

CHAPTER 2

Major Powers and Global Contenders

A great number of historians and political scientists share the view that international relations cannot be well understood without paying attention to those states capable of making a difference. Most diplomatic histories are largely histories of major powers as represented in modern classics such as A. J. P. Taylor's *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848–1918*, or Paul Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. In political science, the main theories of international relations are essentially theories of major power behavior. The realist tradition, until recently a single paradigm in the study of international relations (Vasquez 1983), is based on the core assumptions of Morgenthau's (1948) balance-of-power theory about major power behavior. As one leading neorealist scholar stated, "a general theory of international politics is necessarily based on the great powers" (Waltz 1979, 73). Consequently, major debates on the causes of war are centered on assumptions related to major power behavior.

Past and present evidence also lends strong support for continuing interest in the major powers. Historically, the great powers participated in the largest percentage of wars in the last two centuries (Wright 1942, 1:220–23; Bremer 1980, 79; Small and Singer 1982, 180). Besides wars, they also had the highest rate of involvement in international crises (Maoz 1982, 55). It is a compelling record for the modern history of warfare (since the Napoleonic Wars) that major powers have been involved in over half of all militarized disputes, including those that escalated into wars (Gochman and Maoz 1984, 596).

Any search for the causes of war can then hardly ignore the behavior of major powers, and yet little attention has been given to clarifying the notion of "major powers." Typically, the question of identifying major powers is treated as "an empirical one, and common sense can answer it" (Waltz 1979, 131). Since one person's common sense about this issue is not necessarily shared by all, it should not be surprising that the most commonly used list of major powers is a compromise.

This list, developed by Singer and Small (1972), was generated from a survey of fellow scholars about the states they would include in the major power subsystem. As the responses were evaluative and inevitably subjective, they differed in details, and a compromise, or an intercoder agreement, was the only option.

An alternative and conceptually more satisfying approach is to first clarify the conceptual notion of major powers and then proceed with their historical identification according to specific criteria. This approach has been attempted only once (Levy 1983), an astonishingly slim record for such a voluminous body of work on major powers. To rectify this lack of conceptual discussion about major powers, appendix B provides a thorough discussion of the requirements that differentiate them from other countries. Guided by the conceptual criteria for their historical identification as set out in appendix B, this chapter presents a historical survey of those states that have met one or all of these criteria in modern history, with an emphasis on the twentieth century. The survey should also help differentiate between the classical notion of major powers and the upper echelon of global contenders given that these two groups might not share the same interests or patterns of behavior.

The Idea of “Major Powers”

Although major powers have been shaping international events since ancient times, the phrase *major powers* or *great powers* did not appear in the official diplomatic or scholarly discourse until the early nineteenth century. Leopold Ranke’s seminal essay “The Great Powers,” published in 1833, established a precedent for historians to use this phrase, but Ranke was merely following official diplomatic usage. For their part, diplomats did not use the term before the Congress of Vienna (1814–15), when “Great Powers” were recognized for the first time through the establishment of “The Concert of Europe.” The diplomatic precedent for using the term appeared in Castlereagh’s circular letter sent to British ambassadors on February 13, 1814, where Castlereagh announces a great victory for his policy of building the post-Napoleonic peace through the Concert of Great Powers.

It affords me great satisfaction to acquaint you that there is every prospect of the Congress terminating with *a general accord and*

Guarantee between the great Powers of Europe, with a determination to support the arrangement agreed upon, and to turn the general influence and if necessary the general arms against the Power that shall first attempt to disturb the Continental peace. (Webster 1931, 307)¹

Only a month later, the distinction between the great powers and other states was formally recognized by other powers as well in the Treaty of Chaumont (Webster 1931, 229).

The expression *major powers* has come into a common usage more recently, replacing the original phrase *great powers*. However labeled, it is important to understand the meaning that is directly or implicitly attached to this term. In this respect, major powers are usually specified through one or more defining elements.

1. The *power* dimension reflecting the sheer size of a nation's capabilities. Despite a number of methodological disagreements, such as those over the amount of capabilities necessary for a nation to qualify as a major power, power potential is nevertheless routinely acknowledged as a necessary defining requirement for major powers.²

2. The *spatial* dimension that refers to geographic scope of interests, actions, or projected power. Although often neglected in the literature, the spatial criterion is especially significant for distinguishing major powers from regional powers.³

3. The *status* dimension indicating a formal or informal acknowledgment of the major power status. Since the official or unofficial status of a major power also requires the nation's willingness to act as a major power, it is the most subjective and thus a more difficult criterion to establish empirically.

Although some of these elements require more subjective assessment, particularly status, a fairly reliable list of major powers can be developed by evaluating states consistently along *each* dimension. Moreover, the spatial dimension that gives states some degree of global reach seems to be a more appropriate indicator of the upper layer of great powers, often labeled as global contenders (or superpowers). The chapter concludes with the listed composition of major powers and global contenders for the period from 1895 to 1985. This list of powers is developed from a historical survey of each nation that is generally considered to meet one or more of the above criteria during most or some part of the observed ninety-year period. The concluding list of major power composition will then provide the pool of nations for the empirical analyses in subsequent chapters.

The Position of Major Powers, 1895–1985

We now turn to a careful historical analysis of the development of major powers in all three dimensions in order to determine those with a predominant status over other powers. Those powers rising above others on power or spatial dimensions (e.g., having a global reach) that are also willing to assume the role of major power will be considered here as global contenders. After a historical survey of the entire pool of major powers, the chapter will conclude by identifying their hierarchical status as global contenders and the rest of the powers. We can start the survey with one of the oldest European powers—the ill-fated Austria-Hungary.

