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# WORLD REGIONAL GEOGRAPHY

THE NEW GLOBAL ORDER

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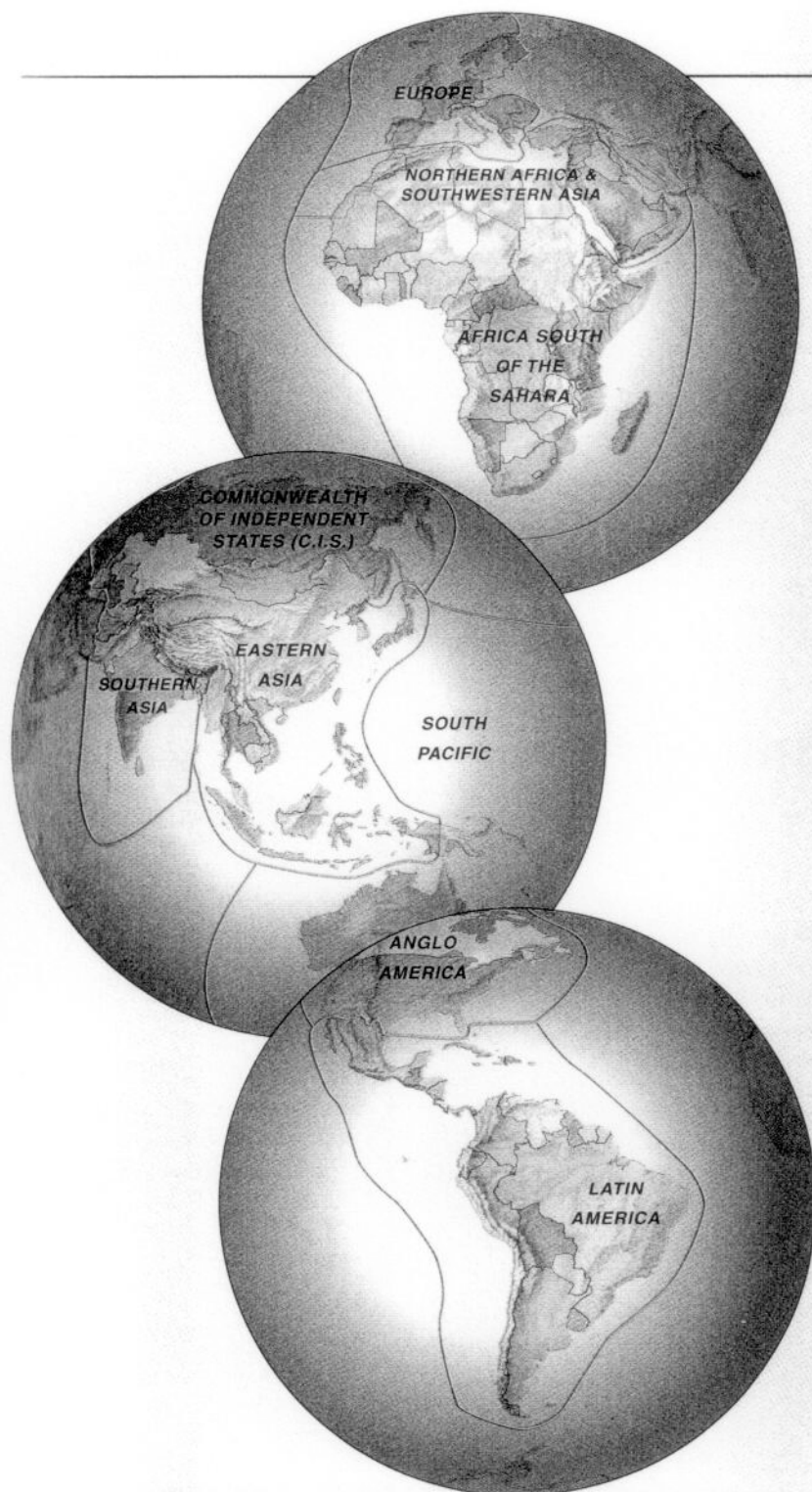


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# A NEW GLOBAL ORDER AND GEOGRAPHY

## 1 Chapter



### THIS CHAPTER IS ABOUT:

What comprises a new global order

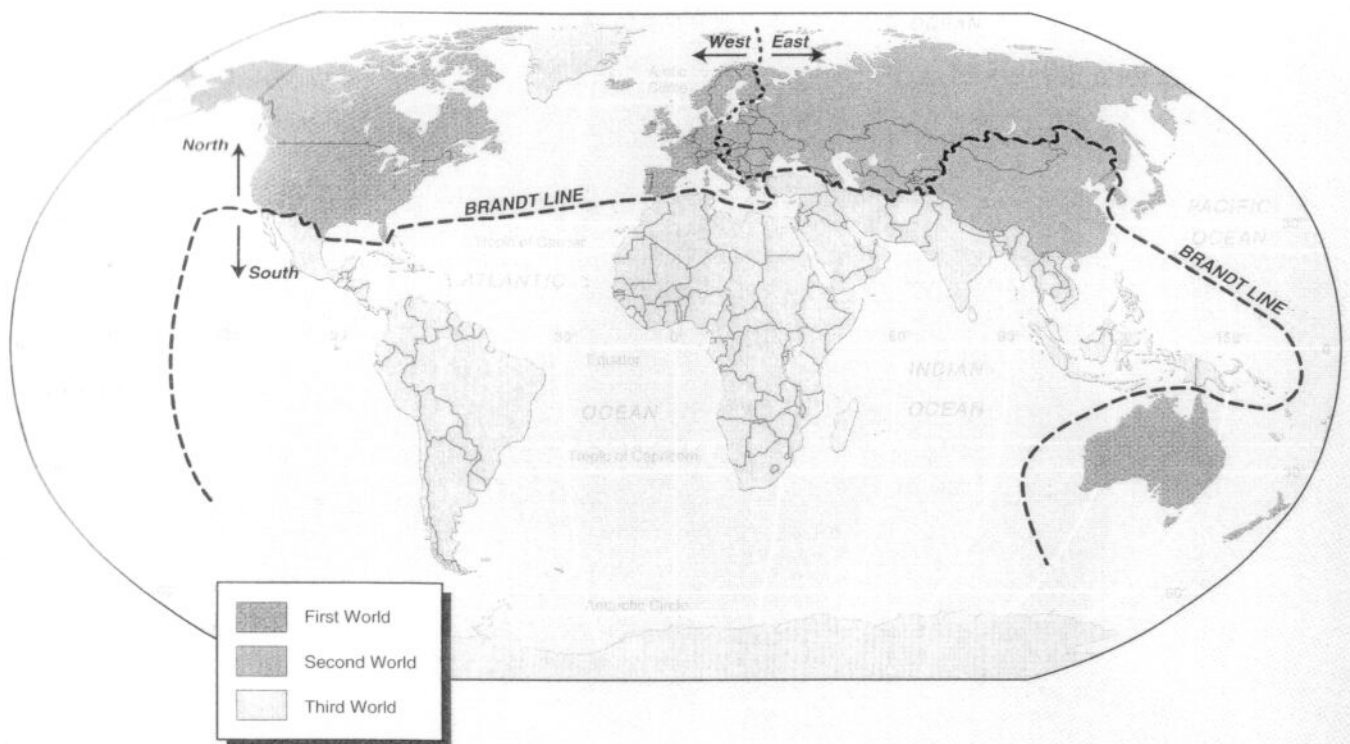
The importance of geography in understanding a new global order

