World Politics

An Introduction to International Relations

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CHAPTER

4

The state system

This chapter examines the nature of international systems in general and then traces the emergence of the state system, outlining its basic characteristics and principles. The balance between continuity and change is explored first by comparing two phases in the evolution of the state system: the 'Concert' system of the nineteenth century and the 'Cold War' system which emerged after World War II. The chapter then considers the character of the emerging 'post-Cold War' system.

International systems

Over time a variety of international systems – that is to say, regular patterns of interaction among the actors within the arena – have emerged and it is these patterns that constitute the essence of international relations.[1] International systems have emerged at particular historical periods, flourished and then disappeared to be subsumed within, or replaced by, other systems, but they can be analysed in terms of certain characteristics:

- The nature of the *actors* operating within the system: empires, nation-states, city-states, varieties of non-state actors, etc.
- The stratification or *distribution of power* within the system and the structures associated with this.
- The nature of the *interactions* characteristic of the system: patterns of conflict and cooperation, trade war, etc.
- The *norms of behaviour and rules* through which the system is maintained.

This chapter is concerned with the evolution and nature of the contemporary international system, the 'state system'. Before discussing this, however, it will be helpful to consider the above characteristics in a broader historical perspective.

Different systems have included a wide variety of *actors*, from the feudatories existing within the system of the Chinese Chou dynasty, to the Greek and Italian city-states, to the nation-states of the present system. As we have seen, the contemporary system is distinguished by the sheer number of actors, both state and non-state, operating within it.

The second characteristic, the *distribution of power*, reveals wide differences between

the international systems already referred to. In the era of the Roman Empire there was one 'great power', vastly stronger than any other actor with which it came into contact. During the early phase of the Chou dynasty, however, it is estimated that 1,700 small states existed, reflecting great differences in size. For most of the post-1945 period, there were two powers whose strength was markedly greater than that of the other actors in the system. It is also worth noting (a point to be taken up again later) that actors have been graded in terms of different criteria at different periods, including military prowess, economic strength and cultural achievement.

This fact is clearly linked to the *patterns of interaction* which today operate at a global level and create a far more integrated system than had been the case hitherto. The Chinese Chou system, for example, overlapped chronologically with the Greek city-states but there was no contact between the two: each remained a separate international system located in different parts of the arena. The Italian city-states, on the other hand, while operating as a distinct system, did have contacts with other geographical areas. By the end of the fifteenth century, the interactions with northern Europe had become so intense that the city-state system was effectively incorporated into the emerging European states system.

Through these patterns of interaction international systems develop networks of relationships. Some of these are geographically focused, for example the alliance structures characteristic of the state system. Others may be centred on issues and problems and gain expression in the form of international organisations such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). The international system in the late twentieth century is characterised by the complexity of its cross-cutting networks which have developed within the global arena.

Fourth, because they lack centralised and authoritative power to regulate their activities, international systems have relied on *rules and norms of behaviour* which have established expectations regarding the actions of their members. Among the Greek city-states, for example, rules and practices evolved concerning the conduct of war and the resolution of conflict through the processes of arbitration and conciliation (both of which were to survive into later international systems). The mere existence of such rules and practices conditions behaviour; they may not always be observed but this does not mean that they are of no significance.

Within the physical setting – the arena – of international relations, then, a variety of systems have existed each possessing their own features. The contemporary system – the state system – has developed, and now operates, within an arena of greater extent and complexity than in any previous era. The twentieth century has witnessed the emergence of an environment in which the international system occupies the planet's entire physical space. Against this backdrop, the patterns of world politics are developing.

The state system

The development of the state has been described as the world's single growth industry and this is reinforced by the way in which world events are presented. 'Thailand may deport Vietnamese boat people'; 'US outlines a new vision for Europe'; 'Japan split on

plutonium imports': headlines such as these are continual reminders that states are dominant actors on the world stage and have provided concepts, institutions and practices which form the framework within which international relations is conducted. The impression of the centrality of states is reinforced by the frequent use of the term 'state system' as a synonym for 'international system'. How has this system developed?

The emergence of the state system

Sovereignty

The origins of what is now recognised as the state system are to be found in the breakdown of the medieval assumption that a universal order existed based on the dual authorities of the Holy Roman Empire and the Roman Catholic Church. The notion of this universal order, of a single entity – 'Christendom' – came increasingly into conflict with emerging nations and the claims of territorial rulers concerned to assert their independence of both Pope and Emperor.[2] By the seventeenth century, the principle of 'sovereignty', namely that there should be a single focus of authority within a territory, had become widely accepted, as had the right of rulers to determine the religion to be observed within their territories. These ideas were expressed in the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648. Consequently, two key principles of contemporary international relations were gradually established:

1. The principle of *internal sovereignty*, that is, the pre-eminence of the ruler against the claims of other centres of power within the state.
2. The associated principle of *external sovereignty*, in other words, independence from power centres outside the state.

However, it would be wrong to assume that what were momentous changes were instantly understood or accepted. The proposition that some form of overarching international order existed was slow to disappear and the implications of a world of sovereign states was slow to gain recognition. It was left to the great international lawyers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, such as Grotius and Vattel, to grapple with the implications of an international system comprising sovereign states.[3] In other words, just as nation-states themselves have been the subject of a process of evolution, so has the international system to which they have lent their name.

The emerging states of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were the product of a set of interactions between economic, technological, political and social forces which have continued to shape their development and the pattern of relations between them up to the present day. Taking one particular difference, states in the early phase of their creation were not 'nation-states' as this term is now commonly understood. While 'nations' were recognised, they were conceived of as linguistic and cultural rather than political entities and it was not suggested that a relationship existed between such communities and the sovereign state.[4] The latter was the creation of powerful monarchical systems and sovereignty resided in the person of the monarch. Territories and the people living in them were, in a sense, the property of their rulers and they could be transferred from one monarch to another at will.

The rise of nationalism

However, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were to witness profound changes in domestic and international politics through which the state was no longer viewed as the property of the monarch and sovereignty came to be regarded as resting with the people, the 'nation'. During the nineteenth century, the political state and cultural nation were brought into a new relationship alongside the emergence of a revolutionary theory whose effects were to change the shape of international relations, and the consequences of which are very apparent in contemporary world politics.

This new theory, *nationalism*, held as a principle that humanity was divided into cultural groups, or nations, and that these groups should be given identity and expression within their own political communities.[5] Hence the ideal of the nation-state, which would, it was hoped, create a more stable international order.

The relationship between state and nation developed during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; the state, indeed, became 'nationalised'. This trend reflected mutual needs and mutual dependencies. As the role and activities of the state expanded in an international environment characterised by the ever-present reality of external threat and in an era of rapid industrial and technological change, so the bonds between state and society grew stronger.

While nations and the social groups they comprise have found the organisational mechanisms of the state indispensable to the satisfaction of their needs, so the state, in order to perform its functions and achieve its goals as an organisation, has found it necessary to 'nationalise' itself through two processes. First, through the involvement of wider sections of the community in the processes of political management and, second, by fostering a sense of distinctness, of nationhood, focused on the state as a territorial entity. Thus, during the last century of international relations, groups which possess or aspire to a sense of identity have fostered the creation of states. The formation of the modern state of Italy in 1870 and of Israel in 1948 are cases where a pre-existing sense of nationhood resulted in the formation of a territorial nation-state.

More generally, however, states have generated nations through a range of devices: the use of nationalistic symbols, educational systems, encouraging or imposing linguistic uniformity and national military service are obvious examples. Such processes are demonstrated in the wave of nation-state creation as the newly independent states of the Third World emerged from the former colonial empires. Here, the sense of national identity was defined in terms of an external enemy, political and economic imperialism, rather than in the form of cultural, ethnic and linguistic homogeneity which is, usually, noticeably absent.

Third World political leaders have been concerned to develop the idea of the nation as an inseparable element in the creation of new states and the processes of political and economic modernisation. The desire and perceived need to create nation-states in geographical areas far removed from their European origins is, perhaps, the greatest testimony to the strength of this key element in world politics. With the collapse of the Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe and the USSR itself, a new wave of ethnic-linguistic nationalism has been unleashed, as dramatically demonstrated in the former Yugoslavia.

Fragmentation

These two fundamental characteristics of the state system, sovereignty and nationalism, have created one of its most significant characteristics – fragmentation between its component parts. Whereas, as later chapters will demonstrate, cooperation between the building blocks of the system – nation-states – is as much a dimension of international life as is competition and conflict, nevertheless the logic of the twin concepts of sovereignty and nationalism constitutes a powerful force against which the need for harmony has to battle.

As long as the problems confronting societies could be addressed within national boundaries, the consequences of this fragmentation were limited. However, as domestic and international life have become more complex and intertwined and, consequently, the capacity of individual actors to cope with a growing agenda of issues more limited, so the costs of fragmentation have grown.

In many ways, then, the historical evolution of the state system has constituted a dialogue between the fact of an international system in which sovereign states constitute highly significant elements and a growing realisation and fear of its consequences. Bearing this point in mind, what more can be said about the characteristics of this phase of international relations and the principles underpinning the state system?

Concert and Cold War: principles and characteristics of the state system

The state system, like earlier systems which it has replaced, is not static. Different epochs have generated new principles and practices and transformed old ones. As noted earlier, the balance between change and continuity presents problems in terms of analysis and interpretation; a familiar concept such as sovereignty can acquire new meaning and significance in a changing environment. At the same time, events continue to be shaped by an inheritance of ideas and patterns of thought which create links with earlier periods.

In order to demonstrate this more clearly, the four dimensions identified at the beginning of the chapter will be applied to two specific phases in the development of the state system: the mid- to late nineteenth century – a period in the evolution of what is often referred to as the 'Concert of Europe' – and the years following World War II – the height of the Cold War era (see Table 4.1). We shall then examine the nature of the emerging post-Cold War system.

The state as international actor

A continuing feature of the state system is the significance of the state as an actor on the international stage. This flows from three factors:

1. The evolution of the state has produced a set of rules and patterns of behaviour which are immensely influential in world politics;

Table 4.1 The evolving international system

	Concert system (1815–1914)	Cold war system (1945–89)
Actors	Relatively small number of states	Rapid expansion in number of both state and non-state actors
	Growing but limited number of non-state actors	Emergence of a global international system
	System focused on Europe	
	Limited impact of ideological divisions between state actors	Ideological divisions greatly decrease level of homogeneity in international system
	Nationalism emerges as a potent force	
Stratification and structure	Five great powers	Emergence of two 'superpowers'
	Multipolar structure	Bipolar structure; modified by emergence of other power centres; an emerging tripolar system in 1970s
		Military stratification increases with development of nuclear weapons
		Economic stratification increases: North–South divide
Patterns of interaction	Great power war diminishes in frequency; increases of intensity, extent and severity	Pattern of great power war continues; no war in central balance and conflict between superpowers restricted to secondary balance
	Costs of war increase with industrialisation	Costs of war increase with development of nuclear weapons
	Developments in communications lead to expansion of international trade and commerce	International trade and commerce continue to develop but with compartmentalisation into blocs
	Role of diplomacy begins to change with improved communications	Growth of summit and multilateral diplomacy
	Professionalisation of diplomacy	Role of diplomacy challenged by ideological divisions and impact of economic interdependence
	Flexible alliance systems	Rigid alliance systems based on ideological commitment
Rules and practices	A 'managed' balance of power system; conditions for balance undermined by expansion of system and growth of German power	A new 'managed' balance based on self-restraint by superpowers through formal and informal rules
	Use of great power conferences to resolve disputes	Balance of power replaced by balance of terror based on doctrine of mutual assured destruction
		Superpowers use summit diplomacy in managing relationships

2. Its functions and organisational characteristics set it apart in vital respects from other international actors;
3. Its sheer capacity or strength, as will be argued later, place it in a unique position on the international stage.

An obvious difference between the two periods under examination, however, is the extent to which states share the stage with other, 'non-state' actors. The causes and implications of this development will be examined in the following chapter; here, we shall focus on the nature of the state as an actor on the world stage.

Despite the obvious diversity among states, they share three characteristics without which they cannot be said to exist and, therefore, to be fully constituted state actors. These are as follows:

1. A territorial base.
2. A population.
3. A 'sovereign' government (that is, a government enjoying a monopoly in the exercise of legitimate coercive power within its boundaries).

No other international actor possesses such qualities. Some, it is true, may have a limited territorial base; some may have a 'population' in some sense. The Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) might be said to represent a people. However, none, by definition, can possess a government invested with sovereign powers.

However, rather than any one of these characteristics, it is the interaction of each on the others that confers upon the state its peculiar characteristics. The relationship between government and the nation, and the strength that the former can derive from a sense of national identity focused on the territorial state, is not the least of these. In practice, of course, defining the state in such terms serves as a guide rather than a set of rigid principles.

