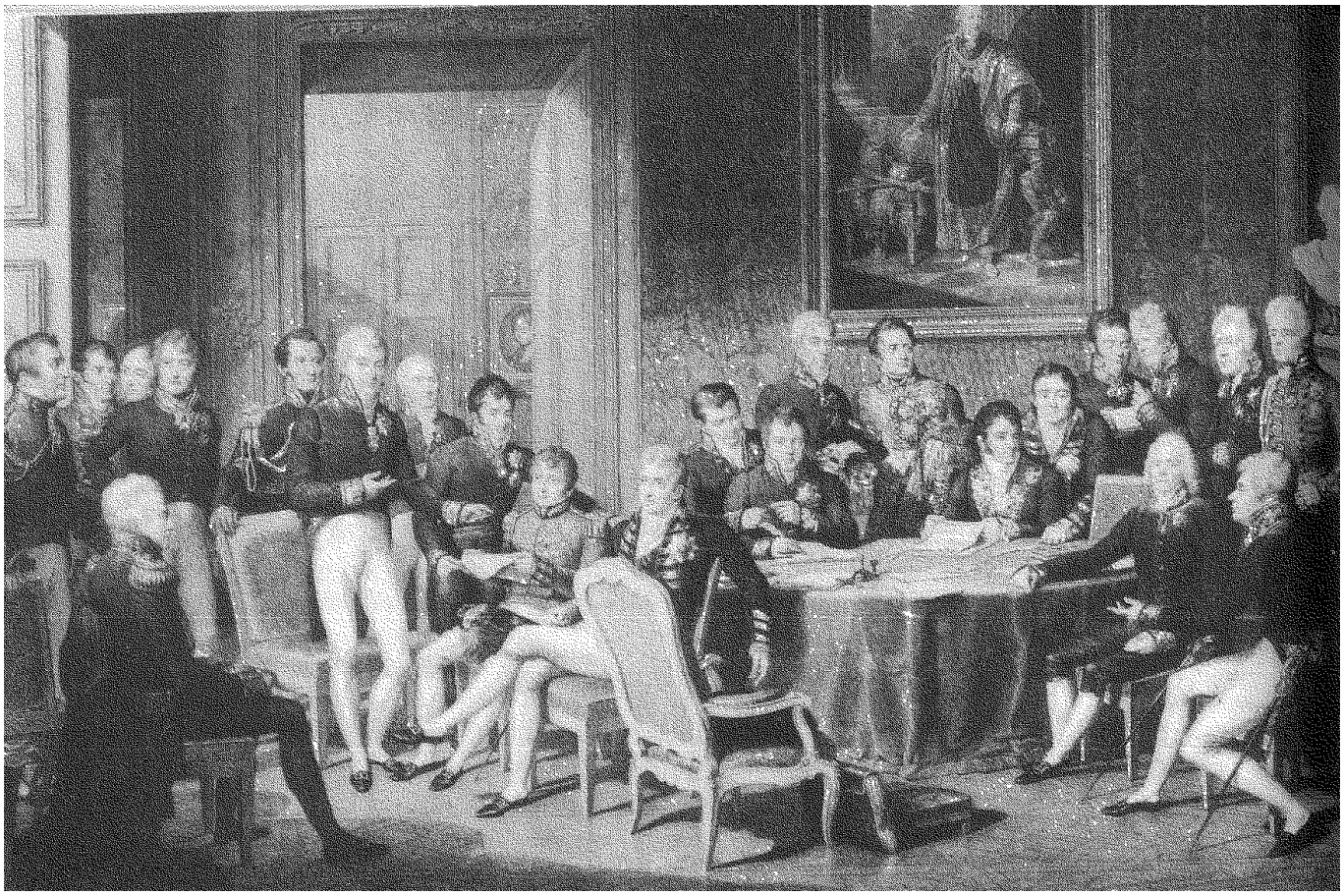

CHAPTER FOUR

The Concert of Europe: Great Britain, Austria, and Russia

While Napoleon was enduring his first exile, at Elba, the victors of the Napoleonic Wars assembled at Vienna in September 1814 to plan the postwar world. The Congress of Vienna continued to meet all during Napoleon's escape from Elba and his final defeat at Waterloo. In the meantime, the need to rebuild the international order had become even more urgent.

Prince von Metternich served as Austria's negotiator, though, with the Congress meeting in Vienna, the Austrian Emperor was never far from the scene. The King of Prussia sent Prince von Hardenberg, and the newly restored Louis XVIII of France relied on Talleyrand, who thereby

maintained his record of having served every French ruler since before the revolution. Tsar Alexander I, refusing to yield the Russian pride of place to anyone, came to speak for himself. The English Foreign Secretary, Lord Castlereagh, negotiated on Great Britain's behalf.

These five men achieved what they had set out to do. After the Congress of Vienna, Europe experienced the longest period of peace it had ever known. No war at all took place among the Great Powers for forty years, and after the Crimean War of 1854, no general war for another sixty. The Vienna settlement corresponded to the Pitt Plan so literally that, when Castlereagh submitted it to Parliament, he attached a draft of the original British design to show how closely it had been followed.