The special nature of regional geography

How major world regions are chosen: the basis for the rest of the book

How world regions developed through history

**FIGURE 1.1** Global view of Earth and the major world regions. Views of Earth from space led to a wider global consciousness and concern for the planet. The globes show the major world regions that are the subject of this book.



**FIGURE 1.2 Old global order of the three worlds.** The First World comprised the affluent countries of the West, dominated by the United States and western Europe. The Second World included the Soviet Union, China, and other communist countries. The Third World made up the rest—the world's poor countries. The West-East division marked a Cold War boundary of potential conflict. The Brandt line, proposed in the early 1970s by Willy Brandt, chancellor of West Germany, separated the rich North from the poor South.

## FACETS OF A NEW GLOBAL ORDER

From the 1960s, space vehicle views of Earth (Figure 1.1) brought a deeper consciousness of our planet's unity. They emphasized the finite limits of the land areas and materials on "spaceship Earth." On the eve of a new millennium, all parts of the world are interlinked increasingly by political, economic, and cultural ties and environmental concerns. Within this new global order, however, local, regional, and national areas retain their distinct characters, or geographies.

Any text that sets out to involve the whole world needs central themes to organize and select what will be included. It also needs a set of basic principles to provide a basis for comparison among the various parts of the whole. The main theme of this text, "a new global order," challenges geographers to evaluate its meaning and how it affects different parts of the world. This book sets out to explore the importance of regional geographic variations within wider global contexts. It begins with a discussion of what makes a new global order and how geography—particularly regional geography—is relevant to its study (this

chapter). This is followed by a summary of the basic geographic principles that contribute to regional geographic analysis (Chapter 2). The remaining chapters (3–11) are each concerned with a major world region.

### Global Political Order

Politics is about power and the ways in which countries are governed. During the 1990s, a new global emphasis grew out of major political events in the late 1980s. A single superpower—the United States—displaced the old divisive geopolitical order of the Cold War.

### Cold War

In the Cold War, which lasted from 1950 to 1990, two rival groups of countries advocated different political systems (Figure 1.2). One group was led by the United States—the **First World**, or *free market, countries*—and the other by the Soviet Union—the **Second World**, or *planned economy, countries*. They competed for



**FIGURE 1.3 Third World city: midday street scene in Bangalore, southern India.** Compare this view of a main shopping street in Bangalore with a shopping area or main street with which you are familiar. What ways do people use to get about in each place?

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influence among countries in the Third World (Figure 1.3). The First World countries were mainly in western Europe and Anglo America. They had democratically elected governments that placed importance on the rights of the individual. The Second World countries attempted to implement the communist ideals of Marx and Lenin, in which the needs of the state came before those of the individual. In the Soviet Union and its subordinate neighbors in eastern Europe, and in countries such as China, central governments controlled most aspects of political, economic, and cultural life.

The Cold War competition between two rival political systems resulted in huge investments on both sides in weapons of mass destruction. Wars of a more or less local nature erupted every few years, mostly in the Third World. New military technology made wholesale slaughter possible. The nightmare of a "hot war," in which the leaders of the two groups fought with nuclear weapons, was, however, averted. The wars in Korea in the early 1950s and in Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s were the main conflicts, but civil wars such as those in Angola, Mozambique, and Malaysia were instigated and supported by the two sides. Some countries in the Third World took sides, as when Fidel Castro aligned Cuba with the Soviet Union after 1959. In the late 1970s, Egypt

linked itself with the United States, obtaining economic support in exchange for moves toward reconciliation with Israel. This phase of world history resulted in countries becoming parts of political blocs.

### After the Cold War

The 1991 breakup of the Soviet bloc Second World countries cost them political influence. The United States became the sole world political, military, and economic superpower. When it invaded Kuwait in 1990, Iraq found itself up against U.S. military forces and those of other countries drawn into the conflict by their links to the United States. Iraq also had to face its Arab neighbors, who supported the U.S. forces in the absence of intervention from the weakened Russian remnant of the former Soviet bloc. Although the 1990s showed that the United States is not able by itself to maintain a role as policeman to the world, countries had to take note of American wishes since there were no longer two superpowers to play off against each other. The greater interest in peace between the Arab countries and Israel in Southwest Asia and the end of apartheid in South Africa owe much to the shift from the Cold War to a new global order.

The full political implications of a new global order were not worked out by the late 1990s but will become clearer as they affect world political events into the next century. Challenges to the political leadership of the United States may come from a revived Russia that retains pretensions to world power, from the growth of Chinese aspirations, or from a grouping of Muslim countries. Throughout most of the 1990s, the view prevailed that the rest of the world should become Westernized. It is now becoming understood that Western politics must share the global stage with other countries to form the world's future.

### **New Global Disorder**

The world is not politically united, and is unlikely to be so. It remains a dangerous place of rivalries within and among countries. The armaments industry makes its wares widely available. New sources of conflict arise from racism and ethnic or religious antagonisms. Some have suggested that the term "New Global Disorder" is more appropriate for world politics in the 1990s, bringing into question whether or not world events are dominated by a state of confused or unruly behavior. If global political order is unlikely, it is necessary to examine the economic, cultural, and environmental dimensions of a new global order.