It is clear, for example, that Antarctica is not a state, lacking as it does both a people and a government. Colonies, similarly, are not regarded as independent state actors in as much as they lack their own sovereign government. (This is not to say that colonies were [and are] not international actors, because they can be, as the history of Southern Rhodesia [Zimbabwe] in the1960s indicates, but merely that they do not enjoy the full benefits of sovereign statehood such as the powers to send and receive ambassadors.) However, the point at which former colonial possessions have become states is not always clear. It is hard to say with any precision when Canada and Australia became fully sovereign states. Each was represented at the League of Nations in its own right but the latter did not possess its own diplomatic service until after World War II. The answer to the question 'when does a state exist?' turns in part on the attitude of other states who may or may not 'recognise' its existence. This point will be explored a little further below.

One might consider these characteristics as 'organisational resources' which states can draw on in pursuit of their domestic and international objectives. When considered as political organisations, moreover, it is clear that states possess additional resources which are derived from their activities. The growth of the state as social provider has been accompanied by the creation of vast and complex bureaucratic machines while state spending has greatly increased with the rise of the welfare state. Whereas it is true that

some of the largest multinational corporations have a turnover larger than the GNP of some smaller states, measured by these criteria, the organisational resources of the state appear to be qualitatively and quantitatively different from those of the vast majority of other international actors.

The qualities of states as organisations reflect the functions they perform for their populations, their 'clientele', who consume the resources they are able to provide. In this respect, the key factor which impinges on the role of the state as actor is its multifunctional character.[6] Domestic and international political organisations are able to provide specific services for various individuals and interests. Some international actors, such as the United Nations and its agencies, cover a vast range of issues that are central to domestic and world politics: education, health, employment legislation and environmental pollution do not exhaust the list. But no actor other than the state provides such a multitude of services for its citizens, is able to act as provider of security in a hostile international environment, to maintain public order, to facilitate trade and investment, to arbitrate in domestic disputes and to effect redistribution of wealth in pursuit of social justice.

The point is that in the state there exists a combination of functional scope and organisational capacity to perform roles not available to other actors. This, combined with the ability to serve as a focus for, and expression of, national identity helps to explain the qualities of states that set them apart from other actors.

States and governments

The discussion so far has repeatedly referred to the 'state' as an 'actor'. This usage raises some obvious problems. The states so often cited in newspaper headlines have no physical existence other than in the actions taken on their behalf by people living within their boundaries. States as legal and constitutional abstractions do have a limited role in international affairs it is true: treaties are signed and ratified in their name, indicating that such commitments transcend the lifespan of those entering into them.

Nor do we usually think of the communities living within it – the nation – as a collective entity acting on behalf of the state. This is not to deny that nationalist groups, such as the Basque Nationalists in Spain, are international actors organised to achieve certain objectives through, in part, international activities. Generally, however, the term most widely used to indicate the issues and processes with which this book is concerned, 'inter*national* relations', is misleading. In fact, it is governments acting as agents of the state which are the manifestations of state activity and state interests.

Governments are, effectively, the repositories and the practical expression of state sovereignty in its internal and external dimensions. As already noted, they alone have the authority to exercise control over their populations; the only permissible military force is that employed by governments. Internationally, governments, by means of their foreign policies, are assumed to act in defence of the interests of their state – the 'national interest'. But governments are also complex structures and, as Chapter 5 demonstrates, may well speak with several voices on the world stage, depending on a combination of domestic political factors and the precise character of a given international issue.

'Recognising' governments

To be an effective actor, a government will need to be recognised as the legitimate authority within its territory.[7] As already pointed out, one of the criteria for a state to be legally accepted as an international actor is the recognition of its statehood by the international community and this is partly determined by the extent to which the legitimacy of a government is acknowledged by those it rules over. In an international environment marked by very similar values, as was the case with the state system in the nineteenth century, the issues of legitimacy and recognition were far more clear-cut than in the Cold War era marked by major ideological division.

For some countries, particularly the United States, the act of recognising another regime has come to acquire a sense of moral and political approval, whereas for others a government is recognised as legitimate if it appears to exercise control within its own territory. For example, the attitude of the Reagan administration towards Nicaragua, whereby Washington refused to recognise the legitimacy of, and sought to destabilise, the Ortega government, clearly affected the latter's position as an international actor in terms of its capacity and status in its region and on the broader world stage. A similar point can be made about the Clinton administration and the military regime in Haiti in the mid-1990s. Just how significant the act of recognition or non-recognition of governments can be is amply demonstrated by the unfolding saga of the former state of Yugoslavia as its component elements such as Croatia and Bosnia-Hercegovina sought recognition as independent states from other governments.

These general characteristics of statehood, then, link the Concert and Cold War systems. The nation-state has continued to expand as the dominant form of political organisation. By 1970, over 99 per cent of the world's population was located within sovereign states. Nevertheless, the character of these state actors has changed in important respects. First of all, the great European empires of the pre-1914 era have disappeared, partly in response to the changing needs of the former imperial powers but also because of the combined pressures of nationalism and the rival ideological beliefs of the two dominant powers which emerged after World War II, the United States and USSR, both hostile (for different reasons) to the maintenance of European imperialism.

A second change, already noted but worth emphasising, is the expansion of the tasks assumed by governments, a process beginning in the latter part of the nineteenth century and gathering pace in the twentieth century with the development of the welfare state. Alongside this, the political complexion of government has undergone noticeable modification. Whereas the nineteenth century witnessed the expansion of democratic institutions and processes such as free elections and the extension of the franchise, the trend in the Cold War era was towards the creation of authoritarian regimes and restricted popular participation in political processes. In the Third World particularly, there was a tendency towards one-party states and military rule as liberal-democratic models were frequently rejected as inappropriate to the needs and conditions of modernising states.

Finally, and in many ways most significantly in terms of the way states behave on the international stage, there has been the impact of ideological conflict focused on two rival

and competing images of world order. One, in the form of international socialism, which questioned an international order based on autonomous states and asserted in its stead the reality of competing economic classes. The other (as articulated by the US President, Woodrow Wilson, during World War I) aimed at reform of the existing state system on liberal-democratic and capitalist free trade assumptions. These competing images were to become associated with the USSR and the United States respectively, the two pre-eminently powerful victors of World War II. One consequence of this was to be an era of ideological conflict between international actors markedly different from the situation existing in the nineteenth century, when ideological divisions between liberal and conservative-oriented European states were diminished by mutual interests and not allowed to stand in the way of agreement where this was perceived to be desirable.

Stratification and structure

As with other international systems, the state system has been characterised by a hierarchy of power (stratification) which has produced certain kinds of power structure at different periods in its evolution. Historically, states have frequently been classified under three headings: 'great', 'middle' and 'small' powers. These categories have been refined and expanded, as will be seen later in the chapter, but they have been determined by two essential considerations: the power of states and the function that they perform within the system of states.

Detailed analysis of power as a determinant of international hierarchy will be left until Chapter 11; for the moment, however, it should be noted that a variety of factors relating to power have helped to determine the nature of the state hierarchy as it has evolved. Military and economic resources have remained a consistent influence in determining the relative position of a state within the system. Other factors have been significant at specific periods. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, dynastic prestige and splendour helped to establish great power status but had rapidly diminished in importance by the latter part of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Cultural factors assumed importance during the eighteenth century, technological prowess in the twentieth century.

On the one hand, these indices of power interact with the commitments that states assume. Not infrequently, changes in the international hierarchy have occurred as states overextend themselves and, as a consequence, enter into a period of decline.[8] On the other hand, position in the hierarchy of states can be influenced by the perceptions held by the policy-makers of their state's role in the international system. Thus, countries such as Australia, Canada and Mexico have consciously identified and pursued a role as 'middle powers' in the international system.

In terms of functions, the great powers have come to be recognised as discharging what might be termed a 'managerial' role in the state system, invested with particular responsibilities for the maintenance of order within it. Such a role developed in the early part of the nineteenth century in the wake of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. Under the Treaty of Chaumont, in 1814, the four victorious powers, Britain, Russia, Prussia and Austria, agreed to confer regularly on European affairs. France became a

member of this great power league in 1818. However, the precise number of great powers has fluctuated greatly. By the end of the eighteenth century, Spain, Portugal, the United Provinces, Sweden and Denmark, all considered to be great powers in the seventeenth century, were no longer so regarded.

Whereas the nineteenth-century state system had produced an international hierarchy dominated by five European great powers, Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia, the Cold War era was to witness the relative decline of the first four states and the rise of the latter, alongside the United States, to a position of pre-eminence. Measured in terms of GNP the change is dramatic. In the early nineteenth century, Britain's GNP was greater than any of the other leading states, but, by the early 1990s, it had slumped to sixth in a world league headed by the United States. Not only has the ordering of the states at the top of the world hierarchy changed, the international system has become increasingly stratified in terms of the distribution of wealth between rich and poor countries (see Chapter 9).

Unlike the situation which existed in the nineteenth century, the Cold War era witnessed the rise of a class of great power, the two 'superpowers', which, by virtue of their military and economic capabilities, together with their global interests, were qualitatively different in terms of their potential as international actors from the second level of major powers such as France, Germany and the United Kingdom. (This is not to say that great powers are always successful in converting this potential into actual influence, as will be seen in Chapter 11.) For many purposes, the postwar international system came to resemble a power duopoly rather than the great power oligarchy of the pre-World War I era.

This pattern of stratification is reflected in the power structure of the Cold War phase of the state system. The multipolar structure which operated, with modifications, up until World War II was replaced by a bipolar power structure reflecting the ideological nature of postwar international relations, the dominant role of the superpowers and the creation of rival alliance systems around the two poles. These alliances differed markedly from those of the nineteenth century: competition between rival social, political and economic systems invested NATO and the Warsaw Pact with a range of functions and a complexity of structure unknown hitherto.

Bipolarity did not, however, imply total cohesiveness of the rival blocs or the dominance of the superpowers over their alliance partners. As early as 1948, a split occurred between Yugoslavia and the USSR, to be followed by growing tensions between Peking and Moscow. Within the Western Alliance, differences between the United States and its European allies were evident on a range of issues including nuclear strategy.[9] The emergence of China as another potential superpower during the 1970s encouraged the image of a tripolar rather than a bipolar system.

At the same time new centres of economic power were emerging and challenging the pre-eminence of the United States. Japan, although not a superpower in military terms, seemed destined to become one in economic terms. The European Community, having consolidated its position during the 1960s, was to expand to become the world's largest trading bloc in the 1970s and to find itself increasingly in conflict with both the United States and Japan. The picture presented by the international power structure of the 1980s (sometimes referred to as 'bipolycentric') was one in which two ideologically opposed superpowers continued, by virtue of their military pre-eminence, to dominate an international system in which there was another candidate for superpower status – China. There was dramatically less cohesiveness within the alliance systems than in the early Cold War era and several rival centres of economic power.

Patterns of interaction

Conflict and cooperation

The state system has demonstrated the same basic patterns in the relationships between its constituent elements as have other international systems – a balance between cooperation and conflict. This balance reflects those basic characteristics of the system which have been discussed earlier in the chapter, particularly the tendency towards fragmentation. While, on the one hand, clashes of interest between the members of the system emphasise conflict, on the other, the existence of common problems, which can easily be resolved by mutual action if the system is to be preserved, underscores the need for cooperation.

Furthermore, the evolution of the system itself has helped to determine the balance between the two modes of interaction. At one level, the need for cooperation has developed as societies have become more interrelated, economies more dependent on one another and problems demanding common action, as in the area of the environment, more apparent and hard to manage. Coincidentally, the opportunities for cooperation have grown as developments in technology generally, and communications in particular, facilitate interactions of all kinds.

However, a point made in the previous chapter is worth restating in this context. The emergence of closer international linkages does not necessarily imply an automatic and inevitable movement towards cooperative interaction between actors. Closeness generates friction as well as demands for cooperative behaviour and there is a clear danger in assuming that enhanced communications and economic interdependence will inevitably result in greater global harmony.

It is not only the system which determines the nature of interactions. Individual governments pursue different policies which reflect their own interests, role perceptions and positions within the system and these, in turn, determine their patterns of interactions with the outside world. So, for example, it is possible to find that states which have intensive cooperative interactions with certain actors are indifferent to some and are locked in conflict with others. Levels of interaction will also vary depending on the status and resources of an actor (great powers will engage in a wider set of interactions than will small, regional powers) and policy choices adopted by specific regimes. (Burma, Albania, Romania and Tanzania have, for example, chosen to limit their contacts with the international system, or specific parts of it, in the recent past.)

War and diplomacy

Two forms of interaction have come to be particularly associated with the state system: war and diplomacy. The former is often regarded as the ultimate expression of the absence

of order in a system which lacks the institutions capable of determining and enforcing law. In this sense, violent conflict is seen as a property of the state system and is inseparable from it. For other observers of international relations, however, this type of interaction flows from the character of individual states rather than from properties of the system. Authoritarian states, for example, have often been regarded as inherently prone to use war as a foreign policy tool, while democratic regimes have been viewed as less likely to resort to conflict in pursuit of their goals.

