417) as a historical constant, found in all historical and contemporary societies.

'Eastern question'. The 'Eastern question' refers to the structural instabilities of the Balkans region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These instabilities resulted from a power vacuum which occurred through the territorial and political decline of the Ottoman Empire, which had once covered the Middle East, much of south-eastern Europe and parts of North Africa. This meant that the Balkans, a region consisting of a complex pattern of ethnic and religious groupings which, by the late nineteenth century, were increasingly animated by nationalist aspirations, sparked the expansionist ambitions of two of Europe's traditional great powers, Russia and Austria-Hungary. But for this, the assassination of the Austrian archduke Franz Ferdinand in June 1914 may have remained a localized incident. As it was, it led to war between Russia and Austria-Hungary, which turned into a continent-wide war and eventually a world war.

Wider explanations of the outbreak of WWI have drawn attention to developments such as the advent of imperialism and the impact of nationalism. As discussed earlier, the late nineteenth century had witnessed a remarkable period of colonial expansion and particularly a 'scramble for Africa'. Marxist historians have sometimes followed V. I. Lenin in viewing imperialism as the core explanation for world war. Lenin (1916) portrayed imperialism as the 'highest' stage of capitalism, arguing that the quest for raw materials and cheap labour abroad would lead to intensifying colonial rivalry amongst capitalist powers, eventually precipitating war. However, critics of Lenin's Marxist interpretation of WWI have argued that in interpreting imperialism as essentially an economic phenomenon he failed to take account of a more powerful force in the form of nationalism. From the late nineteenth century onwards, nationalism had become enmeshed with militarism and **chauvinism**, creating growing support for expansionist and aggressive foreign policies amongst both political elites and the general public. In this view, the spread of chauvinist or expansionist nationalism both fuelled 'new' imperialism and created intensifying international conflict, eventually leading to war in 1914.

Road to World War II

World War I was meant to be the 'war to end all wars', and yet within a generation a second world war broke out. World War II was the world's biggest military confrontation. Over 90 million combatants were mobilized with estimates of the war dead, including civilians, ranging from 40 to 60 million. The war was more 'total' than WWI, in that the proportion of civilian deaths was much greater (due to indiscriminate air attacks and the murderous policies of the Nazi regime, particularly towards Jewish people), and the level of disruption to domestic society was more intense, with economies being restructured to support the war effort. The reach of warfare during WWII was also truly global. The war started as a European war with the invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939 by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, leading, within days, to the UK and France declaring war on Germany. Denmark, Norway, Belgium and the Netherlands were engulfed in war through Germany's *Blitzkrieg* ('lightning war') attacks in 1940. In 1941 an Eastern Front opened up through the German invasion of Yugoslavia, Greece and, most crucially, Russia. The war in Asia was precipitated by the Japanese attack on the US military base at Pearl Harbour in Hawaii on 7 December 1941, which also drew the USA into the war against Germany and Italy and resulted in fighting in Burma and

● **Chauvinism**: An uncritical and unreasoned dedication to a cause or group, typically based on a belief in its superiority, as in 'national chauvinism'.

KEY EVENTS . . .

World history, 1900–45

1900–01	Boxer Rebellion in China
1904–05	Russo-Japanese War
1914	World War I begins
1915	Armenian genocide
1917	Russian Revolution creates world's first communist state
1919	Treaty of Versailles
1922	Mussolini seizes power in Italy
1929	Wall Street Crash (October); Great Depression begins
1929	Stalin begins forced collectivization in Soviet Union
1930	Japan invades Manchuria
1932	F.D. Roosevelt elected US President, the New Deal starts
1933	Hitler becomes Chancellor of Germany
1934	Mao Zedong begins the Long March
1935	Italy invades Abyssinia (Ethiopia)
1936	Germany reoccupies the Rhineland
1938	*Anschluss* with Austria
1938	Munich Agreement
1939	World War II begins
1941	Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour
1942–3	Battle of Stalingrad
1942–5	Holocaust extermination campaign
1945	End of WWII in Europe (May) and against Japan (September)

across much of south-east Asia and the Pacific. The war also spread to North Africa from 1942 onwards. The war in Europe ended in May 1945 with the capitulation of Germany, and the war in Asia ended in August 1945, following the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The factors that were decisive in determining the outcome of WWII were the involvement of the USSR and the USA. War against Russia forced Germany to fight on two fronts, with the Eastern Front attracting the bulk of German manpower and resources. Following the Battle of Stalingrad in the winter of 1942–3, Germany was forced into a draining but remorseless retreat. The involvement of the USA fundamentally affected the economic balance of power by ensuring that the resources of the world's foremost industrial power would be devoted to ensuring the defeat of Germany and Japan. However, the origins of WWII have been a subject of even greater historical controversy than the origins of WWI. The main factors that have been associated with the outbreak of WWII have been:

- The WWI peace settlements
- The global economic crisis
- Nazi expansionism
- Japanese expansionism in Asia.

E. H. Carr (1892–1982)

British historian, journalist and international relations theorist. Carr joined the Foreign Office and attended the Paris Peace Conference at the end of WWI. Appointed Woodrow Wilson Professor of International Politics at the University College of Wales at Aberystwyth in 1936, he later became assistant editor of *The Times* of London before returning to academic life in 1953. Carr is best known for *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939* (1939), a critique of the entire peace settlement of 1919 and the wider influence of 'utopianism' on diplomatic affairs, especially a reliance on international bodies such as the League of Nations. He is often viewed as one of the key realist theorists, drawing attention to the need to manage (rather than ignore) conflict between 'have' and 'have-not' states. Nevertheless, he condemned cynical *realpolitik* for lacking moral judgement. Carr's other writing includes *Nationalism and After* (1945) and the quasi-Marxist 14-volume *A History of Soviet Russia* (1950–78).

Many historians have seen WWII as, in effect, a replay of WWI, with the Treaty of Versailles (1919) marking the beginning of the road to war. In this sense, the years 1919–39 amounted to a 'twenty-year truce'. Critics of Versailles tend to argue that it was shaped by two incompatible objectives. The first was the attempt to create a liberal world order by breaking up the European empires and replacing them with a collection of independent nation-states policed by the League of Nations, the world's first attempt at global governance (see p. 455). The second, expressed in particular by France and the states neighbouring Germany, was the desire to make Germany pay for the war and to benefit territorially and economically from its defeat. This led to the 'war guilt' clause, the loss of German territory on both western and eastern borders, and to the imposition of **reparations**. Although it set out to redress the European balance of power, Versailles therefore made things worse. Realists have often followed E.H. Carr in arguing that a major cause of the 'thirty-year crisis' that led to war in 1939 was wider faith in 'utopianism', or liberal internationalism. This encouraged the 'haves' (the WWI victors) to assume that international affairs would in future be guided by a harmony of interests, inclining them to disregard bids for power by the 'have-nots' (in particular Germany and Italy).

The second major factor that helped to foster intensifying international tension in Europe was the global economic crisis, 1929–33. Sparked by the Wall Street Crash of October 1929, this highlighted both the higher level of interconnectedness of the global economy (through its rapid spread across the industrialized world) and the structural instability of its financial systems in particular. The main political impact of the economic crisis was a rise in unemployment and growing poverty, which, in politically unstable states such as Germany, invested radical or extreme political solutions with greater potency. Economically, the crisis resulted in the abandonment of free trade in favour of protectionism and even in **autarky**, the turn to economic nationalism helping to fuel the rise of political nationalism and international distrust.