### **Global Economic Order**

After the end of the Cold War global order, economic events became a major factor in growing worldwide linkages and exchanges. The breakup of the Soviet bloc not only left the United States as the single world political superpower, it also enabled the capitalist economic system—of which the United States and multinational corporations are the most powerful exponents—to dominate the world. Politics and economics work closely together.

### **Economic Systems**

An economic system is a way in which goods and services are produced, distributed, and consumed. The capitalist economic system emphasizes the private or corporate organization of business and investment, together with the determination of prices, production, and distribution of goods by market forces. Governments intervene in capitalist economies mainly to regulate terms of trade.

The alternative economic system to the capitalist system during the Cold War was that of state-run, socialist economies exemplified by the former Soviet bloc and China. They failed to generate the high levels of wealth, consumer goods, and tourism options that became a mark of most people living in Western countries. Although socialist countries often had universal medical care, comprehensive educational systems, and strong military defense, they did little to reduce the numbers of poor and had few people with middle and upper incomes. The inability of the socialist economic system to provide

consumer goods had much to do with the failure of the related communist political system.

### **Global Economic System**

The capitalist system now operates in virtually all parts of the world and is regarded as the new global economic system. The few countries, such as the People's Republic of China, that attempt to maintain central state control of a planned economy work within the capitalist system and are being drawn increasingly into it. Russia and the other countries that were part of the former Soviet system are in transition from their planned economies to market-related systems.

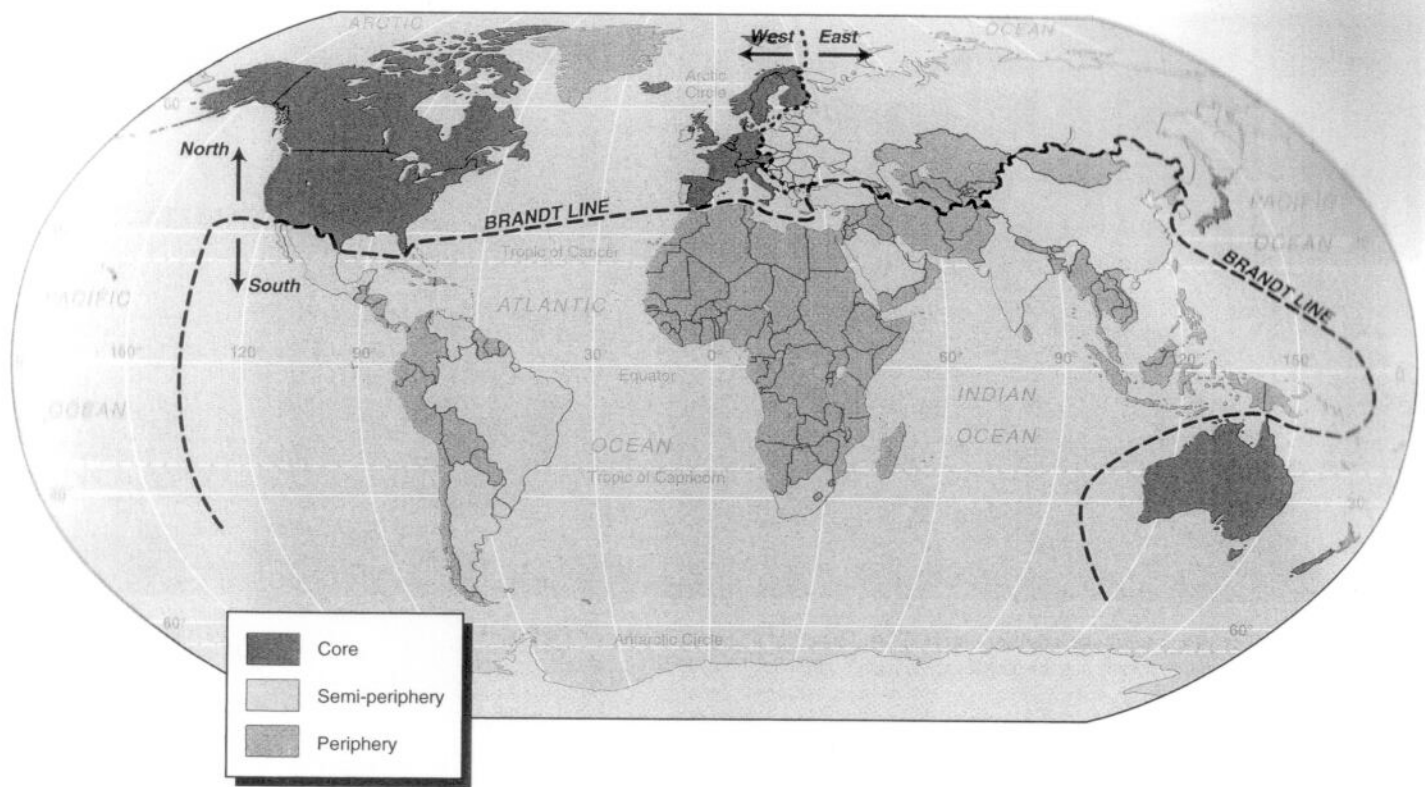
The few exceptions to this trend are in the remotest parts of the world, such as the most isolated parts of the Amazon rain forest and Papua New Guinea, where a few tribes still live outside the world economy. In parts of Africa, people are returning to hunting and gathering modes of livelihood after failing to become part of the world economy.

During the 1990s, the United States and other Western countries promoted the geographic expansion of capitalist activities, thus strengthening their own economies. They encouraged former Soviet bloc countries to become part of the world economic system, and discouraged countries, such as Iran and Iraq, from finding alternatives. The end of the Cold War spread capitalist power to many countries inside and outside the former Soviet bloc.

As more of the world becomes involved in this economic order, complaints arise that rich countries get richer—along with rich people within those countries—and poor countries (and poor people) generally get poorer. Even though the world's poorest countries as a whole experienced relative economic growth in the 1990s, those in Africa did not; neither did large groups of people in Asia and Latin America. Poorer countries in the Third World that received financial assistance from several sources in the Cold War era can now obtain aid only from a limited group of countries. New loans from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund—both headquartered in the United States—are often based on agreements requiring stringent actions to open a country's internal economy for external investment and foreign goods and to reduce its bureaucracies.