Diplomacy, by contrast, is seen as occupying the other end of the conflict–cooperation spectrum of interstate relations, emphasising the resolution of conflict through dialogue and persuasion. Special emphasis has been placed on the institutions of diplomacy as a means of compensating for the absence of centralised and authoritative decision-making processes in the state system and, indeed, the use of residential embassies accompanies the emergence of the system itself.

Thus special significance is attached to such diplomatic conventions as the inviolability of diplomatic staff and premises. When these are not observed – such as when US troops entered the Nicaraguan ambassador's residence in Panama City following the overthrow of the Panamanian leader, General Noriega, in 1989 – considerable disquiet is expressed within the international community. The key point is that the very processes of international communication are dependent on the security afforded to the diplomatic representatives of governments.

Comparisons between the Concert and Cold War systems in terms of patterns of interactions between their member states reflect, once again, elements of change and continuity. Both periods have witnessed the emergence and development of a multilateral trading system and the expansion of economic linkages. The challenges presented by a growing variety of economic, social and scientific problems have encouraged the creation of international agencies to deal with them and these bring both state and non-state actors together in a variety of contexts. But, as already noted, the international system of the nineteenth century was both more 'compact' and more homogeneous. The international economic institutions created at the end of World War II were not global in their scope because the centrally planned economies of the communist world did not participate, whilst the emerging countries of the Third World remained linked to, but not an integrated element within, the Western international economic system.

On the one hand, therefore, while the twentieth century has witnessed the emergence of a global international system, it is one that is marked by obvious cleavages derived from ideology and economic status which condition the nature of relationships within it. Nowhere is this more clearly evident than in the character of the major alliance systems of the Cold War era. Unlike the situation operating in the nineteenth century, when alliances were flexible and formed for tactical purposes, post-1945 international relations produced ideologically oriented alliances, membership of which reflected the character of political regimes. For a state to transfer from one of the major ideological blocs to the other would presuppose a change in the character of its political system.

Two of the major modes of international interaction, diplomacy and war, also reflect the consequences of ideology. Whereas the nineteenth century witnessed the growth of professional diplomacy and a change in the role of the diplomat as communications technology developed, the Cold War era witnessed both changes to and the continuation of established practices. Diplomacy was challenged by the weakening of the common cultural assumptions on which it rested in the era of the Concert of Europe. The strains of ideological conflict have diminished the utility of, and opportunity for, classical diplomacy.

The wave of attacks against diplomatic personnel (as in the case of the Israeli embassy in London in 1994) and events such as the seizure of the staff of the US embassy in Tehran in 1979 indicate the challenges confronting this traditional channel of international communication. Moreover, an expanding range of issues in contemporary international relations have brought into question the desirability of separating the conduct of domestic and foreign policy through the maintenance of distinct ministries responsible for the latter. At the same time, US–Soviet relations employed, in the form of 'summit diplomacy', a method of diplomacy utilised throughout the nineteenth century: meetings of heads of state or government held to discuss specific international issues.

In terms of patterns of conflict, the two periods once again demonstrate elements of continuity. Although wars between the great powers increased in terms of extent, severity and intensity, they decreased in frequency – a pattern which has continued into the twentieth century.[10] One factor that clearly does differentiate the Concert and Cold War eras is the development of nuclear weapons; the potential cost of a nuclear war ensured that both superpowers were anxious to avoid open warfare. War in the Cold War era occurred outside the central (European/North American) balance, in various areas of the Third World. The incidence of civil as opposed to international wars (the Korean and Vietnam wars, for example) indicates both the ideological nature of much contemporary warfare and the degree to which superpower tensions were reflected in wars limited both in scope and intensity and fought in 'secondary' theatres within the international system.

Rules and practices

The basic rules of the state system are derived from the principles of sovereignty referred to earlier:

- A government is supreme within its own territory.
- Externally, a sovereign government is accountable to no superior authority.
- No other international actor, state or otherwise, has the authority to interfere in the internal affairs of another state.
- Since each government is sovereign within its own boundaries, all sovereign states are equal in a legal sense, despite their obvious disparities in terms of power.

These basic 'rules' condition the form in which world politics is conducted; they are not immutable because governments themselves act in ways which continually modify their operations. Not infrequently, sovereignty is compromised when governments agree to abide by other sets of rules, such as those resulting from membership of international organisations. Nevertheless, sovereignty-related rules continue to provide a framework for international interactions and are widely observed. Where states choose to infringe them it is usually the case that justifications follow.

When the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968, the action was justified in terms of the 'Brezhnev Doctrine', which, in effect, redefined the principles of national sovereignty as they applied to the Soviet bloc, thereby limiting the freedom of action of its members. Both the United Kingdom and Argentina, before, during and after the Falklands conflict of 1982, justified their actions and policies in terms of the vocabulary of sovereignty. In a very different context, debates on the future of the European Union indicate the continuing significance of sovereignty and its associated concepts and values.

These rules of behaviour endure, in the final analysis, because they are found to be useful. Weaker states in the international system have been keen adherents to the principle of sovereignty because it helps, in a minor way, to redress imbalances of power and to provide security. The legal equality of states, for example, ensures Vanuatu representation in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on an equal footing with the most powerful states. The fact that the basic code of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), established at the 1955 Bandung Conference, embraced the principle of non-interference in the affairs of other states indicates the sensitivity with which Third World countries in the Cold War environment regarded the consequences for their often fragile statehood should the force of such rules be weakened. For them, and for other states in certain circumstances, these sovereignty-related rules were resources which could be utilised in the conduct of their foreign policies.

'Anarchy' versus 'society'

The problem is, of course, that sovereignty and its derivative ideas emphasise the decentralised nature of the state system and diminish its capacity to formulate rules that protect the interests of the system as a whole. To the centrifugal forces of sovereignty are added those which flow from nationalism and the assertion of individual national identities. This situation, in particular the lack of any authoritative body able to override the power of sovereign states, has resulted in a common description of the state system as constituting an 'international anarchy', a term that is misleading in two respects.

First, the forces of anarchy are modified by a variety of behavioural norms that produce some of the characteristics of a society.[11] Second, the assumption, derived from developed political systems, that a central locus of power and institutional mechanisms are prerequisites for political systems ignores the fact that there are domestic political systems which operate without such features. Thus the comparison with domestic political structures and the inferences drawn from it can be misleading.

It is possible to identify a variety of rules which modify the centrifugal forces of the state system and confer upon it a degree of order which would not otherwise exist. These range from what might be termed 'practices' – modes of behaviour understood but rarely expressed in a legal format and developed to sustain the system from disintegration – to international agreements expressed in written form and which constitute one element of international law. These rules will be explored at various points in the ensuing chapters and, in the case of international law, discussed in some detail in Chapter 15. For the moment, it is useful simply to note their existence, their function and the basic forms that they assume.

In terms of practices, one which has been particularly identified with the state system

is that of the *balance of power*. This term has been used in a number of ways to describe particular aspects of international politics – the respective power of two state actors. In this sense, one might talk of the balance (or distribution) of power between India and Pakistan. However, the phrase is also used to describe a mechanism for the maintenance of international order, whereby an equilibrium of power is maintained within the international system. Through the processes of alliance formation and reformation, no single state is allowed to dominate the system.

Another practice characteristic of the state system has been that of the 'sphere of influence'. Here, a mutual recognition on the part of two or more states of geographical areas regarded as central to their interests is intended to reduce the likelihood of conflict. Spheres of influence can achieve this objective because 'they regulate behaviour in areas of competition outside the bounds of formal jurisdiction where the possibility of misunderstanding is correspondingly greater'.[12]

The body of rules constituting international law is vast and touches on virtually every aspect of human existence from the conduct of war to trade, environmental issues and labour relations. Again, these will be looked at in some detail in later chapters, but before leaving the issue of rules and practices in the state system, three points should be noted:

1. Not all rules are created by governments. Increasingly, international organisations have come to generate rules in specific areas, and also to monitor their observance.
2. In the final analysis it is governments who decide when rules and practices should be observed and when they should be broken. Because such decisions are intermeshed with foreign policy objectives, the rules of the state system are fragmented and frequently disrupted.
3. Despite the fact that sovereignty-related rules and rules intended to preserve world order are frequently in tension, and notwithstanding the lack of an authoritative central law-giving agency within the state system, rules and practices do condition expectations and patterns of behaviour in a variety of ways.

Again, both Concert and Cold War systems share common features regarding their characteristic rules and practices. An era marked by ideological conflict did not witness the disappearance of the 'sovereignty-related' rules discussed earlier. However, patterns of regulation to counter their worst excesses have reflected the emergence of the nuclear age. First, both Concert and Cold War systems were a reaction to the 'free-for-all' balance of power system characteristic of the eighteenth century – both sought to construct a 'managed' balance based on the recognition of the need for a degree of cooperation to mitigate competition.

Second, in both periods there was a tacit acceptance of the need for a rough parity in military power between the major powers and the necessity for self-restraint in the pursuit of foreign policy objectives. During the nineteenth century, however, the key regulatory principle, as noted above, was the balance of power. This mechanism was to break down in the latter part of the century because major assumptions on which it rested – particularly an approximate equality of power between the five great powers and a defined area of operation – were undermined by the growth of German power and the extension of international rivalries outside the confines of Europe.

The advent of the bipolar, nuclear age with its rigid system of alliances required the creation of new mechanisms of self-regulation by the superpowers, some of them tacit and informal in nature. The fear of a nuclear war produced a new form of managed balance of power (or 'balance of terror') based on the principle of 'mutual assured destruction' should either superpower seek to pursue its objectives at the expense of the other. The dangers of nuclear conflict were lessened by the recognition of spheres of influence within which each superpower operated with caution, recognising the interests of its opponent, the avoidance of war – as already noted – in the central balance of the international system, and the development of techniques (often referred to as 'crisis management') to reduce the likelihood that periods of tension – such as that which arose during the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 – did not lead to the outbreak of war.

After the Cold War

Comparing these two phases in the evolution of the state system reveals the ways in which fundamental concerns deriving from the basic features of the system interact with new developments to produce changing environments in which world politics is conducted. Given the dramatic changes which accompanied the end of the Cold War era and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union, an obvious question arises: To what extent have we entered another phase in the development of the system? And is this phase more akin to some earlier periods in the development of recent international relations?

Trying to provide an answer to such questions poses a number of very real difficulties. Not least is the fact that there is little evidence on which to make out a case. Indeed, it is only with the passing of the Cold War that its nature, and the phases through which it passed, have become clearer. The 1990s mark the beginning of a new period, that much seems obvious, but how that relates to what has gone before and, in particular, whether we are witnessing the emergence of a more or less stable world is highly uncertain.

There is also a problem in teasing out what actually has changed. In the early 1980s, for example, with President Reagan installed in the White House and adopting a more aggressive stance towards the Soviet Union, it became common to refer to the beginnings of a 'second' Cold War, following the relaxation of East–West tensions in the late 1960s and early 1970s. However, despite a less cooperative environment, it soon became clear that too much had changed in the nature of East–West relations for simple comparisons between the intense hostility of the early 1950s and the early 1980s to be drawn.

Thus early analyses of what was to be termed the 'new world order' of the 1990s have focused on a number of developments whose origins can be traced back far beyond the point at which the Cold War era could be said to have ended. To take just two examples which are themes central to the nature of world politics: the relative importance of economic versus miltary power and the growing linkage between domestic and foreign policy. Both of these are often portrayed as inherent features of the post-Cold War international system. So they are, but as will be argued in various parts of this book, they have been increasingly significant features of political life since at least the 1970s. In other words, in making judgements about developments in international relations, it is

important to view them in their broader context so that balanced conclusions can be reached.

Bearing these points in mind, what can be said about this 'post-Cold War' system? To assist in making comparisons, the same categories employed in comparing the Concert and Cold War phases of the state system will be used.

Actors

At one level, the situation here is very much the one described in the Cold War era. In other words, the process of state creation has continued and the number of non-state actors continues to grow. Indeed, the international system since the end of the Cold War appears to be confronting a dangerous wave of subnationalism whereby ever-smaller ethnic groupings lay claim to their own territory as the only means of defending their interests. The former USSR had, by 1994, subdivided into fifteen separate states, with more queuing in the wings; Yugoslavia had disintegrated into bloody conflict; and hardly before German unification had been formalised, the Sorbians in eastern Germany were agitating for their own state, Lusatia.

With regard to non-state actors, as already suggested, their numbers continue to grow apace. At the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, some 15,000 representatives of non-governmental organisations attended. But it is noticeable that their functions and relationship with government may be changing. Rather than viewing governments and NGOs operating almost in separate worlds, there are clear indications that the two are coming together in the pursuit of linked, if not always common, goals. There are several reasons why this might be so. Two will be noted here. First, the closer links between domestic politics and foreign policy place a premium on those who can interpret public opinion or have access to shaping it.