However, the main controversies surrounding the origins of WWII concern the role and significance of Nazi Germany. Historians have disagreed about both the importance of ideology in explaining the outbreak of war (can German

● **Reparations**: Compensation, usually involving financial payments or the physical requisition of goods, imposed by victors on vanquished powers either as punishment or as a reward.

● **Autarky**: Economic self-sufficiency, often associated with expansionism and conquest to ensure the control of economic resources and reduce economic dependency on other states.

Focus on . . .
Hitler's war?

The debate about Hitler's personal responsibility for WWII has been particularly intense. Those who subscribe to the 'Hitler's war' thesis emphasize the clear correlation between the three aims he set out for Germany in *Mein Kampf* (1924) and unfolding Nazi expansionism in the 1930s. Hitler's 'war aims' were, first, to achieve a Greater Germany (achieved through the incorporation of Austria and the Sudetan Germans into the Third Reich); second, the expansion into eastern Europe in search of *lebensraum* or 'living space' (achieved through the invasion of Russia); and third, a bid for world power through the defeat of the major sea empires, Britain and USA. This view is also supported by the fact that Nazi Germany operated, in effect, as Hitler's state, with power concentrated in the hands of a single, unchallengeable leader.

On the other hand, opponents of this view have emphasized the limitations of the 'great man' theory of history (in which history is seen to be 'made' by leaders acting independently of larger political, social and economic forces). Marxist historians, for example, have drawn attention to the extent to which Nazi expansionism coincided with the interests of German big business. Others have drawn attention to miscalculation on the part of both Hitler and those who sought to contain Nazi aggression. The chief culprits here are usually identified as a lingering belief in liberal internationalism across much of Europe, which blinded statesmen generally to the realities of power politics, and the UK's policy of **appeasement**, which encouraged Hitler to believe that he could invade Poland without precipitating war with the UK and eventually the USA.

aggression and expansionism be explained largely in terms of the rise of fascism and, specifically, Nazism?) and the extent to which the war was the outcome of the aims and deliberate intentions of Adolf Hitler. German foreign policy certainly became more aggressive after Hitler and the Nazis came to power in 1933. The Rhineland was occupied in 1936, Austria was annexed in 1938, the Sudetenland portion of Czechoslovakia was occupied and the rest of Czechoslovakia invaded in 1938–9, then Poland was invaded in September 1939. Moreover, the fact that fascist and particularly Nazi ideology blended **social Darwinism** with an extreme form of chauvinist nationalism appeared to invest Hitler's Germany with a sense of messianic or fanatical mission: the prospect of national regeneration and the rebirth of national pride through war and conquest. Others, on the other hand, have argued that Nazi foreign policy was dictated less by ideology and more by either geopolitical factors or by a political culture that was shaped by the nineteenth-century unification process. From this perspective, there was significant continuity between the foreign policy goals of the Nazi regime and the preceding Weimar Republic (1919–33) and early Wilhelmine Germany, the turn to aggressive expansion in the 1930s being explicable more in terms of opportunity than ideology.

However, unlike WWI, WWII did not originate as a European war which spilled over and affected other parts of the world; important developments took place in Asia, notably linked to the growing power and imperial ambition of Japan. In many ways the position of Japan in the interwar period resembled that of Germany before WWI: the growing economic and military strength of a single state upset the continental balance of power and helped to fuel expan-

● **Appeasement**: A foreign policy strategy of making concessions to an aggressor in the hope of modifying its political objectives and, specifically, avoiding war.

● **Social Darwinism**: The belief that social existence is characterized by competition or struggle, 'the survival of the fittest', implying that international conflict and probably war are inevitable.

CONCEPT

Third World

The term 'Third World' drew attention to the parts of the world that, during the Cold War, did not fall into the capitalist so-called 'First World' or the communist so-called 'Second World'. The less developed countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America were 'third' in the sense that they were economically dependent and often suffered from widespread poverty. The term also implied that they were 'non-aligned', the Third World often being the battleground on which the geopolitical struggle between the First and Second Worlds was conducted. The term Third World has gradually been abandoned since the 1970s due to its pejorative ideological implications, the receding significance of a shared colonial past, and economic development in Asia in particular.

sionist tendencies. Japan's bid for colonial possessions intensified in the 1920s and 1930s, in particular with the occupation of Manchuria in 1931 and the construction of the puppet state of Manchukuo. In 1936, Japan joined with Germany and Italy to form the Anti-Comintern Pact which developed into a full military and political alliance, the 'Pact of Steel', in 1939 and eventually the Tripartite Pact in 1940. However, expansionism into Asia brought growing tension between Japan and the UK and the USA. Calculating that by 1941 its naval forces in the Pacific had achieved parity with those of the USA and the UK, and taking advantage of the changing focus of the war once Germany had invaded Russia in June 1941, Japan decided deliberately to provoke confrontation with the USA through the pre-emptive strike on Pearl Harbour. By drawing the USA into WWII, this act also effectively determined its outcome.

End of Empires

1945 was a turning point in world history in a number of respects. These include that it instigated a process of decolonization that witnessed the gradual but dramatic disintegration of the European empires. Not only did 'end of empire' symbolize the larger decline of Europe, but it also set in train, across much of Asia, Africa and the Middle East in particular, political, economic and ideological developments that were going to have profound implications for global politics.

The process whereby European control of overseas territories and peoples was gradually dismantled had begun after WWI. Germany was forced to give up its colonies and the British dominions were granted virtual independence in 1931. However, the process accelerated greatly after WWII through a combination of three factors. First, the traditional imperial powers (especially the UK, France, Belgium and The Netherlands) were suffering from 'imperial over-reach' (Kennedy 1989). Second, a decisive shift against European colonialism had occurred in the diplomatic context as a result of the ascendancy of the USA over Western Europe and the capitalist West in general. US pressure to dismantle imperialism became more assertive after WWII and more difficult to resist. Third, resistance to colonialism across Asia, Africa and Latin America became fiercer and more politically engaged. This occurred, in part, through the spreading influence in what came to be known as the Third World of two sets of western ideas: nationalism and Marxism-Leninism. In combination, these created a potent form of anti-colonial nationalism across much of the Third World in pursuit of 'national liberation', implying not only political independence but also a social revolution, offering the prospect of both political and economic emancipation.

The end of the British Empire, which had extended across the globe and, at its greatest extent after WWI, extended over 600 million people, was particularly significant. India was granted independence in 1947, followed by Burma and Sri Lanka in 1948, and Malaya in 1957, with the UK's African colonies achieving independence in the late 1950s and early 1960s. By 1980, when Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia) achieved independence, the end of the British Empire had brought 49 new states into existence. Although the UK had confronted military resistance in Malaya and Kenya in particular, the logic of inevitable decolonization was accepted, meaning that the process was generally peaceful. This contrasted with French experience, where a greater determina-