### **Core and Periphery**

The capitalist world economic system, like the political order, has a geographic dimension (Figure 1.4). It reflects the relative success of countries in the system. The richer countries are termed the core countries. Core countries have a wide range of products and services, use advanced technology, and enjoy relatively high wages. They play major roles in world trade by importing raw materials from poorer countries and exporting manufactured goods and services back to them. Core countries establish favorable balances of trade with poorer countries and build up reserves of capital that can be invested in their own or other countries. The core countries mainly invest in each other's economies, and their



**FIGURE 1.4 New global economic order: core and periphery.** The core countries are the rich countries of the world that dominate world trade: they have a wider range of products, use advanced technology, pay high wages, and consume massive amounts of resources. The countries of the periphery are poor, have a limited range of products, and often depend on trade with the richer countries. Countries in the semiperiphery are moving up or down in this order. Discuss changes you might make to the country placings.

most valuable trade is with each other. The levels of such intracore investment and trade multiplied several times in the 1980s and 1990s.

The poorer countries belong to the **periphery** of the world economic system. Peripheral countries have narrow ranges of products, less advanced technology, and lower wages. They play a secondary role in world trade. Peripheral countries commonly depend on core countries for purchasing their exports, supplying their imports, and providing capital. Some peripheral countries have a part of their economy that is involved deeply in world trade by supplying raw materials to core countries. Many areas of peripheral countries, however, have subsistence-type economies based on local needs and production. The core-periphery relationship is generally one of core countries exploiting dependent peripheral countries. By the late 1990s, agencies such as the United Nations and World Bank were more optimistic about the future of poorer countries as a whole—although some of the poorest continue to have little prospect of making life better for their peoples.

Transition between core and periphery is possible. Some countries move from dominant to dominated status, or vice versa. Countries in the process of moving between the two extremes are grouped as the **semiperiphery**. Countries in the semiperiphery retain dependent relationships with core countries but have peripheral countries dependent on them.

At present newly industrializing countries (NICs), such as South Korea, Mexico, and Argentina, are clearly part of the semiperiphery, moving toward the core. Former Soviet bloc countries, including Russia and its neighbors, are either in the periphery or the semiperiphery.

### Impacts of Economic Change

As with the shifts in global political order, the outcome of changes within the world economic order are not fully apparent in the late 1990s. The late 1980s and early 1990s were bad years for most countries in the peripheral group because of recession in the core countries on which they depended. Core countries switched capital investments away from peripheral countries and toward other core countries. Despite this, several countries, including Mexico, Malaysia, and Thailand, entered the semiperiphery with an upward momentum, although it is not certain that any will join the core group. Such countries were marked by a greater participation in the world economy as they relaxed duties on imports and produced more goods for export. The late 1990s, however, brought problems for many of these countries when banking systems failed and currencies were devalued. Although the global economic system was widely established by the 1990s, local and regional variations remained and appeared to be an integral part of the system.



**FIGURE 1.5 City center, Bangalore, southern India.** What aspects of transportation types might help to define an Indian technological culture, as compared with your own? Remember that India has the technology to launch satellites, produce computer software, and explode nuclear bombs.

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## Global Cultural Order

Some evidence suggests a cultural trend toward “One World.” Cultural characteristics at national and local levels, however, modulate the influences of global political and economic pressures, producing cultural variety. The culture of a group of people living in a particular part of the world is based on the ideas, beliefs, and practices they hold in common and pass on from one generation to the next. It is demonstrated in their language and religion, the ways in which they do things socially, and the design of items they make (Figure 1.5). Different cultures have distinctive approaches to family life, the roles of women, the structure and decoration of houses, and the values they place on communal and individual actions.

### One World

The One World idea is based on extending the Western urban-industrial culture to the rest of the world in the wake of the world economic system. This process is often referred to as “Westernization,” or “Europeanization.” It is met in the so-called “Cocacola-ization” of eating and drinking habits, the worldwide extension of Western popular music, and the global presence of the same personal computers, cars, and other consumer goods.

### Cultural Differences

Although the One World trend is powerful, many local cultural features derived from past events and constructions still demonstrate lasting qualities. People can conclude which part of the world they are in from clues that inform about local habits. For example, the housing styles and

shop signs in Japan, Australia, Pakistan, Brazil, Romania, or Kenya can be told apart. Awareness is widespread through the increasingly global medium of television that distinctive cultural traits, economic contrasts, political systems, and environmental conditions mark out different parts of the world.

During the 1990s, cultural factors often replaced political ideologies in generating local conflicts. Historic cultural differences existed among the dominating Christian Orthodox Serbs, the Roman Catholic Croats and Slovenes, and the Muslims in the former Yugoslavia. They led to declarations of independence as Yugoslavia broke apart in 1991, leaving the Serbs alone in a remnant of that country. Determined to reassert their former dominance, the Serbs instigated years of civil war, first in Bosnia, then in Kosovo in the late 1990s.

## Global Issues in the Natural Environment

The world’s natural environment is the world as it might be without human modifications. It includes the mountains and rivers, atmosphere and oceans, plants, animals, and soils. It provides contrasts at the regional and local levels. The variations from tropical forest to desert (Figure 1.6) and from mountain peak to flat plain and polar ice cap are determined by atmospheric and interior Earth activities that are often too powerful for humans to modify.

### People Modify Nature

Human numbers and technologic abilities continue to increase rapidly, however, and have rising impacts on natural



(a)



(b)

**FIGURE 1.6 Contrasting natural environments.** (a) Tropical island in the Caribbean with tree-covered hills and vigorous plant growth resulting from high temperatures and plenty of rain. (b) Desert in northern Africa, covered by sand dunes except where water is available at a palm-fringed oasis. What other contrasts in natural environments have you experienced?

(a) © Gregory Ochocka/Photo Researchers, Inc.; (b) © Fred Maroon/Photo Researchers, Inc.

environments. People modify all landscapes in which they live. The effect is greater where those activities are more intense or the environment is more fragile, as where farming or urban activities occur on the edge of a desert. It may be less where fewer people live in a more resilient environment, such as a well-watered plain.