Second, as public policy becomes more technical and complex, the relative advantage of governments in terms of a monopoly in expertise (in the environmental area, for example) diminishes. Scientific and technological expertise are required and this can be provided by groupings outside governmental structures. Moreover, the desire to contain public expenditure makes tapping the expertise of NGOs even more attractive. Thus in the mid-1990s, the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (along with other foreign ministries) was making greater use of such resources in, for example, its United Nations Department.

From another perspective, the end of the Cold War has witnessed a changed role for, or even the demise of, some familiar actors on the world stage. By 1994 CoCom, the body charged with overseeing Western export controls on exports of sensitive technologies to the Eastern bloc, had effectively ceased to exist. The security services, whose activities were symbolic of the Cold War, are redefining their roles towards countering economic espionage in the West and, in the case of the KGB, attempting to contain the growth of organised crime. Questions are being raised about the continued need for certain agencies. The need for the World Bank, argue some, has now passed. Others have suggested that the kind of economic intelligence work performed by the OECD, the organisation

containing the world's wealthiest economies, can be as well performed by private sector companies.

One of the major differences between the Cold War and the post-Cold War periods lies in the disappearance of the ideological underpinnings which were such a clear characteristic of the former. The triumph of capitalism has changed the nature of international relations in a profound manner. Virtually every government, even those few which adhere to some residual form of communism such as China, embraces the free market, as opposed to the centralised economy, to some degree.

But as the previous chapter has suggested, this does not mean that values and beliefs no longer assume significance. There may well be, as argued in Chapter 2, legitimate reservations about the extent and significance of actual and potential clashes between the West and Islam and between the geographical centres of capitalism. Yet it is clear that these and other tensions do exist and that differences over such prominent issues as human rights and the environment can assume an aura of 'ideological' conflict.

Stratification and structure

One feature of the post-Cold War international system seems uncontestable: the bipolar structure has disappeared. This is, partly, because there are no longer two 'superpowers' on which rival alliance systems can focus. As Chapter 13 will demonstrate, the collapse of the USSR, whilst it leaves Russia as a country of formidable power, has served to underscore the fact that this power was based on a relatively narrow, principally military, resource base.

But the end of the Cold War presents problems of a different kind for the United States – and, by extension, for the international system itself. Quite clearly, whatever reservations might exist about the power of the United States and its oft-heralded decline, in the 1990s it stands as the world's only state capable of making any realistic claim to superpower status. The real issue, however, is whether Washington has the will to perform the kind of leadership role that such a status suggests.

The fact that the Clinton administration came into office proclaiming its determination to give priority to domestic rather than foreign policy indicated to many that the United States was unwilling and unable to perform a leadership role. Since then, the uncertain tenor of American foreign policy as the White House has sought to accommodate its initial domestic-oriented inclinations to the realities of an interdependent world has been reflected in a series of problems from Bosnia to trade policy towards China and – closer to home – events in Haiti.

The position of the United States poses two linked issues which bring together the question of system structure and the stability of the international system. The first might be regarded as an analytical issue, albeit one with clear practical implications: Does a stable international system require a dominant (or 'hegemonic') state capable of providing leadership? If it does, and the United States is unwilling to perform that role, then (here is the second and far more political issue) who will do so? Obvious candidates such as Japan and Germany appear unwilling, for several reasons, some domestic and some international, to assume the burden.

As noted earlier, this problem was less marked in the bipolar era because the immediacy of the perceived threat from the East provided a clear justification for the American leadership role and the costs that accompanied it. Also, as we have seen, Moscow and Washington developed a relationship through which, to a degree, they were able jointly to provide leadership and stability, if at the price of the threat of nuclear annihilation.

Accompanying the demise of the Soviet Union – and in some senses preceding it as President Gorbachev replaced the Brezhnev Doctrine with the so-called 'Sinatra Doctrine' – encouraging the countries in Moscow's East European sphere of influence to 'do it their way' – has been the disappearance of the Warsaw Pact and its economic counterpart, COMECON. But if the 1990s represented a crisis for the East in the East–West relationship which was to witness the demise of one half of the bipolar structure, it also presented a crisis of function for its Western counterpart, NATO.

What purpose could this organisation serve when shorn of its original purpose, namely to protect the West from communism? The attempts to re-define its role in the absence of a credible threat from what was the USSR symbolises the real differences in system structure that have emerged. NATO appears to be developing into a security agency with a far wider remit, one which through the 'Partnership for Peace' formula has been extended to former members of the Soviet bloc and to Russia itself.

Apart from these developments, the structure of the international system continues to display many of the features of the Cold War era. The removal of the Soviet threat has weakened the links forged by the United States with Western Europe and Japan. In consequence, the emergence of a multipolar world which was clear in economic terms in the 1970s is maturing into a political multipolarity. This has reawakened debates about the relative stability of bipolar and multipolar systems, with some observers suggesting that the complexities of the latter compare unfavourably with the former.

One further point regarding structure and stratification should be noted: the impact of the end of the Cold War on North–South relations. A concern here is that this will lessen considerably the influence that the South was able to exercise over the rival superpowers. Events of the late 1980s and early 1990s seemed to sustain this as former client states of Moscow lost their influence in the wake of the latter's fundamental reappraisal of its foreign policy goals.

Furthermore, the opening up of Eastern Europe to Western foreign investment suggested the prospect of the diversion of resources previously destined for countries of the South. The question arises, then, as to whether the relative influence of the South will diminish and the stratification of the international system actually increase as the gap between rich and poor grows.

We shall return to this issue in Chapter 9, but it is important to recall that the South looks increasingly diverse in the 1990s, with few similarities between the plight of Africa and the situation in much of the Asia–Pacific region.

Patterns of interaction

Much of what has been said about actors and structures is reflected in the patterns of interaction characterising the post-Cold War World. One of the major changes, of course,

is the 'opening-up' of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. This will be discussed in Chapter 13 and thus for the moment the point will be briefly made. In economic, political and social terms, the landscape of what has hitherto been regarded as 'East–West' relations has been transformed both in an official, governmental sense but also through private sector commercial and financial involvement in what had been the formerly largely self-contained economies of the Soviet bloc.

Beyond this significant development, it is hard to draw any conclusions as to the relative balance between the basic forms of interaction discussed above: conflict and cooperation. It has already been noted that the hopes enmeshed in the phrase 'new world order' – where that is taken to suggest a more just and peaceful world – have been challenged by events. Indeed, armed conflict has returned to Europe in the areas occupied by the former Yugoslavia, and there are other powder kegs, such as Macedonia and Albania, which stand ready to ignite.

Outside Europe, the threat of nuclear proliferation does little to suggest an untroubled future. According to some estimates, there are twenty or so 'nuclear threshold' states around the world which may be able to deliver some form of nuclear device by the turn of the millennium. In the mid-1990s, one of the most worrying instances is to be found in the case of North Korea, widely believed to be developing nuclear weapons and refusing to admit international inspection teams to verify its claim that it is developing a nuclear capacity for peaceful purposes.

At the same time, diplomacy has had some qualified triumphs in the post-Cold War environment. The end of the East–West split has created a new climate which has clearly affected regional disputes in a number of geographical areas from South Africa to the Middle East. As in the Cold War period, however, the scope for diplomatic interaction confronts obstacles. Terrorism remains a danger to diplomacy but is supplemented by the growth of organised crime to which it is sometimes closely linked. Ideology, now in the form of Islamic fundamentalism suspicious of Western patterns of behaviour, continues to restrict the scope for the peaceful resolution of disputes in certain contexts.

Rules and practices

It has already been suggested that some of the most fundamental rules of the state system, those deriving from the concept of sovereignty, are being questioned – or at least re-examined. On the one hand, it can be argued, this is because these sovereignty-related rules and practices look less relevant to the contemporary situation. In the context of the Cold War, for example, the principle of non-intervention assumed a clear relevance for Third World countries; but now the emphasis has shifted to problems of access rather than denial – access to markets and access to foreign investment, for example. Although it has obvious limits, there is consequently a greater willingness to open up national societies to external forces.

The reverse side of the coin, however, reveals the working out of those forces of nationalism and national self-determination which, as noted earlier in this chapter, have been instrumental in the shaping of the state system. But the system itself now stands in danger of disintegration from those very forces. Is it possible to sustain a situation where

every ethnic group demands its own territorial state as the world fragments into an ever-more complex patchwork quilt of ethnic groups? Or are there alternative means by which the hopes and fears of minority groups can be safeguarded within their existing territorial settings? These appear to be some of the most telling issues which the latest phase of the state system confronts. This crisis of self-determination, so dramatically represented by the bloody fragmentation of Yugoslavia, stands as one of the central challenges confronting the international community as it seeks to adapt to new realities.

Against this background, the old problem of managing power relations in what, in some senses, is becoming a more fragmented international system remains. For some observers, the post-Cold War era suggests the replacement of the condominium of power which emerged in the Cold War years with a return to some form of 'concert of powers' reminiscent of the nineteenth century. Here, the argument goes, the 'great powers' – as in the past – will manage the system supported by a renewed and strengthened United Nations. The pattern is best exemplified in the assembling of a coalition of powers in the context of the Gulf War of 1991.

The future for such a model of international relations depends on a number of factors, some of them already touched on above. It could be argued that the great powers of the late twentieth century have more in common than their predecessors of a hundred years earlier. But experience since the Gulf War demonstrates the difficulties of marshalling national interests into collective action, particularly where domestic politics impinges increasingly on the conduct of foreign policy. Whatever the future holds, just as the Cold War built on the practices of earlier periods in the evolution of the international system – through the adaptation of spheres of influence and the development of techniques of crisis management, for example – so the post-Cold War era, the so-called 'new world order', will constitute a hybrid as old concepts are married to new in a rapidly evolving and uncertain environment.

Summary

Within the international arena, patterns of interactions – international systems – develop. Over time, a number of systems have emerged and disappeared. Since the late Middle Ages, we have witnessed the evolution of one these systems, the state system. Based on territorial units – states – it has been marked by its tendency towards fragmentation.

This reflects key characteristics of the state as actor, in particular the principles which derive from the concept of sovereignty. In addition, the rise of nationalism has reinforced the tendency towards division within the system. Although the lack of a central, international government creates the impression of 'anarchy' in world politics, this is balanced by elements of an international 'society' based on the recognition of mutual needs and growing linkages between actors.

By comparing three periods in its evolution, the Concert, and Cold War and Post-Cold War phases, it becomes clear that the principles and characteristics of the state system have an enduring quality yet, at the same time, are subject to major evolutionary change.

Notes

1. K. J. Holsti, *International Politics: A framework for analysis*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice Hall, 6th edn, 1992, chs 2 and 3; E. Luard, *Types of International Society*, New York, Free Press, 1976; A. Watson, *The Evolution of International Society: A comparative historical analysis*, London, Routledge, 1992.
2. W. Ullman, *A History of Political Thought: The Middle Ages*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1965, pp. 186–95.
3. F. H. Hinsley, *Power and the Pursuit of Peace: Theory and practice in the history of relations between states*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1963, pp. 23–8 and pp. 166–7.
4. A. Cobban, *The Nation State and National Self-Determination*, London, Collins/Fontana, 1969, pp. 23–38.
5. J. Mayall, *Nationalism and International Society* (Cambridge Studies in International Relations: 10), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990.
6. A useful discussion of the qualities and functions of states is provided by S. Brown, 'The world polity and the nation state system: an updated analysis', *International Journal*, 39, Summer 1984.
7. The legal basis of recognition is discussed in J. L. Brierley, *The Law of Nations*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 6th edn, 1963, pp. 138–50.
8. The processes attending the rise and decline of great powers is discussed in P. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic change and military conflict from 1500 to 2000*, London, Unwin Hyman, 1988.
9. On the developing tensions within the rival alliance systems, see S. Brown, *New Forces, Old Forces and the Future of World Politics*, Glenview, IL, Scott Foresman/Little Brown, 1988, chs 4 and 5.
10. J. S. Levy, *War in the Modern Great Power System 1495–1975*, Lexington, Kentucky University Press, 1983, pp. 144 ff.
11. On the nature of international society, see H. Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A study of order in world politics*, London, Macmillan, 1977, ch. 1.
12. R. Cohen, *International Politics: The rules of the game*, London, Longman, 1981, p. 57.

Further reading

On the nature of various international systems including the state system, see: K. J. Holsti, *International Politics: A framework for analysis*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice Hall, 6th edn, 1992, chs 2 and 3; E. Luard, *Types of International Society*, New York, Free Press, 1976; H. Bull and A. Watson, *The Expansion of International Society*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1984; A. Watson, *The Evolution of International Society: A comparative historical analysis*, London, Routledge, 1992. Additional material on the state system can be found in F. S. Northedge, *The International Political System*, London, Faber, 1976, ch. 3, and M. Wight, *Systems of States*, edited by H. Bull, Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1977.

On the concept of **sovereignty and international relations**, see: F. H. Hinsley, *Sovereignty*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2nd edn, 1986, ch. 5; A. James, *Sovereign Statehood: The basis of international society*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1987; and J. A. Camilleri and J. Falk, *The End of Sovereignty?: The politics of a shrinking and fragmenting world*, Aldershot, Elgar, 1992.

