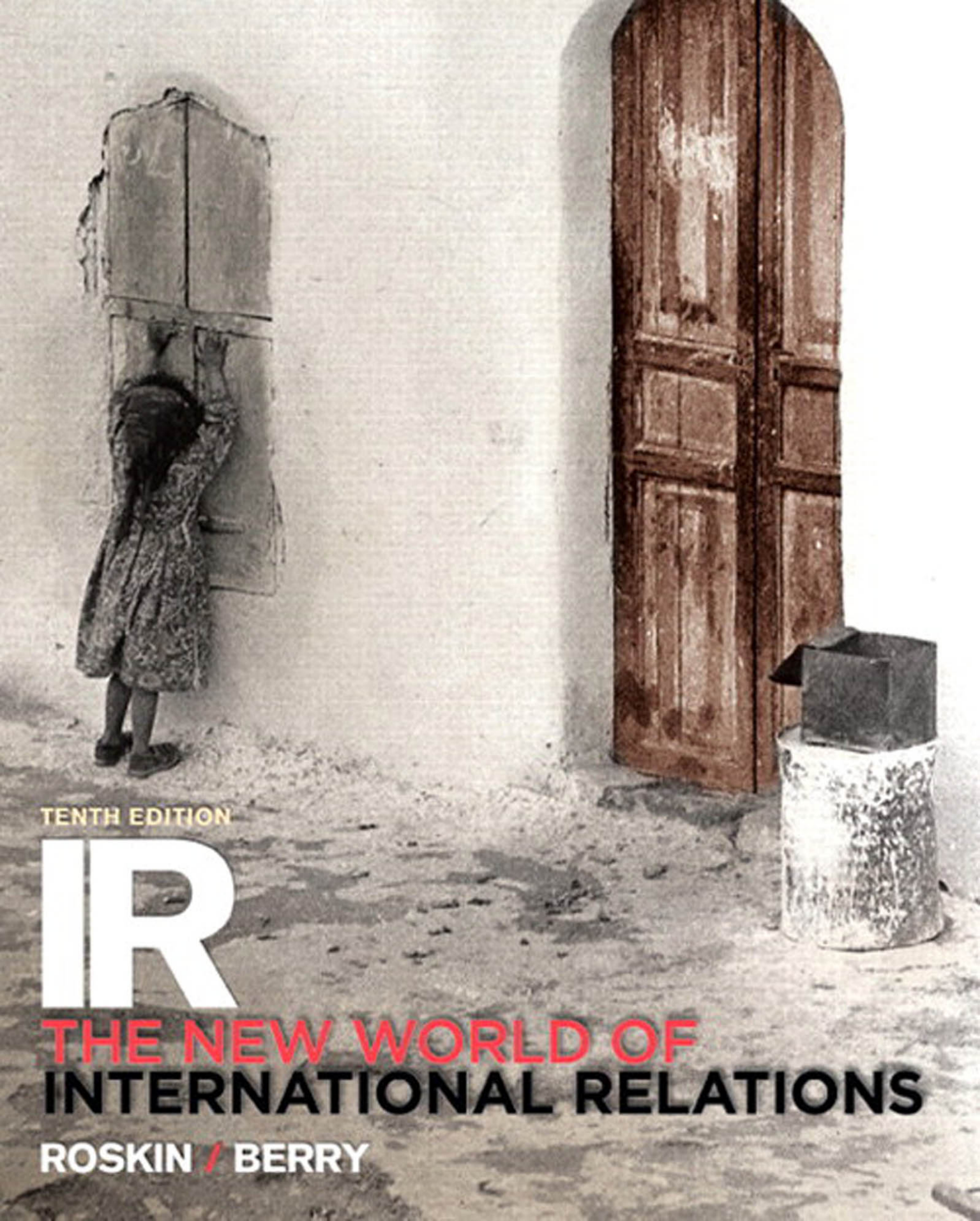
TENTH EDITION
IR
THE NEW WORLD OF
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
ROSKIN / BERRY

IR

The New World of International Relations

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IR
The New World of International Relations

