3 The idea of the state

> Civil power, properly considered as such, is made up of the aggregate of that class of the natural rights of man, which become defective in the individual in point of power, and answers not his purpose; but when collected to a focus, becomes competent to the purpose of every one.
>
> (Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man*, 1791)

The concept of the state

States and the idea of the state have traditionally formed the cornerstone of political geography, providing the key terms of reference for explaining the distribution and exercise of political power. Even though their continuing relevance has been increasingly questioned in recent years as regional and global institutions have begun to evolve which are less fettered by the constraints of state control, states remain central to understanding the social and economic dynamics of the political landscape. As Thomas Paine so cogently argued more than two hundred years ago, natural rights cannot be guaranteed by individuals on their own; they require the support of a collective, civil, authority if they are to be a reality. He was writing at the time when the whole idea of state identity being invested exclusively in the person of a monarch, or some other absolute ruler, was crumbling in the face of the rise of capitalism, the spreading urbanisation of the population, and popular demand for the people to have a greater direct say in government.

The role of the state, or more precisely its more confined antecedent the city state, was first articulated by the philosopher Aristotle in ancient Greece in the third century BC (Nicholson, 1984), but it is only since the advent of the new economic order based on capitalism and industrialisation at the end of the eighteenth century that states have

become established in anything approaching their present form (Box 3.1). In pre-agrarian societies, few of which still function as such in the modern world, tribal loyalties were the main force for social cohesion. Groups of nomadic hunters and gatherers were too small, scattered, and ephemeral to have the time or the need to develop formal political institutions, though complex, sophisticated, and rigidly enforced codes of behaviour invariably underpinned the stability of daily life (Cohen, 1978).

Box 3.1

Aristotle's city state

The Greek philosopher Aristotle developed his theory of the city state in about 350 BC in his book, *Politics*. Based on his experience of life and government in Athens, he argued that a natural logic dictated that societies should have government, or political rule, and that government, in its turn, led inevitably to the emergence of the city state. He demonstrated, in terms that would be highly contested today, how city states gradually grew out of much simpler communities. First, individual humans combined in pairs because they could not survive alone: men and women came together to reproduce; the master and slave stayed together for mutual self-preservation. The master used his intellect to rule, while the uneducated slave used his physical strength to labour. Second, the household unit arose naturally out of these primitive communities to serve domestic and economic needs. Third, groups of households quickly combined to serve higher order needs, resulting in villages. Finally, villages inevitably merged to form city states, complete and self-sufficient communities, which originated as the logical culmination of a natural order, but which survived because they are the best guarantee of a good life for citizens.

The settled agrarian societies that followed, by contrast, rapidly developed a need for institutional coherence and organisation to sustain their more elaborate social order. Coherent and defined territories became essential and the production and marketing of agricultural, and other, surpluses were a measure of their success. This in turn presupposed the emergence of literate and educated elites to manage the more complicated social and economic relations, both within the society and with the wider world beyond, which led inexorably to a greater division of labour and to hierarchical social structures. Access to territory and the ability to exercise exclusive control over it also became increasingly

important issues, leading inevitably to conflict, attempts at conquest and, in extreme situations, war.

Nonetheless, most agrarian societies were largely self-sufficient and self-contained, though frequently embedded within a loose overarching polity, such as the Roman Catholic Church of the Holy Roman Empire in early modern Europe. Gellner (1983) has emphasised that political units in the agrarian age varied enormously in both size and kind, but suggests that they may be divided broadly into two types. On the one hand, there were city states and rural, peasant, communities largely running their own affairs with high levels of political participation, at least for men. On the other, there were extremely large territories or empires, controlled by a single dominant force, with power concentrated at a single point. Frequently, of course, the two coexisted side by side, with a dominant, but remote, central authority operating alongside largely autonomous local units. Indeed, it can be argued that somewhat similar arrangements still predominate in many parts of the world, notably in countries such as Russia and the People's Republic of China, where the central political authority of the state is thousands of miles removed from the everyday lives of many people and communities. They organise their affairs in a largely self-sufficient manner, in some cases virtually dispensing with money as a medium of exchange, relying instead on extended forms of barter, which insulate them still further from the wider world beyond the confines of their own neo-feudal social and economic systems.

The modern state is a product of the post-feudal order, in which the state gradually took over increasing responsibility for managing the process of socialisation. The origins of this fundamental change in Europe date back to the Reformation in the mid-fifteenth century, when the monolithic ecclesiastical hegemony of the Roman Catholic Church began to break down, to be replaced by more localised and independent Protestant alternatives. In England the rupture was also closely identified with the state, in that the monarch, Henry VIII, was the driving force behind the break with Rome and the establishment of the overtly national Church of England (Box 3.2). It meant that for the first time in the modern period church and state were explicitly brought together in a unified entity, with the monarch, the head of state, also leader of the official national church.

It was, however, the establishment of capitalism as the dominant form of economic organisation three hundred years later, alongside industrialisation, which really heralded the emergence of the intricate

Box 3.2

The English Reformation

The Protestant Reformation only gathered ground slowly in England in comparison with some other European countries, such as Germany and Switzerland. Somewhat ironically, it did eventually begin to gain ground during the rule of King Henry VIII, a very strong defender of Roman Catholicism during the early years of his reign, when the Pope actually bestowed on him the coveted title, Defender of the Faith.