Among the many studies of **nationalism**, see: E. Kedourie, *Nationalism*, London, Hutchinson, 3rd edn, 1979; A. D. S. Smith, *Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, Oxford, Martin Robertson, 1979;

F. H. Hinsley, *Nationalism and the International System*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1973; P. Alter, *Nationalism*, translated by S. McKinnon-Evans, London, Arnold, 1989; and J. Mayall, *Nationalism and International Society* (Cambridge Studies in International Relations: 10), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990.

On **war and the state system**, see: H. Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A study of order in world politics*, London, Macmillan, 1977, and chapter 13 in Northedge, *The International Political System* (see above). The development of **diplomacy** is outlined in A. Watson, *Diplomacy: The dialogue between states*, London, Methuen, 1982. (See also further reading to Chapter 11.)

On the **Concert of Europe**, see: R. Langhorne, *The Collapse of the Concert of Europe: International politics 1890–1914*, London, Macmillan, 1981; A. J. P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1954; and (for a theoretical overview) C. Holbraad, *The Concert of Europe: A study in German and British international theory 1815–1914*, London, Longman, 1970. For references relating to **the Cold War and post-Cold War periods**, see the list of references at the end of Chapter 13.

CHAPTER

5

Beyond the state system

This chapter focuses on four central themes. First, it examines the changing nature of the state as an actor on the world stage, especially the relationships between states, governments and societies. Second, it examines shifts in the position of the state as a participant in world politics, and the changing notions of international 'actorness' that this implies. Third, it assesses the consequential shifts in relationships between states, societies and a range of non-state political forces. Finally, it evaluates the impact of these developments on ideas of the international system, in particular the notion of a 'mixed actor system' in which new actors, structures, patterns and rules have emerged.

The aim of Chapter 4 was to identify some of the key features of the state system and the principles on which it rests. In comparing two key phases in its development, the 'Concert' and the 'Cold War' phases, it became clear that these principles and characteristics have an enduring quality whilst at the same time being subject to major evolutionary change. This makes the world of the policy-maker and the analyst all the more confusing, for while vocabularies remain the same, ideas evolve and are changed by a variety of economic, technological, social and political developments.

Despite the impact of such changes, it could be inferred from the argument in Chapter 4 that states remain the centre of all international activity, and that an understanding of what states do on the world stage is sufficient for understanding the nature of world politics as a whole. Such assumptions have a compelling logic, and they lead directly to an image of international relations which is centred on the state as an actor: a 'state-centric' image, which is summarised in Figure 5.1. Here, the international system consists of states interacting with one another through their governments, which are capable of determining and expressing the collective or 'national' interests of the societies over which they rule. Such a portrayal of international relations has the advantages of clarity and relative simplicity, and expresses well the undoubted significance of states on the world stage. It gives rise to a powerful set of assumptions about the qualities necessary to become an actor on the international scene, which have coloured debate about the development of world politics more generally, and which are derived from the principles set out in Chapter 4 (pp. 50–73):

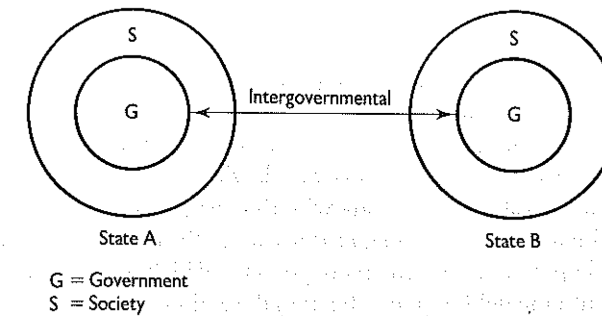


Figure 5.1 A state-centric image of the world.

- *Sovereignty* – which suggests that the state has no legal superior in the international system.
- *Recognition* – a means by which membership of the exclusive 'club' of nation-states can be regulated.
- *Territorial control* – the ability of a given government not only to rule over a given 'space' but also to regulate the activities of citizens and others within it.

Taken together, these principles form the basis of the nation-state's qualities as an actor, or what might be termed its 'actorness'. State-centrism not only attaches particular importance to these attributes, but also assumes that any entity not possessing all three of them is in some way a 'second-class citizen' in the international community, liable to be dominated by even the least powerful state. Thus, the UN, the EU or large multinational corporations (MNCs) such as Ford or Unilever are regarded as being essentially under the control of national governments rather than as autonomous actors.

The argument in this chapter is that this state-centric image of world politics is both inaccurate and potentially damaging for the analysis of world politics. In the terms used in Chapter 2, a state-centric focus, however sophisticated, can limit the ability of both academics and policy-makers to describe, explain and manage the complexity of the world arena. Some have been tempted on this basis to claim that the state-centric approach should be rejected in its entirety, and that notions such as sovereignty, recognition and territoriality should be consigned to the waste-bin as historical curiosities. Perhaps, though, there are ways of looking at the contemporary international system which take account of its complexities whilst allowing for the still highly influential role of the state and governments.

The evolution and functioning of the state system itself have created complexities and have stimulated debate about the nature of statehood, the 'rules of the game' and the principles of state action. During the late twentieth century, the recognition that there are new actors and systems on the world stage has led to the development of new frameworks and theories to describe and explain a changing reality. This bears out a central theme of this book: that the concept of a 'system' is important not only because in some way it

represents international reality, but also because it affects debate, activity and the 'images' held by groups and individuals.

The purpose of this chapter is to develop and explore further the line of argument summarised above. The first step is to examine the changing nature of states and, in particular, the governmental processes which are the basis of action and influence in the international system. Second, it is necessary to ask whether there are processes of change going 'beyond the state system'. In dealing with the image and reality of a 'state system', it is difficult, if not impossible, to avoid questions about the broader context within which states operate. In Chapter 4 there were many points at which forces other than states and their agents crept onto the field of play, affecting the actions and the perceptions of those involved. Evidently, states and their actions represent only one network – albeit a highly significant one – in the international political scene.

There are many other groups, organisations and networks that could also be included in a definition of 'world politics', and in this chapter a major focus is on this broader range of participants. In particular, the concern is with the ways in which and the extent to which non-state forces have come to modify or challenge the 'state system', both in practical terms and in terms of its power to explain trends and events. This concern leads to a reassessment of the four major components isolated in Chapter 4: the actors, the structure of the system, patterns of interaction and rules and practices.

The problems can initially be explored on two interrelated levels: first, the changing character of states themselves and, second, the changing position of states in the international system. As noted above, awareness of this twofold trend has led some commentators to predict the demise of the state and the replacement of the state system by a variety of other political forces. Such predictions have been met by equally positive assertions that the state system is both vigorous and indeed irreplaceable as an organising feature of world politics. Reality is not so neat or clear-cut, and it is the coexistence of diverse political forces that shapes the character of the international system in the late twentieth century. Chapter 6 will explore this reality through a case study of multinational corporations, but the rest of this chapter will identify the scope and depth of the changes affecting the state system.

The changing nature of statehood

A state-centric view of the international system emphasises the ability of governments both to represent the broad interests of their citizens and to control the actions of groups within society. State action, it was once said, is action taken by those acting in the name of the state. This assertion reflects the idea that governments can in some way bring together and control all the needs and actions of national societies.[1] Indeed, without such an assumption the concept of a coherent state system would be very difficult to sustain. It is thus important to know that the pronouncements and deeds of US Presidents, British Prime Ministers or other designated governmental leaders are both representative and authoritative – that they can be relied upon as 'facts' of world politics.

The growth and diversity of government

During the twentieth century, this assumption has been buttressed by the growth of government itself and its identification with the notions of territoriality and self-determination (see Chapter 4). In all societies, government regulation and government expenditures have consistently increased – often despite the claims of leaders that they will 'roll back the state'. Very few areas of human activity remain untouched by government even in the most libertarian of political systems or the most 'free market' of economies. But this very spread of government, which, on the face of it, provides a powerful foundation for the continued authority of states at home and abroad, has brought with it a number of tensions. Four such tensions are particularly important for world politics:

1. As the spread of government has proceeded, its diversity has increased.
2. 'Big government' and complex structures have increased the likelihood of fragmentation within the governmental apparatus.
3. Government itself can become an arena within which contending forces compete.
4. Governments can experience leakages of authority which reduce their ability to represent or control their national societies.

Often these problems are not simply national or 'domestic' in their extent: they affect and are affected by forces in the broader international arena.

Even the most adamant proponents of state-centric views have never claimed that all governments are the same. It is true to say, however, that 'state system' approaches tend to play down the differences between forms of government since, to a certain extent, these can be seen as marginal to the real concerns of the international arena. Differences of ideology, changes of leadership and the impact of domestic upheaval can have significant effects, but in many cases (so the argument would go) these do not affect the imperatives of national interests and international status. Thus it can be argued that (for example) the interests of Russia have remained essentially the same despite major changes in its system of government during the twentieth century, not least during the 1990s.

Arguably, such a position is simply no longer tenable. The spread of government to all parts of the globe has produced such a profusion of political structures that these are bound to have important consequences for international behaviour. It seems preposterous to assert that, for the purposes of world politics, the governments of the United States, Zaïre and Vietnam are identical, and experience bears out this perception. Likewise, the changes of governmental structure and patterns of authority which occurred during 1989 and 1990 within the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were bound to have significant effects on both the behaviour of Eastern European states and world politics as whole.

The diversity of forms of government thus means that assumptions of uniformity about the nature of governments as international actors should be treated with caution. A further dimension is added by the growth and diversification of the workings of government itself. While a 'state system' view would imply that foreign offices and other administrative bodies are neutral, operating as the passive tools of political leaders, such a view has been increasingly open to attack. Government has grown big (far bigger in some countries than

in others), it has become complex and it has consequently become subject to fragmentation, loss of control and internal competition. Before World War II, the State Department in the United States mustered fewer than 1,000 diplomatic personnel; in the 1990s the figures run into tens if not hundreds of thousands. As can be seen from Figure 5.2, the administrative structure of the Department was complex and wide-ranging, creating the potential for both managerial and political difficulties.

Equally, other parts of the US government have expanded and developed distinct interests in international affairs: whereas the military have always and inevitably possessed this quality, they have been joined by a vast range of notionally 'domestic' bureaucracies with international interests. Thus, the US government departments dealing with monetary policy, environmental issues and agriculture all have important international interests, sometimes at odds with those of the 'national security' departments. Figure 5.3 sets out the range of US government departments and agencies involved in dealing with the development of the Single Market Programme in the European Community during the late 1980s. It is clear from this that the problem of coordination between a multitude of agencies is severe. The bureaucracies of US federal government are both uniquely complex and uniquely open to competition, but for almost all national governments growth has produced complexity and internal fragmentation.

It should not, therefore, be assumed that 'government' is a monolithic entity, whether in the domestic or in the international arena. Indeed, government itself can become an arena for political competition in which politicians, bureaucrats and their clients are central players. Whatever the size, prosperity or political system of a country, government is about the allocation of resources. In most societies, government is the largest single concentration of financial power and this has an inevitable impact on the way business gets done. When the division of the annual budget involves millions, billions or even trillions of dollars, pounds or roubles, the interests of different 'empires' within government will automatically come into conflict.

Nor is this simply a matter of money. The gaining or loss of authority, status or responsibility will be a central concern of many supposedly neutral officials and will often intersect with broader political battles in society. This means that the actions of government, in the international as well as the domestic field, can often best be interpreted as the almost accidental by-product of internal governmental struggles. What then becomes of the assumption that international politics is built upon the authoritative actions of national monoliths?

A good example of such processes at work in the late 1980s was provided by the process of 'perestroika' ('restructuring') in the USSR, which opened up divisions within the Soviet leadership and produced conflicts between the need for economic reform and military modernisation. After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991–2, the government of Boris Yeltsin also experienced severe internal conflicts about the nature and pace of reform, which on occasions led to the outbreak of violent conflict. Even where this did not occur, it was clear that the internal fragmentation of the government weakened it both at home and in the international arena.