Tenth Edition

Michael G. Roskin
Lycoming College

Nicholas O. Berry
Foreign Policy Forum

PEARSON

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Cover Image: Michael G. Roskin
Director of Digital Media: Brian Hyland
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Full-Service Project Management
and Composition: Integra
Printer/Binder: Courier/Kendallville
Cover Printer: Lehigh-Phoenix Color/Hagerstown
Text Font: 10/12 Palatino

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Roskin, Michael
IR: the new world of international relations/Michael G. Roskin, Nicholas O. Berry.—Tenth edition.
pages cm
ISBN-13: 978-0-205-99893-7
ISBN-10: 0-205-99893-3
1. International relations—Textbooks. 2. World politics—1945–1989—Textbooks.
3. World politics–1989—Textbooks. 4. United States—Foreign relations—1945–1989—Text books. 5. United States—Foreign relations—1989—Textbooks. I. Berry, Nicholas O. II. Title.
JZ1242.R67 2015
327—dc23

2013033945

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10—EDW—14 13 12 11 10

Student Edition:
ISBN-13: 978-0-205-99893-7
ISBN-10: 0-205-99893-3

Books á la carte:
ISBN-13: 978-0-205-99894-4
ISBN-10: 0-205-99894-1

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Brief Contents

Detailed Contents

Preface

We opened the previous edition of *IR: The New World of International Relations* three years ago with two questions: Is the United States in decline, and is China's rise inexorable? With this, the tenth edition, we may give tentative answers: No to both, or, at any rate, things are more complicated than many thought back then. The U.S. economy is slowly and painfully recovering. The big U.S. problem, however, which limits its effectiveness on the world scene, is Washington's political paralysis in which Republicans in Congress block a Democratic president, preventing for years even passage of a budget.

China has hit some speed bumps. Its frantic economic growth is "unsustainable" in the words of some of its top people. Overinvestment, a poisoned environment, and corruption are leading to doubts about China's one-party authoritarianism. Other Asian powers are pushing back against China's maritime claims. In late 2012, nationalists took the helm in both Beijing and Tokyo, raising tensions and increasing the chances of hostilities.

These are some of the problems that make the world complicated for U.S. foreign policy, which faces several dilemmas. Should the United States keep a substantial fleet in the Western Pacific to "counterbalance" China's naval buildup? Should we be supporting Japan, the Philippines, and Vietnam against Chinese claims over small islands in the South and East China Seas? Was it wise to threaten to strike Syria's capacity to use poison gas on its own people? Or would that just get us involved in another Middle East war—in which some of our allies would be Islamist *jihadis*—as we end the longest wars in U.S. history?

Are today's students intellectually prepared to comprehend and respond rationally to this disquieting new world? Or will they react in ignorance and anger? This book attempts to make sure students understand how the global system has changed over the course of a century or more and how it keeps changing. These are some of the challenges the tenth edition of *IR: The New World of International Relations* deals with.

The first step is to get a clear picture of what the current global system is. Some say that we have already left the "post–Cold War system" but few are able to define what sort of system we have entered. We offer some suggestions. Global systems—the distribution of power and motives of a given period—matter a great deal. They structure all countries' foreign and security policies. If we accurately comprehend the system that we are in—the "structure"—then we can make shrewd and effective policies. If we misunderstand the current structure—for example, interpret the present system as a new Cold War bipolarity—then we can make terrible mistakes. Because we emphasize international systems and what they imply, we have been called "structural realists," a term we neither embrace nor reject.

Few young people nowadays enter college with adequate background in geography and twentieth-century history. Ask students questions about major events in the last century or strategic waterways and you are likely to face silence. It is all news to them. But they cannot be blamed; they don't know it because they

have never been taught it. Accordingly, we take it as our task to do considerable backfilling in recent history, which we arrange largely by geographic area and use to illustrate one or more concepts of international relations. Many instructors have thanked us for this approach.

We believe that because world system is now rapidly evolving, IR is more exciting and relevant than ever. In this new world there are new threats to guard against and new opportunities to take advantage of. As in earlier editions, we are trying to awaken young newcomers to the field to its fascinating and sometimes dramatic qualities, as well as acquaint them with its basic concepts and vocabulary. Toward this end, we include feature boxes titled "Theories" and "Classic Thought," as well as "Economics," "Turning Point," "Diplomacy," and "Geography." We also include "Reflections" feature boxes, which recall the authors' personal experiences or introduce issues that may affect students personally to show that IR is not a distant abstraction.