Paradoxically, this international order, which was created more explicitly in the name of the balance of power than any other before or since, relied the least on power to maintain itself. This unique state of affairs occurred partly because the equilibrium was designed so well that it could only be overthrown by an effort of a magnitude too difficult to mount. But the most important reason was that the Continental countries were knit together by a sense of shared values. There was not only a physical equilibrium, but a moral one. Power and justice were in substantial harmony. The balance of power reduces the opportunities for using force; a shared sense of justice reduces the desire to use force. An international order which is not considered just will be challenged sooner or later. But how a people perceives the fairness of a particular world order is determined as much by its domestic institutions as by judgments on tactical foreign-policy issues. For that reason, compatibility between domestic institutions is a reinforcement for peace. Ironic as it may seem, Metternich presaged Wilson, in the sense that he believed that a shared concept of justice was a prerequisite for international order, however diametrically opposed his idea of justice was to what Wilson sought to institutionalize in the twentieth century.

Creating the general balance of power proved relatively simple. The statesmen followed the Pitt Plan like an architect's drawing. Since the idea of national self-determination had not yet been invented, they were not in the least concerned with carving states of ethnic homogeneity out of the territory reconquered from Napoleon. Austria was strengthened in Italy, and Prussia in Germany. The Dutch Republic acquired the Austrian Netherlands (mostly present-day Belgium). France had to give up all conquests and return to the "ancient frontiers" it had possessed before the Revolution. Russia received the heartland of Poland. (In conformity with its policy of not making acquisitions on the Continent, Great Britain confined its territorial gains to the Cape of Good Hope at the southern tip of Africa.)

In Great Britain's concept of world order, the test of the balance of power was how well the various nations could perform the roles assigned to them in the overall design—much as the United States came to regard its alliances in the period after the Second World War. In implementing this approach, Great Britain faced with respect to the Continental countries the same difference in perspective that the United States encountered during the Cold War. For nations simply do not define their purpose as cogs in a security system. Security makes their existence possible; it is never their sole or even principal purpose.

Austria and Prussia no more thought of themselves as "great masses" than France would later see the purpose of NATO in terms of a division of labor. The overall balance of power meant little to Austria and Prussia if it did not at the same time do justice to their own special and complex relationship, or take account of their countries' historic roles.

After the Habsburgs' failure to achieve hegemony in Central Europe in the Thirty Years' War, Austria had abandoned its attempt to dominate all of Germany. In 1806, the vestigial Holy Roman Empire was abolished. But Austria still saw itself as first among equals and was determined to keep every other German state, especially Prussia, from assuming Austria's historic leadership role.

And Austria had every reason to be watchful. Ever since Frederick the Great had seized Silesia, Austria's claim to leadership in Germany had been challenged by Prussia. A ruthless diplomacy, devotion to the military arts, and a highly developed sense of discipline propelled Prussia in the course of a century from a secondary principality on the barren North German plain to a kingdom which, though still the smallest of the Great Powers, was militarily among the most formidable. Its oddly shaped frontiers stretched across Northern Germany from the partly Polish east to the somewhat Latinized Rhineland (which was separated from Prussia's original territory by the Kingdom of Hanover), providing the Prussian state with an overwhelming sense of national mission—if for no higher purpose than to defend its fragmented territories.

Both the relationship between these two largest German states and their relationship to the other German states were central to European stability. Indeed, at least since the Thirty Years' War, Germany's internal arrangements had presented Europe with the same dilemma: whenever Germany was weak and divided, it tempted its neighbors, especially France, into expansionism. At the same time, the prospect of German unity terrified surrounding states, and has continued to do so even in our own time. Richelieu's fear that a united Germany might dominate Europe and overwhelm France had been anticipated by a British observer who

wrote in 1609: "... as for Germany, which if it were entirely subject to one Monarchy, would be terrible to all the rest."[1] Historically, Germany has been either too weak or too strong for the peace of Europe.

The architects at the Congress of Vienna recognized that, if Central Europe were to have peace and stability, they would have to undo Richelieu's work of the 1600s. Richelieu had fostered a weak, fragmented Central Europe, providing France with a standing temptation to encroach and to turn it into a virtual playground for the French army. Thus, the statesmen at Vienna set about consolidating, but not unifying, Germany. Austria and Prussia were the leading German states, after which came a number of medium-sized states—Bavaria, Württemberg, and Saxony among them —which had been enlarged and strengthened. The 300-odd pre-Napoleonic states were combined into some thirty and bound together in a new entity called the German Confederation. Providing for common defense against outside aggression, the German Confederation proved to be an ingenious creation. It was too strong to be attacked by France, but too weak and decentralized to threaten its neighbors. The Confederation balanced Prussia's superior military strength against Austria's superior prestige and legitimacy. The purpose of the Confederation was to forestall German unity on a national basis, to preserve the thrones of the various German princes and monarchs, and to forestall French aggression. It succeeded on all these counts.

In dealing with the defeated enemy, the victors designing a peace settlement must navigate the transition from the intransigence vital to victory to the conciliation needed to achieve a lasting peace. A punitive peace mortgages the international order because it saddles the victors, drained by their wartime exertions, with the task of holding down a country determined to undermine the settlement. Any country with a grievance is assured of finding nearly automatic support from the disaffected defeated party. This would be the bane of the Treaty of Versailles.

The victors at the Congress of Vienna, like the victors in the Second World War, avoided making this mistake. It was no easy matter to be generous toward France, which had been trying to dominate Europe for a century and a half and whose armies had camped among its neighbors for a quarter of a century. Nevertheless, the statesmen at Vienna concluded that Europe would be safer if France were relatively satisfied rather than resentful and disaffected. France was deprived of its conquests, but granted its "ancient"—that is, prerevolutionary—frontiers, even though this represented a considerably larger territory than the one Richelieu had ruled. Castlereagh, the Foreign Minister of Napoleon's most implacable foe, made the case that:

> The continued excesses of France may, no doubt, yet drive Europe . . . to a measure of dismemberment . . . [but] let the Allies then take this further chance of securing that repose which all the Powers of Europe so much require, with the assurance that if disappointed . . . they will again take up arms, not only with commanding positions in their hands, but with that moral force which can alone keep such a confederacy together. . . .[2]

By 1818, France was admitted to the Congress system at periodic European congresses, which for half a century came close to constituting the government of Europe.