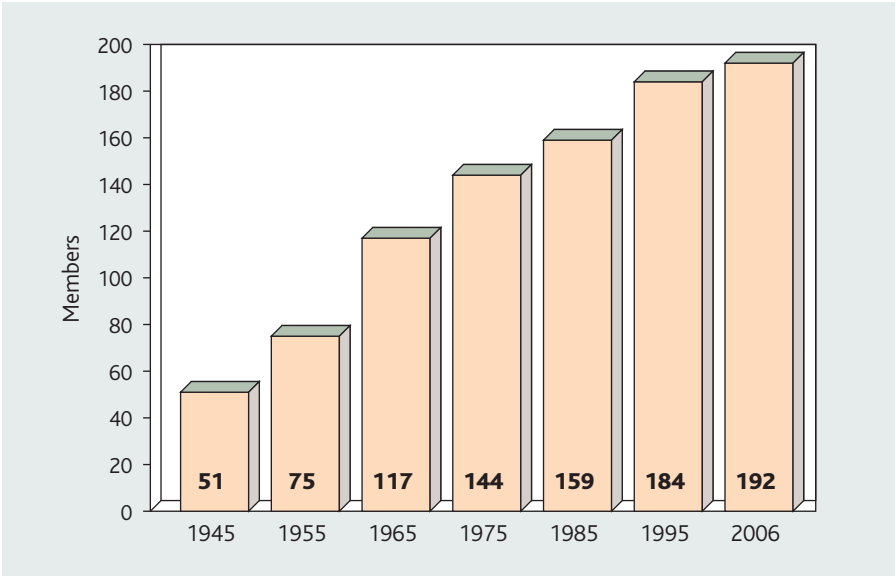


Figure 2.2 **Growth of membership of the United Nations, 1945 to present**

tion to retain her imperial status resulted in a prolonged and ultimately fruitless war to resist Vietnamese independence, 1945–54, and the similarly fruitless Algerian War of Independence, 1954–62. The final major European empire to be dismantled was that of Portugal, which occurred following the overthrow of the military dictatorship in Lisbon in 1974. Africa's final colony, Namibia (formerly known as South West Africa), achieved independence in 1990, once South Africa accepted that it could not win its war against national liberation forces.

It may be possible to argue that the implications of decolonization were more profound than those of the Cold War, and it certainly had an impact over a longer period of time. In the first place, the early decades after WWII witnessed the most dramatic and intense process of state construction in world history. European decolonization in the Third World more than tripled the membership of the UN, from about 50 states in 1945 to over 150 states by 1978 (see Figure 2.2). This meant that the European state-system that had originated in the seventeenth century became a truly global system after 1945. However, the end of empire also significantly extended the reach of superpower influence, highlighting the fact that decolonization and the Cold War were not separate and distinct processes, but overlapping and intertwined ones. The developing world increasingly became the battleground on which the East–West conflict was played out. In this way, the establishment of a global state-system, and the apparent victory of the principle of sovereign independence, coincided with a crucial moment in the advance of globalization: the absorption of almost all parts of the world, to a greater or lesser extent, into rival power blocs. This process not only created a web of strategic and military interdependence but also resulted in higher levels of economic and cultural penetration of the newly independent states.

CONCEPT

Superpower

First used as 'super-power' by William Fox (1944), the term indicates a power that is greater than a traditional 'great power' (see p. 7). For Fox, superpowers possessed great power 'plus great mobility of power'. As the term tends to be used specifically to refer to the USA and the Soviet Union during the Cold War period, it is of more historical than conceptual significance. To describe the USA and the Soviet Union as superpowers implied that they possessed (1) a global reach, (2) a predominant economic and strategic role within their respective ideological bloc or sphere of influence, and (3) preponderant military capacity, especially in terms of nuclear weaponry.

Finally, the achievement of formal independence had mixed consequences for developing world states in terms of economic and social development. In the case of the so-called 'tiger' economies of East and southeast Asia and many of the oil producing states of the Gulf region, high levels of growth were achieved, banishing poverty and bringing wider prosperity. Despite the political upheavals of the Mao period in China, 1949–75, steady levels of economic growth laid the foundation for the subsequent transition to a market economy and rising growth rates from the 1980s onwards. However, many other areas were less fortunate. Across what started from the 1970s to be called the 'global South' (see p. 360), and most acutely in sub-Saharan Africa (the 'Fourth World'), widespread and sometimes acute poverty persisted.

Rise and fall of the Cold War

If the 'short' twentieth century was characterized by the ideological battle between capitalism and communism, 1945 marked a dramatic shift in the intensity and scope of this battle. This occurred through an important transformation in world order. Although badly shaken by WWI and having experienced economic decline relative in particular to the USA, Europe and European powers had been the major forces shaping world politics in the pre-1939 world. The post-1945 world, however, was characterized by the emergence of the USA and the USSR as 'superpowers', predominant actors on the world stage, apparently dwarfing the 'great powers' of old. The superpower era was characterized by the Cold War, a period marked by tensions between an increasingly US-dominated West and a Soviet-dominated East. The multipolarity (see p. 230) of the pre-WWII period thus gave way to Cold War bipolarity (see p. 216).

The first phase of the Cold War was fought in Europe. The division of Europe that had resulted from the defeat of Germany (the Soviet Red Army having advanced from the east and the USA, the UK and their allies having pushed forward from the west) quickly became permanent. As Winston Churchill put it in his famous speech in Fulton, Missouri in 1946, an 'iron curtain' had descended between East and West, from Lübeck in Northern Germany to Trieste in the Adriatic. Some trace back the start of the Cold War to the Potsdam Conference of 1945, which witnessed disagreements over the division of Germany and Berlin into four zones, while others associate it with the establishment of the so-called 'Truman Doctrine' in 1947, whereby the USA committed itself to supporting 'free people', later instigating the Marshall Plan, which provided economic support for the rebuilding of war-torn Europe in the hope that it would be able to resist the appeal of communism. The process of division was completed in 1949 with the creation of the 'two Germanys' and the establishment of rival military alliances, consisting of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and, in 1955, the Warsaw Pact. Thereafter, the Cold War became global. The Korean War (1950–53) marked the spread of the Cold War to Asia following the Chinese Revolution of 1949. However, how did the Cold War start in the first place?

There is a little controversy over the broad circumstances that led to the Cold War: in line with the assumptions of realist theorists, superpower states provided an irresistible opportunity for aggrandizement and expansion which made rivalry between the world's two superpowers virtually inevitable. In the case of the USA and the Soviet Union, this rivalry was exacerbated by their common

- The notion of a 'cold war' suggests a condition of 'neither war nor peace'. However, to describe US–Soviet relations during this period as a 'war' (albeit a 'cold' one) is to suggest that levels of antagonism between the two powers were so deep and impassioned that they would have led to direct military confrontation had circumstances allowed. In practice, this only applied to the first, most hostile, phase of the so-called Cold War, as tensions began to ease after the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. The idea of an enduring 'cold war' may therefore have been shaped by ideological assumptions about the irreconcilability of capitalism and communism.

Deconstructing . . .

'COLD WAR'

- The Cold War was supposedly 'cold' in the sense that superpower antagonism did not lead to a 'fighting war'. This, nevertheless, remained true only in terms of the absence of direct military confrontation between the USA and the Soviet Union. In respect of covert operations, so-called proxy wars and conflicts that were clearly linked to East–West conflict (Korean, Vietnam, the Arab–Israeli wars and so on) the Cold War was 'hot'.

geopolitical interests in Europe and by a mutual deep ideological distrust. Nevertheless, significant debates emerged about responsibility for the outbreak of the Cold War, and these were closely linked to the rivalries and ideological perceptions that helped to fuel the Cold War itself. The traditional, or 'orthodox', explanation for the Cold War lays the blame firmly at the door of the Soviet Union. It sees the Soviet stranglehold over Eastern Europe as an expression of long-standing Russian imperial ambitions, given renewed impetus by the Marxist-Leninist doctrine of world-wide class struggle leading to the establishment of international communism.