Austria-Hungary

Since the accession of the Archduke of Austria to the Holy Roman Emperorship in 1452, the Hapsburgs were at the center of great power politics until their demise in 1918. Even when the death of Charles V divided the Hapsburg dynasty into Austrian and Spanish branches (1556), the Austrian Hapsburgs continued to play a major role in European politics. Their slow decline under internal pressures became more apparent in the nineteenth century, when the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary was created through the compromise (*Ausgleich*) acknowledging the rising domestic power of the Magyars.

Still, by most indications, at the turn of the century Austria-Hungary belonged to the major power club. It was ahead of both Italy and Japan in industrial potential, accounting for more than 4 percent of the world's manufacturing output (see table 2.1). In addition, its gross domestic product (GDP), which doubled from 1890 to 1913, was among the fastest growing in Europe (see table 2.2). Overall, it kept very close to the French level in terms of basic resources for industrialization and armament production such as coal, pig iron, and steel production (Taylor 1954, xxix–xxx).

Although the empire was certainly not one of the leading military powers at the time, it had one of the largest armies in Europe (424,000 in 1914)⁴ and strong military alliance ties with the rising Germany and Italy. Its status as a great power was steadily acknowledged through regular participation at almost all major conferences from the Congress of Vienna (1814) through the Peace of Paris in the aftermath of the Crimean War (1856) to the Conference at Algeciras (1906).

Yet, despite its high prestige and solid macrolevel power indica-

tors, Austria-Hungary was at best a second-ranked power by the eve of World War I, limited strictly to European affairs, and, more important, on the brink of imminent collapse. Its large population, second only to Germany and Russia in Europe, was the source of its formidable presence and, at the same time, the key factor of its ultimate vulnerability. Ethnic diversity and severe socioeconomic regional differences could not have been sustained for a long time and eventually led to the empire's decline. The 1910 census was very revealing: it showed more Slavs (45 percent) than the combined percentage of both Austro-Germans (23 percent) and Hungarians (19 percent) in the entire empire.⁵ This ethnic fragmentation was exacerbated by the unequal development of the provinces: the annual growth rate of a real national prod-

TABLE 2.1. Relative Shares of Major Powers in Total World Manufacturing Output (in percentages)

	1860	1900	1913	1928	1938	1953	1980
United States	7.2	23.6	32.0	39.3	31.4	44.7	31.5
United Kingdom	19.9	18.5	13.6	9.9	10.7	8.4	4.0
Germany/West Germany	4.9	13.2	14.8	11.6	12.7	5.9	5.3
Russia/USSR	7.0	8.8	8.2	5.3	9.0	10.7	14.8
France	7.9	6.8	6.1	6.0	4.4	3.2	3.3
Japan	2.6	2.4	2.7	3.3	5.2	2.9	9.1
Italy	2.5	2.5	2.4	2.7	2.8	2.3	2.9
China	19.7	6.2	3.6	3.4	3.1	2.3	5.0
Austria-Hungary	4.2	4.7	4.4	—	—	—	—
Other countries	24.1	13.3	12.2	18.5	20.7	19.6	24.1
Total world	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Bairoch 1982, 298, 304 (tables 10 and 13).

TABLE 2.2. GDP Growth (1913 = 100)

	1870	1890	1928	1932	1938	1950	1980
United States	19.0	41.5	153.6	119.0	154.5	282.4	803.3
United Kingdom	44.6	66.9	108.7	106.2	132.5	160.8	335.5
Germany/West Germany	30.4	48.7	119.9	92.8	151.9	147.5	652.3
Russia/USSR	36.0	43.2	99.8	109.5	174.4	219.6	735.6
France	49.9	65.8	125.9	114.7	129.7	152.6	563.9
Japan	37.0	56.6	173.4	181.2	245.7	227.1	2221.9
Italy	43.8	55.4	126.9	127.9	150.8	172.8	790.8
China	62.2	77.6	126.1 ^b	133.1	132.8	111.5	476.6
Austria-Hungary ^a	35.9	56.2	—	—	—	—	—

Source: Maddison 1995, 148–60 (table B-10).

^aAustria only.

^b1951 year.

uct per capita from 1890 to 1913 was slowest in the southern non-German lands such as Transylvania (0.88), Dalmatia (1.00), or Croatia-Slavonia (1.04), and it was predictably the highest (2.00) in the Germanic Alpine lands (Good 1991, 230–31).⁶

The internal vulnerability was further aggravated by a series of decisions made by the succession of foreign ministers, who were all domestically opposed to the idea of a Triple Monarchy with the Slavs.⁷ Consequently, their international policy was primarily directed against the rising pan-Slavist and Russian influence in the region (Albertini 1952; Taylor 1954), which, in turn, backfired domestically among the disenfranchised Slavic population. Against this background, the Hapsburg monarchy entered World War I and the last phase of its history as one of the oldest European great powers.