For thousands of years the human modification of landscapes was the means of expanding food production. From around 3000 B.C., river plains in dry countries were managed for irrigation farming, but they became subject to erosion, waterlogging, and salinization. Vast tracts of forest were converted to farmland in medieval Europe and Asia, and when settlement moved westward across the United States in the 1800s. By the early 1900s, it was widely understood that some farming practices destroyed soils that had taken hundreds or thousands of years to develop. Industrial practices fouled rivers and the atmosphere. In the later 1900s, governments in the wealthier countries took measures to restrict soil erosion and air and water pollution. In poorer countries, such steps are seldom seen as necessary or affordable. The core countries even exported some of the polluting industries that could not meet local regulations to peripheral countries, a development highlighted by the chemical industry disaster at Bhopal, India, in 1984.

### Global Environmental Issues

People throughout the world are becoming increasingly aware of the linkages among different aspects of the natural environment: the human impacts on the natural environment, and the need to initiate policies that will sustain significant environmental resources into the future. The environment is likely to become a major issue of regional and international political tensions in the new century.

A major issue facing the new global order is providing for the needs of the increasing numbers of people in the world from the same stock of natural resources. **Natural resources** are those materials stored in the natural environment, such as metallic minerals, stone, water, timber, fish, and soils, that human societies use to build and maintain their economic and cultural systems. In the next 25 years (to A.D. 2025), the world population is likely to increase from 6 billion to 9 billion. The 4.6 billion in peripheral countries will rise to 7.5 billion, while the populations of core countries will increase slowly or stop growing. This will place additional pressures on the natural environments of peripheral countries by increasing the extraction of minerals and the usage of water and by placing more demands on soils. The core countries may be able to afford to preserve their own surroundings through costly conservation measures.

Although the world's resources of water, soils, timber, fish, and minerals are limited, people have continually expanded their usage by discovering new sources or inventing new technologies to manage what is there. So far, as population has expanded, discoveries of new resources or technologies have made it possible for all to be fed and provided with the necessities of life. Many people in the world live in extreme poverty, and some die of starvation or lack basic facilities. This is more a problem of politics, economics, and culture than of environmental resource availability or technical ability to produce sufficient food. Distribution through the world economic system is often hampered by political restrictions on trade. The paradox of setting aside farmland in the United States and Europe while people in other countries starve highlights a dilemma that human systems have not yet solved.

### RECAP 1A: A New Global Order

The new global order has political, economic, cultural, and environmental dimensions. These dimensions are interdependent. The global economic system led the way, but culture and environment assumed greater significance in the 1990s. Although a new global order is developing, local and regional differences are maintained.

1A.1 What do you think are the main elements of a new global order? Support your answer with examples of recent events.

**Key Terms:** Make sure you understand the meaning of the following (see definitions in the Glossary in the Reference Section):

First World	core	natural environment
Second World	periphery	natural resources
Third World	semiperiphery	
economic system	culture	

## GEOGRAPHY AND A NEW GLOBAL ORDER

Geography is the study of how human beings live in varied ways on different parts of Earth's surface. Geographic studies relate the political, economic, cultural, and environmental aspects of a new global order to countries around the world and to regions within countries. The features and products of each region complement others. For example, people living in small towns in coastal China work in new factories built since the 1980s to make goods that will be sold in America, often financed by money from Japan or Taiwan. Yet they still depend on local farms for their food and are subject to communist governmental controls and to a cultural heritage from the more distant past. These characteristics—global, national, and local, with inputs from past and present—give character to each part of Earth's surface. They form the basis of geographic studies.

### A World of Differences

Although linked and interdependent in many ways, the world is marked by differences and inequalities among its parts and by rapid changes that affect people's lives. So much has been made of a global order focused on worldwide politics and economics determining local events that some have forecast "the end of geography"—implying that differences between one part of Earth's surface and another may no longer be significant. Such a view is premature; the reverse is true. Geography—differences among places—still matters.

Multinational corporations with their worldwide networks have to adapt their manufacturing and marketing strategies to local conditions. The 1980s concept of the world car was abandoned because people in different countries demanded special variants. Manufacturing industries still locate in concentrated areas, such as Silicon Valley, California (microelectronics), or Dalton, Georgia, USA (carpets). Service industries focus specialist activities on major cities such as London, England (currency trading), Hartford, Connecticut (insurance), Chicago (futures trading), or Los Angeles (entertainment). There is no likelihood that locations of people, jobs, or demands for goods and services will disperse evenly around the world. Country

governments or distinctive local cultures set local conditions and priorities. This will not change.

## Nature of Geography

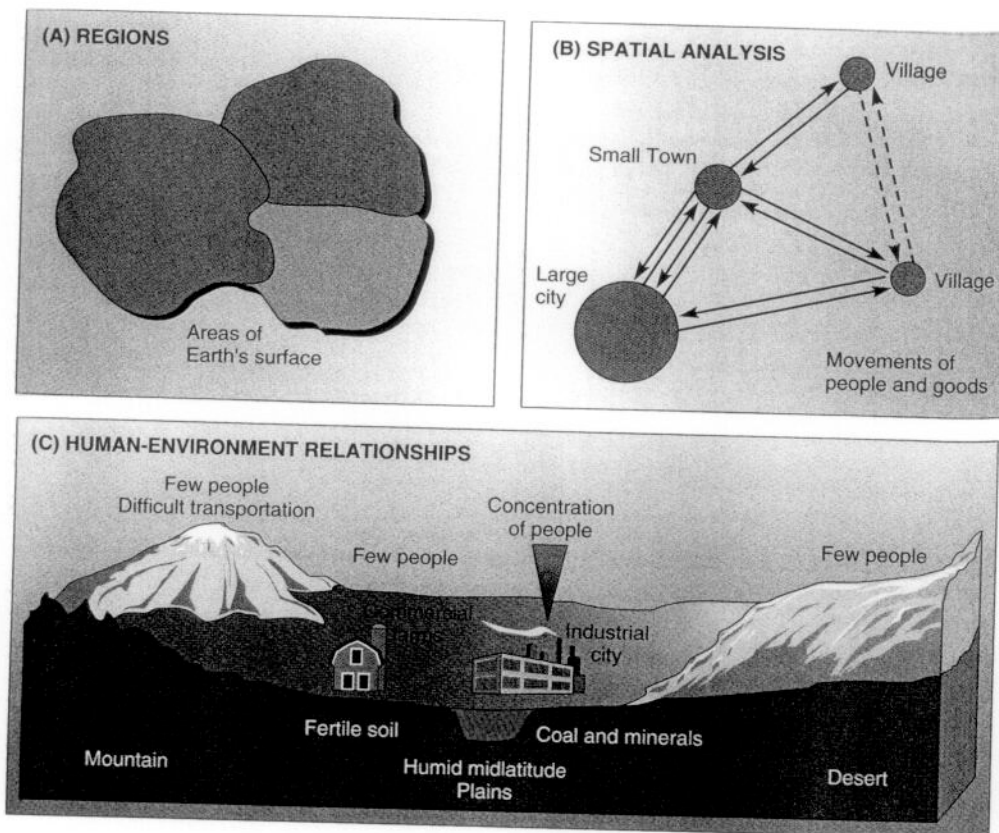
Geography begins with the study of places and their locations within physical and human environmental contexts. When we say we go to visit a place, it might be an individual building (ski center), small town (Freeport, Maine), large city (New York), rural area (Midwest), another state, or another country. Places may be points on a map or areas of several thousand square kilometers. Each place has its own character, defined by what it looks like and what people do there and how they feel about it. Each place is linked to other places by transportation and telecommunications networks.

