

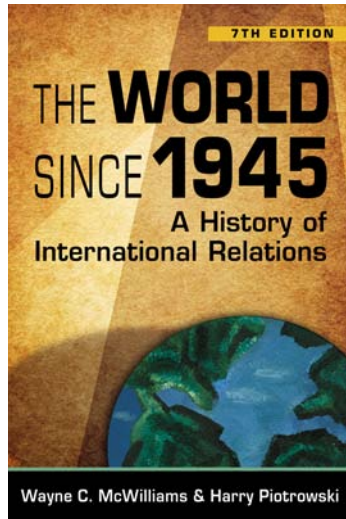
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The World Since 1945:
A History of
International Relations

SEVENTH EDITION

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and Harry Piotrowski

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Introduction

In this new edition of *The World Since 1945*, we take the story to early 2009—to the inauguration of US president Barack Obama—reflecting the changing political, ideological, and economic landscape as it emerged during the early years of the twenty-first century. Arguably the most significant development during these years was the increasing globalization of the economy, a process that produced an ever-tightening, interlocking economic relationship among nations. This brought prosperity to many nations, notably China (which by the end of 2008 had reached the rank of the world’s third largest economy, behind only the United States and Japan) and India. The perils of globalization, however, came into sharp focus with the financial crises and the global recession that started in 2007.

We have also seen a new intensification of the Arab-Israeli conflict—part of a greater clash between militant Islam and the secular governments in the Islamic world—as well as the potentially deadly nuclear proliferation in western Asia. In Europe, Vladimir Putin (who still called the shots, although no longer president of Russia) made it plain with Russia’s invasion of Georgia that the eastward expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization could go only so far. And a number of nations—notably in Latin America, Africa, and Asia—struggled with the challenges of establishing democratic institutions and raising the standard of living of their people.

In his inaugural address, President Obama expressed the belief that the problems that his nation—and the world—face can be resolved. Whether his conviction was justified cannot yet be determined. But we can achieve an understanding of how we arrived at this particular point in history.

* * *

A survey of current world conditions and a reading of the recent past reveal that the world is neither a fair nor a friendly place. Insurrections and wars abound, and all too many of the world’s inhabitants live in misery and hunger

while others live in comfort and luxury. In this age of modern science and technology, of space exploration and heart transplants, how does one account for the absence of peace and the prevalence of poverty in a world of plenty? What are the roots of the perilous condition of human affairs? Today's students, young and old, must ask and seek to answer these questions. This book, a history of the world since 1945, was undertaken in order to assist them in that endeavor.

Tribal hostility and war between nations have been common throughout history, but in modern times, and especially in the twentieth century with the development of modern military technology, war has become increasingly deadly. World War II brought death and destruction on an unprecedented scale, and it ended with the use of a powerful new weapon of mass destruction, the atomic bomb. From the ruins of that war came a cry, expressed even by military leaders, that there must never be another such war. Yet, even as the ashes of World War II were still smoldering, friction developed among its victors, and they—the United States and Britain on one side and the Soviet Union on the other—became locked in a new power struggle that threatened the very peace they had sacrificed so much to attain. The postwar friction between them rapidly hardened into a political Cold War that soon turned into a military confrontation marked by mutual mistrust, suspicion, and hostility. After World War II the Cold War continued for more than forty-five years as the major determinant of international affairs. The two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, aggressively sought to establish and maintain blocs of allies, thus dividing the world into two hostile camps. And since each claimed to be the champion of a superior system, one capitalist and the other Communist, the world became the arena of an ideological conflict that endured for nearly half a century.

Meanwhile, both superpowers engaged in a relentless arms race. Each claimed that security—both national and global—lay in military strength, but that the other's armaments threatened world peace. Thus they justified the building of massive arsenals containing thousands of nuclear weapons far more powerful than the ones used against Japan in 1945. Their arsenals have long since been large enough to destroy each other many times over and possibly extinguish human life on this planet, and yet year after year they continued piling up more expensive weapons. When they decided to scale back their nuclear arsenals, they found out that the genie was already out of the bottle, that even poor Third World nations had the capability to build and launch them.

The military standoff between the nuclear powers brought about a precarious truce between them, but the rest of the world was not free of war. On the contrary, there have been more than a hundred wars since World War II, and many of these lesser wars, though contained geographically and limited to conventional weapons, carried the potential of igniting a larger conflagration.

Indeed, the combatants were all too often clients of the major powers and were armed by them.

Equally dangerous to the safety and well-being of humanity was the growing gulf between the world's rich and poor, between the industrially advanced nations of the North and the underdeveloped nations of the South. In the South, often referred to as the Third World, one finds the world's lowest standards of living, lowest economic growth rates, lowest levels of education, lowest rates of life expectancy, and the highest population growth rates and infant mortality rates. Thus, millions of the inhabitants of the Third World are dreadfully impoverished, malnourished, disease-ridden, and unable to live productively and in dignity. Governments of Third World nations struggled, usually ineptly, to lift their countries from such impoverishment, and while some have made marginal progress, many others were merely marking time or slipping even farther behind. Many of these countries contracted enormous foreign debts they were unable to pay, and their indebtedness threatened the financial stability of the wealthier nations of the North. Economic failure made the Third World more volatile politically and more vulnerable to intervention and militarization by the superpowers. Nearly every war fought since World War II was fought in Third World countries, and all were fought with weapons supplied by industrialized nations.

