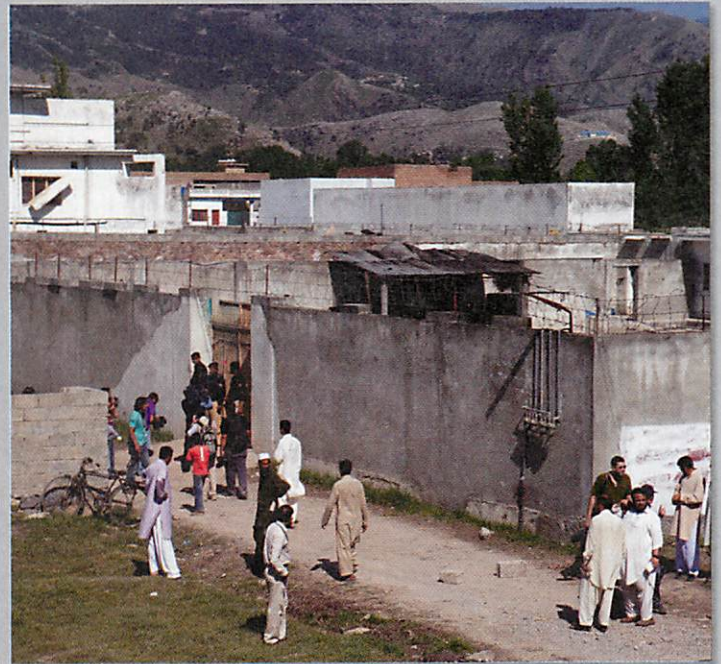


# Chapter

# 8 Political Geography



Why did Morocco build this wall across the Sahara Desert?  
Page 265



Who lived here? Page 293

## KEY ISSUE 1

Where Are States Distributed?



### A World of States p. 261

Earth is divided into approximately 200 states. This was not always the case.

## KEY ISSUE 2

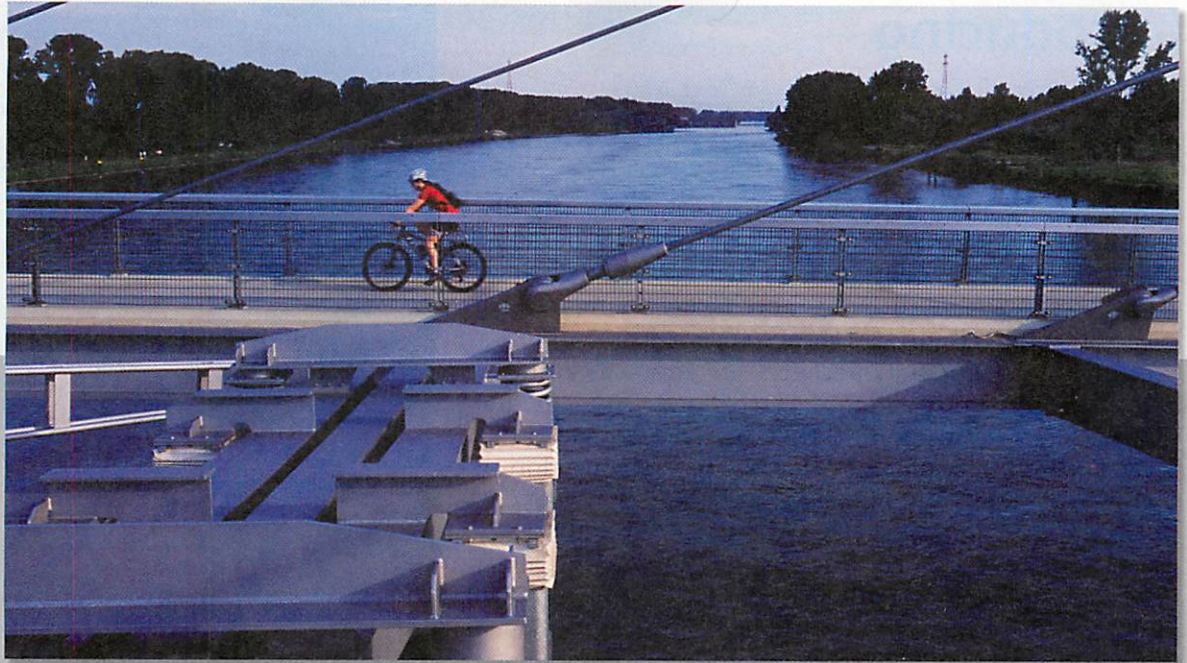
Why Are Nation-States Difficult to Create?