A place's location is defined by reference to its position on Earth's surface, or **absolute location**, often recorded as its latitude and longitude, or by its level of interactions with other places, or **relative location**. The increasing availability of rapid transportation facilities and the "global information highway" bring people into easier contact with each other, making them relatively—but not absolutely—closer. This process helps a new global order penetrate more aspects of local life.

Geographers study places on Earth's surface as the environments and spaces in which humans live. Studies of the surrounding environment with its natural and human conditions at a place join with studies of the links among different places. Geographers sometimes separate **physical geography** as the study of nonhuman processes and environments across Earth's surface (e.g., distribution of climate variety, plant ecology, or soil formation, or the location of mountain building or river action). **Human geography** is the study of the distribution of people and their activities (e.g., economies, cultures, politics, urban changes). Although it helps to study aspects of geography separately, such divisions may obscure interactions between human activities and the natural environment. This text seeks to present geography as a unified field of study in which the understandings of physical and human geography work together.

The two basic geographic concepts of place and location are combined in three main approaches to geographic studies.

- **Regional geography** evaluates the differences among places and is based on recognizing the uniqueness of some places and the features that several places may have in common. It provides an informed approach to assessing the roles of global processes and their impacts on people in different places. A **region** is an area of Earth's surface with similar physical and human characteristics that distinguish it from other regions and cause it to interact with other regions in specific ways (Figure 1.7a). Regional geography involves the description of the characteristics within each region that give rise to distinctive landscapes. It places each region and its location in a national and global context. The other approaches contribute to regional geography.
- The second approach is called **spatial analysis**, highlighting the relationships among places that are based



**FIGURE 1.7** Geographers study how people use Earth's surface. (a) By dividing the surface into regions. (b) By analyzing spatial relationships among places. (c) By evaluating human-environment relationships.

on linkages over the space of Earth's surface (Figure 1.7b). The character and location of places are often considered in terms of geometrical points, lines, and areas. Statistical links among places add to the mathematical basis of spatial analysis. Studies often focus on a particular aspect of geographic significance, such as economic or population changes, or on geographic relationships among different sectors of towns or rural areas. Spatial analysis helps to assess linkages among regions.

- The third approach adopted by geographers is that of investigating **human-environment relationships** (Figure 1.7c). The study of the interactions between human activities and the natural environment broadened from one earlier in the 1900s that was concerned mainly with the impacts of climate, mountain and lowland relief, and soil types on human affairs. More recent studies assess the impacts of human activities on the environment. A landscape is seen by geographers as summarizing the outcomes of interactions between people and natural environments over time. Comparisons among town-scapes and rural landscapes help to define regional characteristics.

## REGIONS IN A NEW GLOBAL ORDER

This text's central theme of "a new global order" makes demands on geographic studies. Global processes and tendencies in the post-Cold War world interact in different

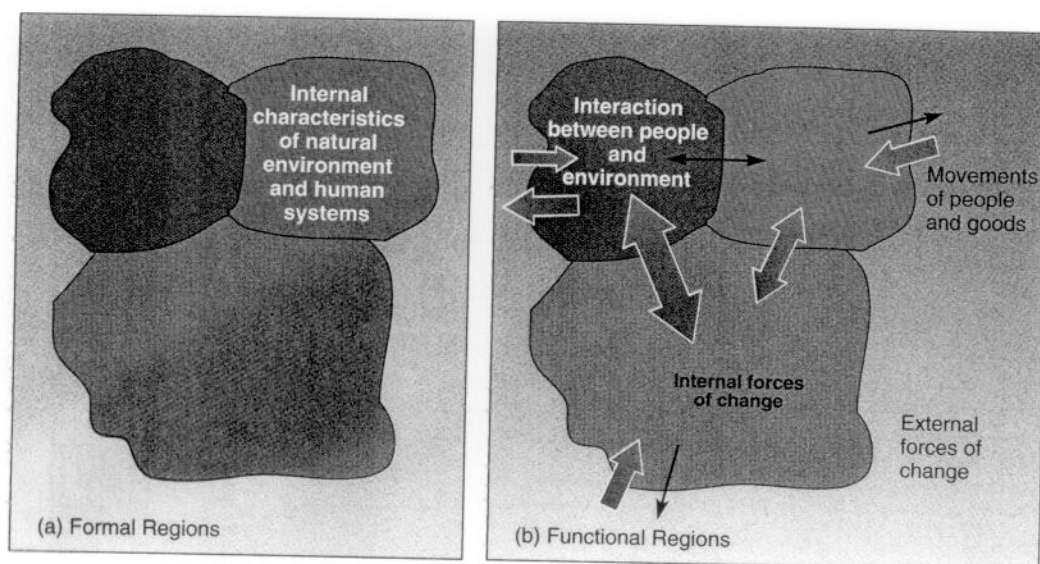
ways with local areas, countries, and major world regions. Contrasts among countries in the core, periphery, and semiperiphery are linked to the changing global context. Geographers carry out regional studies to unravel some of the connections and differences. Regions provide comparable units in relation to scale and function.