Convinced that the various nations understood their self-interest sufficiently to defend it if challenged, Great Britain would probably have been content to leave matters there. The British believed no formal guarantee was either required or could add much to commonsense analysis. The countries of Central Europe, however, victims of wars for a century and a half, insisted on tangible assurances.

Austria in particular faced dangers that were inconceivable to Great Britain. A vestige of feudal times, Austria was a polyglot empire, grouping together the multiple nationalities of the Danube basin around its historic positions in Germany and Northern Italy. Aware of the increasingly dissonant currents of liberalism and nationalism which threatened its existence, Austria sought to spin a web of moral restraint to forestall tests of strength. Metternich's consummate skill was in inducing the key countries to submit their disagreements to a sense of shared values. Talleyrand expressed the importance of having some principle of restraint this way:

> If . . . the minimum of resisting power . . . were equal to the maximum of aggressive power . . . there would be a real equilibrium. But . . . the actual situation admits solely of an equilibrium which is artificial and precarious and which can only last so long as certain large States are animated by a spirit of moderation and justice.[3]

After the Congress of Vienna, the relationship between the balance of power and a shared sense of legitimacy was expressed in two documents: the Quadruple Alliance, consisting of Great Britain, Prussia, Austria, and Russia; and the Holy Alliance, which was limited to the three so-called Eastern Courts—Prussia, Austria, and Russia. In the early nineteenth century, France was regarded with the same fear as Germany has been in the twentieth century—as a chronically aggressive, inherently destabilizing power. Therefore, the statesmen at Vienna forged the Quadruple Alliance,

designed to nip any aggressive French tendencies in the bud with overwhelming force. Had the victors convening at Versailles made a similar alliance in 1918, the world might never have suffered a Second World War.

The Holy Alliance was altogether different; Europe had not seen such a document since Ferdinand II had left the throne of the Holy Roman Empire nearly two centuries earlier. It was proposed by the Russian Tsar, who could not bring himself to abandon his self-appointed mission to revamp the international system and reform its participants. In 1804, Pitt had deflated his proposed crusade for liberal institutions; by 1815, Alexander was imbued with too strong a sense of victory to be thus denied—regardless that his current crusade was the exact opposite of what he had advocated eleven years earlier. Now Alexander was in thrall to religion and to conservative values and proposed nothing less than a complete reform of the international system based on the proposition that "the course *formerly* adopted by the Powers in their mutual relations had to be *fundamentally* changed and that it was *urgent* to replace it with an order of things based on the exalted truths of the eternal religion of our Saviour."[4]

The Austrian Emperor joked that he was at a loss as to whether to discuss these ideas in the Council of Ministers or in the confessional. But he also knew that he could neither join the Tsar's crusade nor, in rebuffing it, give Alexander a pretext to go it alone, leaving Austria to face the liberal and national currents of the period without allies. This is why Metternich transformed the Tsar's draft into what came to be known as the Holy Alliance, which interpreted the religious imperative as an obligation by the signatories to preserve the domestic *status quo* in Europe. For the first time in modern history, the European Powers had given themselves a common mission.

No British statesman could possibly have joined any enterprise establishing a general right—indeed, an obligation—to intervene in the domestic affairs of other states. Castlereagh called the Holy Alliance a "piece of sublime mysticism and nonsense."[5] Metternich, however, saw in it an opportunity to commit the Tsar to sustain legitimate rule, and above all to keep him from experimenting with his missionary impulses unilaterally and without restraint. The Holy Alliance brought the conservative monarchs together in combatting revolution, but it also obliged them to act only in concert, in effect giving Austria a theoretical veto over the adventures of its smothering Russian ally. The so-called Concert of Europe implied that nations which were competitive on one level would settle matters affecting overall stability by consensus.

The Holy Alliance was the most original aspect of the Vienna settlement. Its exalted name has diverted attention from its operational significance, which was to introduce an element of moral restraint into the relationship of the Great Powers. The vested interest which they developed in the survival of their domestic institutions caused the Continental countries to avoid conflicts which they would have pursued as a matter of course in the previous century.

It would be too simple to argue, however, that compatible domestic institutions guarantee a peaceful balance of power by themselves. In the eighteenth century, all the rulers of the Continental countries governed by divine right—their domestic institutions were eminently compatible. Yet these same rulers governed with a feeling of permanence and conducted endless wars with each other precisely because they considered their domestic institutions unassailable.

Woodrow Wilson was not the first to believe that the nature of domestic institutions determined a state's behavior internationally. Metternich believed that too but on the basis of an entirely different set of premises. Whereas Wilson believed the democracies to be peace-loving and reasonable by their very nature, Metternich considered them dangerous and unpredictable. Having witnessed the suffering that a republican France had inflicted on Europe, Metternich identified peace with legitimate rule. He expected the crowned heads of ancient dynasties, if not to preserve the peace, then at least to preserve the basic structure of international relations. In this manner, legitimacy became the cement by which the international order was held together.