A 'revisionist' interpretation of the Cold War was nevertheless developed that attracted growing support during the Vietnam War (1964–75) from academics such as Gabriel Kolko (1985). This view portrayed Soviet expansionism into Eastern Europe as defensive rather than aggressive, motivated essentially by the desire for a **buffer zone** between itself and a hostile West, and a wish to see a permanently weakened Germany. Various 'post-revisionist' explanations have also been developed. Some of these acknowledge the hegemonic ambitions of both superpowers, arguing that the Cold War was the inevitable consequence of a power vacuum that was a product of the defeat of Germany and Japan as well as the exhaustion of the UK (Yergin 1980). Alternative explanations place a heavier emphasis on misunderstanding and missed opportunities. For example, there had

● **Buffer zone**: An area, state or collection of states located between potential (and more powerful) adversaries, reducing the likelihood of land-based attack in particular.

Debating . . .
Was the Cold War inevitable?

There is always a tendency to read inevitability into historical events: they happened because they *had* to happen; history has a predestined course. In the case of the Cold War, this debate has raged with a particular passion, because it is linked to rival theories about the factors that drive world politics. Is history shaped by irresistible political or ideological forces, or is it, all too often, a product of misperceptions and miscalculations?

YES

Dynamics of bipolarity. Realist theorists have argued that the Cold War is best understood in terms of power politics and the nature of the international system. In this view, states are primarily concerned with their own survival and therefore prioritize military and security concerns. However, their ability to pursue or maintain power is determined by the wider distribution of power within the international system. What made the Cold War inevitable was that after WWII the defeat of Germany, Japan and Italy and the long-term decline of victorious states such as the UK and France created a bipolar world order in which the USA and the Soviet Union had predominant influence. The shape of global politics in the post-WWII era was therefore clear. Bipolarity meant that rivalry and hostility between the USA and the Soviet Union was inevitable, as each sought to consolidate and, if possible, expand its sphere of influence. This led to growing enmity between a US-dominated West and a Soviet-dominated East. A world of multiple great powers had given way to a world dominated by two superpowers, and peace and cooperation between these superpowers was impossible.

The ideological 'long war'. An alternative version of Cold War inevitability portrays ideology as the irresistible driving force. In this view, the Cold War was essentially an expression of the global ideological struggle between capitalism and communism that emerged in the nineteenth century but assumed more concrete form after the Russian Revolution of 1917. Antagonism between capitalism and communism derives from the fact that they represent incompatible modes of economic organization; in effect, competing visions of the future. The Cold War was therefore a battle between the capitalist West and the communist East, the USA and the Soviet Union being merely the instruments through which it was fought. The Cold War, thus, became inevitable once fascism had been vanquished in 1945, leaving global politics to be structured by East–West conflict.

NO

Western misperceptions about the Soviet Union. The Cold War was not dictated by either bipolarity or ideology, but came about through a process of mistake, miscalculation and misinterpretation. Both key actors blundered in missing opportunities for peace and cooperation; instead, escalating misperception created a mentality of 'bombs, dollars and doctrines' that made mutual suspicion and ingrained hostility seem unavoidable. Western misperceptions about the Soviet Union were based on the assumption that Soviet foreign policy was determined by ideology rather than territorial security. The Soviet Union's primary concerns were permanently to weaken Germany and to create a buffer zone of 'friendly' states in Eastern Europe. However, by 1946–7, US policy analysts were starting to see the creation of the Soviet bloc as either an expression of deep-seated Russian imperial ambitions or as a manifestation of the Marxist-Leninist doctrine of worldwide class struggle. Key figures in the Truman administration came to believe that they were confronting a Soviet Union bent on pursuing world revolution, and increasingly acted accordingly.

Soviet misperceptions about the West. The Soviet Union, particularly under Stalin, was influenced by a deep distrust of the West, borne out of inter-war fears about 'capitalist encirclement'. Paralleling western misperceptions, Soviet leaders believed that US foreign policy was guided more by ideological considerations, particularly anti-communism, rather than by strategic concerns. Thus, the USA's rapidly reducing military presence in Europe (US forces from 3.5 million in May 1945 to 400,000 the following March, and eventually to 81,000) had little or no impact on Soviet policy-makers, who failed to understand that the USA genuinely wanted cooperation after WWII, albeit on its own terms. The mutual interest that the Soviet Union and the USA had in establishing a possible long-term relationship (based on a shared desire to reduce their defence burden and plough resources instead into domestic reconstruction) thus proved to be insufficiently strong to contain the drift towards fear and antagonism.

KEY EVENTS . . .

The Cold War period

1945	United Nations created (June)
1945	Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bomb attacks (August) (see p. 265)
1946	Nuremberg and Tokyo Trials begin (see p. 335)
1947	Truman Doctrine announced (April)
1947	Marshall Plan introduced (June)
1948–9	Berlin Blockade/Airlift
1949	Soviet atomic bomb explosion (August)
1949	Chinese Revolution (October)
1950–53	Korean War
1955–75	Vietnam War
1956	Soviet invasion of Hungary
1961	Berlin Wall is erected
1961	Yuri Gagarin first person in space
1962	Cuban Missile Crisis
1967	Six Day War
1968	Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia
1969	Apollo 11 lands on the moon
1971	Communist China joins the UN
1973	Oil crisis
1977	Economic reforms begin in China
1979	Islamic Revolution in Iran
1980	Soviet Union invades Afghanistan
1980–8	Iran–Iraq War
1985	Gorbachev becomes Soviet leader
1989	Berlin Wall falls (November 9) (see p. 43)
1990	CSCE meeting formally ends the Cold War (November)
1991	Collapse of the Soviet Union (December)

been early signs of hope in President Roosevelt's belief in peaceful co-operation under the auspices of the newly-created United Nations, and also in Stalin's distinctly discouraging attitude towards Tito in Yugoslavia and Mao in China.

The Cold War was not a period of consistent and unremitting tension: it went through 'warmer' and 'cooler' phases, and at times threatened to become a 'hot' war. The Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 was probably the moment at which direct confrontation between the superpowers came closest to happening. The fact that this exercise in **brinkmanship** ended peacefully perhaps demonstrated the effectiveness of the condition of **Mutually Assured Destruction** in preventing tension between the superpowers developing into military confrontation. However, the bipolar model of the Cold War became increasingly less accurate from the 1970s onwards. This was due, first, to the growing fragmentation of the communist world (notably, the deepening enmity between Moscow and Beijing), and second, to the resurgence of Japan and Germany as 'economic

● **Brinkmanship**: A strategy of escalating confrontation even to the point of risking war (going to the brink) aimed at persuading an opponent to back down.

● **Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD)**: A condition in which a nuclear attack by either state would only ensure its own destruction, as both possess an invulnerable second-strike capacity.

superpowers'. This was reflected in the emerging multipolarity of the 1963–71 period and, more clearly, to the era of **détente** between East and West, 1972–80. *Détente* nevertheless ended with the advent of the 'Second' Cold War in 1980, which was a product of the Reagan administration's military build-up and more assertively anti-communist and anti-Soviet foreign policy.

However, when the Cold War came to an end, the end was dramatic, swift and quite unexpected. Over 70 years of communism collapsed in just two years, 1989–91, and where communist regimes survived, as in China, a process of radical change was taking place. During the momentous year of 1989, communist rule in Eastern Europe was rolled back to the borders of the Soviet Union; in 1990 the CSCE Paris Conference formally announced the end of the Cold War; and in 1991 the Soviet Union itself collapsed. Nevertheless, debate about the end of the Cold War is mired in as much ideological controversy as the debate about its origins (see p. 218). The range of factors that have been associated with the collapse of communism and the end of the Cold War include the following:

- The structural weaknesses of Soviet-style communism
- The impact of Gorbachev's reform process
- US policy and the 'Second' Cold War
- Economic and cultural globalization.

