

History of  
International  
Relations and Russian  
Foreign Policy in the  
20th Century  
(Volume I)



# History of International Relations and Russian Foreign Policy in the 20th Century (Volume I)

Edited by

Anatoly V. Torkunov,  
William C. Wohlforth  
and Boris F. Martynov

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# PREFACE

Dear Reader,

This textbook encapsulates more than two decades of research carried out by the historians and political scientists at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO). It comes out as part of a series of English-language textbooks on the core subjects of the MGIMO curriculum. MGIMO scholars and educators, in collaboration with their international counterparts, have never stopped developing their approaches to major trends and pivotal events in 20th-century international politics. These perspectives usually fall in line with other national and global schools of thought, but are sometimes distinct, while always supported by facts and sound arguments.

At MGIMO, we train diplomats, international entrepreneurs, journalists, future experts in the field of international relations, and many other kinds of practitioners. We consider the ability to analyse and conceptualise the history of world politics as indispensable skills, a *sine qua non* for international relations professionals in a globalised world. Productive negotiation, effective conflict prevention and resolution—as well as leadership in the international arena more generally—are not possible without a firm grasp of the meaning of that history for the challenges the world is facing today. We have the privilege to look from a distance at the fascinating and often tragic history of international relations in the previous century. With that privilege, however, comes the responsibility to draw relevant conclusions and educate future policymakers about the risks and opportunities in contemporary world politics.

I would like to express gratitude to my co-editors William Wohlforth and Boris Martynov for their hard work on the manuscript and pertinent generalisations of the course material in the Introduction and Conclusion, Maria Ananieva for leading the group of translators, Anne Crowley-Vigneau for language editing, and Andrey Baykov, Andrey Sidorov, Mikhail Troitskiy and Yan Vaslavskiy for co-ordinating the textbook project.

Whether you are a teacher or a student or both, my sincere hope is that you will find the textbook useful and enjoy your reading.

Anatoly V. Torkunov  
Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences  
Rector, MGIMO University  
Moscow, December 3, 2019

# INTRODUCTION

WILLIAM C. WOHLFORTH

The material contained between the covers of this book is vital for the modern student for two crucial reasons. Firstly, in order to understand the present dilemmas and challenges of international politics, we need to know the past. Every current major global problem has historical antecedents. To know what is truly new, to know whether international politics is really changing and, if so, how, it is necessary to know how we got here. To take but the most obvious example, as of the writing of this introduction there was frequent talk of the “new Cold War” between Russia and the West. To determine what this claim actually entails, it is necessary to know something of the general contours of the original Cold War—a task undertaken herein in Chapters 12-23.

Secondly, the material presented in this book constitutes the empirical foundation of much theoretical scholarship on international politics. Yes, there are other periods and even other international systems whose experience also informs systematic thinking about International Relations, but the chapters that follow present an expert narrative of the history that has most informed the efforts of generations of scholars to create a modern social science of international relations. Indeed, it is fair to say that the events related in Chapter 1—the breakdown of the Concert of Europe and the outbreak of the devastating and unexpectedly sanguinary global conflagration of World War I—are those that sparked the modern study of international relations in the aftermath of that horrible conflict. As had no event prior to its occurrence, the Great War of 1914 to 1918, which left all of its main protagonists save the United States far worse off than they were when it started, underlined the tragic wastefulness of the institution of war. It caused scholars to confront one of the most enduring puzzles of the study of international relations—why humans continue to resort to this self-destructive method of conflict resolution?

Needless to say, many thinkers, including many historians, question the utility of international relations theory. Often it is seen as a way of

preventing the analyst from seeing the true complexity of international relations—complexity well represented in the chapters that follow. Yet, at a very minimum, theoretical models and concepts help to organise the myriad details of history. They make explicit the assumptions underlying claims about what might have caused what, and what might have happened had statesmen made different choices. The subsequent chapters narrate events of immense complexity and importance. And if nothing else, one thing the theoretical scholarship does is identify and clarify enduring problems that beset the chief actors on the international stage.

The story that follows can be told as a struggle on the part of a few crucial actors—mainly the great powers of Europe and Asia—to confront and overcome a set of challenges that are especially relevant in international relations, even though analogous problems do emerge in other social realms. What international relations scholarship can offer is generations of distilled thought on the nature of these problems. To help you organise your thinking about the detailed events chronicled in the body of this book, this introduction examines some of the most important of these problems and shows how scholars in international relations deal with them.

## **Anarchy and the Challenges of Security and Co-operation**

This book's chief protagonists are states or empires (for simplicity, let's just call them states or great powers): gigantic sovereign territorial political units recognising no higher authority. By the time we enter the story in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, these states had been formed over many, many centuries since the Middle Ages. As their governments acquired ever more control over their ever-expanding territory, they engaged periodically in warfare against each other. In this intense, highly competitive environment, governments of these major powers became ever better at extracting resources from their societies, and tapping technological and organisational developments for the production of military power. They then went on to conquer or dominate most of the rest of the world. The late 19<sup>th</sup> century “colonial rush” Professor Reviakin describes in Chapter 1 represented the last stage of a process of domination of almost the entire world by powerful European states, their offspring in the new world (e.g. the USA), or those few non-European polities that managed to compete with them in the generation of power (Japan).