France

Also one of the oldest powers in modern history, France was at its zenith after the Peace of Westphalia (1648). With the Dutch and the British close behind, the French assumed a leading role in the second half of the seventeenth century, appropriately called the Age of Louis XIV. France lost its leading position soon after the War of the Spanish Succession (1702–13), sharing that status with Great Britain throughout the eighteenth century. Its ultimate defeat in the Napoleonic Wars and another crushing humiliation in the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71) pushed France into the background among major players such as Prussia/Germany, Russia, and Great Britain. France, nevertheless, enjoyed the reputation of a top-ranked great power at the dawn of the twentieth century. The French language was still widely used as the diplomatic language of the time, and France was at the core of alliance aspirations for both Russia (1892) and Great Britain (1904).

France's reputation as a great power continued to be recognized throughout the interwar period when it joined England to lead the League of Nations and share mandates over the colonial areas previously held by the defeated Germany.⁸ The French colonial empire was immense, growing aggressively from 3.7 percent (1878) to 8.7 percent (1913) and 9.3 percent (1939) of the world land surface, even though France itself occupies hardly 0.4 percent of the world area (see table 2.3). The French presence across several continents through vast colonial possessions kept it at the global level of competition, although this position as a global contender was not always sufficiently backed up by its declining power.

Throughout the twentieth century, France's power base lagged behind the large transcontinental scope of its influence. French manufacturing production has been in the middle range of powers (see table 2.1), and its economic growth was never as fast as that of other powers. While it took Germany and even Russia only twenty years to double their gross domestic product (from 1890 to 1913), it took France forty years (from 1870 to 1913) to achieve the same growth (table 2.2). Its relative share of world manufacturing output steadily declined from 7.9 percent in 1860 to 3.2 percent a hundred years later (1953).

Since the end of World War II, France continued its great power policy as one of five permanent members of the UN Security Council. Its permanent seat on the Council became an unofficial form of recognizing great power status in an era when diplomatic communication across the Iron Curtain became more symbolic than it was at the time of the Congress of Vienna (1814). France also became one of the few states with independent nuclear forces. Still, the size of its arsenal was far behind that of the superpowers. The most dramatic development was in the area of its rapidly diminishing colonial empire through the decolonization wave of the 1950s. For all these reasons, France may be said to have had a respectable position as a major power since 1945, but this was certainly the period when it lost its previous position as a global contender.

Great Britain

The British insular position provided it with a retreat from European affairs whenever circumstances demanded it. Despite some remarkable military moments such as its defeat of the mighty Spanish Armada in

TABLE 2.3. Total Land Areas of Major Powers (Home Area, Colonies, and Mandates) as Percentage of World Surface

	1878	1913	1933	1939	Home Area Only
United States	7.1	7.3	7.3	7.3	5.9
United Kingdom	18.9	22.3	23.8	23.9	0.2
Germany/West Germany	0.4	2.6	0.4	0.4	0.4
Russia/USSR	17.2	17.2	16.0	16.0	— ^a
France	3.7	8.7	9.3	9.3	0.4
Japan	0.3	0.5	1.5	1.5	0.3
Italy	0.2	1.9	2.1	2.2	0.2

Source: For the years 1878, 1913, 1933, see Clark 1936, 23–24 (table I); for 1939, see Townsend 1941, 18.

^aThe sources do not distinguish between “colonial” and “home” areas for Russia.

1588, England did not take any significant part in decisive continental developments such as the Thirty Years' War. Remarkably, it was the only power absent from the historic Congress of Westphalia (1648). The British rise to a leading maritime and industrial power was to come later.

The turning point came with the end of the War of Spanish Succession. The British army had retreated before the war ended, but the Tory government managed to induce great diplomatic gains from the peace terms in the Treaties of Utrecht (1713) and Rastadt (1714). As historians remark, "considering the settlement as a whole, there was no doubt that the great beneficiary was Britain" (Kennedy 1987, 105). It was clear from the peace settlements that Britain was now joining France as a leading great power. In the following hundred years, the gradual decline of France and Napoleon's self-defeating strategy paved the way for Britain's final ascension to supremacy in the nineteenth century.

At the turn of the century, the only challenge to British predominance could have come from two rising powers, the United States and Germany. Both powers overtook the British industrial position: the United States surpassed its economic lead in the second half of the nineteenth century and never lost it, while Germany showed a different pattern, passing British manufacturing levels before each world war (table 2.1). Yet British *naval* supremacy, which gave it the ultimate global reach, remained intact despite accelerating buildups by Germany at the turn of the century and, later, by the United States in the 1920s and 1930s. Furthermore, Britain's relative industrial decline was compensated by its extensive foreign trade. It had the largest share of world trade, losing this position to the United States only at the beginning of the Cold War period (see table 2.4).

As much as British naval power was an important element of the nineteenth-century Pax Britannica, its navy was hardly a suitable deterrent against the German land-based *Drang nach Osten* in the late 1930s (Northedge 1966, 624–25). Even though Britain continued to appear powerful, with an immense empire stretching over one-quarter of the globe (table 2.3), it was increasingly becoming a "troubled giant" (Northedge 1966). Despite the marginal increase in the area of its large imperial possessions, the lack of cohesion within the Commonwealth marked a significant departure from London's previous tight control over its colonies and dependencies. Overall, the interwar period showed many signs of Britain's demise as a global power, which eventually took place in the aftermath of World War II.