This is the world into which the youth of today were born. Their chances of resolving the immense problems they have inherited, of reducing the nuclear threat, and of alleviating the misery of the majority of humankind, thus making this world a safer and more civilized place, depend to a great extent on what they know of the causes of these problems. The clear-eyed vision needed to come to terms with these difficult problems and to progress toward a resolution of them must be based on an understanding of the past. To remain unaware of that past is to compound the chances of either perpetuating the current problems or committing grievous and possibly irretrievable errors.

Our aim is to provide our readers with an evenhanded, yet critical, explanation of the political history of this troubled world and to expose them to more than one viewpoint. We seek to advance our readers' knowledge of the recent past and to develop a better understanding of the difficult issues and dangerous conditions in the world today. Above all, we hope to instill an appreciation of the need for greater objectivity and for careful, critical thinking about political issues. It is, therefore, our hope that this text will serve as a primer for responsible global citizenship.

It should be emphasized that we are primarily dealing with political history in this text, except in certain chapters where economic themes are particularly relevant. We do not address many of the social or cultural dimensions of recent world history, as interesting or important as they may be. We also wish to point out that a text with a scope as broad as the world cannot help but be selective. Not every political development around the globe can be discussed within these

pages. We have attempted to provide a balanced coverage of global history, rather than a Western- or US-centered approach. Thus, a substantial portion of the text is devoted to Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

The study of the recent past is no substitute for studying the longer haul of human history. Obviously, World War II had antecedents, the knowledge of which deepens our understanding of that momentous event, its consequences, and the course of events in the postwar period. Nonetheless, because World War II represents a historic watershed, it is not inappropriate that it be taken as a starting point for the study of recent world history. And because the postwar period was distinctly a new era with many new features—the advent of nuclear warfare, the development of high-speed aviation, the emergence of two superpowers, and the end of European colonialism, to name just a few—it makes sense to treat it as a distinct historical period. To be sure, for certain topics treated in this text, such as the Arab-Israeli conflict or the revolution in China, it will be necessary to trace historical roots further back in time, but our focus remains on the postwar period.

Seven Major Consequences of World War II

The enormous consequences of World War II gave shape to the postwar world, and they are treated as major themes in this text. We have identified the following as the most important of those consequences:

1. *The end of the European age.* Europe ceased to be the center of international power. At war's end, Europe was in shambles; its nations were prostrate, its cities in ruins, its people exhausted, and its economies shattered. The total defeat and destruction of Germany created a power vacuum in central Europe, and since nature and politics both abhor a vacuum, the victors inevitably filled it.
2. *The rise of the United States to superpower status.* Having played a decisive role in the global war and emerging from it militarily and economically supreme among the nations of the world, the United States shed for good its earlier isolationism and assumed a leadership role in the international arena.
3. *The expansion of the Soviet Union and its rise to superpower status.* Despite its severe war damage and its dire economic condition, the Soviet Union was determined to extend its power, especially in Eastern Europe, and play a major role in world affairs.
4. *The emergence of the Cold War.* Contention, mistrust, and hostility between the two emerging superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, developed quickly and produced an ongoing, global, bipolar power struggle.

5. *The beginning of the nuclear age.* The use of the atomic bomb by the United States and the world's failure to achieve international control of atomic energy resulted inevitably in an ever-growing nuclear arms race.
6. *The rise of nationalism and independence movements in Asia and Africa.* Although the roots of nationalism may be traced back to pre-war times, it was not until the postwar period that nationalist movements became strong enough to challenge successfully the colonial order in Asia and Africa. The struggle for independence, stimulated by Japan's victories over Western colonial powers during World War II, and the weakening of the European colonial powers resulted in an end to Western colonialism in a remarkably short span of time.
7. *A renewed effort to secure lasting peace through international organization.* The United Nations was created in the hope that it might help preserve the global peace and security that the old League of Nations had failed to maintain.

Most of these—interrelated—themes are discussed in Part 1, “The Origins of the Cold War,” where we examine the global state of affairs at the end of World War II and the origins of the Cold War. In Part 2, “Nationalism and the End of Colonialism,” we take up the sixth theme. There, we also trace the development of Arab and Israeli nationalism and the conflict arising from them. Part 3, “The Shifting Sands of Global Power,” focusing mainly on the 1960s, examines the changing configuration of the Cold War, the strains within the Eastern and Western blocs, the Sino-Soviet split, and the resulting emergence of multipolarity, which replaced the bipolar confrontation of the earlier Cold War period. This section also includes coverage of the Vietnam War and its consequences.

Part 4, “The Third World,” takes us back to Asia and Africa to trace their postindependence progress—or lack thereof—and to Latin America. In addition to investigating the political and economic patterns on the three Third World continents, we devote sections to such topics as the problem of the Third World's debt, the issue of apartheid in South Africa, and the economic progress of certain Asian nations.

Part 5, “The Emergence of a New Landscape,” treats the major global developments since the 1980s. We have selected for special attention the rise of Japan and the European Community as new economic superpowers, in addition to later Cold War issues such as the rise of Solidarity in Poland, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the nuclear arms race. We also discuss the momentous changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe since the end of the 1980s, changes that signaled the end of the postwar era. We conclude the book with a discussion of the rise of militant Islam, as manifested in the Iranian revolution and in the Arab world.

6 *Introduction*

We urge our readers to join with us in a quest for a fuller, more objective understanding of the world of turmoil in which we live. And we would remind them that history, especially recent political history, is not merely the compilation of dead facts; it is alive with controversy and conflicting ideas. We challenge our readers to confront these controversies, to weigh the conflicting ideas and viewpoints, and to formulate their own opinions.