In short, the great powers that enter the scene in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in Chapter 1 had survived a brutal centuries-long process of nearly constant

warfare, creating a sovereign state system that dominated the globe. One of the most basic insights of international relations scholarship is that the political system that results when powerful, sovereign actors interact with each other is very different from other kinds of political systems. Recognising no higher authority, great powers are sovereign, which means the political system they form is governed by anarchy—a system that lacks any higher authority that can enforce agreements the chief actors may make. The chapters that follow are full of examples of states making agreements with each other. The thing to bear in mind is that in each case, there is no authority that can enforce such treaties if either party should violate their terms. This kind of system is in stark contrast to most domestic political systems that are formed on the basis of hierarchy, containing powerful, authoritative institutions that can enforce any contracts agreed to by parties within those political systems. The political scientist, Kenneth Waltz called this anarchical system a “self-help” world, one in which each actor must provide for its own security, indeed must rely chiefly on its own efforts to achieve whatever objectives it may seek.

In this anarchical system, if two states sign an agreement—as, for example, when Germany and the Soviet Union signed a mutual pact of nonaggression, promising each not to attack the other (Chapter 8)—there is no third force to appeal to should one of the parties to the agreement decide to violate it, as of course happened with the Barbarossa invasion of June 1941. The treaties and agreements that states reach must somehow be self-enforcing. It must somehow be in the states’ own interest to continue the agreement. If circumstances change, interests change, and the fact that there is a treaty committing a state to some path of behaviour, this adds up to only the weakest of constraints. And this applies not only to bilateral agreements like the Hitler-Stalin pact but also of course to larger and much more elaborate international institutions, such as the League of Nations or the United Nations. Each of those institutions had to rely in the final instance on their most powerful members—namely the great powers themselves—to enforce its provisions. As soon as those major stakeholders cannot come to a mutual understanding about the provisions of various treaties or the obligations states undertook by signing such treaties, those institutions lose force, as we see in Part 5 concerning the League and Part 10 concerning the UN.

Even more important, in this anarchical system, any state may decide to resort to the use of violent force—to unleash war—if it is unsatisfied with the bargain that may be offered by another state. Any state that determines that it can get a better deal by unleashing war may do so. There is, again,

no third force to prevent any state's resort to force if it feels it is in its interest. To be sure, the community of states developed principles of international law surrounding the resort to force, but in practice, these principles exert a fairly weak constraint on the war-and-peace decisions of states. Having developed within the sovereign system of states itself, international law always recognised the right to use force in self-defence. And, in practice, most states most of the time can come up with a defence rationale for the use of force. And even if they cannot, there is no third party to enforce violations of the international law of war, leaving it up to the other states to do so. And that feeds back into the problem of co-operation just discussed: if all states agree collectively to enforce international law there is no force other than their own self-interest to compel them to do so if doing so should harm their fundamental interests. This is the story of the failure of the League of Nations. This potential for any state to try to use force to get what it wants is thus an ever-present background reality in an anarchical system. It is, depressingly, the unwritten clause in every treaty.

Scholars of international relations disagree about how powerful a force this problem of anarchy actually is. Scholars known as realists place the greatest emphasis on the effect of the absence of rule among states. Others, notably liberals and constructivists, develop arguments and theories and have research findings to show that, in some circumstances, the effects of anarchy can be attenuated by the actions of states, or even in some instances, nonstate actors. But for our purposes, the key point is that almost all scholars agree that the absence of governmental authority in international politics does present special challenges to co-operation and conflict.

This debate regarding how powerful an effect the system of anarchy has in international politics produces roughly two ways one can interpret the narrative that follows in this book. The more pessimistic reading is the realist view of these events as exemplifying the "tragedy of great power politics", to use political scientist John J. Mearsheimer's apt phrase. The story begins with the attempt after the Napoleonic wars at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries to create a system of co-ordinating the policies of the great powers based on a few restraining norms and the practice of consultation on matters of common concern—the Concert of Europe or the Vienna system. As Chapter 1 chronicles, in the lead up to 1914, the major powers increasingly exempted themselves from this system's already weak norms, pursuing their own self-help in ways that ultimately primed Europe for war. Because of the unwieldy combination of alliances, commitments

and security problems that had built up over the years, Vienna's effort to deal with what it thought were its existential security problems via punishing Serbia in 1914 morphed into a gigantic war which led to the destruction of not only the Austro-Hungarian Empire itself, but of the Ottoman and Russian ones as well. This massive war led to a concerted effort to try to co-operate in the fashioning of a more stable international system. What Chapters 2-5 below make perfectly clear, tragically, is that the Versailles Peace agreement that was reached by the powers in 1919 contained within it the seeds of its own destruction. The great powers' efforts to finally look ahead and tame the baleful consequences of anarchy through a new international institution, the League of Nations, also fell afoul of the fact that any power could exempt itself from the system if it so chose, as the United States did by failing to participate in the first place. As Professor Kleimenova stresses in Chapter 3, the "US refusal to be a guarantor of the post-war global and European order undermined its very foundation".