Some have argued that the collapse of communism was an accident waiting to happen, the inevitable outcome of structural flaws that doomed Soviet-style regimes to inevitable collapse more effectively than the contradictions identified by Marx as the fatal flaw of the capitalist system. These weaknesses were of two kinds, economic and political. The economic weaknesses were linked to the inherent failings of central planning. Centrally planned economies proved to be less effective than capitalist economies in delivering general prosperity and producing modern consumer goods. Eruptions of political discontent in 1980–91 were thus, in significant measure, a manifestation of economic backwoodsness and expressed a desire for western-style living standards and consumer goods. The political weaknesses derived from the fact that communist regimes were structurally unresponsive to popular pressure. In particular, in the absence of competitive elections, independent interest groups and a free media, single-party communist states possessed no mechanisms for articulating political discontent and initiating dialogue between rulers and the people. There is little doubt that, in addition to economic frustration, the popular protests of the 1989–91 period articulated demand for the kind of civil liberties and political rights that were seen as being commonplace in the liberal-democratic West.

Although structural weaknesses may explain communism's susceptibility to collapse they do not explain either its timing or its swiftness. How did economic and political frustration accumulated over decades spill over and cause the downfall of regimes in a matter of months or even weeks? The answer lies in the impact of the reforms that Mikhail Gorbachev introduced in the Soviet Union from 1985 onwards. There were three key aspects of the reform process. The first, based on the slogan **perestroika**, involved the introduction of elements of market competition and private ownership to tackle the long-term deficiencies of Soviet central planning, drawing on earlier experiments in 'market socialism', particularly in

● **Détente**: (French) Literally, loosening; the relaxation of tension between previously antagonistic states, often used to denote a phase in the Cold War.

● **Perestroika**: (Russian) Literally, 'restructuring'; used in the Soviet Union to refer to the introduction of market reforms to a command or planned economy.

GLOBAL POLITICS IN ACTION . . .

Fall of the Berlin Wall

Events: On November 9, 1989, a weary East German government spokesman announced that travel restrictions would be lifted. Flustered and subjected to further questioning, he then stated that this would take effect 'immediately'. The effect of the announcement was electric. Inspired by the heady excitement that had been generated by the collapse of communist regimes in Poland and Hungary and by weekly mass demonstrations in Leipzig and, on a smaller scale, in other major East German cities, West and East Berliners rushed to the Wall. A euphoric party atmosphere rapidly developed, with people dancing on top of the Wall and helping each other over in both directions. By the morning of November 10, the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, the chief symbol of the Cold War era, had begun. Over the following days and weeks, the borders between the two Germanies and the two parts of Berlin were increasingly opened up. Just as the fall of the Berlin Wall had been inspired by events elsewhere in Eastern Europe, it, in turn, proved to be a source of inspiration. Communist rule collapsed in Czechoslovakia in December, and in Romania rioting first forced the Communist leader Ceauşescu and his wife Elena to flee by helicopter, before they were captured and summarily executed on Christmas Day.

Significance: The fall of the Berlin Wall was the iconic moment in the momentous year of 1989, which witnessed the Eastern Europe Revolutions that effectively rolled back the boundaries of communism to the borders of the Soviet Union and ignited a process of reform that affected the entire communist world. 1989 is widely, and with justification, viewed as one of the most significant dates in world history, ranking alongside 1648 (the birth of the European state-system), 1789 (the French Revolution), 1914 (the outbreak of WWI) and 1945 (the end of WWII and the beginning of the Cold War). The momentum generated in 1989 led directly to a series of world-historical events. First, Germany was reunified in 1990, starting a process through which Europe would be reunified through the subsequent eastward expansion of the EU (see p. 505) and, to some extent, NATO. Also in 1990, representatives of the Warsaw Pact and NATO, the military faces of East–West confrontation, met in Paris formally to declare an end to hostilities, officially closing the book on the Cold War. Finally, in December 1991, the world's first communist state, the Soviet Union, was officially disbanded.

For Francis Fukuyama, 1989 marked the 'end of history', in that the collapse of Marxism-Leninism as a world-historical force meant that liberal democracy had emerged as the sole viable economic and political system worldwide (for a fuller discussion of the 'end of history' thesis, see pp. 512–13). For Philip Bobbitt (2002), the events precipitated by 1989 marked the end of the 'long war' between liberalism, fascism and communism to define the constitutional form of the nation-state. Nevertheless, some have questioned the historical significance of 1989, as represented by the fall of the Berlin Wall. This has been done in two ways. First, it is possible to argue that there is significant continuity between the pre- and post-1989 periods, in that both are characterized by the hegemonic position enjoyed by the USA. Indeed, 1989 may simply mark a further step in the USA's long rise to hegemony. Second, 1989–91 may have marked only a temporary weakening of Russian power, which, as Russia emerged from the crisis years of the 1990s and started to reassert its influence under Putin, led to the resumption of Cold-War-like rivalry with the USA.

Yugoslavia. However, economic restructuring under Gorbachev had disastrous consequences: it replaced an inefficient but still functioning planned economy with one that barely functioned at all. The second aspect of the reform process involved the dismantling of restrictions on the expression of opinion and political debate, under the slogan of ***glasnost***. However, *glasnost* merely gave a political voice to Gorbachev's opponents – hard-line communists who opposed any reforms that might threaten the privileges and power of the party-state elite, as well as radical elements that wished to dismantle the apparatus of central planning and communist rule altogether. Gorbachev thus became increasingly isolated and retreated from 'reform communism' into more radical changes, including the formal abandonment of the Communist Party's monopoly of power. The third, and crucial, aspect of Gorbachev's reforms was a new approach to relations with the USA and Western Europe, the basis of which was the abandonment of the **Brezhnev doctrine**. Its replacement, the so-called 'Sinatra doctrine', allowing the states of Eastern Europe to 'do it their way', meant that Gorbachev and the Soviet Union refused to intervene as, one after another, communist regimes collapsed in 1989–90, symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Alternative explanations of the end of the Cold War draw attention away from internal developments within the Soviet Union and the communist bloc in general, and focus instead on the changing context within which communism operated. The chief external factors contributing to the collapse of communism were the policies of the Reagan administration in the USA and the advance of economic and cultural globalization. The Reagan administration's contribution to this process was in launching the 'Second Cold War' by instigating a renewed US military build-up in the 1980s, particularly in the form of the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) (the so-called 'star wars' initiative) of 1983. Whether intended or not, this drew the Soviet Union into an arms race (see p. 266) that its already fragile economy could not sustain, helping provoke economic collapse and increase the pressure for reform. The contribution of economic globalization was that it helped to widen differential living standards between the East and the West. While the progressive internationalization of trade and investment helped to fuel technological and economic development in the US-dominated West from the 1970s onwards, its exclusion from global markets ensured that the Soviet-dominated East would suffer from economic stagnation. Cultural globalization contributed to the process through the spread of radio and television technology, helping ideas, information and images from an apparently freer and more prosperous West to penetrate the more developed communist societies, particularly those in Eastern Europe. This, in turn, further fuelled discontent and bred support for western-style economic and political reforms.

● ***Glasnost***: (Russian) Literally, 'openness'; used in the Soviet Union to refer to freedom of expression within the context of a one-party communist state.