It was his increasingly desperate determination to be rid his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, that drove Henry VIII to decide to split away from Rome, which refused to countenance divorce. In 1532, legislation was passed through Parliament limiting the influence of the papacy in England and making the monarch the Supreme Head of the Church. Once having successfully effected his divorce, Henry VIII went much further and took control of the majority of the property of the Church through the dissolution of the monasteries.

There was little popular enthusiasm for the change in religious allegiance, but for the most part people acquiesced, in some cases encouraged by the redistribution of Church property in the wake of the confiscation of monastic lands. However, after the death of Henry VIII in 1547, more active steps were taken to consolidate the position of the new Protestant Church. The regency government representing his under-age successor, Edward VI, set in train a determined programme of reform, resulting in a new Prayer Book and a new order of service, as well as the removal of most of the physical artefacts of Catholicism from the England's churches.

After only six years on the throne, Edward VI died and was succeeded by Mary I, who, in her reign between 1553 and 1558, effectively reversed the whole Reformation, returning England to Catholicism. Her successor, Elizabeth I, then determinedly set about re-establishing Protestantism and gradually, during her long reign, the new religion took an increasingly firm hold. When she died, childless, in 1603, the dominant position of Protestantism was further secured when the throne passed to King James VI of Scotland, who became James I of England as well, creating for the first time a joint Protestant kingdom across the two countries.

patchwork of independent states that now characterise the world political map (Hobsbawm, 1990). Urban–industrial society encouraged an ever more sophisticated division of labour and a growing dependence on technologically advanced communications systems to link the varied industrial skills into a coherent and viable national economic whole

(Harvey, 1982 and 1985). The actual production of goods and services became increasingly separate from the means of production by the commodification of the workforce. Labour became just another tradable element in the marketplace, rather than being ineluctably tied into a rigid feudal system. In theory, workers were able to sell their skills wherever they liked, to the highest bidder, even though in practice, of course, all kinds of constraints, such as tied company housing, ensured that the market in labour was far from free for many. Nevertheless, there was a new flexibility that would have been unthinkable within the more rigid framework of pre-industrial agrarian society. Also, the competition between employers at all levels helped prevent, though not totally eliminate, the creation of exclusive monopolies. Although many major industrial cities in North America and Europe were dominated for many years by a single employer, such as Pittsbugh and the US Steel Corporation, Essen in Germany and Krupp A.G., which effectively nullified the advantages of a commodified labour market, over time these monopolies loosened their grip, as the cities grew and the employment market diversified through the influx of new firms and companies, all competing for labour.

An important feature of the urban–industrial, capitalist environment was the fiction it created that the economic and political environments were separate, the market supposedly ensuring that economic interests were fully engaged competing with each other, leaving states to provide the political shell within which the economy functioned. It was a fiction because the supposed separation was demonstrably false. The economic leaders always sought to manipulate the political system to further their own interests and, to this end, spent much of their time and energy trying to establish themselves in positions of political power and influence. Equally, the state had a quite legitimate interest in ensuring that its economic infrastructure flourished, not least in a highly competitive international environment. Indeed, one of the most serious criticisms levelled against the capitalist system has been that, after a period of sustained success in expanding world trade throughout the greater part of the nineteenth century, it failed to control competition between states and establish a stable international order capable of preventing two world wars (Carr, 1968). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is now under attack from a different direction, for failing to prevent the development of a global trade system that is manifestly unfair, consigning the bulk of the global population to a life of poverty (see Chapter 11).

Recognising the need to devise new forms of political infrastructure, which incorporated a much greater level of explicit general consent, states in the modern era began to provide for popular representation in government and to formulate and adopt written constitutions on behalf of all their population. The USA is often cited as a model in this regard, with its 1789 Constitution, proclaiming freedom and equality for all, although it was actually signed by just 39 male delegates from 13 of the then states along the eastern seaboard of North America. Such lofty ideals were widely praised and copied, but actual participation in government was still invariably strictly controlled, based on age, gender, wealth, or a combination of these, effectively excluding all but a privileged minority. The constitutions themselves defined, with varying degrees of precision, the nature of the state, specifying, for example, the official languages and in some cases the national religion. They also set out the mutual responsibilities of the state and the citizen and how they were to be managed, paving the way in the process for a whole raft of state-run services. Communications, such as the postal service, became a matter for the state, as did the provision of social services like public health and education, and the maintenance of public order through the creation of an effective national legal system and police service.