TABLE 2.4. Relative Shares of Major Powers in Total World Trade (in percentages)

	1890	1913	1938	1950	1980
United States	10.5	11.5	10.7	18.3	11.8
United Kingdom	21.4	15.9	13.9	12.6	5.8
Germany/West Germany	11.8	13.8	9.2	4.5	9.4
Russia/USSR	3.5	4.1	1.1	2.4	3.6
France	10.2	7.9	4.7	5.8	6.1
Japan	0.9	1.8	3.2	2.2 ^a	6.7
Italy	2.8	3.3	2.4	2.6	4.4
China	1.3	2.0	0.9	1.2	0.9
Austria-Hungary	4.3	3.4	—	—	—
Other countries	33.3	36.3	53.9	50.4	51.3
Total world	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: For the years 1890, 1913, 1950, see *Statesman's Year-Books* (selected years); for 1938, see League of Nations 1941; for 1980, see United Nations 1983.

^aYear is 1951 (from International Monetary Fund 1955).

Like France, Great Britain became one of five permanent members of the UN Security Council and one of the few nuclear powers. Its loss of colonial possessions was less traumatic and violent than the French experience, but it was nevertheless the final loss of its effective global reach. Once a leading world trade partner, Britain dropped to fifth place by 1980, ranking behind the United States, Germany, France, and Japan (table 2.4). The former industrial leader was now contributing 4 percent of the world manufacturing output in 1980, which paled in comparison to the top U.S. share of 31.5 percent (table 2.1). In short, while it has maintained the status and military capabilities of a major power in the last fifty years, it has definitely lost the economic and colonial base of its previously held position of a major global contender.

Germany

In the seventeenth century, Brandenburg-Prussia rose above the other German states to become one of Europe's central forces. The fast rise of modern Prussia coincided with the collapse of the short-lived Swedish empire, a principal rival among other middle powers (Kennedy 1987, 91–92). This sudden rise is largely attributed to the famous Prussian “militarism,”⁹ consolidated by several successive leaders, most notably Frederick William I (1713–40), who created one of the ablest continental armies and reorganized it under the command of Junker officers. However, subsequently weakened by the Seven

Years' War (1756–63), Prussia remained in the middle range of powers until the Franco-Prussian War, which opened the door for its unification with other German states in 1871. In the following twenty years of the Bismarck chancellorship, Germany became a prominent European power. After Bismarck's downfall, a turning point in many respects, Germany became free to launch its troubled campaign as a world power.

"The German empire has developed into a world empire," Kaiser Wilhelm II declared in 1896 (Townsend 1966, 179), announcing a major shift in German policy. The traditional policy of continental hegemony through alliance diplomacy, created by Otto von Bismarck and supported by his successor Caprivi, was now replaced with the new course of "world policy" (*Weltpolitik*) oriented toward global competition through an intense naval arms race and colonial expansion. The new course was strongly advocated by all key members of the post-Bismarckian foreign policy establishment: Kaiser Wilhelm II, his two successive chancellors (Hohenlohe-Landenburg and Count von Bülow), and the influential General Alfred von Tirpitz, a new secretary of the Imperial Navy since 1897.

The consensus over the *Weltpolitik* resulted in two Fleet Acts (1898, 1900) that launched a considerable buildup of the German navy based on the view, shared with other major powers at the time, that naval capabilities were a prerequisite for global power. As a result, German naval power rose from fifth in 1890 to second by 1914, close behind the English navy (Wright 1942, 670–71). Besides naval power, foreign commerce and colonies were other major pillars of global power. An aggressive approach to colonialism was consequently launched in 1898 with the occupation of Kiao-Chow in China as the first demonstration of *Weltpolitik* (Geiss 1976, 84; Taylor 1954, 375), while the amount of German foreign trade grew to rank second in the world by 1913, again close behind Britain.

German global power was revived in the 1930s despite the loss of its colonies and humiliating defeat in World War I. In the early 1920s, a new chancellor of the Weimar Republic, Gustav Stresemann, invested his great diplomatic skills in restoring the respectability of his nation. He eventually succeeded only after the concessions he had to make at the Locarno Conference of 1925, in return for which Germany was admitted into the League of Nations. Most important, Stresemann secured a permanent seat on the League Council, bringing Germany back into the ranks of major powers (Marks 1976, 63–82).

In the 1930s, radical political changes, triggered by the rise of

Nazism, again shifted the course of both German and European history. From an economic perspective, Germany showed the most rapid recovery from the Great Depression, sharing with the USSR the fastest rate of GDP growth (see table 2.1). By 1938, it was one of the top powers in both manufacturing production (behind only the United States; see table 2.1) and world trade (behind only Britain, table 2.4). On the other hand, Nazi rule inevitably brought a strong militaristic element to the new German ascent, spending an astonishing 80 percent of its national income on military defense (Wright 1942, 2:671).¹⁰ This new economic strength was simultaneously translated into military might for an expansionist policy, leading to another major war.

There is substantial disagreement over the position of West Germany in the Cold War balance of power. Singer and Small (1972) do not include it in the postwar great power system, but Levy (1983) makes a strong case for its inclusion since 1955. Stoll's reliability analysis of Singer and Small's standard list also recommends the inclusion of both West Germany and Japan as major powers since 1960 (Stoll 1989, 156), and Kennedy lists them both as recent postwar powers in his major historical survey (1987). If we compare some indicators of German strength in 1955 and 1980, it is not difficult to trace radical differences. By 1980, West Germany was the second largest trading partner in the world (9.4 percent of international trade, table 2.4), third-ranked in industrial potential (behind only the United States and USSR; see Bairoch 1982, 299), and it had the largest of the NATO armies in Europe (Kennedy 1987, 479). Politically, Germany was divided and regulated by the "treaty powers," and both Germanies were absent from the list of permanent members of the UN Security Council. Like France and Britain, Germany never came close to the top echelon of global superpowers. Nevertheless, the real power potential of the Federal Republic, both economic and military, put it in the limelight of rising powers by the late 1960s. For this reason, it seems to be valid to place West Germany among major economic powers at least since then.