The difference between the Wilsonian and the Metternich approaches to domestic justice and international order is fundamental to understanding the contrasting views of America and Europe. Wilson crusaded for principles which he perceived as revolutionary and new. Metternich sought to institutionalize values he considered ancient. Wilson, presiding over a country consciously created to set man free, was persuaded that democratic values could be legislated and then embodied in entirely new worldwide institutions. Metternich, representing an ancient country whose institutions had developed gradually, almost imperceptibly, did not believe that rights could be created by legislation. "Rights," according to Metternich, simply existed in the nature of things. Whether they were affirmed by laws or by constitutions was an essentially technical question which had nothing to do with bringing about freedom. Metternich considered guaranteeing rights to be a paradox: "Things which ought to be taken for granted lose their force when they emerge in the form of arbitrary pronouncements. . . . Objects mistakenly made subject to legisla-

tion result only in the limitation, if not the complete annulment, of that which is attempted to be safeguarded."[6]

Some of Metternich's maxims were self-serving rationalizations of the practices of the Austrian Empire, which was incapable of adjusting to the emerging new world. But Metternich also reflected the rationalist conviction that laws and rights existed in nature and not by fiat. His formative experience had been the French Revolution, which started with the proclamation of the Rights of Man and ended with the Reign of Terror. Wilson emerged from a far more benign national experience and, fifteen years before the rise of modern totalitarianism, could not conceive of aberrations in the popular will.

In the post-Vienna period, Metternich played the decisive role in managing the international system and in interpreting the requirements of the Holy Alliance. Metternich was forced to assume this role because Austria was in the direct path of every storm, and its domestic institutions were less and less compatible with the national and liberal trends of the century. Prussia loomed over Austria's position in Germany, and Russia over its Slavic populations in the Balkans. And there was always France, eager to reclaim Richelieu's legacy in Central Europe. Metternich knew that, if these dangers were permitted to turn into tests of strength, Austria would exhaust itself, whatever the outcome of any particular conflict. His policy, therefore, was to avoid crises by building a moral consensus and to deflect those which could not be avoided by discreetly backing whichever nation was willing to bear the brunt of the confrontation—Great Britain vis-à-vis France in the Low Countries, Great Britain and France vis-à-vis Russia in the Balkans, the smaller states vis-à-vis Prussia in Germany.

Metternich's extraordinary diplomatic skill permitted him to translate familiar diplomatic verities into operational foreign policy principles. He managed to convince Austria's two closest allies, each of which represented a geopolitical threat to the Austrian Empire, that the ideological danger posed by revolution outweighed their strategic opportunities. Had Prussia sought to exploit German nationalism, it could have challenged Austrian pre-eminence in Germany a generation before Bismarck. Had Tsars Alexander I and Nicholas I only considered solely Russia's geopolitical opportunities, they would have exploited the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire far more decisively to Austria's peril—as their successors would do later in the century. Both refrained from pushing their advantage because it ran counter to the dominant principle of maintaining the *status quo*. Austria, seemingly on its deathbed after Napoleon's onslaught, was given a new lease on life by the Metternich system, which enabled it to survive for another hundred years.

The man who saved this anachronistic empire and guided its policy for nearly fifty years did not even visit Austria until he was thirteen years old or live there until he was seventeen.[7] Prince Klemens von Metternich's father had been governor general of the Rhineland, then a Habsburg possession. A cosmopolitan figure, Metternich was always more comfortable speaking French than German. "For a long time now," he wrote to Wellington in 1824, "Europe has had for me the quality of a fatherland [*patrie*]."[8] Contemporary opponents sneered at his righteous maxims and polished epigrams. But Voltaire and Kant would have understood his views. A rationalist product of the Enlightenment, he found himself propelled into a revolutionary struggle which was foreign to his temperament, and into becoming the leading minister of a state under siege whose structure he could not modify.

Sobriety of spirit and moderation of objective were the Metternich style: "Little given to abstract ideas, we accept things as they are and we attempt to the maximum of our ability to protect ourselves against delusions about realities."[9] And, "with phrases which on close examination dissolve into thin air, such as the defense of civilization, nothing tangible can be defined."[10]

With such attitudes, Metternich strove to avoid being swept away by the emotion of the moment. As soon as Napoleon was defeated in Russia, and before Russian troops had even reached Central Europe, Metternich had identified Russia as a potential long-term threat. At a time when Austria's neighbors were concentrating on liberation from French rule, he made Austria's participation in the anti-Napoleon coalition dependent on the elaboration of war aims compatible with the survival of his rickety empire. Metternich's attitude was the exact opposite of the position taken by the democracies during the Second World War, when they found themselves in comparable circumstances vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. Like Castlereagh and Pitt, Metternich believed that a strong Central Europe was the prerequisite to European stability. Determined to avoid tests of strength if at all possible, Metternich was as concerned with establishing a moderating style as he was with accumulating raw power:

> The attitude of the [European] powers differs as their geographical situation. France and Russia have but a single frontier and this hardly vulnerable. The Rhine with its triple line of fortresses assures the repose of... France; a frightful climate... makes the Niemen a no less safe frontier for Russia. Austria and Prussia find themselves exposed on all sides to attack by their neighbouring powers. Continuously menaced by the preponderance of these two powers, Austria and Prussia can find tranquillity only in a wise and measured policy, in relations of goodwill among each other and with their neighbours....[11]