● **Brezhnev doctrine**: The doctrine, announced by Leonid Brezhnev in 1968, that Warsaw Pact states only enjoyed 'limited sovereignty', justifying possible Soviet intervention.

THE WORLD SINCE 1990

A 'new world order'?

The birth of the post-Cold War world was accompanied by a wave of optimism and idealism. The superpower era had been marked by East–West rivalry that extended across the globe and led to a nuclear build-up that threatened to destroy the planet. As communism collapsed in Eastern Europe, and Soviet power was in retreat both domestically and internationally, President Bush Snr. of the USA

proclaimed the emergence of a 'new world order'. Although the idea of a 'new' world order often lacked clear definition, it undoubtedly expressed quintessentially liberal hopes and expectations. Whereas the Cold War had been based on ideological conflict and a balance of terror, the end of superpower rivalry opened up the possibility of 'liberal peace', founded on a common recognition of international norms and standards of morality. Central to this emerging world order was the recognition of the need to settle disputes peacefully, to resist aggression and expansionism, to control and reduce military arsenals, and to ensure the just treatment of domestic populations through respect for human rights (see p. 304). As 'end of history' theorists such as Francis Fukuyama (1989, 1991) argued, all parts of the world would now irresistibly gravitate towards a single model of economic and political development, based on liberal democracy.

The post-Cold War world order appeared to pass its first series of major tests with ease, helping to fuel liberal optimism. Iraq's annexation of Kuwait in August 1990 led to the construction of a broad western and Islamic alliance that, through the Gulf War of 1991, brought about the expulsion of Iraqi forces. The disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1991, which precipitated war between Serbia and Croatia, saw the first use of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) (renamed the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in 1994) as a mechanism for tackling international crises, leading to hopes that it would eventually replace both the Warsaw Pact and NATO. Although the CSCE had been effectively sidelined by superpower hostility since its creation at the Helsinki Conference of 1975, it was the CSCE heads of government meeting in Paris in November 1990 that produced the treaty that brought a formal end to the Cold War. However, the early promise of international harmony and co-operation quickly proved to be illusory as new forms of unrest and instability rose to the surface.

Stresses within the new world order were generated by the releasing of tensions and conflicts that the Cold War had helped to keep under control. The existence of an external threat (be it 'international communism' or '**capitalist encirclement**') promotes internal cohesion and gives societies a sense of purpose and identity. To some extent, for instance, the West defined itself through antagonism towards the East, and *vice versa*. There is evidence that, in many states, the collapse of the external threat helped to unleash centrifugal pressures, usually in the form of racial, ethnic and regional tensions. This occurred in many parts of the world, but in particular in eastern Europe, as demonstrated by the break-up of Yugoslavia and prolonged bloodshed amongst Serbs, Croats and Muslims. The Bosnian War (1992–5) witnessed the longest and most violent European war in the second half of the twentieth century. Far from establishing a world order based on respect for justice and human rights, the international community stood by former Yugoslavia and, until the Kosovo crisis of 1999, allowed Serbia to wage a war of expansion and perpetrate genocidal policies reminiscent of those used in WWII. Nevertheless, these early trends, hopeful and less hopeful, in post-Cold War world history were abruptly disrupted by the advent of global terrorism in 2001.

● **Capitalist encirclement**: The theory, developed during the Russian Civil War (1918–21), that capitalist states were actively engaged in attempts to subvert the Soviet Union in order to bring down communism.

9/11 and the 'war on terror'

For many, the September 11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington (see p. 21) were a defining moment in world history, the point at which the true

GLOBAL ACTORS . . .

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Type: State • **Population:** 309,605,000 • **Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita:** $47,702
Human Development Index (HDI) ranking: 13/182 • **Capital:** Washington DC

The United States of America was established as a federal republic in 1787, through the adoption of the US Constitution. It was formed by 13 former British colonies that had founded a confederation after the 1776 War of Independence. The nineteenth century was characterized by the establishment of the territorial integrity of the USA as it exists today. By 1912 all 48 states of the continuous land mass of the USA had been created (Hawaii and Alaska were added in 1959). The USA is a liberal democracy (see p. 185) comprising:

- The Congress, composed of the House of Representatives and the Senate (two senators represent each state, regardless of size)
- The presidency which heads the executive branch of government
- The Supreme Court, which can nullify laws and actions that run counter to the Constitution

As the US system of government is characterized by a network of constitutional checks and balances, deriving from federalism and a separation of powers between the legislature, executive and judiciary, it is susceptible to 'government gridlock'. For example, treaties need to be both signed by the president and ratified by the Senate, and although the president is the commander-in-chief, only Congress can declare war.

Significance: The USA's rise to global hegemony started with its economic emergence during the nineteenth century. By 1900, the USA had overtaken the UK as the world's leading industrial country, producing around 30 per cent of the world's manufactured goods. However, burgeoning economic power was only gradually expressed in international self-assertiveness, as the USA abandoned its traditional policy of isolationism. This process was completed in 1945, when the USA emerged as a superpower, commanding unchallengeable military and economic might and exerting influence over the whole of the capitalist West. The USA's rise to global hegemony came about both because the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 left the USA as the world's sole superpower, a hyperpower, and because of close links between the USA and 'accelerated' globalization (so much so that globalization is sometimes viewed as a process of 'Americanization'). US power in the post-Cold War era was bolstered by massively increased defence spending, giving the USA an unassailable lead in high-tech military equipment in particular and, as its response to September 11 demonstrated, making the USA the only country that can sustain military engagements in more than one part of the world at the same time.

However, US power has a paradoxical character. For example, although the USA's military dominance cannot be doubted, its political efficacy is open to question. September 11 thus demonstrated the vulnerability of the USA to new security threats, in this case transnational terrorism. The launch of the 'war on terror' as a response to September 11 also highlighted the limits of US power and was, in some senses, counter-productive. Although the invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 were quickly successful in removing the targeted regimes, both wars developed into protracted and highly complex counter-insurgency wars that proved to be difficult to 'win' in the conventional sense. Moreover, the general tendency of the Bush administration towards unilateralism and in particular its approach to the 'war on terror' damaged the USA's 'soft' power (see p.216) and bred resentment, particularly within the Muslim world. The need to work within a multilateral framework in a more interdependent world has been recognized by shifts that have occurred in US foreign affairs under President Obama since 2008. Perhaps the most significant challenge to US power, however, is the rise of so-called emerging states, and particularly China. Warnings about the decline of US hegemony date back to the 1970s and 1980s, when events such as defeat in the Vietnam War and economic decline relative to Japan and Germany were interpreted as evidence of 'imperial overreach'. The rise of China is nevertheless much more significant, in that it perhaps suggests the emergence of a new global hegemon, with China set to overtake the USA in economic terms during the 2020s.

nature of the post-Cold War era was revealed and the beginning of a period of unprecedented global strife and instability. On the other hand, it is possible to exaggerate the impact of 9/11. As Robert Kagan (2004) put it, 'America did not change on September 11. It only became more itself'. A variety of theories have been advanced to explain the advent of global or transnational terrorism (see p. 284). The most influential and widely discussed of these has been Samuel Huntington's (see p. 514) theory of a 'clash of civilizations'. Huntington (1996) suggested that twenty-first century conflict will not primarily be ideological or economic but rather cultural, conflict between nations and groups from 'different civilizations'. In this light, September 11 and the so-called 'war on terror' that it unleashed could be seen as evidence of an emerging 'civilizational' struggle between the West and Islam. Such a view suggests that the origins of global terrorism lie in arguably irreconcilable tensions between the ideas and values of western liberal democracy and those of Islam, particularly Islamic fundamentalism. Islamic fundamentalists wish to establish the primacy of religion over politics. However, the view that global terrorism is essentially a religious or civilizational issue ignores the fact that radical or militant Islam developed in the twentieth century in very specific political and historical circumstances, linked to the tensions and crises of the Middle East in general and the Arab world in particular. The key factors that have contributed to political tension in the Middle East include the following:

- The inheritance from colonialism
- Conflict between Israel and the Palestinians
- The 'curse' of oil
- The rise of political Islam

Political instability in the Middle East can be traced back to the final demise of the Ottoman Empire in 1918. This led to the establishment of UK and French 'mandates' (trusteeships) over Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and what became Iraq. Western colonialism had a number of debilitating implications for the region. It bred a sense of humiliation and disgrace, particularly as it led to the dismantling of traditional Muslim practices and structures including *Shari'a* law; it resulted in political borders that reflected the interests of western powers and showed no regard for the facts of history, culture and ethnicity; and authoritarian and corrupt government was installed, based on pro-western 'puppet' rulers. Although the mandates were gradually given up during the 1930s and 1940s, western influences remained strong and the inheritance of colonialism was difficult to throw off.

The establishment, in 1947, of the state of Israel was perceived by the surrounding newly-independent Arab states as an extension of western colonialism, the creation of a western outpost designed to weaken the Arab world, defeat in a succession of Arab–Israeli wars merely deepening the sense of frustration and humiliation across the Arab world. The political and symbolic impact of the 'Palestine problem' – the displacement of tens of thousands of Palestinian Arabs after the 1948 war and establishment of 'occupied territories' after the Six-Day War in 1968 – is difficult to overestimate, particularly across the Arab world but also in many other Muslim states. In addition to breeding a festering sense of resentment against western influences that are seen to be embodied in the state of Israel, it also made it easier for corrupt and complacent military dictatorships to

come to power and remain in power, knowing that they could always use the issue of Israel and Palestine to mobilize popular support.

On the face of it, the idea that the possession of the world's largest oil reserves could be a source of political tension and instability strains credibility. However, oil can be viewed as a 'curse' on the Middle East in at least two senses. First, in providing regimes in the Middle East with a secure and abundant source of revenue, it reduced the pressure for domestic political reform, thereby helping entrench complacent and unresponsive government. Oil revenues were also sometimes used to build up extensive military-security apparatus, which were used to repress political opponents and contain discontent. Monarchical **autocracy** and military dictatorship thus remained deeply entrenched in the Middle East. The second drawback of oil was that it guaranteed the continuing involvement in the Middle East of western political and corporate interests, concerned to ensure access to oil resources and, until the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) succeeded in tripling the price of crude oil in the early 1970s, keeping oil prices low. Together with the fact that the Middle East was also an important arena for Cold War antagonism, this helped to fuel anti-westernism and sometimes, more specifically, anti-Americanism. While anti-westernism was expressed during the 1960s and 1970s in the form of Arab socialism, from the 1980s onwards it increasingly took the form of religious fundamentalism.

Political Islam, a militant and uncompromising form of Islam that sought political and spiritual regeneration through the construction of an Islamic state, gained impetus from the potent mix of national frustration, political repression, cultural disjunction and the social frustrations of both the urban poor and young intellectuals in the twentieth-century Middle East. In its earliest form, the Muslim Brotherhood, it moved from being a non-violent, puritanical movement to one that increasingly advocated violence in order to resist all 'foreign' ideologies and construct a pure Islamic state. The profile and influence of political Islam was substantially strengthened by the Iranian Revolution of 1979, which brought the hard-line Shia cleric Ayatollah Khomeini (see p. 192) to power (see Iran's 'Islamic' Revolution, p. 200). Thereafter, radical Islamic groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah ('Party of God') tended to displace secular-based groups, like the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), in leading the struggle against Israel and what was seen as western imperialism. Al-Qaeda (see p. 295), which emerged out of the Islamic fundamentalist resistance fighters who fought against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, 1979–86, has developed into the foremost exponent of global terrorism, increasingly mounting direct attacks on US targets. Through 9/11, al-Qaeda not only demonstrated the new global reach of terrorism but also that in the twenty-first century war can be fought by non-state actors, including loosely-organized terrorist networks, as well as by states.

After 9/11, the USA's approach to the 'war on terror' quickly started to take shape. Its opening act, launched in November 2001, was the US-led military assault on Afghanistan that toppled the Taliban regime within a matter of weeks. Because the Taliban was so closely linked to al-Qaeda and had provided Osama bin Laden and his followers with a base, this war attracted broad international support and became only the second example in which the United Nations endorsed military action (the first one being the Korean War). Influenced by the ideas of neoconservatism (see p. 226), the strategy of the Bush administration was geared to a larger restructuring of global politics, based on the need to

● **Autocracy**: Literally, rule by a single person; the concentration of political power in the hands of a single ruler, typically a monarch.

KEY EVENTS . . .

The post-Cold War period

Jan–Feb 1991	Gulf War
1992	Civil war breaks out in former Yugoslavia
1993	European Union created
April–July 1994	Rwandan genocide
September 1994	Apartheid ends in South Africa
1996	Taliban seize power in Afghanistan
1997–8	Asian financial crisis
1999	Kosovo War
2001	September 11 terrorist attacks on the USA (see p. 21)
October 2001	US-led invasion of Afghanistan
2003	US-led invasion of Iraq
2008	Russia invades Georgia (August) (see p. 232)
September 2008	Global financial crisis deepens

address the problem of 'rogue' states (see p. 224) by promoting democracy, if necessary through pre-emptive military strikes (see p. 225). In January 2002, President Bush identified Iraq, Iran and North Korea as part of a 'axis of evil', later expanding this to include Cuba, Syria and Libya (later dropped from this list). However, it was becoming clear that 'regime change' in Saddam Hussein's Iraq was the administration's next objective, supposedly providing the basis for the larger democratic reconstruction of the larger Arab world. This led to the 2003 Iraq war, fought by the USA and a 'coalition of the willing'.

Although the initial goals of military intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq were speedily accomplished (the removal of the Taliban and the overthrow of Saddam and his Ba'athist regime, respectively), the pursuit of the 'war on terror' became increasingly problematical. Both the Afghan and Iraq wars turned into protracted counter-insurrection struggles, highlighting the difficulties involved in modern asymmetrical warfare (discussed in Chapter 10). Despite improvements to the security position in Iraq in particular, the establishment of civic order and the longer-term processes of state-building and even nation-building have proved to be complex and challenging. Moreover, the US policy of using military intervention in order to 'promote democracy' was widely viewed as an act of imperialism across the Muslim world, strengthening anti-westernism and anti-Americanism. The fear therefore was that the 'war on terror' had become counter-productive, threatening to create, rather than resolve, the clash of civilizations that was fuelling Islamist terrorism.

Shifts in the Bush administration's approach to the 'war on terror' were evident from 2004 onwards, especially in attempts to increase the involvement of the UN, but more significant changes occurred after President Obama came to office in 2009. These involved, in the first place, a reduced emphasis on the use

of military power and a greater stress on building up the USA's 'soft' power (see p. 216). A phased withdrawal of US troops from Iraq was started and Iraqi forces assumed responsibility for security in towns and cities in May 2009. Important overtures were also made to the Muslim world in general and, more specifically, to Iran (in view of its strengthened influence, not least over Iraq, and the belief that it was trying to acquire nuclear weapons), calling for a strengthening of cross-cultural understanding and recognizing the mistakes of the past. The Obama administration's strategy also attempted to give greater attention to the causes of terrorism and not merely its manifestations, addressing long-standing sources of resentment and grievance, most importantly through bolder international pressure to resolve the Palestinian problem.