By the 1930s it was clear that the powers were back in a world of self-help, but even here, their efforts to counter the threat emanating from revisionist powers to create a stable system using the traditional mechanisms balancing alliances once again failed with Germany's, Italy's and Japan's decisions to forcefully create a world order to their liking. The resulting conflagration, dwarfing the First World War in death, destruction and implications, once again led to a flawed attempt to create peace in 1945. The major powers failed to reach peace settlements in both Europe and Asia, which ultimately led to the Cold War. And that intense rivalry confined the more ambitious attempt at global governance, the United Nations. Even the effort at the end of the Cold War to get the United Nations to live up to its original potential, as of this writing, seems to be falling prey yet again to the rise of great power rivalry, disagreements over the nature of international order, and the continuing permissive effect of anarchy, allowing states to resort to force to influence conflicts as they choose.

But there is a second more progressive and optimistic narrative that could be read into the pages that follow—an endless and insistent effort by states and other international actors to try to regulate their behaviour and co-operate in the interests of peace. While realists point to the tragic ends of major efforts at international co-operation, their liberal and constructivist colleagues are impressed by the fact that states and non-state actors never give up trying. The dramatically increased power and influence and authority of the United Nations, as imperfect as it is when compared to all

international institutions that preceded it, is a case in point. The massively increased ambition and scope of international law is another. Many note the heightened activity of the United Nations in peacekeeping, peacebuilding, mediation and other crucial diplomatic activities with the end of the Cold War deadlock. And although they may see the emerging apparent increase in great power tensions and its effect of slowing down or indeed perhaps reversing the increased activity of the United Nations in peace and security affairs, they nonetheless see in the events of the last 25 years the potential for a more institutionally rich, more co-operative international setting, one that flies in the face of the tragic narrative so beloved of realists.

Whichever narrative is more compelling to you, the basic problem of anarchy identified in international relations theory gives you a toolkit of arguments and models that you can use to help understand the patterns of behaviour and outcomes chronicled below.

## **The Challenge of Bargaining in the Face of Changing Power Relations**

With no higher authority to enforce agreements, great powers face a big challenge when their underlying capabilities change over time. When a state's relative capabilities change, so does its bargaining power. Remember, under anarchy, any state that is dissatisfied with the terms on offer from another state can threaten to use force if it thinks that by so doing it may get a better deal. An agreement reached at one time may come to be seen as an intolerable imposition if increased relative power gives one party reason to believe that it could, if it made the deal today, secure much better terms. Treaties, agreements, norms, understandings, and even entire international orders are vulnerable to destabilisation or revision as the underlying distribution of capabilities changes. And that, as historian Paul Kennedy pointed out, is an inescapable reality of international politics, "the relative strengths of the leading nations in world affairs never remain constant, principally because of the uneven rate of growth among different societies and of the technological and organisational breakthroughs which bring a greater advantage to one society than to another". (Kennedy 1987 xv-xvi.)

And this was the fundamental problem of the period that historian E. H. Carr called "the 20 years crisis", that turbulent time between the first and second world wars. For, as chronicled below in Chapter 2, the victorious Powers in 1919 crafted a peace agreement highly disadvantageous to two



states whose capabilities had most dramatically declined as a result of the war—Germany and the Soviet Union. What the crafters of the Versailles Peace failed to plan for was the inevitable increase in these two countries' capabilities, and thus their bargaining power and consequently their dissatisfaction with the post-World War I order. This basic problem underlay the complex diplomacy of the entire inter-war period. France was too insecure to offer Germany the concessions needed to ease Berlin's dissatisfaction with the international order. British statesmen ultimately understood that the best path to peace would be to try to engineer concessions to Germany as its power increased so as to avert a situation in which it was extremely dissatisfied. But in the early post-war years, Britain was incapable of offering France the security guarantees it would have needed to acquiesce to those concessions. Paris's problem was that many of the key concessions themselves would make Germany even stronger, which would then increase its bargaining capabilities even further. With no third force to provide security, France was unwilling to make adjustments to the restrictive terms imposed upon Germany. For its part, the Soviet Union needed above all to avoid a situation in which all of the "imperialist" states ganged up on it. So, a constant concern of its diplomacy was to keep Germany and the Western powers at loggerheads, something it achieved brilliantly, as Professor Sidorov details in Chapter 4.