Though Austria needed Russia as a hedge against France, it was wary of its impetuous ally, and especially of the Tsar's crusading bent. Talleyrand said of Tsar Alexander I that he was not for nothing the son of the mad Tsar Paul. Metternich described Alexander as a "strange combination of masculine virtues and feminine weaknesses. Too weak for true ambition, but too strong for pure vanity."[12]

For Metternich, the problem posed by Russia was not so much how to contain its aggressiveness—an endeavor which would have exhausted Austria—as how to temper its ambitions. "Alexander desires the peace of the world," reported an Austrian diplomat, "but not for the sake of peace and its blessings; rather for his own sake; not unconditionally, but with mental reservations: he must remain the arbiter of this peace; from him must emanate the repose and happiness of the world and all of Europe must recognize that this repose is his work, that it is dependent on his goodwill and that it can be disturbed by his whim. . . ."[13]

Castlereagh and Metternich parted company over how to contain a mercurial and meddlesome Russia. As the Foreign Minister of an island power far from the scene of confrontation, Castlereagh was prepared to resist only overt attacks, and even then the attacks had to threaten the equilibrium. Metternich's country, on the other hand, lay in the center of the Continent and could not take such chances. Precisely because Metternich distrusted Alexander, he insisted on staying close to him and concentrated on keeping threats from his direction from ever arising. "If one cannon is fired," he wrote, "Alexander will escape us at the head of his retinue and then there will be no limit any longer to what he will consider his divinely ordained laws."[14]

To dilute Alexander's zealousness, Metternich pursued a two-pronged strategy. Under his leadership, Austria was in the vanguard of the fight against nationalism, though he was adamant about not permitting Austria to be too exposed or to engage in unilateral acts. He was even less inclined to encourage others to act on their own, partly because he feared Russia's missionary zeal could turn into expansionism. For Metternich, moderation was a philosophical virtue and a practical necessity. In his instructions to an Austrian ambassador, he once wrote: "It is more important to eliminate the claims of others than to press our own. . . . We will obtain much in proportion as we ask little."[15] Whenever possible, he tried to temper the Tsar's crusading schemes by involving him in time-consuming consultations and by limiting him to what the European consensus would tolerate.

The second prong of Metternich's strategy was conservative unity. Whenever action became unavoidable, Metternich would resort to a juggling act which he once described as follows: "Austria considers every-

thing with reference to the *substance.* Russia wants above all the *form;* Britain wants the *substance* without the form. . . . It will be our task to combine the *impossibilities* of Britain with the *modes* of Russia."[16] Metternich's dexterity enabled Austria to control the pace of events for a generation by turning Russia, a country he feared, into a partner on the basis of the unity of conservative interests, and Great Britain, which he trusted, into a last resort for resisting challenges to the balance of power. The inevitable outcome, however, would merely be delayed. Even so, to have preserved an ancient state on the basis of values inconsistent with the dominant trends all around it for a full century is not a mean achievement.

Metternich's dilemma was that, the closer he moved toward the Tsar, the more he risked his British connection; and the more he risked that, the closer he *had* to move toward the Tsar to avoid isolation. For Metternich, the ideal combination would have been British support to preserve the territorial balance, and Russian support to quell domestic upheaval—the Quadruple Alliance for geopolitical security, and the Holy Alliance for domestic stability.

But as time passed and the memory of Napoleon faded, that combination became increasingly difficult to sustain. The more the alliances approached a system of collective security and European government, the more Great Britain felt compelled to dissociate itself from it. And the more Great Britain dissociated itself, the more dependent Austria became on Russia, hence the more rigidly it defended conservative values. This was a vicious circle that could not be broken.

However sympathetic Castlereagh might have been to Austria's problems, he was unable to induce Great Britain to address potential, as opposed to actual, dangers. "When the Territorial Balance of Europe is disturbed," avowed Castlereagh, "She [Britain] can interfere with effect, but She is the last Government in Europe which can be expected, or can venture to commit Herself on any question of an abstract character. . . . We shall be found in our Place when actual danger menaces the System of Europe; but this Country cannot, and will not, act upon abstract and speculative Principles of Precaution."[17] Yet the crux of Metternich's problem was that necessity obliged him to treat as practical what Great Britain considered abstract and speculative. Domestic upheaval happened to be the danger Austria found the least manageable.

To soften the disagreement in principle, Castlereagh proposed periodic meetings, or congresses, of the foreign ministers to review the European state of affairs. What became known as the Congress system sought to forge a consensus on the issues confronting Europe and to pave the way for dealing with them on a multilateral basis. Great Britain, however, was not comfortable with a system of European government, because it

came too close to the unified Europe that the British had consistently opposed. Traditional British policy apart, no British government had ever undertaken a permanent commitment to review events as they arose without confronting a specific threat. Participating in a European government was no more attractive to British public opinion than the League of Nations would be to Americans a hundred years later, and for much the same reasons.

The British Cabinet made its reserve quite evident as early as the first such conference, the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1818. Castlereagh was dispatched with these extraordinarily grudging instructions: "We approve [a general declaration] on this occasion, and with difficulty too, by assuring [the secondary powers] that . . . periodic meetings . . . are to be confined to one . . . subject, or even . . . to one power, France, and no engagement to interfere in any manner in which the Law of Nations does not justify interference. . . . Our true policy has always been not to interfere except in great emergencies and then with commanding force."[18] Great Britain wanted France kept in check but, beyond that, the twin fears of "continental entanglements" and a unified Europe prevailed in London.