Russia/USSR

Despite its long history, Russia joined the ranks of major powers relatively late, during the reign of Peter the Great in the early eighteenth century.¹¹ Peter the Great (1689–1725) formally assumed the title of emperor (*imperata*), and the Muscovy became known as the Russian Empire. These changes reflected radical transformations initiated by the

new ruler after his travels to Western Europe. In an attempt to Westernize the Russian Empire, he drastically reorganized the military, created a standing army and navy, reformed the state administration and judicial system, divided Russia into provinces, increased state revenues by imposing higher duties on the nobility, and subordinated the church to the state (Florinsky 1953, 355–74; Seton-Watson 1967, 8–45).

The rise of the Russian Empire was almost uninterrupted until the Crimean War when it suffered defeat. The domestic situation was exacerbated when the economic slump of 1899–1902 was followed by the war with Japan and the domestic disorders of 1905–6. At the same time, the second half of the nineteenth century marked a period of important reforms, including the abolition of serfdom in 1861, laying the grounds for modern Russia (Ulam 1974, 7–8). The immense Russian territory, spreading over European and Asian lands, and its massively growing population, which doubled from 1870 to 1914 reaching 171 million by the beginning of World War I (Wright 1942, 2:671), could not be ignored by other powers despite its social and political weaknesses.

It is also important to realize that recurrent political problems and turmoil did not impede a steady military and economic progress. Russia went through remarkable recovery and growth, particularly after 1908 (Seton-Watson 1952, 281), accounting for more than 8 percent of world manufacturing output. This solid growth positioned it ahead of France and many other powers, though still behind U.S., British, and German industries. On the other hand, it continued to pursue a protectionist foreign trade policy (Seton-Watson 1952, 287), which explains its low share of world trade. The acquisition of Port Arthur in 1898 provided a navy route into less frozen water and by 1914, the Russian government was spending large sums on defense appropriations. Only Germany spent more on defense at that time, building the largest standing army in the world (Wright 1942, 2:670–71).

The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and the ensuing civil war (1917–22) pushed Russia—by now the Soviet Union—into the backstage of great power politics. However, its enormous Euro-Asian territory, its equally large population, and the aggressive rhetoric of its new leadership in “world revolution” denied Western powers the luxury of ignoring its presence. It also became the fastest growing economy in the 1930s, leaving both Germany and Japan lagging slightly behind (see table 2.2). On the other hand, although it had the largest standing army, the Stalinist purges in 1937 virtually obliterated the army officers’ corps.

The Soviets suffered tremendous casualties in World War II, but the beginning of the Cold War elevated them to one of two global power centers for next fifty years. In the nuclear age, only the Soviet Union and the United States played the roles of superpowers. In 1969 the Soviets reached parity with U.S. strategic missiles (ICBMs) and even developed more ICBMs by the following year (Nogee and Donaldson 1992, 279). On the other hand, the United States was leading the arms race in the number of nuclear warheads, strategic cruise vehicles, and long-range bombers (Nogee and Donaldson 1992, 304).

Notwithstanding its nuclear superpower status, the early signs of the Soviet Union's economic collapse started to show in the same decade as its nuclear superpower ascent. After the initial economic reforms of the early 1960s, which ultimately failed, its GNP growth plummeted from 6.4 percent in the 1950s to an annual average of 3.7 percent between 1967 and 1973. The final collapse of the Soviet Union three decades later found its industry technologically obsolete and, not unlike Austria-Hungary eighty years earlier, its internal nationality problems reaching acute proportions. Foundations for its final demise in 1990 had been laid much earlier, as it was a system driven by the quantitative standards of a noncompetitive economy that even gradual decentralization and perestroika in the 1980s could not salvage.

Italy

Generally viewed as "the least of the great powers" (Bosworth 1979), Italy was nonetheless an important factor in European politics after its unification (1860). Unlike Austria-Hungary, Italy was not vulnerable internally, and it quickly joined other powers in their overseas expansions during the age of imperialism. While it certainly enjoyed great power status, the discrepancy between this status and its real strength sharply increased over time. Militarily, for instance, Italy was the third-ranked power in naval warships in 1890, but fell to sixth place by 1914 (Wright 1942, 2:670–71). While its colonial ambitions in the Mediterranean and Africa were not backed up by an adequate navy, it did succeed in waging a successful colonial war against Libya in 1911. The Ministry of Colonies was subsequently established in 1912, and its status as a colonial power became fully restored after its recovery from a disaster at Adowa (1896), when Ethiopian forces had simply crushed the Italian army.

Italy's economic situation was quite different from these occasional military successes. Almost completely lacking supplies of coal, it had to

depend on imports for this basic source of its industrialization. The level of economic development was chronically lower than that of other European powers: almost 60 percent of its labor force was still employed in agriculture by 1913 (in contrast to 35 percent in Germany),¹² the illiteracy rate reached an alarming 37.6 percent and was even higher in the southern regions (Bosworth 1979, 4). Its manufacturing output was constantly the lowest among all major powers (table 2.1).