Also now included are chapter-opening Learning Objectives, which prime students for the main points. Previously we opened each chapter with Questions to Consider, now moved to the chapter's end as Review Questions. Running marginal glossaries are retained to help students build their vocabularies as they read. Each chapter also concludes with a list of key terms and further references.

NEW TO THIS EDITION

In addition to the usual updates that include recent and current developments—especially relating to the Arab Spring and China's claims to its nearby seas—instructor comment prompted us to add to the tenth edition of *IR*:

- Old Chapter 12, "The Causes of Interstate Conflicts," has been renamed "Why War?" and moved to Chapter 3, to better fit the initial theoretical considerations of the first two chapters.
- The Vietnam War is just yesterday to some of us, but for today's students it makes more sense to trim it down and integrate it into Chapter 4 on U.S. national interests. Vietnam illustrates how national interests may become warped.
- In Chapter 6 on U.S. leadership, a new box shows how Libya and Syria were agonizing decisions for President Obama.
- Chapters on national security in general and nuclear weapons have been rolled into one, now Chapter 12, and greatly updated.
- Since much conflict now takes place within countries, a new Chapter 13 on internal conflict has been added.
- Drones and cyberwar are now explicated in boxes in Chapter 14 on asymmetrical conflict.
- Nationalistic hostility between China and Japan now leads our Asia/Pacific chapter, Chapter 16.

Acknowledgments

We owe a great deal of thanks to specialists who read and commented on our chapters and saved us from foolish misstatements. Caroline Payne of Lycoming College contributed to the updating of several chapters and did the new chapter on internal warfare. Ambassador Theresa A. Healy and Charles Ahlgren of the State Department made valuable suggestions for the chapter on diplomacy. Dr. Ed Dew of Fairfield University perceptively reviewed our chapters on Africa and Latin America. Physicist David Fisher of Lycoming College gave sound comments on our new final chapter. Also, we thank the following reviewers for their helpful comments: Michael Grossman, Mount Union College; Allen Meyer, Mesa Community College; Yury Polsky, West Chester University; Rick Whisonant, York Technical College; and David Zimny, Los Medanos College. Responsibility, of course, lies with the authors, who are happy to receive your comments directly for incorporation into future editions.

Michael G. Roskin
maxxumizer@gmail.com

Supplements

Pearson is pleased to offer several resources to qualified adopters of *IR* and their students that will make teaching and learning from this book even more effective and enjoyable. Several of the supplements for this book are available at the Instructor Resource Center (IRC), an online hub that allows instructors to quickly download book-specific supplements. Please visit the IRC welcome page at www.pearsonhighered.com/irc to register for access.

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PART I

Systems and Theories

Chapter 1 Power and Systems To get an overview of *international relations* (IR) we will look at some of its basic concepts, systems, and theories. Chapter 1 explains how IR is quite different from *domestic politics*, because each *state* has *sovereignty*. In this anarchic situation, IR depends a lot on *power* and how it is distributed. The distribution of power gives rise to international *systems*, which are tricky to define and change over time. These systems are just mental constructs or models and must not be reified. Most agree there were several during the twentieth century: a failing *balance-of-power* system, an unstable system from World Wars I through II, and a *bipolar* Cold War system. No IR system lasts forever; all break down. An accurate definition of the current IR system is crucial to sound foreign policy, but we do not yet have a clear definition. *Multipolar*, *unipolar*, *globalized*, *clash of civilizations*, and other systems have been suggested.

Chapter 2 IR Theories Chapter 2 briefly introduces some of the grand or broad theories of IR: realism, liberalism, constructivism, and Marxism, with their mutual criticisms and a caution to take all with a grain of salt. Many other theories—mostly mid-range and empirical—are found throughout the book, but here we consider the big, philosophical approaches that guide what kind of questions we ask and which we ask first. Most IR thinkers subscribe to one of these grand theories, sometimes blending one with another.

Chapter 3 Why War? Chapter 3 examines some of the theories on the causes of war—whether it is inherent in humans, a product of the states they live in, or a result of a chronically insecure international system. Thucydides' theory that fear causes wars is still highly relevant. China's rapid growth has reawakened the theory that "rising powers" cause wars.