There was only one occasion when Great Britain found Congress diplomacy compatible with its objectives. During the Greek Revolution of 1821, England interpreted the Tsar's desire to protect the Christian population of the collapsing Ottoman Empire as the first stage of Russia's attempt to conquer Egypt. With British strategic interests at stake, Castlereagh did not hesitate to appeal to the Tsar in the name of the very allied unity he had heretofore sought to restrict to containing France. Characteristically, he elaborated a distinction between theoretical and practical issues: "The question of Turkey is of a totally different character and one which in England we regard not as a theoretical but a practical consideration. . . ."[19]

But Castlereagh's appeal to the Alliance served above all to demonstrate its inherent brittleness. An alliance in which one partner treats his own strategic interests as the sole practical issue confers no additional security on its members. For it provides no obligation beyond what considerations of national interest would have impelled in any event. Metternich undoubtedly drew comfort from Castlereagh's obvious personal sympathy for his objectives, and even for the Congress system itself. Castlereagh, it was said by one of Austria's diplomats, was "like a great lover of music who is at Church; he wishes to applaud but he dare not."[20] But if even the most European-minded of British statesmen dared not applaud what he believed in, Great Britain's role in the Concert of Europe was destined to be transitory and ineffective.

Somewhat like Wilson and his League of Nations a century later, Cas-

tlereagh's efforts to persuade Great Britain to participate in a system of European congresses went far beyond what English representative institutions could tolerate on either philosophical or strategic grounds. Castlereagh was convinced, as Wilson would be, that the danger of new aggression could best be avoided if his country joined some permanent European forum that dealt with threats before they developed into crises. He understood Europe better than most of his British contemporaries and knew that the newly created balance would require careful tending. He thought that he had devised a solution Great Britain could support, because it did not go beyond a series of discussion meetings of the foreign ministers of the four victors and had no obligatory features.

But even discussion meetings smacked too much of European government for the British Cabinet. Indeed, the Congress system never even cleared its initial hurdle. When Castlereagh attended the first conference at Aix-la-Chapelle in 1818, France was admitted to the Congress system and Great Britain made its exit from it. The Cabinet refused to let Castlereagh attend any further European congresses, which subsequently took place at Troppau in 1820, at Laibach in 1821, and at Verona in 1822. Great Britain remained aloof from the Congress system, which its own Foreign Secretary had devised, just as, a century later, the United States would distance itself from the League of Nations, which its president had proposed. In each .case, the attempt by the leader of the most powerful country to create a general system of collective security failed because of domestic inhibitions and historic traditions.

Both Wilson and Castlereagh believed that the international order established after a catastrophic war could only be protected by the active participation of all of the key members of the international community and especially of their own countries. To Castlereagh and Wilson, security was collective; if any nation was victimized, in the end all would become victims. With security thus perceived as seamless, all states had a common interest in resisting aggression, and an even greater interest in preventing it. In Castlereagh's view, Great Britain, whatever its views on specific issues, had a genuine interest in the preservation of general peace and in the maintenance of the balance of power. Like Wilson, Castlereagh thought that the best way to defend that interest was to have a hand in shaping the decisions affecting international order and in organizing resistance to violations of the peace.

The weakness of collective security is that interests are rarely uniform, and that security is rarely seamless. Members of a general system of collective security are therefore more likely to agree on inaction than on joint action; they either will be held together by glittering generalities, or

may witness the defection of the most powerful member, who feels the most secure and therefore least needs the system. Neither Wilson nor Castlereagh was able to bring his country into a system of collective security because their respective societies did not feel threatened by foreseeable dangers and thought that they could deal with them alone or, if need be, find allies at the last moment. To them, participating in the League of Nations or the European Congress system compounded risks without enhancing security.

There was one huge difference between the two Anglo-Saxon statesmen, however. Castlereagh was out of tune not only with his contemporaries but with the entire thrust of modern British foreign policy. He left no legacy; no British statesman has used Castlereagh as a model. Wilson not only responded to the wellsprings of American motivation, but took it to a new and higher level. All his successors have been Wilsonian to some degree, and subsequent American foreign policy has been shaped by his maxims.

Lord Stewart, the British "observer" permitted to attend the various European congresses, who was Castlereagh's half-brother, spent most of his energy defining the limits of Great Britain's involvement rather than contributing to a European consensus. At Troppau, he submitted a memorandum which affirmed the right to self-defense but insisted that Great Britain would "not charge itself as a member of the Alliance with the moral responsibility of administering a general European Police."[21] At the Congress of Laibach, Lord Stewart was obliged to reiterate that Great Britain would never engage itself against "speculative" dangers. Castlereagh himself had set forth the British position in a state paper of May 5, 1820. The Quadruple Alliance, he affirmed, was an alliance for the "liberation of a great proportion of the Continent of Europe from the military dominion of France. . . . It never was, however, intended as an Union for the Government of the World or for the Superintendence of the Internal Affairs of other States."[22]

In the end, Castlereagh found himself trapped between his convictions and his domestic necessities. From this untenable situation, he could see no exit. "Sir," Castlereagh said at his last interview with the King, "it is necessary to say goodbye to Europe; you and I alone know it and have saved it; no one after me understands the affairs of the Continent."[23] Four days later, he committed suicide.

As Austria grew more and more dependent on Russia, Metternich's most perplexing question became how long his appeals to the Tsar's conservative principles could restrain Russia from exploiting its opportunities in the Balkans and at the periphery of Europe. The answer turned

out to be nearly three decades, during which time Metternich dealt with revolutions in Naples, Spain, and Greece while effectively maintaining a European consensus and avoiding Russian intervention in the Balkans.