This fundamental challenge of bargaining under anarchy in a situation of rapidly changing power relations can be seen in almost every diplomatic endeavour of the period. E. H. Carr's view (p. 209) of the Locarno Treaty is but one of a myriad of potential examples:

The first proposal for a treaty guaranteeing Germany's western frontier was made by Germany in December 1922, and was emphatically rejected by [French Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Raymond] Poincaré. At this period (it was the eve of the Ruhr invasion) Germany had everything to fear from France, and France nothing to fear from a helpless Germany, and the treaty had no attraction for France. Two years later the position had changed....French fear of Germany was about equally balanced by Germany's fear of France; and a treaty which had not been possible two years before, and would not have been possible five years later, was now welcome to both....Ten years after its conclusion, the delicate balance on which it rested had disappeared. France feared Germany more than ever. But Germany no longer feared anything from France. The treaty no longer had any meaning for Germany.

The dilemma in Carr's story is clear: the convergence of interests required for the Locarno Treaty was the result of Germany's achievement of a rough parity in capabilities with France. But because interests change with relative power, the passage of time undermines the interest convergence necessary for an agreement. The changing distribution of capabilities explains the Franco-German divergence in 1922-23, convergence in 1924, and divergence again in the 1930s. Peaceful change requires a smooth adjustment to the changed relations of power, but the deep challenges of bargaining make such adjustments an extraordinarily difficult task for diplomats. And that challenge is exacerbated by the classic problems of uncertainty and collective action.

### **The Challenge of Collective Action Under Uncertainty**

Bargaining under anarchy is hard enough in the face of shifting power, but it is complicated even further by uncertainty about the intentions of other states. In international politics, one of the main questions about intentions is how strongly committed a given state is to defend a particular status quo, or, conversely, how intent a state is on upsetting a given status quo. If two states are bargaining over whether to change a given international system and one likes things the way they are and the other wants to change them to better fit its interests, what each wants to know about the other is how committed it is to its stance. A major problem, however, is it is extremely difficult to discern another state's intentions.

Let's look at the problem from the standpoint of a state that is revisionist, that is, one that would like to alter the international system to better fit its interests. The revisionist must signal its dissatisfaction with the status quo, else there is no way to get the bargaining going. You need to express dissatisfaction with the status quo by making some claim against another state. So, a revisionist state cannot pretend not to be revisionist at all. But, revisionism comes in many varieties, ranging from a state that may just want a few small territorial adjustments to one that actually seeks a revolutionary overthrow of a given international order. If those states that like the existing international order knew for certain that the revisionist state had such revolutionary intentions, they would face powerful incentives to contain the power of that revisionist early in the bargaining game.

This is the meaning of Henry Kissinger's maxim that "it is only to posterity that revolutionaries seem unambiguous". For the revolutionary leader knows that to expose his true aims is to invite destruction while he

is still weak. The unlimited aims revolutionary revisionist, therefore, faces incentives to portray itself as a reasonable, limited aims revisionist. The problem for the status quo states is that they know that the revisionist faces those incentives, and must somehow find a way to craft policies that would allow them to tell for certain whether the revisionist is a true threat to their fundamental interests, or one that can be accommodated. This can be seen as one of the most challenging tasks of statesmanship. That is the story of the efforts to deal with the phenomenon of Hitler's Germany in the 1930s. Obscured by the clarity of hindsight is the fact that for the statesman of the time there were really two Hitlers. As Kleimenova notes in Chapter 5, there was the Hitler who thundered "Germany is just the beginning. We need Europe and its colonies" and the Hitler who outlined seemingly limited revisions to the unfair Treaty of Versailles. In private, he explained, "It is necessary to make pleas for peace and avoid any territorial claims until we have become strong". Not privy to most of these private discussions at the time, external players could not be sure. Which was the real Hitler? It was hard to tell.

In addition to this challenge of uncertainty, efforts to contain the potential threat of Nazi Germany in interwar Europe faced a second dilemma, namely the problem of collective action. From the standpoint of the status quo states, a balance of power that would contain Germany's aspirations was a public good,—a good that could be enjoyed by all members of a potential status quo coalition, whether or not any given state paid for it, and from which no member of the status quo coalition could be excluded once it was provided. The fundamental problem of such public goods is *free riding*. Because you can enjoy the good even if you do not pay for it, your strong incentive is to avoid paying for it if you think somebody else is going to do it. A credible alliance that would contain Hitler suffered from this core free-riding problem. France and Great Britain would have been delighted for the Soviet Union to step forward and pay the costs of containing Hitler. Those costs would be measured along many dimensions, including reduced co-operation with Germany, increased defence expenditures, and, most importantly, the risk of receiving the full brunt of Germany's military power in case of war. The Soviet Union, naturally, faced exactly the same incentive—much better if the imperialists fight among themselves than if they gang up on the globe's sole socialist state.