Despite all these figures, “European statesmen went on talking as though Italy were a Great Power . . . In the Spring of 1915, most extraordinary of all, many a European statesman awaited with bated breath Italy’s ‘decisive’ intervention in the Great War” (Bosworth 1979, 5). Justifiably or not, Italy’s great power status continued to be acknowledged during the interwar period, starting with its permanent seat on the League of Nations Council. Italy’s position as one of the chief arbiters of the postwar order, symbolized by its permanent seat on the League Council, descended under the fascist regime of Benito Mussolini. Mussolini’s policy led to its withdrawal from the League of Nations after being condemned by the same Council as an aggressor.

Behind Mussolini’s theatrical facade as a modern age emperor, his policies were slowly but firmly plunging his nation into chaos. His aggressive external policy increased the Italian colonial empire to twelve times the size of its homeland (table 2.3), but created more enemies than friends. Additionally, the colonization policy did not bring any economic gains since many conquered areas were mostly desert lands, scarcely populated, and generally considered worthless by the other powers (Townsend 1941, 20). The acquisition of new colonies also did not compensate for the chronic shortage of coal and other essential raw materials. Italy actually exported to its East African colonies twenty times as much as it received from them, and the overall imports from its colonies were just above 2 percent of its total imports (Mack Smith 1976, 121). Without any material, moral, or diplomatic gains from Mussolini’s regime, Italy’s short history as a great power ended dramatically with Mussolini’s fall in 1943. Unlike France or West Germany, it never succeeded in reestablishing itself as a great power in the postwar order.

United States

A decisive victory in the Spanish-American War of 1898 brought the United States into the ranks of major powers, and, although at times reluctant to perform this role, the United States has not descended

from this position to this day (e.g., May 1961; Hinsley 1967, 254; Schulzinger 1984, 16). President McKinley, in many ways an enigmatic personality for he never left personal papers to get an insight into the motives behind his policies, epitomized the new policy shift as follows: “We need Hawaii just as much and a good deal more than we did California. It is manifest destiny” (May 1961, 244). The annexation of the Philippines after the war further expanded the U.S. foothold in the Pacific, which was quickly recognized by other powers as well (May 1961).¹³

Although a new industrial leader, the United States was still not a global power, lagging behind other world powers in military and naval strength. The U.S. government often did, however, offer the “good offices” of a diplomatic mediator in several international crises thus showing the behavior typical of a major power. Theodore Roosevelt’s administration, in particular, consolidated the country’s new status by launching a major naval program, building the Panama Canal, mediating the truce between Russia and Japan in 1905, initiating the Second Peace Conference at the Hague in 1907, and even trying to play a role as diplomatic negotiator in the very tense atmosphere of the Moroccan crisis. Roosevelt had a vision for his country as a world power and steered his policy in this direction. This path toward global prominence was delayed by the Senate’s dramatic vote refusing to ratify all the terms of the Versailles Treaty, thus denying the United States membership, let alone leadership, in the League of Nations.

The internationalist orientation, therefore, swung back into a semi-isolationist stage from Versailles to Pearl Harbor. Unlike traditional scholarship that treats the interwar period as strictly isolationist, a recent historiography reinterprets it as internationalist in economic affairs and naval concerns, but isolationist in almost all other respects (Schulzinger 1984, 144). The United States was notably absent from a number of post-Versailles conferences such as Locarno in 1925, Lausanne in 1932, or Munich in 1938. In the 1930s, Congress passed, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed, a series of neutrality laws in response to a growing number of crises, ranging from the Italian invasion of Ethiopia to the Spanish civil war.

On the other hand, the preoccupation of three Republican administrations in the 1920s with U.S. commercial and naval standing firmly placed their nation close to the British and later the Germans as the leaders in world trade (table 2.4). The United States also took the center stage of monetary diplomacy. The monetary leadership, however,

eventually backfired in the financial collapse of 1929 and the Great Depression that followed, hurting the U.S. economy more than any other nation. From 1928 to 1932, the index of U.S. GDP growth fell from 153.6 to 119.0 (1913 = 100), which was astounding even by the standards of the time (see table 2.2; see also Hillman 1952, 429–30). By comparison, the GDP growth of Russia, Japan, and Italy was not significantly affected by the crisis, while the economic decline of Britain, France, and Germany was less sharp than that of the United States. Other countries also showed a quicker pace of recovery (table 2.2).

Toward the end of the 1930s, the success of previous naval conferences freezing the relative naval strengths of the United States, Great Britain, and Japan at a 5:5:3 ratio (at both the Washington Conference of 1922 and later at the London Conference of 1930) was not repeated. At the 1935 naval conference, the prospects of arms control were clearly much dimmer: the German navy was growing rapidly, and France and Italy were reluctant to limit their already inferior naval strength. We can safely say that even in those few areas that concerned U.S. diplomacy in the interwar era, the United States had only partial successes at best while it suffered greatly from its first bid for economic hegemony.

By 1945, however, the U.S. position as a global power, now grandly called a superpower, was indisputable, and the United States finally had to recognize its “*inescapable* position as a world Power” (Hinsley 1967, 353; emphasis added). A major policy turn came with the adoption of the “containment” policy, officially announced in the Truman Doctrine of 1947 and then militarily consolidated in the NSC-68 document of 1950. As one of only two superpowers, the United States effectively translated its industrial strength and military might into significant influence in the world. It did lose its nuclear monopoly relatively quickly, but it maintained its nuclear and conventional forces at the level reachable only by the Soviet Union since the late 1960s. Between 1947 and 1989, it spent \$8.2 trillion (in 1982 dollars) for military expenses (La Feber 1997, 352), an amount that only a superpower would and could afford for defense programs.

