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CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL STUDIES

*Introduction to
International Politics*

DEREK HEATER AND G. R. BERRIDGE

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Preface

‘International politics’ is not a contradiction in terms despite the arguments of some political scientists. True, if we define politics as activity and thinking related to government, then there can be no international politics for the simple reason that there is no international government. But this is an unhelpfully narrow definition of politics. Relations between states clearly involve politics; they concern differences and tensions that require containment or resolution. Without such containment and resolution, wars – that is, the breakdown and negation of politics – would be even more endemic.

The study of international relations or politics emerged as an identifiable subject after the First World War. Since then the techniques of many disciplines (notably history, law, philosophy and economics) have been used to enhance our understanding of the relations between states. The underlying motive has almost always been the urge to comprehend and even to improve the methods states currently use to live in some kind of working relationship.

The present book is designed for those readers who wish to acquire a basic understanding. We presuppose no background knowledge beyond that which a lively interest in current world affairs and contemporary history provides. However, writing about these matters presents two problems.

First, because in reality international politics are a complicated network of interconnections, selecting and stranding out separate topics is difficult. We have chosen fifteen topics which we believe are the most crucial and we have clustered them under three headings: power, justice and order. These are surely three of the most central concepts underpinning any study of politics.

The second problem relates to the writing of any book that focuses on the present. Whatever is 'the present' at the time of writing is no longer 'the present' after the book is published. We have therefore adopted two devices. One is to write about issues and systems we judge will be of continuing interest and concern for many years yet; and we have provided illustrative detail mainly from recent times. Secondly, where we have referred to matters particularly close to the time of writing, we have indicated this in the text.

Part of the intellectual exercise involved in the study of international politics is, in fact, the constant necessity for the individual to relate new events and developments to a framework of understanding already firmly in place. We hope that this book will provide such a framework.

Derek Heater
G.R. Berridge
May 1992