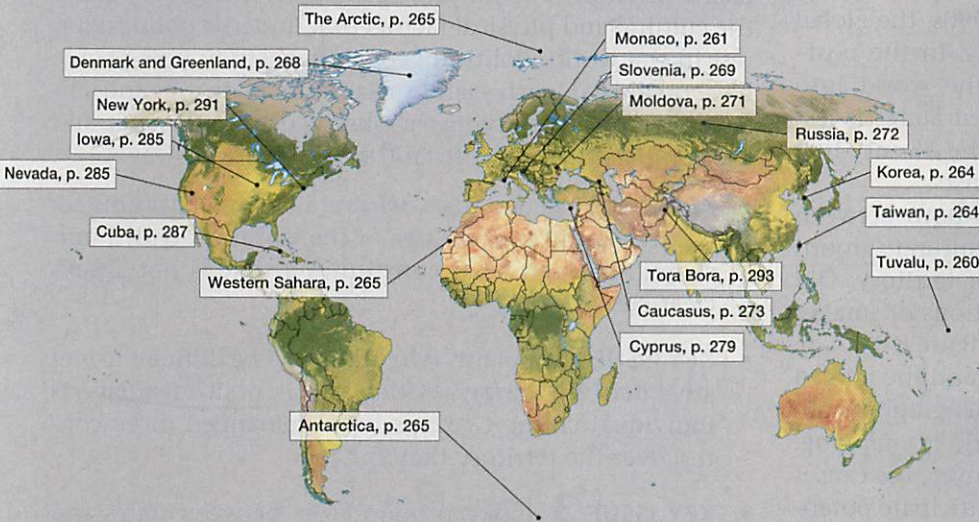
### Nation-States and Multinational States p. 268

Dividing the world into states of single ethnicities has been difficult. States with multiple ethnicities are often in turmoil.



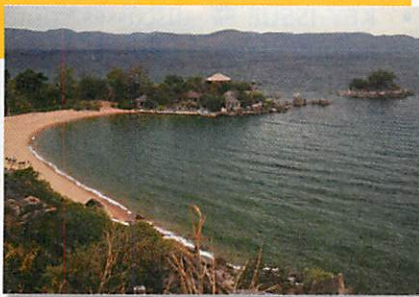


▲ This bicyclist is crossing the Rhine River on the Passerelle Mimram Pedestrian Bridge. He is heading from Strasbourg, France, to Kehl, Germany. France and Germany fought for centuries over control of Strasbourg and the Rhine. These former enemies are now allies, having joined with other European countries to eliminate passport checks and other border controls. Travel between France and Germany is now as easy as travel between two U.S. states.



### KEY ISSUE 3

**Why Do Boundaries Cause Problems?**



## Drawing a Line in the Sand (or Somewhere Else) p. 276

Boundaries between states and within states are hard to set and are often controversial.

### KEY ISSUE 4

**Why Do States Cooperate and Compete with Each Other?**



## States in War and Peace p. 286

States increasingly cooperate economically, but violence is increasingly led by terrorists.



# Introducing Political Geography

When looking at satellite images of Earth, we easily distinguish *places*—landmasses and water bodies, mountains and rivers, deserts and fertile agricultural land, urban areas and forests. What we cannot see are where boundaries are located between countries.

To many, national boundaries are more meaningful than natural features. One of Earth's most fundamental cultural characteristics—one that we take for granted—is the division of our planet's surface into a collection of *spaces* occupied by individual countries.

During the Cold War (the late 1940s until the early 1990s), two superpowers—the United States and the Soviet Union—essentially “ruled” the world. As superpowers, they competed at a global *scale*. Many countries belonged to one of two *regions*, one allied with the former Soviet Union and the other allied with the United States.

With the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, the global political landscape changed fundamentally. In the post-Cold War era, the familiar division of the world into countries or states is crumbling. The United States is less dominant in the political landscape of the twenty-first century, and the Soviet Union no longer exists.

Wars have broken out in recent years—both between small neighboring states and among cultural groups within countries—over political control of territory. Old countries have been broken up into collections of smaller ones, some barely visible on world maps (Figure 8-1).

Geographic concepts help us to understand the altered political organization of Earth's surface. Geographers observe why this familiar division of the world is changing. We can also use geographic methods to examine the causes of political change and instability and to anticipate potential trouble spots around the world.

Today, globalization means more *connections* among states. Individual countries have transferred military, economic, and political authority to regional and worldwide collections of states. Power is exercised through connections among states created primarily for economic cooperation.

Despite (or perhaps because of) greater global political cooperation, local diversity has increased in political affairs, as individual cultural groups have demanded more control over the territory they inhabit. States have transferred power to local governments, but this has not placated cultural groups that seek complete independence.



▲ **FIGURE 8-1 TUVALU** The island of Tuvalu, with 10,000 inhabitants, became an independent country in 1978. It is the world's fourth-smallest country.

No one can predict where the next war or terrorist attack will erupt, but political geography helps to explain the cultural and physical factors that underlie political unrest in the world. Political geographers study how people have organized Earth's land surface into countries and alliances, reasons underlying the observed arrangements, and the conflicts that result from the organization.

- **KEY ISSUE 1** describes *where* states are distributed. Nearly the entire land area of the world is divided into states, although what constitutes a state is not always clear-cut.
- **KEY ISSUE 2** explains *why* states can be difficult to create. *Local diversity* has increased in political affairs, as individual cultural groups have demanded more control over the territory they inhabit.
- **KEY ISSUE 3** looks at boundaries between states and within states. Boundary lines are not painted on Earth, but they might as well be, for these national divisions are very real.
- **KEY ISSUE 4** discusses competition and cooperation among states. Political conflicts during the twentieth century were dominated by the *globalization* of warfare, including two world wars involving most of the world's states and collections of allied states. Into the twenty-first century, the attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001, were initiated not by a hostile state but by a terrorist organization.