1

Power and Systems

President Obama meets with Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013. Both understood that their relations were partly cooperative and partly conflictive. (Ju Peng/ Xinhua/Newscom)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1.1 Differentiate international relations and domestic politics.

1.2 Explain and give examples of the balance-of-power system.

1.3 Demonstrate how an IR system may be inherently unstable.

1.4 Evaluate why the Cold War lasted so long without blowing up.

1.5 Argue which IR system best fits the current world situation.

1.6 Evaluate the rise and durability of states.

1.7 Explain why sovereignty has always been partly fictional.

POWER IN OUR DAY

1.1

Differentiate international relations and domestic politics.

International relations (IR) got more complex with the arrival of the twenty-first century. **Power**—the ability of one country to get another to do (or sometimes not do) something—shifted away from the cash-strapped United States to a rich and often angry China. Washington, preoccupied with **domestic politics**, could not balance its budget and was listened to less in world forums. China, with over $3 trillion in foreign-exchange reserves, was listened to more.

As China got richer, it got stronger and demanded recognition of its ownership of the China seas, something most of the world regarded as absurd and threatening. China constructed a "string of pearls," safe ports across the Indian Ocean, its vital supply route to energy and other resources in the Middle East and Africa. Should the United States oppose the expansion of Chinese power? Were U.S. *national interests* sufficiently involved to risk naval conflict in Asia? Or are the China seas China's business alone?

Power often shifts; this is one reason IR is so interesting. IR occurs *among* sovereign entities (see below); domestic politics occurs *within* a sovereign entity. International laws and institutions are too weak to rely on the way we rely on domestic laws and institutions. In domestic politics, when we have a quarrel with someone, we "don't take the law into our own hands; we take him to court." In IR, it's sometimes the reverse. There is no court, and self-help may be the only option available.

Some thinkers say that IR unfolds amid **international anarchy**, but IR is not completely disorderly. Some order grows out of relative power among nations. For example, during the nineteenth century the mighty British Empire, based mostly on sea power, arranged much of the globe to its liking, and small, weak lands largely obeyed. Such power relationships create international **systems**, the way power is distributed around the globe. An international system is a sort of "power map" for a certain time period. If you can correctly figure out the current system—who's got what kind of power—you know where you stand and how and when to use your power. For example, if many countries have roughly equal power, it is likely a *balance-of-power system* (explored presently). If one country has overwhelming power, enough to supervise the globe (unlikely), it might be a *unipolar system*. The turbulent twentieth century witnessed four IR systems.

1. *Pre–World War I.* Dominance of the great European empires in the nineteenth century until 1914. In systems theory, this period exemplifies a balance-of-power system, but by 1910 it had decayed.
2. *World War I through World War II.* The empires destroy themselves from 1914 to 1945. With several major players refusing to respond to threats, the interwar period might be termed an "anti-balance-of-power" system. It is inherently unstable and temporary.
3. *Cold War.* The collapse of the traditional European powers leaves the United States and USSR facing each other in a *bipolar* system. But the **superpowers** block and exhaust themselves from 1945 through the 1980s, and the bipolar system falls apart.
4. *Post–Cold War.* The collapse of the Soviet Union ends bipolarity, but ideas on the new system are disputed, ranging from *multipolar* (several power centers) to *zones of chaos* and from *globalization* to *Chinese–U.S. duopoly*. We will consider several possibilities.

international relations
Interactions among countries.

power
Ability of one actor to get another to do its bidding.

domestic politics
Interactions within countries.

international anarchy
No overriding power prevents *sovereign* states from conflicting.

system
Interaction of many components so that changing one changes the others.

superpower
Nation with far more power than others; able to wage all levels of warfare.

reification
Mistaking a theory for reality.

force
Application of military power.

Do not reify these periods and systems. They are just attempts to get a handle on reality; they are seldom reality itself. **Reification** is a constant temptation in the social sciences. Students often memorize neat tables to prepare for exams, but take such tables as approximate, not literal. Notice that in the above list one period overlaps with the next. The European empires did not turn off with a click in 1945; they phased out over three decades. To try to understand a confusing world, social scientists must simplify a very complex reality into theories, models, time periods, and conceptual frameworks, all of them mental *constructs*. The systems approach is one such framework.