An important by-product of the dominance of the capitalist economic order and its attendant centralisation and state control has been a growing sense of nationalism. It is a binding political force whose initial roots can be traced back clearly at least as far as the concept of a chosen people in the Old Testament (Hastings, 1997; Davie, 2000). In the modern world, however, nationalism has achieved unprecedented importance and is characterised by a close identification of the population, and popular ideals, with the state and the values of the national government, and by the spread of democracy as the means by which these are communicated to government (see ‘The state apparatus’ in Chapter 4). People become citizens, active participants in the process of nation-building and begin to define themselves in terms of the state, becoming in the process American, British, French, or whatever, ultimately with passports and identity cards to prove their right of citizenship. This in turn gives rise to the concept of the nation state, whereby the organs of the state penetrate and control the civil society, to a point where they are one and the same (Mann, 1984; Giddens, 1985). Nationalism became an increasingly potent force throughout the nineteenth century and was viewed initially as a positive force for its fostering of an integrated political order, but rapidly came to be seen less kindly as a focus for interstate rivalries and

for the territorial ambitions of European states in particular. The horrific conflicts of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, global in scale in the cases of the First and Second World Wars, are now attributed in no small part to the malign influence of nationalism and the need for states to be able to demonstrate to each other their superior power and influence (O'Loughlin and van der Wusten, 1993).

It is somewhat ironic that just at the time when states were striving most energetically to show off their virility and effectiveness, the limitations of the state idea were also becoming all too painfully apparent. In fact, the concept of the state as a self-contained entity, bringing the whole of economic, political, and social life into a single coherent whole, was always an illusion. In a critique of the nature of power in the nineteenth century, Carr argues that 'it was precisely because economic authority was silently wielded by a single highly centralised autocracy that political authority could safely be parcelled out in national units, large and small, increasingly subject to democratic control' (1945, p. 87). The implications of a lack of effective democratic control over the executive were well understood by political analysts at the time, including Karl Marx (Wheen, 1999), and have been repeatedly demonstrated in the subsequent years, threatening to undermine some of the most ambitious political integration projects, such as the European Union.

The so-called globalisation of the world economy and the limited ability of states to determine their economic and political destiny is, therefore, not a new phenomenon. It is the latest manifestation of a tension that has always existed, but which has tended to be downplayed by governments for reasons of national pride. In the political arena, international institutions to counter the darker side of nationalism, under the umbrella of the League of Nations after the First World War and the United Nations after the Second World War, have been extensively developed, though with limited success. In the economic arena, free-market economic entities largely bypassing state control, such as supranational companies and global financial institutions, have been facts of life for most of the twentieth century (see Chapters 11 and 12).

The nature of the challenge to state authority has now moved on to a different plane in the twenty-first century. The so-called information age has gone a long way towards liberating the educated and the wealthy from many of the constraints of state control, with widespread access to information technologies and personal communications networks that transcend and ignore national frontiers (Castells, 1997). Global links of

all kinds can now be made by just a few clicks on a computer mouse and, with convertible currencies increasingly the norm, access to worldwide markets for goods and services is available on an unrestricted individual basis in a matter of minutes, or even seconds.

Nevertheless, it is important to stress the limits on what is available. For the majority of the world population, languishing in poverty and struggling to find shelter and enough to eat, the benefits of individual access to information technology are an incomprehensible joke, with little or no relevance to their daily lives. Having said that, it is also true that in relative terms information technology is cheap technology, so that it is rapidly permeating societies largely bypassed by earlier technological revolutions. In the countries of south-east Asia, for example, the high levels of IT literacy are doing much to fuel the rapid transformation from a semi-feudal to an industrial, capitalist society within the space of a generation. However, it is also the case that although state control may have been weakened, it has by no means been eliminated. It is still possible to manage access to the information highway, either by charging for its use or imposing restrictions on access. As a result, there are big variations between even the most developed industrial societies in the extent to which the internet is used. In the USA, where there is unmetered access via the telephone system, internet usage is virtually universal, whereas in Europe access is generally metered and levels of usage substantially lower.

In practice, there have always been significant limits on the ability of states to manage the full range of matters that concern their peoples. War in the twentieth century may have raised the alert, but other quite different issues, such as the problems of global environmental degradation and the availability and distribution of food and other key resources, have subsequently underlined the message (Deutsch, 1981). States remain an essential and ubiquitous element in the world political order, but they are only part of a complex hierarchical structure within which power relations are in a constant state of flux.

The spread of states

At the beginning of the third millennium the world political map comprises some 180 independent states, varying hugely in both area and population. The most extensive is the Russian Federation, covering 17,075,400 sq km; the most populous the People's Republic of China,

with an estimated 1,400 million inhabitants; and the smallest, in terms of both area and population, the state of the Vatican City, a micro-state located entirely within the Italian city of Rome, covering 0.44 sq km and with only just over 1,000 inhabitants. This complex network embraces the land masses of all the continents with the exception of Antarctica, as well as incorporating increasingly large tracts of the oceans; yet it is almost entirely a product of the past two centuries.

The age of mercantilism

In 1800, nation states barely existed in the form they are recognised today and the few that did were almost exclusively concentrated in Europe. Nominally, the bulk of the globe was encompassed politically by mercantilist empires, with the land held in the name of some far-off monarch, or some other absolute feudal ruler. In reality though, these were often little more than a European conceit, consisting of scattered coastal trading posts, with only intermittent and nominal links to their European sponsors. The largest of these, both territorially and in terms of the scale of trade, was the British Empire (Figure 3.1), ranging over much of North America, the Indian subcontinent, and Australia, but other European states, including Denmark, France, Portugal, and Spain, also had substantial overseas territories over which they claimed sovereignty, with all its associated exclusive rights. The reality everywhere, however, was that imperial control was for the most part nominal and the indigenous peoples were largely unaffected and able to continue their lives much as they did before the coming of the European enlightenment.