### Regional Scales

Regions within the overall global realm are of varied scales from local to continental. In this text, we identify three regional scales. At each scale human and physical geographic features combine to produce distinctive regions.

- **Major world regions** encompass several countries and occupy a major part or all of a continent. Nine such regions are identified, and their human geography is considered through distinctive subregions within each major region in Chapters 3 through 11.
- **Countries** are self-governing political entities within major world regions, and their borders provide the boundaries of major world regions and subregions. Very large countries, such as Russia, Canada, China, the United States of America, Brazil, and India form subregions.
- **Local regions** are subdivisions of countries that may vary in size from an urban neighborhood to an area of distinctive farm products or physical features. There is not

**FIGURE 1.8 Formal and functional regions.** (a) Formal regions reflect a static understanding of regions, each one seen as separate and different from others. (b) Functional regions are a dynamic concept that involves exchanges of raw materials, products, people, and information, and considers the relative influences of regions on each other. This understanding is more appropriate to world regional geography.



room in a text of this length to give detailed analyses of all local regions; some are mentioned to exemplify points and illustrate their existence.

Boundaries of regions may be major physical features, such as coastlines, mountain ranges, and rivers, political borders between countries, provinces, or states, or cultural borders between lands occupied by different peoples.

The ever-changing world and its regions can be studied in terms of *multiple geographies*. In these, a hierarchy of multiple spaces is linked to multiple time periods. The hierarchy of regional scales from local to country, major world region and global scales is linked with timescales from short-term events through medium-term economic cycles to longer-term changes. Many events that change the nature of regions occur over short time spans at a local level but take longer to influence a whole country or wider area. The link between geography and history is a vital part of understanding our world.

## Formal and Functional Regions

### Formal Regions

Formal regions are distinctive parts of Earth's surface that have characteristics determined by a combination of physical and human geographic features. Each region is unique and disconnected to the rest of the world (Figure 1.8a). The definition of a region may be based on such criteria as the arrangement and type of physical features, descriptions of natural landscapes, or economic characteristics. Businesses and governmental bodies use formal regional divisions in defining their marketing and administrative areas.

### Functional Regions

Functional regions are dynamic geographic entities that interact with other regions in national and global geographic

patterns (Figure 1.8b). The growth of worldwide economic and communications systems results in regions changing their roles and relative locations within the systems. Some become political, economic, or cultural cores, while others become parts of peripheries. Interactions between cores and peripheries result in continuing changes as regions grow or decline over time. Each phase in this process leaves behind features in the landscapes and built environments of regions. Seen from a viewpoint of rapid changes in the late 1990s, the complex mosaic of geographic regions has five characteristics that influence the past, present, and possible future character of each region.

- **People create regions.** The people who live in a region—not the natural environment—have a dominating role in determining its characteristics. People act in different ways in similar natural environments and regard each type of natural environment as having different potentials for development. For example, the margins of the Sahara Desert of northern Africa remained home to nomadic tribes into the 1990s, while the deserts of Pakistan in Southern Asia were reclaimed for commercial agriculture by British engineers from the late 1800s (see Chapters 4 and 5). The expansion of Los Angeles in southern California was another different—American urban—response to a desert environment.

Furthermore, similar patterns of human organization are applied across different environments. Within the United States, for instance, similar economic, social, and political systems occur across the arid, humid, subtropical, and temperate environments within the country's borders.

The primary importance of people in fashioning regional character demonstrates that the relative importance of regions is determined less by criteria such as the possession of natural resources and more by human actions at critical phases of history. People create their own images of their country's role, portraying their idea of

its importance and relating other parts of the world to it. For example, the patriotism and political postures engendered within the United Kingdom during the period of the British Empire continue to give that country a greater world political significance and cultural impact than its economic performance would justify.

- **Regions shape people's activities.** The established characteristics of a region influence people's lives. Each region is an environment for human activity. People in a region not only mold its characteristics but also live and work within limits imposed by the economic, social, and political systems and the natural environments that operate there. People living in very dry or cold regions have different options than those in humid midlatitudes. The lives of Amazon tribal peoples reflect the local availability of plants, animals, and fish for food, as well as tribal custom and the penetration of external influences. People living in New York are constrained by the way in which it is built and how the different neighborhoods have developed.

There is thus a two-way process at work. While people are the main forces creating the distinctive features of regions, they are themselves affected by the regional characteristics that others established. Regional characteristics are perpetuated through people developing cultural traits in a place.

- **People remake regions.** A third set of interactions alters regions over time at varying rates when internal or external forces impose stresses on established regional characteristics. An example of changes generated internally over a long period of time was when people in medieval Europe cut down forest to expand farmland. They built market towns that became the basis for craft industries and trade (see Chapter 7).

By contrast, external market conditions may rapidly alter the basic pattern of a region's products once it is incorporated in the world economic system. For example, during the 1950s, farmers in northern Nigeria largely abandoned the traditional subsistence economies that evolved over centuries to cope with climatic fluctuations on the Sahara margins and began to grow commercial crops such as peanuts and cotton for export (see Chapter 3). When this was successful in generating income for purchasing manufactured goods, farmers ceased their former practices of growing their own food, keeping a few cows, and maintaining woodland as a source of firewood. They turned all their land over to peanuts or cotton. Education and health both improved as the sale of crops generated income to supply the need for healthy, educated workers. The economy, social structures, and political influences in this part of Nigeria changed along with the land uses and communal practices. Beginning in the 1970s, however, low world prices for peanuts, combined with more frequent droughts, brought poverty and environmental damage that disrupted the new economy. There was no backup system to provide food during the