Actually, IR thinkers use "systems" in two distinct but overlapping ways. First, there is the real system out there in the world, but it is complex, changeable, and hard to define. Second, there is the simplified system we construct in our heads that tries to describe the real system. Ideally, what's in our heads should match what's out there. Then we can conduct rational and successful foreign policies.

CONCEPTS ■ POWER

Power is widely misunderstood. It is not big countries beating up little countries. Power is one country's ability to get another country to do what it wants: A gets B to do what A wants. There are many kinds of power: rational persuasion, economic, cultural, technological, and military. Rational persuasion is the nicest but rarely works by itself. Military power is the least nice and is typically used only as a last resort. Then it becomes **force**, a subset of power. When Ethiopia and Eritrea quarreled over their border, they mobilized their armies and got ready to use force.

Countries use whatever kind of power they have. President Obama urges Iran to put its nuclear program under international control. Tehran demands conditions. U.S. military power is massive, but Tehran has oil power. In our age, energy resources have become one of the most important sources of power. Russia, with an unimpressive army, kept Europe respectful by control of oil and natural-gas exports. When Ukraine gave Russia trouble, Moscow cut the flow of gas to Ukraine. U.S. dependency on imported petroleum is the Achilles heel of American power, one that we now hope to correct by "fracking" oil out of shale deposits. If we succeed, the United States will be a lot more powerful.

Sometimes, as the United States discovered in Vietnam and the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, power is unusable. The crux of power, remember, is getting the other country to do something—in the case of North Vietnam, to stop its forcible reunification with South Vietnam. Can American power really stop coca cultivation in the Andes, an area where local governments either cannot or will not go? U.S. military power in 2001 beat Afghanistan's army in three weeks but could not calm or control Afghanistan. The problem, ignored by Washington for too long, is that Afghanistan is not a country but a *failed state* of warlords, drug lords, and Islamist fighters. After several years of fighting amid chaos, Americans tired of the war. If all your types of power—political, economic, and finally military—do not work in a particular situation, you turn out to be not as powerful as you thought.

Power cannot be closely calculated or predicted. The Soviet Union looked powerful but suddenly collapsed in 1991 due to a faulty economy and tensions among its many nationalities. You often learn who's more powerful only after a war. Typically, before the war, both sides figured they were pretty powerful. The war serves as a terrible corrector of mistaken perceptions. Washington often relies on a bigger and better army, which does not always work. Remember, military is only one kind of power. No one—not the British, the Soviets, nor the Americans, which were all very powerful—tamed Afghanistan.

One's power may be unsuitable to the problem at hand. Artillery and tanks may not work against religiously motivated guerrillas, who offer few good targets. Attempting to persuade another country may provoke resentment: "Who are you to tell us what to do?" Washington often receives such replies from Beijing and Tehran. Accordingly, power of whatever sort is best exercised cautiously. The question for our day is what kind of power we should emphasize—military, economic, or political?

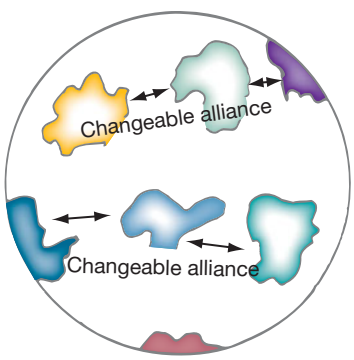
But if the picture in our head does not match reality, we can make terrible, expensive mistakes. For example, if decision makers who were trained for the Cold War keep operating as if the system were still bipolar, with its emphasis on controlling distant lands, they will get bogged down in chaotic places wracked by tribal and religious hatreds. Some critics charged that Soviet-specialist Condoleezza Rice, Bush's national security advisor and later secretary of state, tried to treat Iraq and Afghanistan as Cold War battles. If we try to stop massacres and promote democracy around the globe, we may collide with some nasty realities in "zones of chaos." Getting the current system right means you can go with the flow of events (and sometimes manipulate them) instead of working against them.

THE EUROPEAN BALANCE-OF-POWER SYSTEM

1.2

Explain and give examples of the balance-of-power system.