The imperial model was not exclusively European. The Ottoman Empire, with its heart in the west of modern-day Turkey, covered large parts of north Africa and Asia Minor (now more usually incorporated into the wider region of the Middle East), as well as extending deep into the Balkan peninsula in south-east Europe. The Russian Empire covered most of northern Asia and extended across the Bering Sea into North America in the east, as well as encompassing most of the Caucasus in the west, thus giving Russia too a toehold in Europe. The Chinese Empire already formed a monolithic bloc, covering the greater part of the south-east Asian mainland, much as it still does today. Finally, the USA was beginning its dramatic westward expansion across the central part of North America.

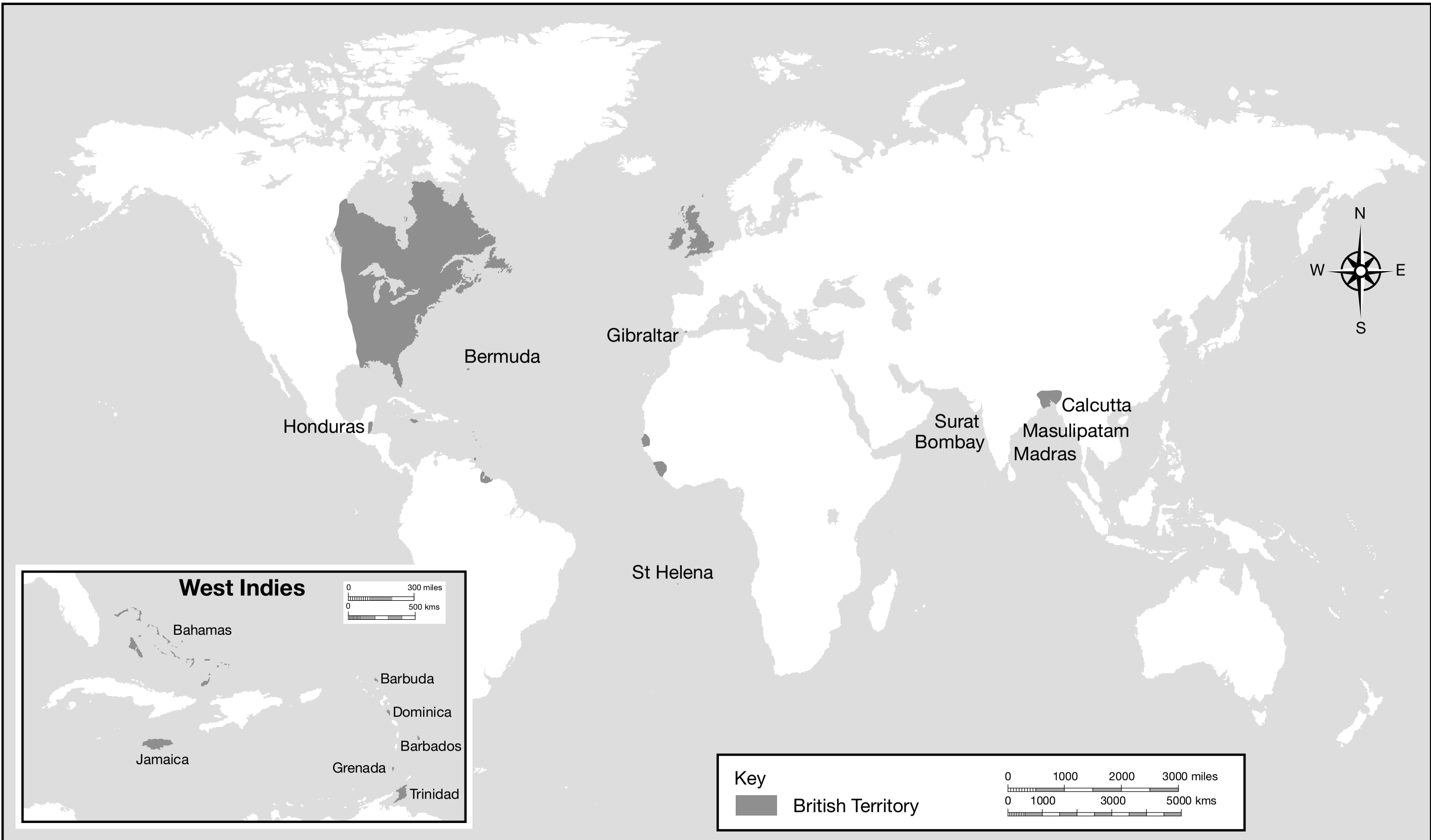

Figure 3.1 ***The British Empire, 1763***

Elsewhere the political order was much more self-contained and isolated, even though other significant political entities were well established. In east Asia, Korea and Japan both maintained sophisticated and flourishing cultures; in central Asia loose-knit and fluid societies, including the Mongols, continued to dominate in 1800 as they had for centuries previously; Persia was a pivotal presence between Europe and Asia; and in Africa, Abyssinia and Morocco were the best-known elements of a wide range of what can broadly be called monarchies spread throughout the continent. A unifying thread linking all these disparate and widely separated entities was that they were beyond the direct scope of European, or any other, external imperial hegemony.