So now we can see how the statesman of the 1930s confronted an extraordinarily difficult challenge. That challenge was further exacerbated by the fact that most of the governments of the time believed that defence tended to have the advantage over offence in times of war. This was a

reasonable inference from the experience of the First World War, characterised by relatively static trench warfare in which defenders could wreak terrible destruction on attacking troops. If you believe the defence has the advantage, then free-riding is even more tempting, because you do not expect the aggressor to be able to quickly seize territory and transform it into more capabilities that can then be turned against you. Rather, your expectation is of a bloodbath among whatever countries are unfortunate enough to be the first to go to war, leaving you to step in at the most opportune time to reap the greatest benefit at the least cost in blood and treasure. Needless to say, the one country that more by the luck of geography than by brilliant statesmanship managed to free ride until late in the game—the USA—radically improved its power position as a result of the war.

The failure of states to create a credible alliance against the threat emanating from Nazi Germany is often told as a morality tale. The evil, craven, capitalist appeasers in Paris and London, or the rapacious totalitarian autocrat in the Kremlin somehow suffered from some defect of character or intelligence or they were so blinded by ideology that they were unable to co-operate to stop Hitler. Insights about uncertainty and collective action, as developed in international relations theory, point to the structure of the situation those inevitably flawed statesmen faced. Until late in the game, it remained very unclear just how big a threat Hitler was, and even as glimmerings of the true nature of the threat emanating from Berlin became evident, the incentives to seek in your own national interest to avoid the horrific cost of containing Germany were overpowering.

## **The Challenge of the Security Dilemma**

Chapters 10 through 20 chronicle the Cold War, a period of international relations dominated by intense superpower rivalry. While the guns of the Second World War were still blazing, the major powers conceived and began to implement a new international institution meant to foster co-operation in the pursuit of peace and security, the United Nations. But the aspirations attendant upon this new undertaking increasingly ran up against a powerful countercurrent: intense security competition between the erstwhile wartime allies, chiefly the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union. As a result of this tension, World War II ended not with a big peace settlement à la Vienna or Versailles that would come to define the post-war era. Rather, an unplanned new structure of international politics took shape that was itself the product of the superpower rivalry.

What explains this dramatic shift from alliance to Cold War? All the challenges already discussed played roles, chiefly the difficulty of bargaining and co-operating in an anarchical interstate system in the face of rapidly changing power. But the emergence of the superpower rivalry illustrates yet another major challenge in international politics, the problem of the security dilemma. This dilemma arises when the policies by which one state seeks to secure itself tend to decrease the security of another state, which takes compensatory actions that then feed back to the insecurity of the first state, reinforcing a spiral of mistrust, competition, arms racing and expensive, dangerous security competition.

The key insight of this model is paradoxical: even states solely interested in their own security—with no interest in expansion—may end up in a highly competitive rivalry that leaves them less secure. The emergence of the Cold War can be seen as a series of discrete choices by Moscow and Washington (of course there were a great many other crucial players, but for simplicity's sake let's focus on these two). Each choice can be thought of as a binary decision either to co-operate with the other side or to defect from co-operation in a unilateral search for security. For example, if your armies occupy territory, you can negotiate with the other side about the disposition of those territories or simply keep your army in place and use it as an instrument of power to transform the occupied territory into a member of your "camp". Both sides could dramatically lower the risks of war, and reduce the high cost of security competition if they could avoid a competitive struggle to control territory. And yet as detailed in Chapter 10, this is precisely what both superpowers did. The Soviet Union progressively and systematically transformed the territories occupied by its army into reliable "socialist" allies, a process of "Sovietisation" that ultimately frightened many in the West, increasing their incentives to co-operate with each other in pursuit of security. The United States, for its part, steadily began to consolidate the Western parts of Germany and Europe into what would eventually become the NATO alliance.

Over time, these decisions left each superpower in an undesirable security position from the standpoint of the ways they themselves had traditionally defined their security. Recall that for Moscow, the chief object of foreign policy was to avoid an alliance of "imperialist" states that would amalgamate all of the power of the capitalist countries and direct it against the Soviet Union. Yet this was precisely the effect its policies in Central and Eastern Europe—as well as its "probes" in Iran and elsewhere—produced. For its part, the United States had a very long-standing tradition of wanting to avoid permanent security entanglements with Europe.

Documentary records show high US officials, as late as Dwight D. Eisenhower's administration, desperately seeking to reduce the commitments to Europe that would ultimately entangle their country's security with that of the old world. And yet again and again they ended up adopting policies that produced precisely that effect, bringing their armies cheek by jowl with those of the Soviet Union and thus generating the geographical proximity that would feed intense arms races and crises for the next 45 years.

