

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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World history focuses strongly on contacts, and earlier sections on trade and on missionary religions and other examples of cultural or technological diffusion have already laid out part of the story.

More formal types of contacts have not been explored as systematically as one might imagine. It is not yet possible, for example, to write a world history of diplomacy – a history of the ways that different states sought to interact with each other over time. Chinese diplomacy – sending emissaries, gifts and even wives into central Asia to conciliate the nomads; receiving tributes from neighboring states -- has been explored, and the same holds true for the origins of formal diplomatic exchange in Europe with the Italian Renaissance. But the larger package has yet to be described.

War is the most obvious exception to these limitations. While a great deal of military history concentrates on individual battles and stories of tactics, there is a larger history of warfare that explores relationships with other themes, such as the nature of agricultural society or developments in technology. Different regions can also be compared over time: some, undoubtedly, were more consistently warlike than others, and it is important to try to tease out the reasons for differences of this sort.

In contrast there are very few formal histories of peace. For many historians, peace may seem too transient, given the frequency of war, or too accidental and unintentional. Yet peace also invites comparative analysis, including attention to the peace efforts of many of the major religions. And some peace themes can clearly be traced over time.

International relations have obviously become far more extensive in the modern centuries of world history, partly because of the expansion of formal mechanisms of diplomacy such as exchanges of ambassadors. New elements include discussions around global standards for human rights.

Finally, globalization itself, though a contemporary term, has encouraged a promising set of inquiries as part of world history. Debates around earlier forms of globalization helps focus additional attention on international relations. The debates also usefully complicate analysis of the phenomenon today: how fundamentally novel is it? Have societies essentially been living with, reacting to, globalization for a longer period of time than novelty of the term suggests?

Questions to Consider:

1. Are some regions historically less warlike than others? What factors may be involved?
2. What are the major debates over the timing of globalization? Do the debates raise significant issues?
3. Is it possible to address topics like the history of human rights without privileging Western values?