Throughout the Cold War, the U.S. economy reigned supreme, although there was some relative decline in its economic and financial primacy as Japan and Germany reestablished their economies. The United States’ share of the world monetary reserves, for instance, dropped from 50 percent in 1950 to 8.8 percent in the mid-1980s, while the country’s debt reached a figure of \$3 trillion by 1989, which was

three times the 1980 amount (La Feber 1997, 353). It is debatable whether or to what degree the United States has been going through a relative decline.¹⁴ It is unquestionable, however, that its firm super-power standing has not been shaken with the end of the Cold War.

Japan

There are two relatively unresolved issues in the literature on major powers regarding Japan: When did Japan become a major power? Has it reemerged as a power since the 1960s? There are two schools of thought in regard to each question.

The beginning of Japanese status as a major power is much more disputable than for any other power. Essentially, there are different views of whether the turning point came with the Japanese victory in the Sino-Japanese War of 1895, or later with its success in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5. Some scholars argue that Japan became a full-fledged, albeit regional, great power only after it defeated Russia in 1905 and secured spheres of influence in the Far East at the Portsmouth (New Hampshire) peace conference (Hinsley 1967, 254; Levy 1983, 42; Kennedy 1987, 209). On the other hand, Singer and Small's (1972) standard list of major powers, widely used in quantitative studies of international relations, includes Japan since 1895 (see also Kajima 1967, 311–12). That year, to the surprise of many European capitals, Japan demonstrated its largely overlooked military prowess, while China revealed many weaknesses. The European scramble for China at the turn of the century was a direct outcome of this surprising revelation of its deep vulnerabilities, which the European powers had largely overlooked before the 1894–95 war.

Two leading British historians on Japan, Nish (1977) and Beasley (1987), furnish a more sophisticated angle on this issue. Nish divides Japanese history from 1853 to 1945 into three phases: "The Powers *versus* Japan, 1853–94; Japan among the Powers, 1894–1931; Japan *versus* the Powers, 1931–45" (1977, 3). More specifically for the 1894–1931 period, Nish argues that after the defeat of China in 1894, Japan's entry among the powers took place in three phases: (1) by 1910, Japan established itself gradually as "a continental Power in east Asia"; (2) from 1910 onward (the year it occupied Korea), it became a larger "Pacific power"; (3) by the end of World War I, it could claim to be a "world power," albeit a marginal one (4). The Manchurian crisis of 1931 was a turning point that put Japan at odds with the League of Nations and most other powers.

Beasley (1987) also believes that the rise of Japan as a power went through several stages, and he also selects 1895 as the starting point. The first stage, starting in 1895, is the period of “dependency” when Japan became a leading power in the region, but was still dependent on outside powers, Britain and the United States, for the growth of its empire. In the second stage, starting in 1905, Japan strengthened its major power position and embarked on “self-assertive imperialism.” The last stage began after 1930 and was marked by “a Japan-centered system of imperialism” (Beasley 1987, 251–55).

There are, therefore, compelling reasons to conclude that 1895 was the decisive moment that marked the early formative years of Japan’s rise as a major power. In this first period, Japan succeeded in having both the United States and Britain on its side in the Far Eastern rivalry against Russia. The tacit cooperation on this issue was cemented through the steady renewals of the Anglo-Japanese alliance (1902, 1905, 1911) and through the Taft-Katsura Agreement of 1905.¹⁵

The interwar development was not linear either. In the 1920s, Japan was the only non-European power to have a permanent seat on the League Council (Marks 1976, 29–30). The reversal of its policy came with the Manchurian crisis, starting in 1931, eventually leading Japan to leave the League and gravitate toward Hitler’s Germany and Mussolini’s Italy. Its external policy became obviously militaristic, manifested through a number of campaigns in East Asia. Like Italy, Japan had some territorial gains, but lost its respectability in the world community. Also like Italy, Japan was short of industrial raw materials and largely dependent on imports. Unlike Italy, however, Japan’s new colonial conquests did provide it with a reliable flow of imported iron ore, coal, and other key materials for heavy industry.¹⁶

Defeated in World War II, Japan descended from the ranks of major powers; yet opinion is divided about whether it has regained that status. Once the U.S. occupation of Japan officially ended in 1952, Japan became a fully independent state with some constitutional restrictions on its armed forces and defense policy. It has spent about 1 percent of its budget on defense expenditures, which is minimal when compared to the average of 3 to 4 percent that NATO members spend (Kennedy 1987, 468).

On the other hand, Japan’s economic recovery and growth are unsurpassed. Its GDP growth index reached a staggering 2,221.9 level by 1980 (1913 = 100) while the same GDP measure for the United States, ranked second in growth rate, was 803.3, or almost three times less than that of Japan (table 2.2). By 1980, the United States did not

yet lose its primacy in international trade, and Britain was still firmly in second position. However, the dynamics of foreign trade growth were different for the United States and Britain as opposed to West Germany or Japan. From 1950 to 1980, the British share of world trade dropped by one-half and the U.S. share by one-third; the German share doubled and the Japanese tripled during the same thirty-year period (see table 2.4).