National historical narratives on both sides of the Cold War often portray the struggle as the result of a threat emanating from the other side. Often, the driving force is said to be the nature of the domestic ideology or institutions of the other side—revolutionary Marxism and totalitarianism versus bourgeois capitalist imperialism. International relations scholars tend to favour a security dilemma perspective. In this view, both sides were to some degree expansionist in the sense that they sought to increase their power and influence over the international system compared to what they had possessed before the Cold War. But as security dilemma theory sees it, each was driven to policies that appeared expansionist to the other, primarily due to insecurity. The key is that in all the interactions that resulted in the fateful decisions that generated their mutual Cold War, co-operation required that each side trust the other side to reciprocate that co-operation. If the other side sought to exploit one's co-operative move, the result could be devastating. Soviet leaders feared that if they did not consolidate Soviet-style control in central Europe, Western forces would manipulate domestic politics in such a way as to cause these states to adhere to a hostile bloc and bring a potential threat closer to Soviet borders. Having lost over 25 million lives in the Great Patriotic War, that was a risk they were reluctant to take. But the same went for the western side, fearing that if they failed to take action to provide security to displaced populations impoverished by the war, Moscow-friendly communist parties might take power and extend the reach of the Soviet Union all the way to the shores of the Atlantic Ocean.

Each side reasoned that the safer move was to defect rather than co-operate. Each side's reasoning in terms of the security dilemma model goes something like this. "If the other side suspects that I am going to defect and unilaterally take control, then it will defect. And in fact, I *am* tempted to defect, so they must assume that I'll defect which means they will defect, and that means I should defect." That same reasoning, of course, goes for both sides. It's driven by three features of international politics that theorists highlight: the uncertainty of intentions (it's impossible

to know for sure the intentions of another state, especially what that state may intend to do in the future); risk aversion (in international politics, it often pays to be very reluctant to run the risk that a co-operative move might entail); and the downside costs of unreciprocated co-operation (co-operating when the other side defects and takes advantage of you leads to dramatic losses in security, as compared to the lower perceived risks of defecting when the other side co-operates). These three features that typified the setting in which Moscow and Washington operated pushed the two superpowers towards competitive policies that seemed necessary and rational in each instance, but cumulatively left them less secure. If you think about it a bit, you can see how the same dynamic occurred when it came to the arms competition.

## **Lessons for 21st Century International Relations**

The history of the Cold War's latter years and eventual end, discussed in Chapters 10 to 17, belies the claim that in an anarchic system, states will always choose short-term unilateral security maximisation over attempts to co-operate in the interests of more stable and longer-term security. After weathering frightening crises in Berlin and Cuba, and devastating wars and proxy wars in Asia and Africa, the superpowers did begin to co-operate in placing some boundaries on their rivalry. These measures, chronicled in Chapters 10 and 11, demonstrated at least the glimmerings of a capacity to develop some level of trust, enabling the powers to choose to co-operate rather than defect in at least some key areas and so rendering the latter Cold War less frightening and somewhat less costly if measured in terms of the proportion of GDP spent on defence and the frequency of intense crises. As the world begins to adjust to a notable increase in great power rivalry, the experience of those years presents useful material for statesmen and scholars to study as they ponder optimal strategies.

Perhaps the most dramatic example of an effort to break out of the tragedy of international politics via strong co-operative moves is Mikhail Gorbachev's new thinking policy described in Chapter 16. In a way, the series of policies emanating from Moscow in the years after 1986 can be interpreted as an effort to break out of the Cold War security dilemma. Gorbachev and his fellow new thinkers were seeking to convince their erstwhile rivals chiefly in the West but also in Asia that the Soviet Union was motivated solely by its own security and was uninterested in expansion. Accepting terms for arms agreements that had previously been thought to be very unfavourable to Soviet interests, unilaterally reducing

forces in central Europe that were seen in the West as threatening, and opening up domestic discourse to reduce uncertainty about intentions were all meant to defuse the fear and mistrust that drove competitive Cold War policies. From today's vantage, these policies might seem to have ill-served the state interest of the Soviet Union, which at this time began to enter an economic and political crisis that led to its demise. But as is clear in Chapters 16 and 17, the foreign policy and domestic policy pursued in this period were distinct. It is possible to imagine a USSR with a more resilient and robust domestic system potentially successfully de-escalating the Cold War via Gorbachev-style policies and yet surviving at least in part. Again, if we are careful to distinguish the fate of Gorbachev's domestic initiatives from his foreign policy, those years may contain very useful lessons to today's statesman if they seek to avoid the dangerous and expensive spiralling competition that can emanate from a security dilemma.

But there may well be lessons, too, from the way the West, led by the United States, handled the final years of the Cold War and the first post-Cold War years. For what drove the innovative but also concessionary grand strategy of Gorbachev was in part apprehensions of decline, and a concern that the USSR would not be able to sustain the material burden of an endless Cold War struggle with the much richer US-led coalition. And there's at least some evidence that Western leaders perceived this reality and therefore made sure not to make too many concessions to Moscow. In particular, a redline for Western leaders was any concession that might call into question the core institutions of the Western alliance, chiefly NATO. In a sense, the innovative strategy that began to bring the Cold War to an end was born of weakness, and the stronger side saw no need to make the concessions that would have been necessary to create a new, equitable order that included all of the Cold War's former protagonists.