Shifting balances within the global economy

There is no settled view about exactly when the modern phase of 'accelerated' globalization began. The idea that economic globalization (see p. 94) was happening was only widely accepted during the 1990s. However, the origins of contemporary globalization can be traced back to the general shift in economic priorities following the collapse of the Bretton Woods system (see p. 446) of 'fixed' exchange rates during 1968–72. The shift to floating exchange rates led to pressures for greater financial deregulation and converted the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (see p. 469) and the World Bank (see p. 373) to the ideas of the so-called 'Washington consensus' (see p. 92), under which many parts of the developing world were encouraged to adopt 'structural adjustment' programmes, based on the rigorous (and sometimes disastrous) application of free-market policies. The emphasis on free-market priorities was most eagerly embraced during the 1980s by the Reagan administration in the USA and the Thatcher government in the UK. In this context, the collapse of communism, in 1989–91, had profound economic implications. Together with China's opening to foreign investment, it dramatically widened the parameters of international capitalism, transforming the western economic system into a genuinely global one. Nevertheless, 'shock therapy' market-based reforms had very different consequences in different parts of the post-communist world. In Russia, for example, they led to falling living standards and a steep decline in life expectancy, which provided the basis for a drift back towards authoritarian rule under Putin after 1999.

However, the balance has continued to shift within the new global economy. Economic globalization was intrinsically linked to the growing economic dominance of the USA. US influence over the IMF, GATT (replaced by the World Trade Organization (WTO) (see p. 511) in 1995) and the World Bank has been decisive in wedding these institutions to free-market and free-trade policies since the 1970s. As with the UK in the nineteenth century, free trade in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has provided the USA with both new markets for its goods and sources of cheap labour and raw materials. By 2000, the USA controlled over 30 per cent of global economic output. The emergence of the USA as the most significant actor in the global economy was linked to the burgeoning power of transnational corporations (TNCs) (see p. 99), major firms with subsidiaries in several countries, which are therefore able to switch production and investment to take advantage of the most favourable economic and fiscal circumstances. By the turn of the century, TNCs accounted for 70 per cent of world trade,

with nearly half of the world's biggest 500 corporations being based in the USA.

However, the benefits of global capitalism have not been equally distributed. In particular, much of Africa has suffered rather than benefited from globalization, a disproportionate number of Africans remaining uneducated and undernourished, with the population also suffering disproportionately from diseases such as AIDS. The impact of TNCs on Africa has often, overall, been negative, leading, for example, to a concentration of agriculture on the production of 'cash crops' for export rather than meeting local needs. Other parts of the world have either suffered from the increased instability of a globalized financial system or have experienced declining growth rates through an unwillingness fully to engage with neoliberal or market reforms. The heightened instability of the global economy was demonstrated by the financial crisis in Mexico in 1995, the Asian financial crisis of 1997–98 which affected the 'tiger' economies of Southeast and East Asia, and the Argentine financial crisis of 1999–2002 which led to a severe contraction of the economy.

Twenty-first century trends in the global economy have perhaps been dominated by the rise of new economic powers, the most important of which are China and India. In this light, the most significant development of the post-1945 period may turn out to be, not the rise and fall of the Cold War, or even the establishment of US economic and military hegemony (see p. 221), but the process of decolonization that laid the basis for the emergence of the superpowers of the twenty-first century. If the nineteenth century was the 'European century', and the twentieth century was the 'American century', the twenty-first century may turn out to be the 'Asian century'.

Since around 1980, when the effects of the transition from a command economy to a market economy started to become apparent, China has consistently achieved annual economic growth rates of more than 9 per cent. In 2009, China overtook Germany to become the world's third largest economy, and, if growth rates persist, it has been estimated that it will eclipse the economic might of the USA by 2027. Indian growth levels since the 1990s have only been marginally lower than those of China. The emergence of India as a major economic power can be traced back to the economic liberalization of the 1980s, which gave impetus to the expansion of the new technology sector of the economy and stimulated export-orientated growth. In many ways, the global financial crisis of 2007–09 (see p. 108) both reflected and gave further impetus to the shift in the centre of gravity of the global economy from West to East. Not only was this crisis precipitated by a banking crisis in the USA, and has brought, some argue, the US model of enterprise capitalism into question, but evidence of early economic recovery in China and India showed the extent to which these countries and some of their small neighbours' economies have succeeded in 'de-coupling' themselves from the US economy.

SUMMARY

- The 'modern' world was shaped by a series of developments. These include the final collapse of ancient civilizations and the advent of the 'Dark Ages'; the growing dominance of Europe through the 'age of discovery' and, eventually, industrialization; and the growth of European imperialism.
- WWI was meant to be the 'war to end all wars' but, within a generation, WWII had broken out. The key factors that led to WWII include the WWI peace settlements, the global economic crisis of the 1930s, the programme of Nazi expansion, sometimes linked to the personal influence of Hitler, and the growth of Japanese expansionism in Asia.
- 1945 is commonly seen as a watershed in world history. It initiated two crucial processes. The first was the process of decolonization and the collapse of European empires. The second was the advent of the Cold War, giving rise to bipolar tensions between an increasingly US-dominated West and Soviet-dominated East.
- Cold War bipolarity came to an end through the Eastern European revolutions of 1989–91, which witnessed the collapse of the Soviet Union. This was a result of factors including the structural weakness of Soviet-style communism, the impact of Gorbachev's reform process, the advent of the 'Second Cold War' and the wider implications of economic and cultural globalization.
- 'Liberal' expectations about the post-Cold War period flourished briefly before being confounded by the rise of forms of ethnic nationalism and the growth of religious militancy. This especially applied in the form of 9/11 and the advent of the 'war on terror', which has sometimes been seen as a civilizational struggle between Islam and the West.
- Power balances within the global economy have shifted in important ways. While some have linked globalization to the growing economic dominance of the USA, others have argued that the global economy is increasingly multipolar, especially due to the rise of emerging economies.

Questions for discussion

- Why and how was Europe a dominant influence in the pre-1900 world?
- In what sense, and why, was Germany a 'problem' following its unification in 1871?
- Was WWII really a re-run of WWI?
- Would WWII have happened without Hitler?
- Was rivalry and tension between the USA and the Soviet Union inevitable after 1945?
- Did the Cold War help to make the world more peaceful and stable or less?
- Did anyone 'win' the Cold War?
- Why did hopes for a 'new' world order of international co-operation and peaceful co-existence prove to be so short-lived?
- Was 9/11 a turning point in world history?
- Is China in the process of eclipsing the USA as the most powerful force in global politics?
- Does history 'teach lessons', and is there any evidence that we learn from them?

Further reading

Cowen, N., *Global History: A Short Overview* (2001). A sweeping account of global history from the classical era through to the modern era.

Hobsbawm, E., *Globalization, Democracy and Terrorism* (2008). A short and lucid account of major trends in modern world history, taking particular account of developments in the Middle East.

Spellman, W., *A Concise History of the World Since 1945* (2006). An authoritative analysis of world history since the end of WWII.

Young, J. W. and G. Kent, *International Relations Since 1945: A Global History* (2004). A comprehensive account of international developments during the Cold War and after.

Links to relevant web resources can be found on the *Global Politics* website