The tide of nationalism

The latter part of the eighteenth century witnessed a fundamental change in popular attitudes to government. Across the world there was a growing restlessness and resentment against feudal absolutism, especially when it was exercised from a faraway continent in little more than name. In North America, a quarter of a century of struggle to oust British rule culminated in the establishment of the USA in 1783. In Europe, the huge upheaval of the French Revolution took proper root in 1789, presaging more than two decades of war, bloodshed, and change, which completely recast the political landscape of the continent.

Everywhere the overt goal was for more representative government, which would be responsive to the emergent tide of nationalism, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter (see also 'Nationalism and self-determination' in Chapter 5). Somewhat surprisingly, the temporal sequence for the founding of the newly independent states that emerged as a result of the massive outbreaks of revolutionary zeal did not quite mirror the fervour of the revolutions themselves, especially in Europe. It was in the Americas where a new order first became firmly established. Following its success in establishing itself as a republic, the USA was eager to see an end to European colonial rule throughout the whole of both North and South America. For their part, the European colonial powers, Spain, France, Portugal, and Britain, were unable to sustain simultaneous wars on either side of the Atlantic, especially as the internal political structure of their pre-revolutionary states was being completely recast. From the beginning of the nineteenth century, France, Portugal, and Spain all began a rapid withdrawal to their European

heartlands, following in the wake of the British after the American Revolution.

After Mexico became a republic in 1823, republican fervour swept across the greater part of the Americas throughout the rest of the century. In some cases, the newly established republics were relatively short lived, being incorporated into larger neighbours after a relatively short interval. The State of Texas, for instance, fought a 10-year intermittent war to separate itself from Mexico, finally becoming independent in 1836. However, a growing stream of European immigrants from the north promoted ever closer ties with the USA and, in 1845, Texas became another state in the growing American Union. The republican movement proved irresistible across the Americas and by the turn of the twentieth century virtually the whole of Central and South America was governed by nineteen independent republican states.

There is no doubt that this avalanche of state-building was much encouraged by the distraction of the former European colonial powers and a determination on the part of the USA to allow them no opportunity to re-establish a colonial foothold in the Americas. Under the terms of the Monroe Doctrine (see Chapter 9), it committed itself to providing naval protection against any threat to the independence of the newly founded republics. Ironically, the only major area that has remained untouched by the republican tide is Canada, which shares a 5,000-km long border with the USA and still retains the British monarch as its nominal head of state, a final remnant of the traditional colonial era.

In Europe, nationalist fervour was translated into new republics rather more slowly. The Congress of Vienna was first convened in 1814 to re-establish political order after the Napoleonic Wars, and the participants – the four major victors, Britain, Russia, Prussia, and Austria, together with defeated France – were certainly not in any mood to adopt the populist ethos of the French Revolution. The decisions made by the Congress actually put the clock back, because of the reactionary way in which they tried to revive Europe's traditional attachment to monarchy, rather than embracing the new republicanism (Davies, 1996, p. 762) (see Chapter 9). Although the deliberations led to the outlines of the modern political structure of the Low Countries and Scandinavia, as well as Switzerland, they also resulted in the imposition of a string of new, or resurrected, monarchies. The most notable example was the Kingdom of the Netherlands (covering both the modern-day Netherlands and Belgium), but in the future unified states of Germany and Italy there

also remained a plethora of kingdoms, duchies, principalities, and papal states whose government was far removed from the popular aspirations of the revolution.

Nevertheless, the revolutionary zeal was only temporarily quelled and soon began to reassert itself. By the middle of the nineteenth century, programmes of political reform, both with and without accompanying revolutions, were widespread across Europe. In Great Britain and Ireland the changes were internal and largely peaceful with the Reform Act (1832) initiating what was to become a fundamental redistribution of political power away from the monarch and a landed elite to the people as a whole.

Elsewhere, territorial redistribution and wholesale political change were required, though it mostly amounted to a severe curtailment in the powers of hereditary rulers, rather than in their wholesale replacement by republics. The patchwork of political units in both Germany and Italy was gradually merged, so that by 1870 it formed two somewhat precariously unified political entities, one led by an emperor, the other by a king. Spain survived the loss of the greater part of its empire in South America and the Pacific to remain an independent kingdom, even if one riven by regional discord. The Netherlands and Belgium, united under a single monarch in 1815, became two separate monarchies in 1830.

The most radical changes in Europe occurred in the Balkan peninsula, where the Turkish Ottoman Empire progressively disintegrated throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Glenny, 1999). The volatile mix of different religions and languages ensured that the whole process of change, undoing more than three centuries of Turkish rule, was both violent and chaotic, creating an unstable mixture of mostly small monarchies, which struggled to produce any real sense of national unity. Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia Herzogovina, Albania, and Turkey itself all trace their modern roots back to this era and all have experienced substantial change in the process, many seeing their monarchies dismantled to make way for republics. With the exceptions of Greece, Turkey, and Albania, these in turn were enveloped by Soviet Communism during the Cold War, between 1947 and 1990, losing most of their effective political independence, only to re-emerge after varying degrees of further inter-ethnic bloodshed in 1989, after the collapse of the Soviet Union (see ‘Managing difference’ in Chapter 5).