In other words, the weaker side was doing most of the innovating, while the stronger side sought to preserve the core elements of the system it had created during the Cold War, one that it felt best reflected its security interests. Yet the post-Cold War order that emerged did have elements of fragility in that it never fully incorporated all of the Cold War's key protagonists. Once again, therefore, the law of the uneven development of power began to place stress on the order that emerged in the wake of the Cold War. It might have suited the longer-term interests of the stronger side in the Cold War to have fashioned a more inclusive order, one more robust to changes in power relations. Perhaps it is not too late to engineer



what historian E.H. Carr thought was needed in the inter-war years, namely a “peaceful adjustment to the changed realities of power”.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTERNATIONAL ORDER AT THE END OF THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

ALEXANDER V. REVIAKIN

*In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the stability of the Vienna System of International Relations was shattered. The alliance of five great powers fell apart. The borders between states were substantially revised as the result of the wars for national liberation or unity. However, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the European order was restored. It maintained a degree of continuity with the Vienna system: the great powers managed to conserve their unique international status and the “European concert” returned to life, as proved by numerous international conferences and congresses. Nevertheless, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, international politics acquired new features. The alliance of all the great powers of Europe was replaced by two opposing blocs of powers—the Triple Alliance and the Franco-Russian Alliance, the latter slowly evolving to include in its ranks the UK and becoming the Triple Entente. The rivalry of both alliances shaped European politics for almost a quarter of a century. In addition, the new international order for the first time in history definitely crossed European borders and acquired global dimensions. It was obviously due to the colonial and territorial expansion of European states, which managed to divide the greater part of the world between them and turn it into their colonies and spheres of influence. The USA and Japan entered this global system of international relations for the first time as equal partners of the European powers.*

## 1. The Crisis of the Vienna System and European Equilibrium

The modern era gave birth to the Westphalian system of international relations in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. Its stability was underpinned by the balance of power, a product of the wars that erupted in the 16<sup>th</sup> and the early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Attempts to disrupt the balance, which traditionally ran up against determined opposition, were fruitless until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. In this period, for the first time, the European equilibrium proved to be an important guarantee of both international security and the unrestricted development of states.

The Westphalian system embraced all European nations including Russia and the Ottoman Empire, although they were not signatories to the Peace of Westphalia and did not consider themselves bound by its provisions. However, the wars and revolutions of the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as well as the rise and decline of key powers, destabilised the system. During the wars led by the revolutionary and then Napoleonic France the old borders were radically redrawn and the European equilibrium was disturbed, thus enabling France to enjoy dominance over the continent for a short period of time.

The victories of the Coalition Forces created the prerequisites for the liberation of European states from French domination and the restoration of a sustainable international order. The main principles of the post-war political framework for Europe were formulated at the *Congress of Vienna* in 1814-1815. The decisions of the Congress laid the basis for the *Vienna System of International Relations*, whose stability rested upon the balance of power and internationally recognised boundaries, as well as the alliance of the five great powers and the Concert of Europe.

However, during national wars, including those fought for the unification of Italy and Germany, the boundaries between states underwent significant changes.

Nevertheless, the major actors on the European stage remained largely the same by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. These included Great Britain, Russia, France, and the Habsburg Monarchy that later was transformed into the dual Austro-Hungarian Empire. The German Empire owed its place in the system thanks to the efforts of several generations of the Hohenzollern family ruling the Kingdom of Prussia. The only newcomer, Italy, entered the club after the Congress of Vienna.

Importantly, the principles underpinning the relations between the powers had changed. Now, with the advent of the epoch of *Realpolitik*, or the politics of interests guided primarily by the calculation of real and substantial benefits, all nations had different foreign policy priorities. Unlike the Napoleonic wars that united European countries against the common enemy, the wars of 1848-1871 created a profound gulf between them.

*The victors were unwilling to lay down their arms; so were the defeated. All sides strengthened their military forces, thus trying to outperform "potential enemies". Meanwhile, most states that were exhausted by wars and internal disorder badly needed peace. Therefore, they decided to develop relationships on the basis of the current balance of power.*

Germany and Italy found themselves in a much stronger position. By contrast, the countries that could provide a counterbalance were in desperate straits. Russia's standing was undermined by the Crimean war and economic and technological backwardness. The military glory of the Habsburg Empire faded in 1866 once and for all. The war of 1870-1871 not only inflicted significant material damage on France, it also plunged the country into a deep social and political crisis.

However, despite some internal problems and foreign failures, Russia, Austria-Hungary and France retained some characteristics of a powerful state, such as vast territories and large populations. France remained one of the world's most influential colonial and sea powers. Not only did Germany and Italy lack colonies and strong navies, but they also failed to stand out economically. Germany achieved its evident industrial and trade superiority over its closest rivals only two or three decades after reunification, while Italy failed to reach the average economic level.