In this context, it is hardly surprising that the challenge to state-centric assumptions reflects, for many writers, a fundamental loss of control by national governments, both

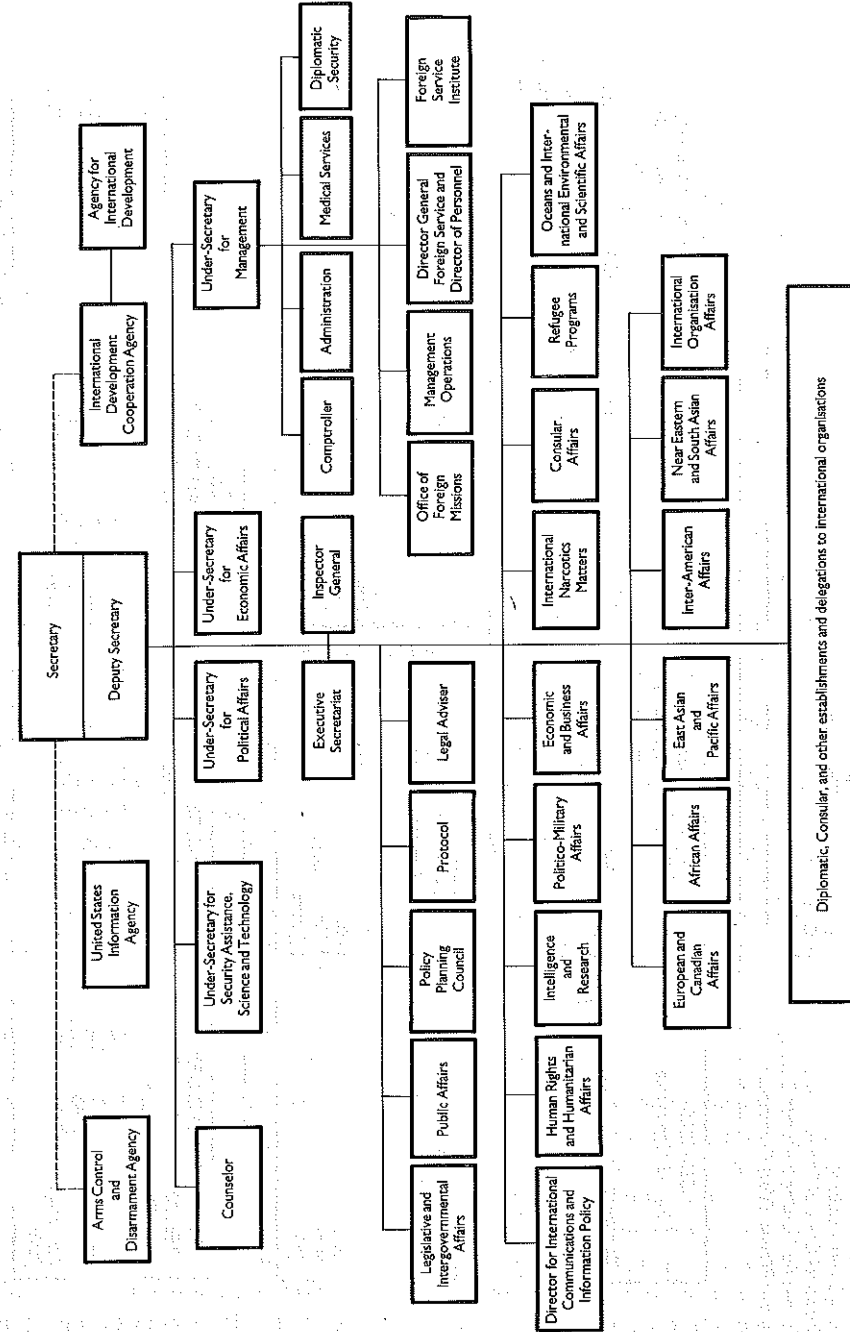


Figure 5.2 Department of State organisation in the late 1980s. (Source: *Manual of US Government Operations 1986–1987*, Washington, DC, US Government Printing Office.)

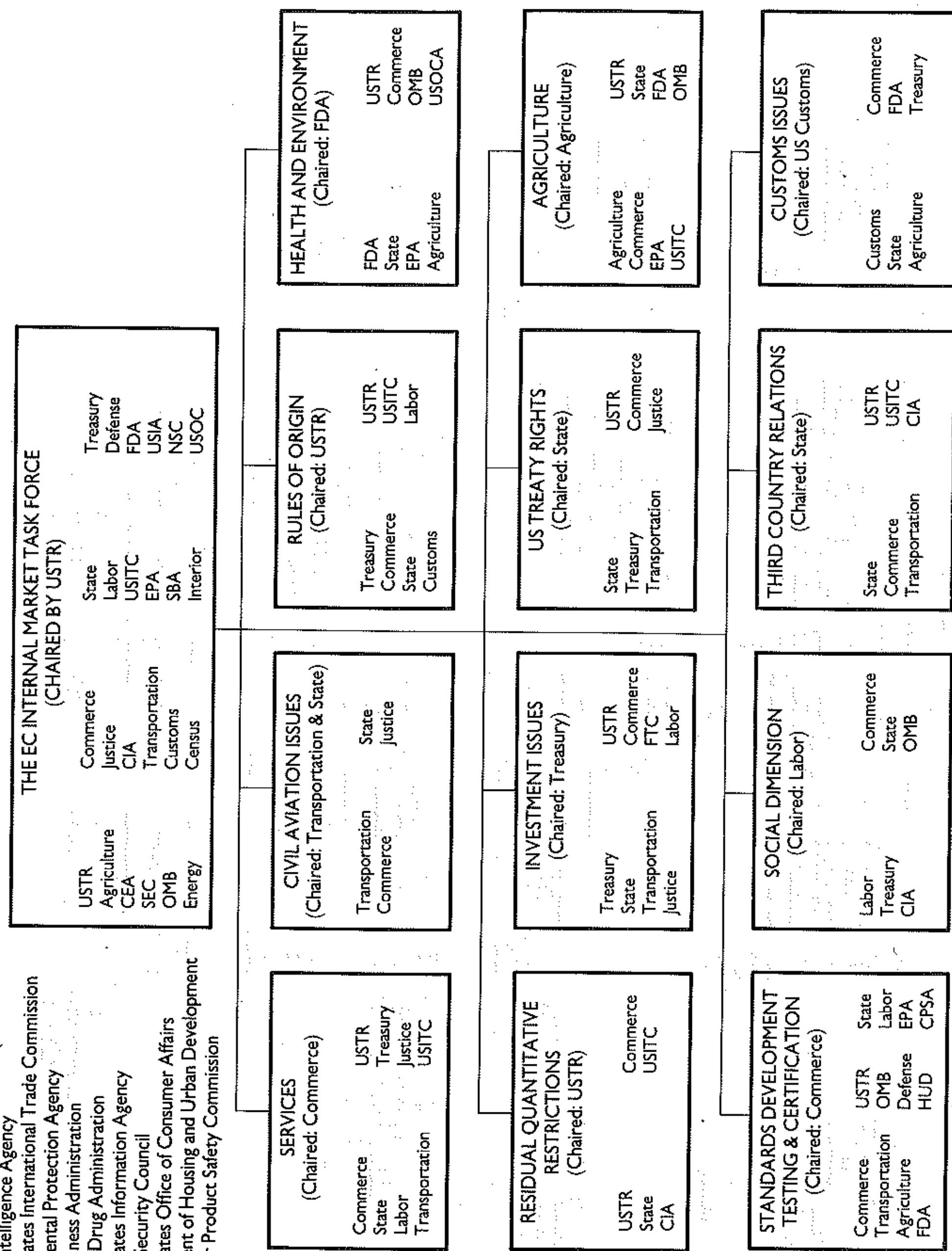


Figure 5.3 Organisation of the US government for policy-making on the European Single Market Programme, 1990. (Source: United States Government Task Force on the EC International Market, *EC 1992*, Washington, DC, Office of the United States Trade Representative, May 1990.)

over their actions in the national and international arenas and over the very mechanisms of policy-making themselves. This issue will be explored in more depth in Chapter 10, but it is also important here.

During the 1970s and 1980s, politicians and commentators became aware of problems variously described as those of 'authority leakage' and 'ungovernability' – the incapacity to satisfy the demands either of domestic populations or of the international arena. While it is difficult to compare the problems facing governments in advanced industrial, former socialist and developing societies, it is clear that for many national governments the late twentieth century has placed new burdens on their ability to satisfy or to express the needs of their peoples. Some of the burdens are economic – can any government realistically claim to fulfil all the welfare or commercial needs of its citizens? Others are in the most sanctified areas of traditional government responsibilities – can any government truly claim to defend its people in the era of space weapons, stealth technology and international terrorism?

During the 1980s, the policy agenda of the 'New Right' in both Britain and the United States focused largely on this issue, but it was far from clear whether its calls for reduced government intervention in the economy, coupled with a fresh impetus for defence expenditure, had succeeded in overcoming the fundamental problems. At the same time, at a very different point on the political spectrum, the programmes of environmental groups such as Greenpeace or Friends of the Earth expressed the view that national governments acting alone could not hope to manage the ecological challenges facing all societies.

Each of these positions – of the New Right and the environmentalists – reflected the perception that national governments could not, and perhaps should not, interfere with international processes. But each expressed a fundamentally opposed view of the need for international action, with the New Right arguing for national independence in a free global market, and the environmentalists espousing the need for new forms of international cooperation and even international 'government' to control national societies. This indicates that the divisions are not merely matters of fact, but also matters of prescription about the kind of world which will emerge in the twenty-first century.

Governments and peoples

The role and status of 'government' has thus undergone considerable change in both the national and the international contexts. Before looking in more detail at some of the groups and organisations that have emerged alongside governments, it is necessary to explore further the changing role and status of peoples and populations. The state-centric perspective on world politics might see the peoples of the world as 'cannon-fodder', manipulated by the national leaders who, to all intents and purposes, constitute the state. However, as the notion of 'government as monolith' is open to question, so is this image of 'people as passive objects': indeed, one of the implications of the discussion so far in this chapter is that governments have become increasingly incapable of channelling, expressing or meeting the needs of their peoples. The problem has four central elements:

1. The growing 'presence' of the state in society.
2. The growth of non-governmental power in society.
3. Domestic fragmentation and instability.
4. The impact of external influences and linkages on national societies.

It has been noted by many commentators that a key feature of twentieth-century society has been the growing 'presence' of the state and its penetration into the everyday lives of its citizens. Earlier in this chapter, this trend was seen to be closely connected with the growth of the mechanisms of government, which have become more extensive and have laid claim to ever-increasing areas of jurisdiction and regulation. Beyond this rather mechanical aspect of state extension, it is clear that governmental activities have an increasing impact on the lives and livelihood of their populations. In some societies the government is a dominant employer and producer of goods and services; in others it is a participant in a mixed economy; in others it is an important provider of background regulations. Equally, the state can be an all-pervasive provider of order and control, an omnipresent check on its citizens' activities or a relatively non-interventionist 'night-watchman'. The state can be seen as possessing a particular monopoly of responsibility and power in the areas of defence and national security.

Just as there is great diversity of national political systems in world politics, it is clear that there are wide variations in the inclination and capacities of governments to control their domestic societies. In some cases, limitations in state authority are built into formal political, economic or social structures – for example in federal systems or in those with a constitutional division of powers. Whatever the constitutional form, though, it is clear that the growing complexity and diversity of modern societies has led to the growth of centres of power and influence outside the state or governmental apparatus.

Sometimes this is exacerbated by the fragility of governmental institutions themselves, as in 'new' or internally divided states where private armies or effectively independent political and economic organisations can grow up. But even the most solidly grounded governments have found themselves having to cope with the consequences of specialised, complex, often intractable social and economic forces. Great corporations or powerful sectional interest groups, wielding power derived from the marketplace or from social forces, have been able to shape or to ignore governmental actions because of their expertise in mobilising money, knowledge or people.

This means that the problems of fragmentation and overload within government are paralleled by – and often linked to – broader social or economic forces. One response to these problems, on the part of governments and other groupings, has been to reassess the role that governments can actually play in shaping or directing the lives of their citizens. A major cause of 'state failure' in societies as tightly regulated as those of Eastern Europe and the USSR was that people came to recognise that the state could not provide everything or control everything. The demise of authoritarian ruling parties, the encouragement of market economies and the influence of Western technologies, fashions and culture bear witness to the limitations that were revealed.

These and other boundaries to governmental power were further exposed by widespread access to new channels of communication and expression. The microcomputer, the mobile telephone or the fax machine are everyday consumer items in many societies, but in all societies they raise potential issues of regulation and control which go back to the fundamental nature of governmental authority. It can thus be argued that the growing inability of authoritarian governments to repress the demands of their citizens during the 1980s – whether this was in Eastern Europe, Latin America or elsewhere – reflected the inexorable broadening of access to information and means of communication.

What makes the impact of these trends more acute and, for the argument here, more significant is the fact that in most, if not all, cases there is an inescapable link between domestic processes and the international system. In the state-centric view of world politics, governments (on behalf of the state) are seen as forming a channel between national societies and the international scene. This channel funnels the needs and demands of the population and regulates the impact on national life of international developments. However, much of what has been said so far in this chapter casts doubt on the relevance of this view in two ways.

First, it is clear that the diffusion of power domestically can reduce the capacity of governments to channel the needs and demands of their populations, especially where organisations or groups have access to significant resources of their own. Second, it follows that those same governments will find it increasingly difficult to channel or control the impact of developments in the international arena on their national societies. In these conditions it becomes very difficult to maintain the idea of an 'impermeable' state possessing sovereignty and able to act as a 'gatekeeper' between the national and international domains. The spectacular collapse of communist rule in Eastern Europe is perhaps the most obvious example of the problem, but it is repeated in less dramatic forms almost everywhere.