Organski and Kugler (1980) consider Japan a global contender. Kennedy (1987) includes Japan in his discussion of great powers for the second half of the Cold War, and Stoll's (1989) analysis of the reliability of Singer and Small's (1972) list of major powers also recommends the inclusion of Japan among major powers. Additionally, the brief survey in this chapter seems to indicate as well that, despite its low defense expenditures by great power standards, Japan's phenomenal growth and economic expansion have reached proportions that place it at the very top of all nations at least since the late 1960s or early 1970s.¹⁷

China

The Sino-Japanese War of 1894–95 revealed how much Western powers had overestimated China's strength, and its defeat opened a process of financial penetration and semicolonial expansion into the Chinese territories by almost all other powers. This period of *de facto* dependence on other powers and of domestic vulnerability (from a protracted civil war) lasted until the People's Republic of China was established in 1949. Its sheer territorial size, combined with the largest population in the world, put Communist China immediately in the category of prospective power. Not until the Korean War ended, however, was its undeniable strength fully recognized by others, most importantly by *both* superpowers. "Its ability to inflict first a defeat then a stalemate upon the U.S. armies illustrated dramatically the emergence of a new world power" (Ulam 1974, 532).

The war also changed the Sino-Soviet relationship: China entered the war as a Soviet satellite and came out of the war as an almost equal partner. This major shift between the two largest communist states had far-reaching repercussions: the rift between the Soviets and the Chinese first surfaced in the border disputes of the 1960s. More profoundly, however, these two communist giants were already in a fierce competition for leadership of the communist world. As a country that had suffered from past colonial aspirations, China was in a much better posi-

tion to be accepted as a leader of anticolonial struggles in Asia and Africa, although this position was almost lost during the Sino-Indian troubles of 1959–62 (Wang 1977, 74).

It took almost two decades for the U.S. administration to realize that communist ideology (albeit different versions) was perhaps the only common denominator between the Soviet Union and China. The famous “triangular diplomacy” of Nixon and Kissinger and the subsequent Sino-American rapprochement after 1971 clearly indicated this new understanding of China as an independent power.

Inherited economic backwardness plagued the first years of a new nation-building process for China. The Cultural Revolution and Mao’s Great Leap Forward retarded the country in many ways, including economic setbacks after some initially successful steps toward accelerated industrialization. Nevertheless, the recovery was rather fast even in the area of foreign trade, which first recovered to pre-Cultural Revolution levels by 1970 and then steadily increased from \$4,246 million (1970) to \$9,870 million (1973), doubling in only three years (Camilleri 1980, 166). The process of industrialization also took a steady course, and by 1980 China rose from an underdeveloped agricultural economy to the fifth-ranked nation in world manufacturing production (table 2.1). Its steel production, for instance, increased from 3.5 million ingot tons in 1957 to 18 million in 1970 (Camilleri 1980, 122), and many other indicators, in heavy industry especially, suggest the same pattern of remarkable growth.

China is also one of the major nuclear powers today, having conducted its first nuclear tests in October 1964 (Wang 1977, 87). Its nuclear forces are primarily land-based medium range missiles (IRBMs), although it has started to develop submarine-based missiles as well as long-range ICBMs, some of which were successfully tested (Camilleri 1980, 42, 155). Beside these impressive but moderate indicators of power in comparison to the superpowers, its regional orientation toward Asia in foreign policy matters also prevents it from assuming a role as a global contender. Nevertheless, China is firmly and unquestionably one of the major players in world politics.

Conclusion

This historical survey examined the development of major powers in modern history from three angles: (1) their power potential, both economic and military as well as demographic and territorial; (2) their

TABLE 2.5. Major Powers and Global Contenders, 1895–1985

	Major Power	Global Contender
Austria-Hungary	1895–1918	—
France	1895–1940, 1945–85	1895–1940
United Kingdom	1895–1985	1895–1945
Germany/West Germany	1895–1918, 1925–45 (1965–85 ^a)	1895–1945
Russia/USSR	1895–1917, 1922–85	1895–1985
Italy	1895–1943	—
United States	1898–1985	1945–85
Japan	1895–1945 (1965–85 ^a)	—
China	1950–85	—

^aSo far, Germany and Japan have reestablished themselves only as economic powers since 1965.

scope of interests and their capabilities to sustain the interests that transcend the boundaries of their home region (this aspect more than any differentiates global contenders from the rest of the major powers); (3) their willingness to pursue a great power role or the acknowledgment by at least some other powers that a nation is expected to assume this role. If applied consistently, these requirements for major powers and those for global contenders would result in the list shown in table 2.5. This list is not substantially different from others (see tables B1 and B2 in appendix B), but it does include the years of inclusion or exclusion of those powers for which we find different interpretations. Japan and Germany have reestablished themselves as economic powers, but hardly as military powers. Neither state has been involved in a single case of extended deterrence either as a challenger or as a defender of the third party. Actually, we find Germany only as a pawn in the early Cold War crises of extended deterrence between the United States and the Soviet Union. Neither Germany nor Japan has independent nuclear weapons, which have become a *sine qua non* for major powers of the modern age.

Since this book is concerned with the military aspect of major power conflict, these two countries will not be treated as major powers of the nuclear age. In the historical overview, a careful argument was made and thorough evidence was offered to clarify these and other choices. The rest of the book will look at the dynamics of conflict between major powers and global contenders during the ninety-year period of modern history.