The nineteenth century exemplifies a **balance-of-power** system, which occurs during certain periods when the power of the several major nations is similar, and they arrange this power, by means of alliances, to roughly balance. If country A feels threatened by country B, it forms an alliance with country C, trying to deter B from aggression. Later, all of them might form an alliance to protect themselves from the growing power of country D. It did not always work, but it helped to hold down the number and ferocity of wars. For a balance-of-power system to function, theorists say, it took at least five major players who shared a common culture and viewpoint and a commitment not to wreck the system. Balance of power is like a poker game in which you'd rather keep the game going than win all the money, so you refrain from bankrupting the other players. Graphically, it looks like this:



balance of power Theory that states form alliances to offset threatening states.

Westphalian System set up by 1648 Peace of Westphalia that made sovereignty the norm.

sovereignty Concept that each state rules its territory without interference.

Historians see two great ages of balance of power, from 1648 to 1789 and again from 1814 to 1914. The Thirty Years War, mostly fought in Germany, pitted Catholics against Protestants and was the bloodiest in history until World War II. By the time it was settled with the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, Europe's monarchs had had enough war and constructed a balance-of-power system that endured until the French Revolution (1789). The **Westphalian** system also established the concept of **sovereignty** (see discussion later in this chapter).

Napoleon overturned the old system with unrestrained ambition and a mass army that conquered most of Europe. When Napoleon played poker, he tried to

Metternichian Conservative restoration of balance of power after Napoleon.

bankrupt all the other players (he also cheated). Gone was the restraint that had characterized the old system. Once Napoleon was beaten in 1814, Europe's top statesmen met under the guidance of Austrian Prince Metternich to restore a balance-of-power system, which was called the **Metternichian** system. It worked moderately well for some decades, but only as long as monarchs restrained their ambitions and shared the values of legitimacy and stability. This slowly eroded under the effects of nationalism in the nineteenth century—especially with German unification in 1871—until it had disappeared by World War I. There has not been a balance-of-power system since then. Some say there cannot be one again.

Some scholars reject the balance-of-power theory, pointing out that there were nasty wars when power was supposed to be balanced—for example, the Seven Years' War (what Americans call the French and Indian War) of the 1750s or the Crimean War of the 1850s. Balance-of-power theorists counter by saying these were relatively small wars that did not wreck the overall system.

CONCEPTS ■ SYSTEMS

A system is something composed of many components that interact and influence each other. If you can analyze the logic of a system, you can roughly predict its evolution or at least understand what could go wrong. Statesmen who grasp the current international system can react cleverly to threats and opportunities. Those who do not can damage their own country.

The crux of systems is in the term "interact." If something is truly a system, you cannot change just one part of it because most of the other components also change. Systems thinking originated in biology. The human body is a system of heart, lungs, blood, and so on. Take away one component, and the body dies. Alter one, and the others try to adjust to compensate. Systems can be stable and self-correcting or they can break down, either from internal or external causes.

After World War II, systems thinking spread to many disciplines, including international relations. Thinkers—some focusing just on Europe, others on the entire globe—found that various systems have come and gone over the centuries, each operating with its own logic and producing variously stable and unstable results. Obviously, an unstable system does not last.

The strong point about systems thinking is that it trains us to see the world as a whole rather than just as a series of unrelated happenings and problems. It also encourages us to see how a clever statesman may create and manipulate events to get desired results. If he presses here, what will come out there? Will it be bad or good?

To some extent, international systems are artificial creations of varying degrees of handiwork. A system that obtains the assent of the major powers and goes with the forces of history may last a long time. A system that harms one or more major players and goes against the forces of history will surely soon be overturned. Systems do not fall from heaven but are crafted by intelligent minds such as Metternich and Bismarck. This brings an element of human intelligence and creativity into international politics.

Does the world form a political system? It is surely composed of many parts, and they interact. The trouble is few thinkers totally agree on what the systems were, their time periods, and the logic of their operation. Looking at the four systems of the twentieth century, some would say there are only three, because the first and second should really be merged (the second was merely the decayed tail end of the first). Others would say, no, there are five, adding the period of the Axis dictatorships as a separate system.

International systems thinking is inexact, not yet a science. We have still not settled on what the present system is. In this chapter, we consider several attempts to describe the current system and note that none are completely satisfactory. With each proposed system, ask two questions: (1) Does it exist, and (2) will it persist? That is, does the proposed system match reality, and, if so, is it likely to remain stable and last for some time?