This is not to argue that the erosion of the state as a unit of world politics is inevitable or that it will be complete (and this point will be taken up later). It does mean, though, that the student and the practitioner of world politics are confronted by a world both more diverse and less predictable than that presented by state-centric interpretations.

The new variety of international actors

Since it is apparent that the state has been joined on the international stage by a range of other actual or potential actors, one important task is to define and identify these actors. This is not simply a dry, abstract analytical enterprise, since participants in world politics often face precisely the same problem, with the possibility of severe penalties if their analysis is inaccurate. Not surprisingly, a great deal of academic and governmental energy has been expended in trying to develop reliable 'indicators' of the likely participants in world politics, along with estimates of their possible impact.

One approach to the problem is to trace the proliferation of new groupings and organisations active in the international arena, and thereby to arrive at an overall picture of the new constellation of actors. Such an approach must start with the fact that states themselves have multiplied and diversified (as noted in earlier discussion): the UN at its foundation in 1946 had about 50 members but now has close to 200. Many of the

additional members arose from the collapse of the Western colonial empires after World War II, and thus simply did not exist as states as late as the 1950s; others, such as those arising out of the collapse of the Soviet Union, were added in a landslide during the early 1990s.

In addition to the new variety of states, however, there are often less familiar features on the international landscape, which pose particular problems for a state-centric interpretation of world politics. A few examples will bring home the point. It has often been noted that the twentieth century, and especially the post-1945 era, has seen an 'explosion' of international organisations and associations led by the UN 'family'. The number of intergovernmental bodies in the world arena has advanced well beyond 300, while less formal and more diverse non-governmental bodies are created in thousands.

Alongside these developments there has been a vast expansion in numbers of economic groupings. The category that has attracted most attention is that of multinational business enterprises, usually known as multinational corporations, and special attention will be paid to this phenomenon in Chapter 6. It is also important to note that even in the field of military security there has been a proliferation of groups which have often posed dramatic challenges to established states or governments through terrorism or insurgency. Finally, and particularly during the 1980s, the proliferation of groups pursuing objectives in the humanitarian or the ecological spheres has had a major impact in the system.

However, this rather descriptive approach to the issue of international actors raises as many questions as it answers. It is not very helpful to produce statements which amount to the claim that there is a lot of activity by a more diverse set of international groupings. It is important to identify precisely what it is about the actors in world politics that is worth knowing, especially in terms of political impact. In other words, the qualities as well as the sheer quantity of actors must be assessed.

Rethinking the nature of 'actorness'

The important task here involves a re-examination of the assumptions concerning the qualities which actors need to possess in order to participate in world politics. The first part of this chapter set out the traditional criteria of 'actorness' derived from three key principles of the state system:

1. Sovereignty.
2. Recognition.
3. Control of territory and people.

These, it was suggested, help to explain the character of states as actors but are not very illuminating when evaluating the role of non-state actors. More than this, they create criteria which, because NSAs are unable to conform to them, actually downgrade the significance of organisations so diverse as the EU, Friends of the Earth and the Palestine Liberation Organisation. What is needed are far less restrictive criteria to enable both student and policy-maker to understand the resources that are possessed by each type of international actor and that help to determine its role and scope for influence in

the international system. Three alternative concepts to those applied traditionally to states are:

1. *Autonomy* – how much freedom of action does an actor have when seeking to achieve its objectives?
2. *Representation* – what constituencies does an actor represent? Are these very broad groupings or limited-purpose and special-interest groups?
3. *Influence* – how much influence can an actor exert in a specific context and on a specific issue?

Adopting these far broader and more adaptable measures enables one to break away from the rather narrow, state-related criteria of actorness and to look afresh at the character of all actors and their role in world politics. Furthermore, they provide a set of guidelines from which judgements regarding the relative strengths and weaknesses of actors can be made and their influence in specific situations estimated. From this revised perspective on actorness, it is possible to consider anew the qualities exhibited by the range of actors engaged in international relations, and thus to reassess the changing characteristics of the international arena: its stratification and structure, patterns of interaction and rules and practices.

The qualities of actors

Four particular qualities can be identified:

1. The *aims* of actors.
2. The *extent* of actor participation.
3. Actors' *structures* and *resources*.
4. *Levels* of actor participation.

Aims

In the first place, it is clear that different actors within the international arena will target markedly differing ranges of issues. For some, the range will be broad, if not all-encompassing, while for others it will be confined to one or two central issues. The government of the United States has to wrestle with a multitude of issues which often intersect, while Greenpeace or Save the Children each has a central focus on one admittedly complex and significant problem. Alongside the focus on particular problems or tasks, there is frequently a variation in the range of interests expressed or represented by given actors, and here again the focus can be broad and diverse or narrow and intense. It is often argued, for example, that the primarily economic concerns of large international corporations confer an advantage over governments, particularly in less developed countries, whose attention and resources are stretched over the whole range of political and economic issues (see Chapter 6).

Extent of participation

A second area of variation between international actors is the extent to which they

participate in world politics. Such participation can be continuous, purposeful and positive or temporary and almost 'accidental' in nature. Sometimes the pressure of events or circumstances (as in aircraft hijackings or other episodes involving hostages) can make participants out of the most unlikely groups or individuals; such was the fate of British and American citizens trapped in Iraq during the Gulf crisis and war of 1990–1. In general, it is important to know that, while some actors will participate over a wide range of activities and with a considerable degree of regularity and persistence, the 'stage appearances' of others will be impermanent, if not fleeting. Neither must it be forgotten that mere evidence of international activity does not always guarantee or produce political involvement. Many groupings in the economic field have argued that their interests and operations are non-political and this is an issue to which further reference will be made in Chapter 6.

Structures and resources

Closely linked to actors' aims and the extent of their participation is a third element: that of structure and resources. There is a world of difference between the organisational features and the capacities of major states and small states, governments and corporations, pressure groups and individuals. It is thus most important to be aware that any given international actor will have a characteristic organisational make-up and a specific range of ways in which it can bring its influence to bear. One central feature of the contemporary international arena is that it has been subject to what might be called an 'organisational revolution': at the national and the international level, the number and complexity of organisational devices has expanded, in time with the number and complexity of human activities.

To give just one example: during the late 1980s the increasing attention given to environmental issues led to a wide range of organisational changes, both within national governments and among non-state actors, which significantly affected the processes of international negotiation and regulation. With governments creating new departments, new international organisations being set up and non-state groupings increasing their activities, there was room for a good deal of organisational confusion as well as for creative initiatives.

Levels of participation

Finally, in assessing the qualities of actors, it pays to be aware of the level or levels at which they exist and operate. Within national societies it is possible to identify many levels at which groups and individuals can enter into the political process – local, municipal, regional – and this coexistence of levels is carried much further in the international arena. At each level of participation and concern, a specific 'mix' of actors will be relevant and interested and although governments will tend to be involved at many of these levels, it should by no means be taken for granted that they will wield effective influence at any or all of them. While there is considerable debate about which levels of participation are most relevant to, or significant in, world politics, there is general agreement on a number of major areas:

- First, many actors are essentially *subnational*. They operate within domestic societies, with their attention and efforts primarily confined by national or even local affairs, yet they can produce political effects either directly or indirectly outside their own societies.
- Second, and related, some actors are *transnational*, relying on organised linkages between groups operating within two or more national societies. Importantly, these transnational actors are not necessarily controlled by any one national government.
- Third, there are actors that rely upon their status as parts or agents of national governments – in other words, *governmental* actors, defined by their roles and concerns within the governmental structure (and these may be – and increasingly are – internationally relevant).
- Fourth, there are those actors which rely for their existence on *intergovernmental* linkages or agreements – a class which includes many international organisations and institutions, such as NATO, the UN and the Organisation of American States (OAS).
- Finally, and most exceptionally, there are bodies which wholly or partly operate at the *supranational* level, that is to say a level to which states and national governments are essentially subordinate. Almost the only body with any claim to this level of activity is the Commission of the European Community, and there is continuing debate about its credentials in this area.

Table 5.1 attempts to summarise and illustrate the features of international actors which have been mentioned in this section. It must be borne in mind that few bodies will conform precisely or always to any given category, but these criteria will provide a checklist against which judgements can be made.

Two major conclusions can be reached at this stage. First, not all international actors are states – and, indeed, in certain areas the states are likely to be peripheral to events. Second, the diversity of actors within the international system implies a corresponding diversity of networks involving various combinations or groupings, and thus a new complexity of stratification and structure. This is the next concern of this chapter.

New networks and relationships

A state-centric view of world politics is unequivocal about the networks or relationships that matter in the international arena: the dominant, if not the only, concern is with relations between states, which are the most authoritative and far-reaching. While other networks of relations exist, they are all ultimately subordinate to the state system and thus to the political processes and patterns of interaction it generates. The argument so far in this chapter implies that this is a misleading image of world politics. States and their governments, it appears, are not as solid and authoritative as might be supposed; they are by no means the only possible participants in world politics and, on specific issues or at specific levels, other actors may be able to outmanoeuvre them. Thus, a view of the international system as a system of states must be supplemented by an image which allows for a far wider range of networks and patterns.

Table 5.1 The new variety of international actors: an illustration

	British government	European Commission	General Motors	Palestine Liberation Organisation	Pope John Paul II
Aims	'National interest'; broad and complex, political, economic and social, military	'Community interest'; economic, social and political. Broad and complex	'Commercial interest'; complex but focused on generation of production/profit	Political status; national liberation for specific groups	Religious, humanitarian; global yet concentrated
Involvement	Continuous, wide-ranging, highly institutionalised	Continuous, wide-ranging, concentrated on economic and social issues	Continuous but concentrated: non-political?	Continuous, regional; political and military	Continuous but concentrated: non-political?
Structure and resources	National government, state authority within international hierarchy	Bureaucratic and political structure, support from member governments	Bureaucratic and industrial; specialist technical and financial skills	'Government in exile'; support from friendly governments; military expertise	Catholic Church; status as leader, support of individuals, groups, others
Level(s) of participation	National governmental, intergovernmental	Intergovernmental, supranational; penetrates national structures	Transnational, often local or regional	Transnational, some traditional 'diplomatic' roles	Transnational, often local and personal

Note: This table is intended merely to illustrate the general features, not to provide detailed discussion of the examples.

One way of expressing this image is by building upon the several levels of participation identified in the previous section: subnational, transnational, governmental, intergovernmental, supranational. These levels correspond to five basic types of network or patterns of activity in the world arena:

1. *Subnational networks* – these reflect the activities of subnational groups and organisations, which may or may not be directed towards the governments concerned. On occasion also they will spill over into the world arena and have political impacts there.
2. *Transnational networks* – these relationships will involve participants from a variety of national societies, organisationally linked for specific purposes. The relationships, although they may well affect or attract the attention of governments, will not be channelled through them.
3. *Governmental networks* – these networks reflect the quality of 'government as an arena' which was pointed out earlier in the chapter (see page 78), and can strongly condition the actions of governments as a result of political interactions within them. An extension of this type of network is the *transgovernmental network*, consisting of links between the agents of different national governments and leading to interactions which can influence political leadership at the national level.
4. *Intergovernmental networks* – these would be the networks most easily recognised by state-centric analyses, since they correspond to the alignments and institutions of the state system. Ranging from formal alliances and organisations to informal alignments, they will involve governmental leaders and those who claim to represent national needs or interests.
5. *Supranational networks* – as already noted, there are relatively few of these relationships, mainly concentrated in the EU (insofar as the EU is able to subordinate national groupings, including governments, to its wishes). It is important to note that where these networks do exist they can be accompanied by a strong growth of transnational and transgovernmental networks. Indeed, it has been argued that these are the twin foundations of broader integration between societies.

Figure 5.4 summarises this profusion of networks – although it is very difficult to do this at more than the most primitive level – and it forms an important contrast to Figure 5.1 (page 75). Two further points must be made. First, this review of networks only deals with 'pure' cases – in other words, the matching and linking of like with like. In reality, there are also many 'mixed' pairings – for example, of government with subnational or transnational or intergovernmental networks. It is precisely these 'mixed cases' that will provide some of the most challenging or surprising developments for policy-makers and other participants in the international arena. Second, the situation(s) described appear static, but in reality they are likely to be highly fluid and dynamic. Participants will emerge and disappear, linkages will wax and wane, networks will be active or fall into disrepair. Again, the result is an awkward, untidy and unpredictable patchwork of actors and their mutual linkages.

