Chapter: 2. The Historical Evolution of the International Community

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This chapter traces the historical evolution of the international legal system, which is organized for analytical purposes in four major stages: from its gradual emergence (sixteenth–early seventeenth century) to the First World War; from the establishment of the League of Nations to the end of the Second World War (1919–1945); from the establishment of the United Nations to the end of the Cold War (1945–1989); and the last three decades since the end of the Cold War (1990–2020). The chapter emphasizes the European roots of international law but also the pressure it has faced since the 1960s to reflect the interests of developing and newly independent States. It also provides some basic historical elements and references to the growing literature on the history of international law, which are useful to understand the historical context of the material examined in subsequent chapters.