



FIGURE I-1

rower and less easily represented. In the late 1990s, such countries as Belarus (between Europe and Russia) and Kazakhstan (between Russia and Muslim Southwest Asia) lie in inter-realm transition zones. Remember, over much (though not all) of their length, borders between realms are zones of regional change.

■ *Geographic realms change over time.*

Had we drawn Figure I-1 before Columbus' time, the map would have looked quite different: Amerindian states and peoples would have determined the boundaries in the Americas; Australia and New Guinea would have constituted one realm, and New Zealand would have been part of the Pacific realm. The colonization, Europeanization, and Westernization of the world changed that map dramatically. During the four decades following the end of

World War II there was relatively little change, but the years since 1985 have witnessed far-reaching realignments that are still going on. Over six editions of this book, between 1971 and 1991, we made only minor adjustments to a realms framework that was essentially stable. Now, in the late 1990s, we continue to make major revisions, underscoring the transformation of our world as the twenty-first century rapidly approaches.

As we try to envisage what a New World Order will look like on the map, note that the 12 geographic realms can be divided into two groups: (1) those dominated by one major political entity (North America/United States, Middle America/Mexico, South America/Brazil, South Asia/India, and East Asia/China as well as Russia and Australia), and (2) those in which there are many countries but no dominant state (Europe, North Africa/Southwest Asia,

Subsaharan Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific realm). For several decades we have known a world dominated by two major powers, the United States and the former Soviet Union. Will a multipolar world arise from the rubble of that bipolar world? That is a question to be addressed in the pages that follow.

Regions and Their Criteria

The spatial division of the world into geographic realms establishes a broad global framework, but for our purposes a more refined level of spatial classification is needed. This brings us to an important organizing concept in geography: the **regional concept**. To continue the analogy with biological taxonomy, we now go from phylum to order. To

establish regions within geographic realms, we need more specific criteria.

Let us use the North American realm to demonstrate the regional idea. When we refer to a part of the United States or Canada (e.g., the South, the Midwest, or the Prairie Provinces), we employ a regional concept—not scientifically, but as a matter of everyday communication. We reveal our *perception* of local or distant space as well as our mental image of the region to which we make reference.

But what exactly is the Midwest? If you were asked to draw this region on the North American map, how would you do it? Regions are easy to imagine and describe, but they can be very difficult to outline on a map. One way to go about defining the Midwest is to use the borders of states: certain states are part of this region, others not. Another way is to use agriculture as the chief criterion: where