These new dimensions to international networks produce a number of consequences. The most apparent is a growth of new channels for participation in and the expression of

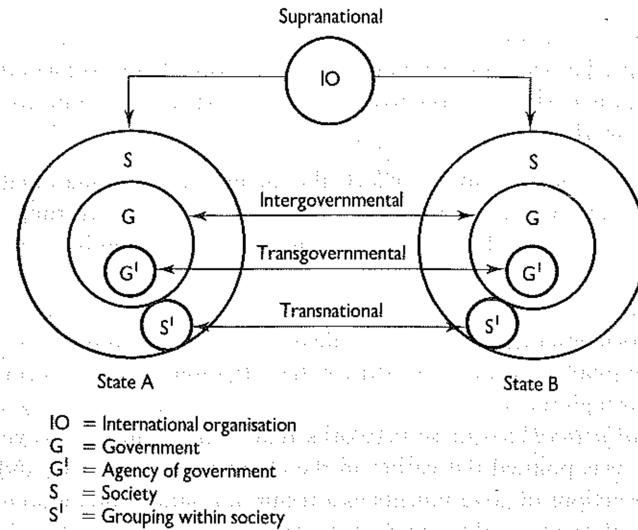


Figure 5.4 Types of international networks.

views about world politics. This is accompanied by a multiplication of the targets against which, and the sources from which, action can be produced. In addition, the combinations of actors that are possible, either as a result of conscious design or as the product of circumstances, are greatly expanded. No longer can it be taken for granted that the international arena is populated by and managed through states; indeed, to make such an assumption can be a decidedly risky business.

For example, in responding to terrorist threats against aircraft, many of the traditional assumptions have to be modified or discarded. The terrorist, although he or she may be associated with a particular state, does not need the state or its government as a channel for participation and influence. At the same time, air transport itself is a complex and vulnerable international network, which undoubtedly needs the state (or at least its territory) as a base, but which operates in some ways independently of states. In addition to the terrorists and the airlines, the system contains international organisations devoted to the regulation of air transport, private individuals and interest groups such as aircraft manufacturers or travel companies. The result of this greatly expanded network is an often delicate system of relations in which states and governments are implicated but not in control, and which terrorists can exploit, sometimes in spectacular fashion.

The contemporary system: beyond the system of states?

It is tempting to conclude, on the basis of arguments like those advanced in this chapter, that the state and the state system are inexorably declining as influences upon and explanations of what goes on in world politics. Indeed, some analysts have argued strongly that the idea of a state system should be abandoned, and that it should be replaced by a

new 'globalist perspective' for the comprehension of world politics, based primarily on transnational forces. Two major variants of this argument can be identified:

1. The first advocates the adoption of a transnationalism based on global pluralism, a constantly fluctuating and changing array of groups exerting their influence on each and every issue. This is seen not simply as a valid method for analysing world politics but also as an 'ideal type' of a more pluralistic and more peaceful world. Such arguments lead to a 'cobweb' conception of the system in which the state is entangled in the myriad bonds of transnational interaction and in which state-centric views are often a barrier to an understanding of the true world.
2. A second 'globalist' conception relies not so much on assumptions of global pluralism as on the mechanisms of transnational capitalism. Here, the state becomes allied to and sometimes 'captured' by the power of monopoly capital, expressed most obviously through the multinational corporation. States, groups and individuals are subject to a global structure in which the key elements are concentrations of capital and in which the key process is the exploitation of dependent classes or peoples. Once again, there is a strongly normative aspect to this version of the world arena. Capitalism is seen as having within it the seeds of its own downfall, which can be brought about by the raising of consciousness among the dependent and exploited and an overturning of the global structure.

More will be said about these approaches in later chapters (especially Chapter 6 and Chapter 14), but it is important to note them here as the strongest analytical expressions of the challenge to state dominance in world politics.

Reality, though, lies untidily somewhere in-between the continued dominance of the state and its terminal decline. The fact of the matter is that for some time past and for the foreseeable future world politics constitutes what Oran Young describes as a 'mixed actor system':

> The basic notion of a system of mixed actors requires a movement away from the assumption of homogeneity with respect to types of actor, and, therefore, a retreat from the postulate of the state as the fundamental unit of world politics. Instead, the mixed actor view envisions a situation in which several qualitatively different types of actor interact in the absence of any settled pattern of dominance–submission (or hierarchical) relationships. In such a system, questions concerning political stature, competencies, rights, obligations and so forth cannot be dealt with in terms of a simple rule indicating the supremacy of one type of actor and, therefore, they must be worked out on an *ad hoc* basis with different results for different types of relationship.[2]

In a 'mixed actor' system, the state remains an important participant (and on many issues the dominant influence); but the role of the state has become problematical rather than obvious. A further dimension is added to the 'mixed actor' view of the arena by the logical conclusion that the system is also one of mixed relationships – a conclusion encapsulated in the idea of 'complex interdependence'.[3] According to this view of international relationships, the central pillars of a state-centric approach have become questionable:

- It can no longer be assumed that states are coherent and dominant actors in world

politics; they are increasingly supplemented or supplanted by multiple channels of actions and interaction.
- There is no longer a settled hierarchy of issues in world politics, with 'power and security' and 'national interests' at its head. Instead there is a fluctuating international 'agenda' reflecting the concerns and influences of a wide range of actors.
- The traditional methods of conducting interstate relations – headed by the use of force – have at least partly been replaced by new methods of asserting influence, once again reflecting the activities of multiple participants.

Summary

Both of the images outlined above – those of a 'mixed actor system' and of 'complex interdependence' between actors – reflect the view that world politics has undergone a substantial but far from complete transformation in the period since 1945. Changes in the 'agenda' of world politics and in methods for exerting influence will be explored in Parts II and III of this book, but the conclusions here, in terms of the international system, can be stated clearly:

- The state is still a major participant in the arena, generating influential actions and attracting attention. The state system, in consequence, still remains the most powerful set of organising forces and activities, but it is not the only significant cluster of networks.
- The state has been joined by a range of other actors, some of them taking advantage of perceived inadequacies in states themselves, and there has been a consequential diffusion of activity and influence within the arena.

Table 5.2 The international system: state-centric and mixed actor perspectives

	State-centric	Mixed actor
Actors	States: non-state actors subordinate; sovereignty, recognition and control as basis for participation	States and non-state actors; autonomy, representation and influence as basis for participation
Stratification and structure	Hierarchy of states; distribution of power between major states and alliances	No settled hierarchy; complex interdependence and influence related to issues or situations
Patterns of interaction	Intergovernmental: agenda dominated by security concerns, diplomacy	Multiple channels of communication; fluctuating agenda; new forms of diplomacy
Rules and practices	Determined by distribution of power; based on preservation of state system; possibility of use of force as sanction.	Changing rules and procedures reflecting circumstances and issues, based on bargaining between state and non-state actors

Summary *Continued*

- New networks of international activity have arisen, characterised by variety and complexity, within which states and other actors coexist. Often this coexistence is uneasy and perplexing, and that is precisely where the challenge for analysis and policy arises.

Table 5.2 opposite summarises the relationships and contrasts between, on the one hand, a state-centric image of the international system and, on the other, a 'mixed actor' perspective, in terms of the criteria used in Chapter 4 – the actors in the system, its stratification and structure, patterns of interaction, and rules and practices.

Notes

1. The particular expression was coined by R. Snyder, H. Bruck and B. Sapin (eds), *Foreign Policy Decision Making*, New York, Free Press, London, Collier-Macmillan, 1962.
2. O. Young, 'The actors in world politics', in J. Rosenau, V. Davis and M. East (eds), *The Analysis of International Politics*, New York, Free Press, London, Collier-Macmillan, 1972, p. 136.
3. R. O. Keohane and J. S. Nye Jr, *Power and Interdependence: World politics in transition*, Boston, Little Brown, 2nd edn, 1989.

Further reading

On the principles and operation of the state system, the following are useful: F. S. Northedge, *The International Political System*, London, Faber, 1976; H. Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A study of order in world politics*, London, Macmillan, 1977; J. D. B. Miller, *The World of States*, London, Croom Helm, 1981; J. Mayall (ed), *The Community of States: A study in international political theory*, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1982. **Specific critiques of a state-centric perspective** can be found in G. Modelski, *Principles of World Politics*, New York, Free Press, London, Collier-Macmillan, 1972; R. Little and M. Smith (eds), *Perspectives on World Politics*, London, Routledge, 2nd edn, 1991. **A robust rejoinder to critics of state-centrism** can be found in H. Bull, 'The state's positive role in world affairs', *Daedalus*, 108(4), Fall 1979.

Treatments that deal with **the changing nature and role of statehood** include E. Morse, *Modernization and the Transformation of International Relations*, New York, Free Press, London, Collier-Macmillan, 1976; W. Hanrieder, 'Dissolving international politics: reflections on the nation-state', *American Political Science Review*, 72(4), 1978; G. J. Ikenberry, 'The state and strategies of international adjustment', *World Politics*, 39(1), 1986; J. P. Nettl, 'The state as a conceptual variable', *World Politics*, 20(2), 1968; R. Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1981. The Hanrieder and Ikenberry articles are reprinted in Little and Smith, *Perspectives on World Politics* (see above), Part II. **Statehood in Eastern Europe and the Third World** is dealt with in K. Dawisha, *Eastern Europe, Gorbachev and Reform*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988; C. Gati, *The Bloc that Failed*, Bloomington, University of Indiana Press, 1990; G. Schopflin, *Politics in Eastern Europe*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1993; C. Thomas, *In Search of Security: The Third World in international relations*, Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1987; J. Spanier, *Games Nations Play*, Washington, DC, Congressional Quarterly Press, 8th edn,

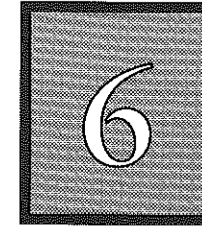
1993, ch. 10; W. Jones, *The Logic of International Relations*, New York, HarperCollins, 7th edn, 1991, Part I.

The rise of new actors and networks is explored by R. W. Mansbach, Y. H. Ferguson and D. E. Lampert, *The Web of World Politics: Non-state actors in the global system*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice Hall, 1976; R. W. Mansbach, *The Global Puzzle: Issues and actors in world politics*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1994, especially chs 4 and 5; D. Pirages, *Global Technopolitics: The international politics of technology and resources*, Pacific Grove, CA, Brooks/Cole, 1989; B. Hocking, *Localising Foreign Policy: Non-central governments and multilayered diplomacy*, London, Macmillan, 1993, especially chs 1–2; M. Banks (ed.), *Conflict in World Society*, Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1984; A. McGrew and P. Lewis (eds), *Global Politics*, Oxford, Polity Press, 1992, especially ch. 1.

The broad concept of a **'mixed actor system'** was first outlined in O. Young, 'The actors in world politics', in J. Rosenau, V. Davis and M. East (eds), *The Analysis of International Politics*, New York, Free Press, London, Collier-Macmillan, 1972. Other treatments dealing with this changed view of the system include: Mansbach, Lampert and Ferguson, *The Web of World Politics* (see above; they coin the term 'complex conglomerate system' for the phenomenon); McGrew and Lewis, *Global Politics* (see above), especially chs 13 and 16; S. Brown, *New Forces, Old Forces and the Future of World Politics*, Glenview, IL, Scott Foresman/Little Brown, 1988.

Issues of **globalisation** are dealt with in contrasting ways by E. Luard, *The Globalization of Politics: The changed focus of political action in the modern world*, London, Macmillan, 1990; J. Burton, *World Society*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1972; J. Galtung, *The True Worlds: A transnational perspective*, New York, Free Press, London, Collier-Macmillan, 1980. See also Little and Smith, *Perspectives on World Politics* (see above) and McGrew and Lewis, *Global Politics* (see above), which present differing perspectives as part of their central arguments.

CHAPTER



CASE STUDY

Multinational corporations

This chapter applies a number of the ideas explored in Chapters 3–5 to a case study of multinational corporations (MNCs). It focuses on four areas: first, the presence of the MNCs in the world arena; second, the 'actorness' of the MNCs; third, the ways in which MNCs form new networks in the arena; and finally, the impact of the MNCs on the international system.

The argument in this book so far has focused on the nature of the world arena, its changing characteristics and the diverse roles of the participants in it. Thus, in Chapter 3, the central concepts to be examined were those of the arena itself and its relationship to the various actors, networks and systems of which it is composed. In Chapter 4, the emphasis was upon the most salient and historically the most influential system within the world arena – the system of states, which, despite important changes in its components and its focus, has remained a central feature of world politics. Finally, in Chapter 5, the concentration was upon the ways in which non-state forces can modify the operation of the state system, constructing new networks of relations and – for some analysts at least – constituting a challenge to the continued predominance of the state system itself.

The overall conclusion of the argument, in general terms, was that reports of the 'death of the state system' were exaggerated. Despite substantial elements of transformation in the world arena, the state system accounts for a great deal of what is significant in the world of the 1990s. None the less, the state system exists in a substantially changed world arena, demonstrating the features of a 'mixed actor system' with diverse participants and a number of different 'games' being played at any one time.

As we shall see in later chapters, the implications of such a situation for the substance and the process of world politics are far-reaching. However, the concern of this chapter is to consolidate and illustrate the conclusions reached so far through the use of a detailed case study.

As noted earlier in the book, the study of world politics should not be seen as an abstract