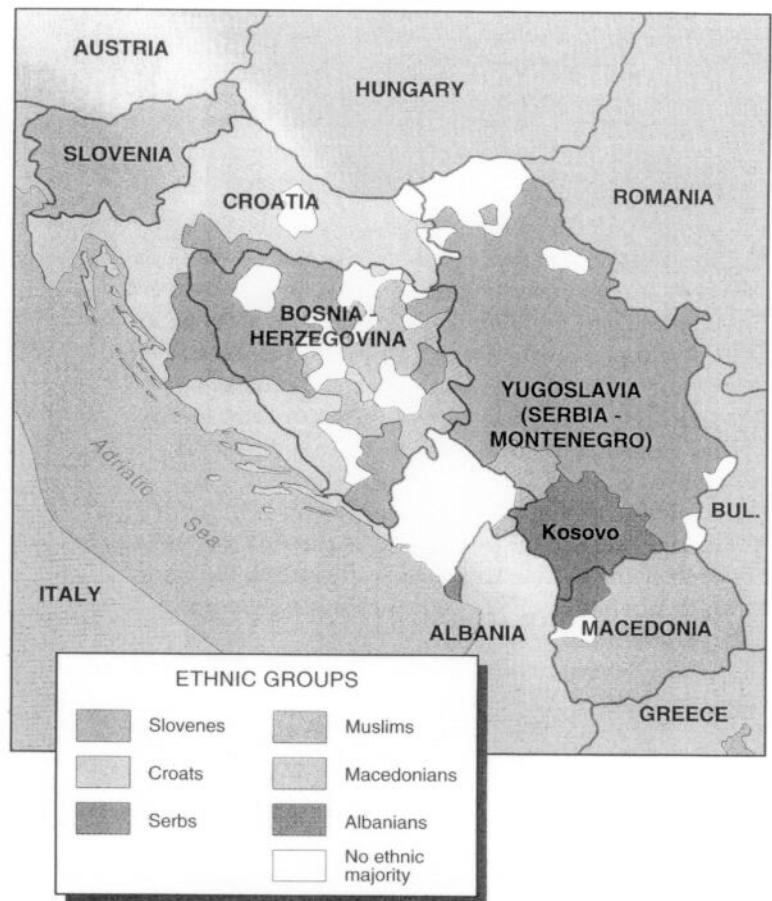
decline of the single crop on which people now depended. Living standards fell, and many families were forced to leave the land and migrate to overcrowded cities.

Within a country, particular groups or individuals may have such an influence that they determine the course and pace of regional changes. The former Soviet Union arose out of the revolution of 1917 that brought communists to power through leaders such as Vladimir Lenin. During the next 70 years, successors such as Josef Stalin changed the way in which the country's economy functioned. In 1991, the ultimate failure of the system Lenin and Stalin created left behind changing patterns of regions within the former Soviet Union and the neighboring countries that had been added to the Soviet bloc. Mikhail Gorbachev in the late 1980s and Boris Yeltsin in the 1990s had important roles in facilitating these changes.

Changes in regions generated by the people who live there or by external forces have impacts on other regions. The poverty of northern Nigeria led to people moving into urban areas, which had effects on both urban areas in other parts of the country and the abandoned farmland. The breakup of the Soviet bloc from 1991 led to a major restructuring of regional geographies from eastern Europe to Central Asia within a few years.

- **Regions interact with other regions.** No region is an isolated entity. Each region interacts with other regions through processes that encourage political, economic, and cultural exchanges on a global scale. Coal miners in Appalachia and farmers in the American Midwest see their jobs and incomes affected by world market prices for fuels and cereal crops (see Chapter 9). European countries lacking mineral resources increasingly supply their manufacturing industries from African sources. From 1950 to 1990, the countries of Eastern and Balkan Europe were tied to the Soviet bloc, which tried to isolate itself economically from the world economic system. When the Soviet Union broke up in 1991, the other countries suddenly had to reorient their economies toward the global economic system (see Chapters 7 and 8). Even the world's remotest regions, such as the upper Amazon River basin and interior Borneo, are being increasingly affected by external economic influences.

Interactions among regions may result in conflicts instead of positive linkages. The presence of several cultural groups within a country, each having territorial claims, often means that one group becomes dominant and others are discriminated against. The Bosnian conflict stemmed from differences among Serbs, Croats, and Muslims (Figure 1.9). Each group had supporters outside Bosnia that supplied them with arms and so kept the conflict going. Conflicts over the ownership and allocation of water resources, as along the Nile River Valley, or over the sources of pollution, as in northwestern Europe, lead to political tensions among countries and regions. Regional differences thus become sources of separation instead of integration.



**FIGURE 1.9 Importance of cultural differences.** The former country of Yugoslavia in the Balkans of Europe. After 1991, Yugoslavia broke into five independent countries, although Serbia-Montenegro continues to call itself "Yugoslavia." Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, and Macedonia maintain their independence with difficulty, and the Albanian southern part of Serbia (Kosovo) became an area of civil conflict in the late 1990s. The colors show areas where particular ethnic groups comprise over 50 percent of the population. Which country has the greatest potential for ethnic conflict?

- **Regions are used by those in power.** Regional characteristics are not always the outcome of the chance interactions among peoples or of the influence of environmental, economic, or social processes. Regional character often reflects the deliberate actions of powerful governments. Regions were manipulated to change people's lives in the former Soviet Union, where rural areas were industrialized on a major scale, even north of the Arctic Circle. Groups of people were also moved from their traditional homes to other parts of the country for state security reasons. In other countries, attempts to modernize regions that lag behind in economic development may destroy local characteristics of culture and discourage local enterprise. In the United States, federal government attempts to develop the economically lagging region of Appalachia were criticized because the modernization introduced was accompanied by the decline of distinctive local cultures (see Chapter 9).

Political power is also exercised against foreign countries. Despite the ending of the era when major powers held territory as colonies, the strategic interests of powerful countries—as defined by the countries themselves—maintain strong influences in some parts of the world. This was particularly noticeable during the Cold War from 1950 to 1990, but it still exists. The

United States, for example, views the oil-producing Persian Gulf countries as important to its own economic well-being as major suppliers of energy. It went to war without hesitation in 1991 to free the oil-producing country of Kuwait after Iraq's invasion. It long resisted, however, involvement to stem the advances of invading Serbs in the Muslim and Croat sectors of Bosnia.

Some regions have continuing strategic roles because of their positions at narrow throughways on ocean trade routes that may be termed **global choke points**: examples include the Suez and Panama Canals, Strait of Hormuz (entrance to the Persian Gulf), Dardenelles and Bosphorus (entrance to the Black Sea in Turkey), and Strait of Malacca (near Singapore). Such strategic places are of importance to core countries for maintaining access to their markets and raw material sources. They provide bargaining points for the countries in which they are situated.

## MAJOR WORLD REGIONS

Dynamic regional geography provides a strong basis for understanding the regional differences and changing circumstances within the global order. Such regional geography highlights inequalities among regions and evaluates attempts