The political landscape was strongly influenced by Great Britain, which remained the colonial, sea and industrial linchpin of the world. However, it did not engage directly in conflicts on the other side of the English Channel. As early as the end of the Crimean war, London's unusual indifference towards wars and military alliances on the continent, which is historically referred to as the *Splendid Isolation policy*, became obvious. In pursuit of its own interests, Great Britain tried to maintain the balance of power among continental nations solely by diplomatic means. Being suspicious of French and Russian aspirations for hegemony, London did not oppose the unification of Germany and Italy.

*Europe witnessed a peculiar situation. With the changing power relationship, the overall balance, which had been substantially shaken by the revolutions and wars of 1848-1871, remained intact. Yesterday's outsiders suddenly became front-runners in the harsh rivalry among nations. However, the international system avoided destructive destabilisation. None of the powers had enough authority and might to impose their leadership or hegemony on others.*

Following the Franco-Prussian War, Europe showed definite signs of calmness and appeasement, which ushered in a relatively peaceful period of its development. Not until the outbreak of the World Crisis of 1914 did a major war erupt in Europe. Rare armed conflicts occurred only in the Balkans.

However, the *German Empire* was a major source of international tension. As Berlin did not count on friendly relations with neighbouring countries, it sought to gain ascendancy over them in keeping with *Realpolitik* principles. Chancellor *Otto von Bismarck*, German head of Government, was sure that France would never abandon its attempts to regain possession of Alsace-Lorraine annexed in 1871. Bismarck's greatest desire was to avoid a war on the two most vulnerable German boundaries in the West and East, i.e. a two-front war.

Bismarck tried to establish a friendly relationship with Austria-Hungary and Russia. On April 24<sup>th</sup> (May 6<sup>th</sup>)<sup>1</sup>, 1873, Russia and Germany signed a defence pact. A month later, on May 26<sup>th</sup> (June 6<sup>th</sup>), the efforts of Bismarck produced a convention between Russia and Austria-Hungary. The Parties agreed if necessary to "defend by force the European peace against any threat regardless of its source". Germany joined the convention on October 11<sup>th</sup>, 1873.

Thus, the *League of the Three Emperors* emerged—a group of states bound by the obligation to consult each other on international issues and provide assistance in case of war. The alliance embodied the plan of Germany, often referred to as the *Bismarckian alliance system*, which aimed to prevent Russia and Austria-Hungary from developing stronger ties with France. However, the alliance was undermined by the differences between Russia and Austria-Hungary in the Balkans.

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<sup>1</sup> The dates referring to Russia are usually given here both according to Old (Julian) and New (Gregorian) calendars, the former being in use in Russia till February 1918.

The year 1875 witnessed the uprising of the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina against Ottoman rule. In April 1876, Bulgaria followed suit. The Ottoman forces suppressed the uprisings in Bosnia and Bulgaria. Their cruelty roused the indignation of the European public and governments.

Russia called on the powers to intervene in the conflict at once. In April 1876, Russia, Germany and Austria-Hungary issued a memorandum proposing that the Ottoman Porte conduct reforms under their control. However, the powers failed to organise a joint move to exert pressure on the Ottoman government. Great Britain opposed the proposed measures, on the grounds that they allegedly undermined the Sultan's prestige.

Russia decided to use its own discretion. On October 19<sup>th</sup>, Russia demanded that the Ottoman Empire, whose army had mounted an offensive against Belgrade, should conclude an armistice with Serbia within 48 hours. The Turks consented to the demand only to be backed by the British. On November 9<sup>th</sup>, British Prime Minister, *Benjamin Disraeli* indicated Britain's readiness to declare war on Saint Petersburg. *Alexander II* responded that Russia would not stop at war if it failed to diplomatically protect the South Slavs and impel the Ottomans to recognise their national rights.

In December 1876, a conference of great powers in Constantinople (Istanbul) took place. Russia wanted the Ottoman Porte to give the Christian peoples broad authority. On the contrary, Great Britain and Austria-Hungary stood up for preserving the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire and only agreed on minor reforms. On December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1876, the first constitution in the history of Turkey was published. It granted all subjects of the Sultan personal freedom and equality before the law regardless of their confession. It allowed the Ottoman government to claim that any special measures to protect the Christians were no longer necessary. In March 1877, Russia initiated a conference of the six great powers in London, which reiterated the demand to the Ottoman Empire to conduct reforms for improving the conditions for Christians. This diplomatic initiative was also rejected by Istanbul.

Russia found itself at a crossroads. Having drawn lessons from the Crimean war, on January 3<sup>rd</sup> (15<sup>th</sup>), 1877, Russia concluded a convention with Austria-Hungary that provided for Vienna's benevolent neutrality and diplomatic assistance in case of a Russo-Turkish war. Russia consented to the right of Austria-Hungary to "occupy" Bosnia and Herzegovina and