The age of empire

Just as all these newly independent states were emerging in the Americas and Europe, the major European powers at the end of the nineteenth century were aggressively vying with each other to establish extensive overseas empires in Africa, Asia, and Oceania. Britain consolidated its control over the whole of the Indian subcontinent, much of Africa south of the Sahara, and Australia and New Zealand (Figure 3.2). At its zenith, before the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, it was a common boast and, as it subsequently turned out a vain one, that the sun never set on the British Empire because it extended over so much of the globe. France controlled much of south-east Asia, including present-day Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, in what was then known as Indo-China, as well as large territories in north and north-west Africa. Germany had colonies in both south-west and east Africa, as well as smaller interests elsewhere. Belgium claimed most of the Congo basin in central and west Africa, while the Netherlands controlled most of the Indonesian archipelago. Portugal, despite leaving its largest colony, Brazil, in 1889, retained Angola and Mozambique, large colonies in south-west and south-east Africa respectively. Italy controlled Abyssinia and other extensive territories in north Africa. In all cases, these were just the major territories and they were supplemented by these imperial states claiming jurisdiction over scores of oceanic islands across the world.

Elsewhere, the USA consolidated its grip on much of North America by incorporating all the lands from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans, south of the 49th parallel of latitude and north of the Mexican border (see 'Environmental determinism and the state' in Chapter 8). North of the 49th parallel, the British converted their relatively small and widely separated colonial holdings into present-day Canada, which stretches across the North American continent from coast to coast, as well as extending northwards nearly as far as the North Pole.

Superpower hegemony and the spread of the nation state

The fundamental redrawing of the world political map that occurred during the nineteenth century was made possible in no small part because powerful states were able to acquire vast global empires at the same time

