1. The history and nature of international law

This introductory chapter provides an overview of the history and nature of international law. Rather than regulating the behaviour of individuals in their relations with one another, international law is usually portrayed as a legal framework to govern the relations between ‘States’, the organized political entities which are the primary subjects of international law. ‘Public international law’ is to be distinguished from ‘private international law’, which describes the principles that determine the applicability of a certain law or set of laws to situations involving individuals with a foreign or transboundary element. Indeed, private international law regulates the conflicts between rules of different domestic legal orders, while public international law concerns relations between States. Today, public international law has exceeded its foundations as the law of inter-State relations and operates as an integral part of the daily lives of individuals.
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