Some writers hold that **hierarchy of power**—the opposite of balance of power—acts to preserve peace. When nations know their position on a ladder of power, they are more likely to behave. The aftermath of a great, decisive war leaves a victor on top and a loser on the bottom, and this brings a few decades of peace. Critics say balance-of-power proponents have mistaken this hierarchy for a balance that never existed. All such hierarchies are temporary and eventually overturned as weaker states gain power and dominant states lose it.

hierarchy of power Theory that peace is preserved when states know where they stand on a ladder of relative power.

Bismarckian Contrived, unstable balance of power from 1870 to 1914.

Either way, the nineteenth-century system decayed when two rising newcomers used a series of wars to grab their own empires. Germany and Japan upset the system with demands for, as Berlin put it, "a place in the sun." The Franco-Prussian War unified Germany in 1871, and Japan's 1868 Meiji Restoration produced powerful, dissatisfied nations willing to fight to overturn the existing system. Tremors started around the turn of the century as Germany armed the Boers against the British in South Africa, engaged Britain in a race to build battleships, and confronted France by boldly intervening in Morocco. At this same time in the Pacific, Japan attacked and beat China and Russia and seized Korea.

The balance-of-power system of the nineteenth century was no longer operative by the early twentieth century. Balance-of-power theorists say the system requires at least five players who are able to make and remake alliances. Flexibility and lack of passion are the keys here. Instead, by 1914 Europe was divided into two hostile, rigid alliances. When one alliance member went to war—first Austria against Serbia—it dragged in its respective backers. By the time the war broke out, the balance-of-power system had broken down, although many statesmen did not realize it.

TURNING POINT ■ BISMARCK: SYSTEM CHANGER

If someone had told Prussian Chancellor Bismarck that the unified Germany he created in 1871 would lead to two world wars and Europe's destruction, he would have been aghast. Bismarck was a conservative, yet his handiwork brought radical, systemic change. Remember, in systems you cannot change just one thing because everything else changes too. Bismarck supervised a giant change in the political geography of Europe—German unification—but this rippled outward, producing a new global political system.

Before Bismarck, Germany had been a patchwork of small kingdoms and principalities that rarely threatened anybody. After unification, Germany had the location, industry, and population to dominate Europe. Bismarck thought unified Germany could live in balance and at peace with the other European powers. He was neither a militarist nor an expansionist. Instead, after unification, Bismarck concentrated on making sure an alliance of hostile powers did not form around his Second Reich. Trying to play the old balance-of-power game, Bismarck made several treaties with other European powers proclaiming friendship and mutual aid.

But the **Bismarckian** system was not as stable as the earlier Metternichian system (see above). Bismarck's unified Germany had changed the European—and to some extent global—political geography. German nationalism was now unleashed. A new Kaiser and his generals were nationalistic and imperialistic. They thought Bismarck was too cautious and fired him in 1890. Then they started empire building, arms races, and an alliance with Austria. France and Russia, alarmed at this, formed what Kennan called the "fateful alliance." Thus, on the eve of World War I, Europe was arrayed into two hostile blocs, something Bismarck desperately tried to avoid. Without knowing or wanting it, Bismarck helped destroy old Europe.

THE UNSTABLE INTERWAR SYSTEM

1.3

Demonstrate how an IR system may be inherently unstable.

Versailles Treaty
The 1919 treaty that ended World War I.

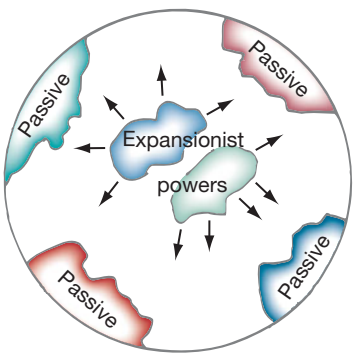
interwar
Between World Wars I and II, 1919–1939.

World War I, which killed some 15 million, was the initial act of Europe's self-destruction. Four empires—the German, Austro-Hungarian, Russian, and Turkish—collapsed. From the wreckage grew the twin evils of communism and fascism. The "winners"—Britain and France—were so drained and bitter they were unable to enforce the provisions of the **Versailles Treaty** on defeated Germany. The international economy was seriously wounded and collapsed a decade later.