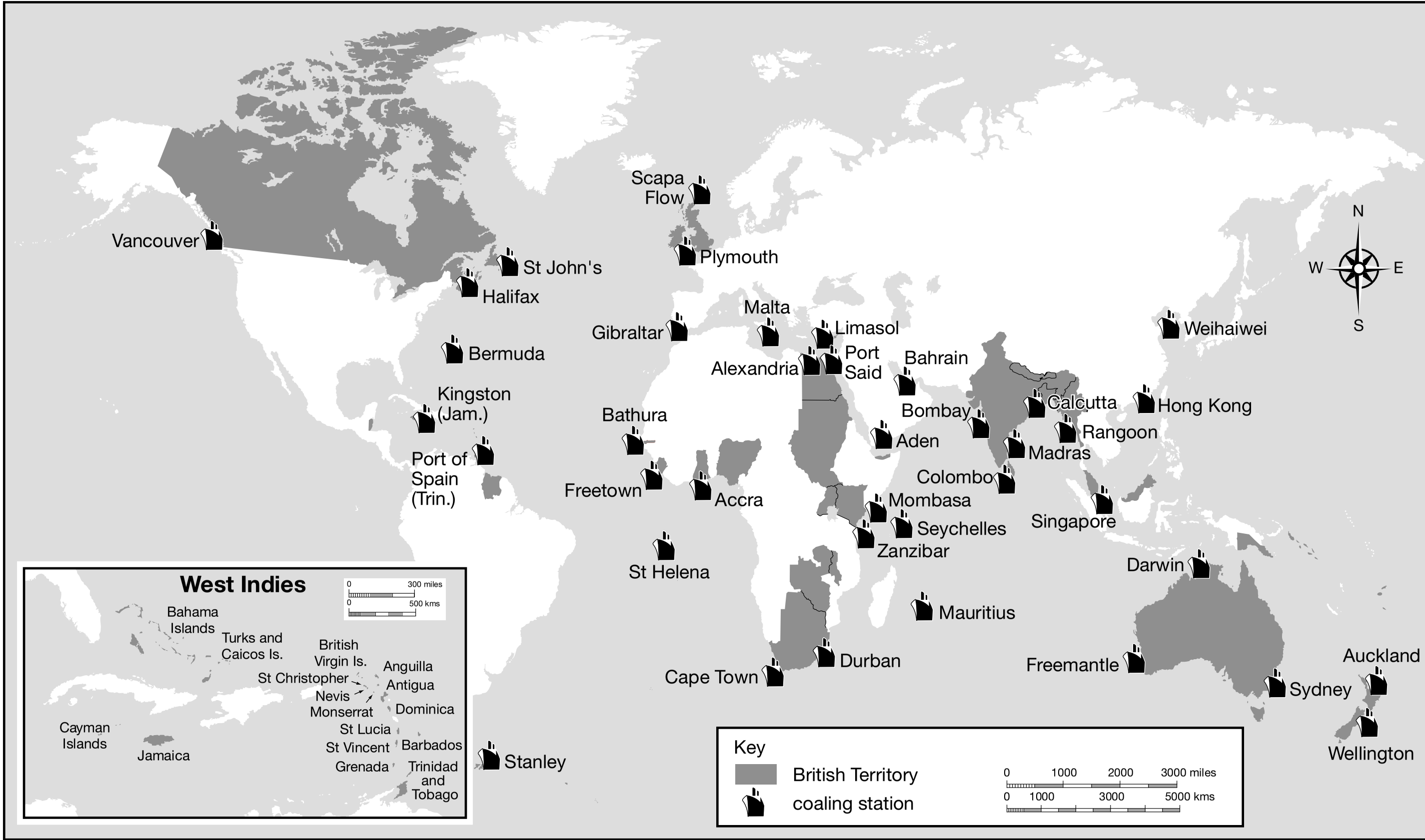

Figure 3.2 ***The British Empire, 1914***

as a host of new states were becoming politically independent (Cohen, 1964). It enabled them, by and large, to compete for extensive hinterlands without laying claim to the territory of other modern states (Carr, 1968). It was, however, a situation that could only ever have a very limited lifespan, since the amount of land available for expansion was always going be finite. Those limits were cruelly exposed by the First and Second World Wars, both of which were partly caused by irreconcilable national territorial ambitions in Europe and east Asia. The two wars also exposed the lack of forethought amongst the imperial powers about how a competitive global order might be managed and controlled through new international agencies.

The limitations first became fully apparent in the negotiations leading up to the treaties agreed to re-establish a stable global political order after the First World War. The most important of these was the Treaty of Versailles, signed in 1919, the core of which essentially revolved around the creation of a series of new states in Europe whose independence would be underwritten and protected by a global governmental body, the League of Nations. The boundaries of the new states were drawn largely on the basis of supposed national coherence, which in effect amounted to a rather crude assessment of ethnic and linguistic unity. The new states formed a swathe, stretching from the Baltic Sea in the north of Europe to the Black Sea in the south-east and the Aegean and the Mediterranean seas in the south-west. Modern-day Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Czech and Slovak republics, Poland, Austria, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Albania all essentially date from this period. However, although the League of Nations was set up in 1920, it proved to be almost completely ineffective as a source of worldwide political authority. The United States refused to join and the emergent Soviet Union was not invited, so that it was left to a militarily weakened group of European states which were members of the League to try to safeguard the territorial integrity of a host of fledgling national democracies both within Europe and beyond. It manifestly failed and, as a result, rapidly became discredited in the face of malign imperial marauding, notably by Italy in Abysinnia and Germany in both the then Czechoslovakia and the Rhineland.

Elsewhere in the world, the former imperial territories of the two main losers from the First World War, Germany and the Ottoman Empire (the precursor of modern Turkey), were reapportioned amongst the victors, as protectorates or other similar sanitised formulations for the reality of colonialism. In the Middle East, Iraq, Syria, the Lebanon, and Jordan

emerged in their present form from this process, as did Tanzania, Namibia, and Cameroon in Africa.

The territorial mix was, therefore, inherently unstable. More than anything else, it was the failure to provide guarantees of security for the nation states created after the First World War that led directly to the Second World War, geographically a much more truly global conflict. The aftermath of that second war, involving directly all five of the populated continents, not only extended dramatically the number of nation states at the expense of the traditional European empires, it also redefined the whole concept of empire in a less direct form of superpower hegemony. The new system has been legitimised and increasingly, though very patchily, underwritten by the United Nations, the global governmental organisation that succeeded the moribund and largely defunct League of Nations in 1945. All independent states may apply to become members and most have done so, seeing membership of the United Nations as a hallmark of their own legitimacy (see Chapter 12).

After the end of the Second World War in Europe in 1945, the fundamentals of the nation state system created by the Treaty of Versailles remained intact, albeit with the loss of a number of states to the Soviet Union in the east (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) and the substantial redrawing of political boundaries throughout Eastern and Central Europe. Imposed upon this map, however, was the fault line of the Iron Curtain and the louring confrontation of the Cold War between the United States and its allies in the west and the Soviet Union in the east (Box 3.3). Elsewhere, in Africa, south-east Asia, and India, decolonisation progressed apace throughout the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s as the European colonial powers found it increasingly difficult to sustain their protective role in the face of internal opposition from ever more confident nationalist movements and external competition for influence from the USA and the Soviet Union, the two Cold War superpowers, with intermittent additional incursions from a third, China.

The other continents were less directly affected. Australasia and North America did become more independent of their deeply rooted European connections and saw, and continue to see, a growing resentment of the colonial ethos amongst their populations, but for the most part this has been expressed through a more evolutionary process of internal change, reflected in a greater general acceptance of the claims by native Americans, Aborigines in Australia, and Maoris in New Zealand that

Box 3.3

The Iron Curtain

The Iron Curtain was the dividing line between Soviet Communist-controlled Central and Eastern Europe and Western democratic Europe for more than four decades in the mid-twentieth century. The term was first coined by the British wartime Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill, in a speech on 5 March 1946 at Fulton, Missouri in the USA. He defined the Iron Curtain as a line running from Stettin on the Baltic to Trieste on the Adriatic. He pointed out that a host of European capital cities were now firmly within the Soviet sphere of influence: Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest, and Sofia. The clear implication was that Europe was severely diminished as a result. Subsequently, the definition of the Iron Curtain was modified to represent the whole of the dividing line between the Communist and free worlds in Europe, from the Northern Cape on the Norwegian–Finnish border in the north to the Greek and Turkish frontiers with Communist-controlled Yugoslavia and Bulgaria in the south.