But the Eastern Question would not go away. In essence, it was the result of independence struggles in the Balkans as the various nationalities tried to break loose of Turkish rule. The quandary this posed for the Metternich system was that it clashed with that system's commitment to maintaining the *status quo,* and that the independence movements which today were aimed at Turkey would tomorrow attack Austria. Moreover, the Tsar, who was the most committed to legitimacy, was also the most eager to intervene, but nobody—certainly not in London or Vienna—believed that the Tsar would preserve the *status quo* after his armies had been launched.

For a time, a mutual interest in cushioning the shock of the collapsing Ottoman Empire sustained a warm relationship with Great Britain and Austria. However little the English cared about particular Balkan issues, a Russian advance toward the Straits was perceived as a threat to British interests in the Mediterranean, and encountered tenacious resistance. Metternich never participated directly in these British efforts to oppose Russian expansionism, much as he welcomed them. His careful and, above all, anonymous diplomacy—affirming Europe's unity, flattering the Russians, and cajoling the British—enabled Austria to preserve its Russian option while other states bore the brunt of thwarting Russian expansionism.

Metternich's removal from the scene in 1848 marked the beginning of the end of the high-wire act by which Austria had used the unity of conservative interests to maintain the Vienna settlement. To be sure, legitimacy could not have compensated indefinitely for the steady decline in Austria's geopolitical position or for the growing incompatibility between its domestic institutions and dominant national tendencies. But nuance is the essence of statesmanship. Metternich had finessed the Eastern Question but his successors, unable to adapt Austria's domestic institutions to the times, tried to compensate by bringing Austrian diplomacy into line with the emerging trend of power politics, unrestrained by a concept of legitimacy. It was to be the undoing of the international order.

So it happened that the Concert of Europe was ultimately shattered on the anvil of the Eastern Question. In 1854, the Great Powers were at war for the first time since the days of Napoleon. Ironically, this war, the Crimean War, long condemned by historians as a senseless and utterly avoidable affair, was precipitated not by Russia, Great Britain, or Austria —countries with vast interests in the Eastern Question—but by France.

In 1852, the French Emperor Napoleon III, having just come to power by a coup, persuaded the Turkish Sultan to grant him the sobriquet of Protector of the Christians in the Ottoman Empire, a role the Russian Tsar traditionally reserved for himself. Nicholas I was enraged that Napoleon, whom he considered an illegitimate upstart, should presume to step into Russia's shoes as protector of Balkan Slavs, and demanded equal status with France. When the Sultan rebuffed the Russian emissary, Russia broke off diplomatic relations. Lord Palmerston, who shaped British foreign policy during the mid-nineteenth century, was morbidly suspicious of Russia and urged the dispatch of the Royal Navy to Besika Bay, just outside the Dardanelles. The Tsar still continued in the spirit of the Metternich system: "The four of you," he said, referring to the other Great Powers, "could dictate to me, but this will never happen. I can count on Berlin and Vienna."[24] To show his lack of concern, Nicholas ordered the occupation of the principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia (present-day Romania).

Austria, which had the most to lose from a war, proposed the obvious solution—that France and Russia act as joint protectors of the Ottoman Christians. Palmerston was eager for neither outcome. To strengthen Great Britain's bargaining position, he sent the Royal Navy to the entrance of the Black Sea. This encouraged Turkey to declare war on Russia. Great Britain and France backed Turkey.

The real causes of the war were deeper, however. Religious claims were in fact pretexts for political and strategic designs. Nicholas was pursuing the ancient Russian dream of gaining Constantinople and the Straits. Napoleon III saw an opportunity to end France's isolation and to break up the Holy Alliance by weakening Russia. Palmerston sought some pretext to end Russia's drive toward the Straits once and for all. With the outbreak of war, British warships entered the Black Sea and began to destroy the Russian Black Sea fleet. An Anglo-French force landed in the Crimea to seize the Russian naval base of Sevastopol.

These events spelled nothing but complexity for Austria's leaders. They attached importance to the traditional friendship with Russia while fearing that Russia's advance in the Balkans might increase the restlessness of Austria's Slavic populations. But they feared that siding with their old friend Russia in the Crimea would give France a pretext for attacking Austria's Italian territories.

At first, Austria declared neutrality, which was the sensible course. But the new Austrian Foreign Minister, Count Buol, found inactivity too nerve-racking and the French threat to Austria's possessions in Italy too unsettling. As the British and French armies were besieging Sevastopol, Austria

presented an ultimatum to the Tsar, demanding that Russia retreat from Moldavia and Wallachia. That was the decisive factor in ending the Crimean War—at least that is what Russian leaders would think ever after.

Austria had jettisoned Nicholas I and a steadfast friendship with Russia dating back to the Napoleonic Wars. Frivolity compounded by panic caused Metternich's successors to throw away the legacy of conservative unity that had been accumulated so carefully and at times painfully for over a generation. For once Austria cut itself loose from the shackles of shared values, it also freed Russia to conduct its own policy strictly on the basis of geopolitical merit. Pursuing such a course, Russia was bound to clash with Austria over the future of the Balkans and, in time, to seek to undermine the Austrian Empire.