World War I led directly to World War II. The dissatisfied losers of the first war—Germany and Austria—joined with two dissatisfied winners—Italy and Japan (Japan participated in a minor way by seizing German possessions in China and the Pacific during World War I)—while another loser, Russia, tried to stay on the sidelines.

Another connecting link between the two wars was the failure of any balance-of-power system to function, this time by design. Balance-of-power thinking stood discredited after World War I. Many blamed the cynical manipulations of power balancers for the war. This is an unfair charge, as the system had already broken down before the war. Maybe balance of power is a defective system, but the start of World War I by itself does not prove that point. At any rate, the winning democracies—Britain, France, and the United States—chose not to play balance of power, and from their decision flowed the catastrophe of World War II.

What do we call this strange and short-lived **interwar** system? It was not balance of power because the democracies refused to play. The dictators, sensing the vacuum, moved in to take what they could. We might, for want of a better term, call it an "anti-balance-of-power system." Britain and France, weary from the previous war and putting too much faith in the League of Nations and human reason, finally met force with force only when it was too late; Germany nearly beat them both. Graphically, it looked like this:



Stalin's Soviet Union also refused to play. Here it was a case of ideological hatred against the capitalist powers and the conviction they were doomed anyway. The United States also refused to play balance of power. Isolationism plus verbal protests to Japan over the rape of China were designed to keep us out of the conflagration. We supposed that we did not need a large military; we had two oceans. In 1941, both the Soviet Union and the United States learned they could not hide from hostile power.

Europe destroyed itself again in World War II. Into the power vacuum moved Stalin's Red Army, intent on making East Europe a security zone for the

Soviet Union. The Japanese empire disappeared, leaving another vacuum in Asia. The Communists, first in China and North Korea, then in North Vietnam, took over. The great European empires, weak at home and facing anticolonial nationalism, granted independence to virtually all their imperial holdings. Britain, the great balancer of the nineteenth century, ceded its place to the United States. The age of the classic empires was over, replaced by the dominance of two superpowers.

bipolar
The world divided into two power centers, as in the Cold War.

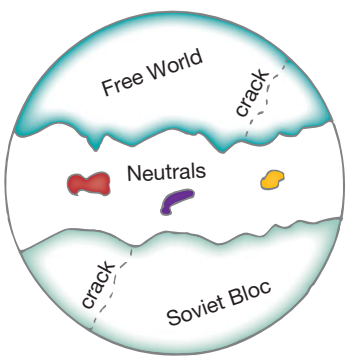
THE BIPOLAR COLD WAR SYSTEM

1.4

Evaluate why the Cold War lasted so long without blowing up.

The Cold War started shortly after World War II as Stalin's Soviet Union, intent on turning East Europe into a belt of Communist-ruled satellites, proved its unfitness as a partner for Roosevelt's grand design for postwar cooperation. Many feared that Stalin was also preparing to move beyond East Europe. In the spring of 1947 the United States openly stated its opposition to Soviet expansion and took steps to counter it. The Cold War was on.

The world lined up in one of two camps—or at least it looked that way—as there was no third major power to challenge either the Soviets or the Americans. Academic thinkers described this situation as **bipolar**. Bipolarity was a dangerous but in some ways comforting system. West and East blocs watched each other like hawks, constantly looking for opportunities to exploit in the other bloc and guarding against possible attack. It was a tense world, with fingers too close to nuclear triggers. Graphically, it looked like this:



The bipolar system was seen as a "zero-sum game" in which whatever one player won, the other lost. If the Communist bloc stole a piece of the Free World, it won, and the West lost. To prevent such reverses, war was always possible (Korea and Vietnam), even nuclear war (over Cuba in 1962). Because both superpowers possessed nuclear weapons, though, they always kept their conflicts at arm's length, fighting by proxy and not directly. Both understood that a direct conflict could quickly turn nuclear, ending both the system and their dominance. They hated each other, but they were not reckless. Better, each thought, to be prince of its half of the world than run the risk of mutual wipeout. At no time did Americans tangle directly with Soviets. Still, everyone was jumpy, worried about possible gains and losses.

Some on both sides still hearken back to those days when life was simpler because you knew exactly who your friends and enemies were. The weaker allies of the superpowers mostly kept quiet and obeyed their leading power. China,