The Iron Curtain has been described as 'one of the most powerful geographical barriers in continental Europe' (Blacksell, 1981, p. 15) and it provided a most durable political dividing line until the implosion of the Soviet Union in 1989/90. Since then, the Iron Curtain has become a historical curiosity and increasingly irrelevant to the geography of Europe. All vestiges of its former significance disappeared with the expansion of the EU to include eight former Communist states in 2004.

their rights be recognised. In South America too the process has been essentially one of internal change, though often accompanied by bitter and violent political conflict, fomented by indirect superpower involvement.

The collapse of Soviet Communism and in particular its economic system in the 1980s has had a profound impact on the state system (Fukuyama, 1992). Many states were cast adrift from their traditional Soviet superpower embrace, but were not immediately absorbed by the US alternative. As a result, a far less predictable political mix has evolved, with independent nation states very much the preferred alternative, but with much more volatile and fickle political allegiances. It makes for an unstable political environment, but one where nationalist sentiments are increasingly significant. Small states, such as the group of independent states that have painfully emerged from the wreckage of the former Yugoslavia since 1990, often feel able to challenge large and

much more powerful ones directly, and frequently they use the threat of political instability and the danger of it spreading as a bargaining counter. Equally, the uncertainty and instability often encourages discontented minority populations within existing established states to press their claims for independence even more vigorously. In short, nation states look set to proliferate in the more deregulated world of the early twenty-first century.

A typology of states

In the discussion so far little attempt has been made to distinguish between states, with the implicit implication that they are more or less uniform. Obviously at one level this is patently untrue, since states vary in terms of their size, population, location, and many other physical characteristics, but it is also the case that they vary significantly in terms of internal organisation as well and that there are well-defined trends in the way states have developed over the past two hundred years.

Essentially there are three broad categories of state governance that have evolved: monarchies, colonial dependencies, and republics, each covering in detail a spectrum of different arrangements. Monarchies include kings, emperors, tsars, princes, shahs, and many more, but are all regimes where dynasties rule as of right. Colonial dependencies cover all those territories where the responsibilities of government are vested in an external power and include not only colonies, but dominions, empires, protectorates, and the like. Republics, according to Plato's ideal, are those states where the government is by the people and for the people (Rowe, 1984). Many states now style themselves as republics to give notice that they are signing up to those ideals, even though this may be far removed from the reality of their governmental systems.

Historically, the distribution of these three categories has altered dramatically, especially in the past century (Christopher, 1999). In 1900, monarchies covered virtually the whole of Europe and Asia and republics were almost entirely confined to North and South America. In Europe, France and Switzerland were the only republics, and in the whole of the rest of the world there were just two others, the Orange Free State and the Transvaal in southern Africa.

In the year 2000 the picture could not be more different. Republics cover the bulk of four of the five inhabited continents, and the greater part of

the rest comprise republics in all but name. In North America, Canada retains residual and largely token links with the UK through retaining the British monarch as head of state, as do Australia and New Zealand. For this reason, they are still technically classified as dominions. Monarchies with quite limited powers are still to be found in Europe, notably in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, and the UK. The emperor is still the head of state in Japan. There are also a few dynastic monarchies in the Middle East, the most significant being Saudi Arabia, and in south-east Asia, Thailand, Cambodia, and Borneo still have monarchs in the form of a king, a prince and a sultan respectively. In Africa, the King of Morocco is the only true remaining monarch, although there are monarchs too within South Africa, in Swaziland and Lesotho.

The transformation is important for what it says about the nature of the world map. Across the globe peoples have begun to take control of their own destinies, defining their identities in terms of how they are governed. The process is far from complete and for most people participatory democracy is a very distant prospect, but the change of attitude as to what constitutes good government is fundamental: even where monarchies survive they do so only with popular approval and true colonialism still remains in just a few small and scattered territories, many of them island dependencies.

Key themes and further reading

This chapter is about states and how they evolved as a framework for government. The role of capitalism and the attendant industrialisation and urbanisation on the development of states should now be appreciated, as should the historical significance of nationalism. The impact of IT and other technologies on the power of states should be clear. Historically, the spread of the state idea across the globe is an important theme, as is the different kinds of state governance, ranging from monarchies to republics, with colonial dependencies in-between.

There is a huge literature on the nature of states and on nationalism written by political scientists. Political geography has taken a great deal from this work and it has provided a most useful background for geographical writing on the subject. R. J. Johnston (1982) in *Geography and the State* has provided a readable and concise introduction to the geography of states, but those wanting to find out how other social

scientists have approached the subject will find Ernst Gellner's (1983) *Nations and Nationalism* stimulating and challenging, particularly his discussion of nationalism. Karl Deutsch (1978) is a political scientist whose writing is readily accessible and in *The Analysis of International Relations* he provides a useful history of the spread of states since the middle of the eighteenth century. An up-to-date geographical survey of the great variety of states in the world and how they have evolved since the turn of the twentieth century is provided by A. J. Christopher (1999) in his *The Atlas of States*.