The reason the Vienna settlement had worked for fifty years was that the three Eastern powers—Prussia, Russia, and Austria—had seen their unity as the essential barrier to revolutionary chaos and to French domination of Europe. But in the Crimean War, Austria ("the chamber of peers of Europe," as Talleyrand had called it) maneuvered itself into an uneasy alliance with Napoleon III, who was eager to undermine Austria in Italy, and Great Britain, which was unwilling to engage in European causes. Austria thereby liberated Russia and Prussia, its acquisitive erstwhile partners in the Holy Alliance, to pursue their own undiluted national interests. Prussia exacted its price by forcing Austria to withdraw from Germany, while Russia's growing hostility in the Balkans turned into one of the triggers of the First World War and led to Austria's ultimate collapse.

When faced with the realities of power politics, Austria had failed to realize that its salvation had been the European commitment to legitimacy. The concept of the unity of conservative interests had transcended national borders and thus tended to mitigate the confrontations of power politics. Nationalism had the opposite effect, exalting the national interest, heightening rivalries, and raising the risks for everyone. Austria had thrown itself into a contest which, given all its vulnerabilities, it could not possibly win.

Within five years of the end of the Crimean War, the Italian nationalist leader Camillo Cavour began the process of expelling Austria from Italy by provoking a war with Austria, backed by a French alliance and Russian acquiescence, both of which would previously have seemed inconceivable. Within another five years, Bismarck would defeat Austria in a war for predominance in Germany. Once again, Russia stood aloof and France did the same, albeit reluctantly. In Metternich's day, the Concert of Europe would have consulted and controlled these upheavals. Henceforth diplomacy would rely more on naked power than on shared values. Peace

was maintained for another fifty years. But with each decade, tensions multiplied and arms races intensified.

Great Britain fared quite differently in an international system driven by power politics. For one thing, it had never relied on the Congress system for its security; for Great Britain, the new pattern of international relations was more like business as usual. In the course of the nineteenth century, Great Britain became the dominant country in Europe. To be sure, it was strong enough to stand alone and had the advantages of geographic isolation and imperviousness to domestic upheavals on the Continent. But it also had the benefit of steady leaders pursuing an unsentimental commitment to the national interest.

Castlereagh's successors did not understand the Continent nearly as well as he had. But they had a surer grasp of what constituted the essential British national interest, and they pursued it with extraordinary skill and persistence. George Canning, Castlereagh's immediate successor, lost no time in eliminating the last few ties through which Castlereagh had maintained his influence, however remote, on the European Congress system. In 1821, the year before he succeeded Castlereagh, Canning had called for a policy of "neutrality in word and deed."[25] "Let us not," he said, "in the foolish spirit of romance, suppose that we alone could regenerate Europe."[26] Then, after becoming Foreign Secretary, he left no doubt that his guiding principle was the national interest, which, in his view, was incompatible with permanent engagement in Europe:

> . . . intimately connected as we are with the system of Europe, it does not follow that we are therefore called upon to mix ourselves on every occasion, with a restless and meddling activity, in the concerns of the nations which surround us.[27]

In other words, Great Britain would reserve the right to steer its own course according to the merits of each case and guided only by its national interest, a policy which made allies either auxiliaries or irrelevant.

Palmerston explained the British definition of national interest as follows in 1856: "When people ask me . . . for what is called a policy, the only answer is that we mean to do what may seem to be best, upon each occasion as it arises, making the Interests of Our Country one's guiding principle."[28] Half a century later, the official description of British foreign policy had not gained much in the way of precision, as reflected in this explanation by Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey: "British Foreign Ministers have been guided by what seemed to them to be the immediate

interest of this country, without making elaborate calculations for the future."[29]

In most other countries, statements such as these would have been ridiculed as tautological—we do what is best because we consider it best. In Great Britain, they were considered illuminating; very rarely was there a call to define that much-used phrase "national interest": "We have no eternal allies and no permanent enemies," said Palmerston. Great Britain required no formal strategy because its leaders understood the British interest so well and so viscerally that they could act spontaneously on each situation as it arose, confident that their public would follow. In the words of Palmerston: "Our interests are eternal, and those interests it is our duty to follow."[30]

British leaders were more likely to be clear about what they were *not* prepared to defend than to identify a *casus belli* in advance. They were even more reluctant to spell out positive aims, perhaps because they liked the *status quo* well enough. Convinced that they would recognize the British national interest when they saw it, British leaders felt no need to elaborate it in advance. They preferred to await actual cases—a position impossible for the Continental countries to adopt, because they *were* those actual cases.

The British view of security was not unlike the view of American isolationists, in that Great Britain felt impervious to all but cataclysmic upheavals. But America and Great Britain differed when it came to the relationship between peace and domestic structure. British leaders did not in any sense consider the spread of representative institutions as a key to peace in the way their American counterparts generally did, nor did they feel concerned about institutions different from their own.

Thus, in 1841, Palmerston spelled out for the British ambassador in St. Petersburg what Great Britain would resist by force of arms, and why it would not resist purely domestic changes:

> One of the general principles which Her Majesty's Government wish to observe as a guide for their conduct in dealing with the relations between England and other States, is, that changes which foreign Nations may chuse to make in their internal Constitution and form of Government, are to be looked upon as matters with which England has no business to interfere by force of arms. . . .
>
> But an attempt of one Nation to seize and to appropriate to itself territory which belongs to another Nation, is a different matter; because such an attempt leads to a derangement of the existing Balance of Power, and by altering the relative strength of States, may tend to create danger to other Powers; and such attempts therefore, the British Government holds itself at full liberty to resist. . . .[31]

Without exception, British ministers were concerned above all with preserving their country's freedom of action. In 1841, Palmerston reiterated Great Britain's abhorrence of abstract cases:

> . . . it is not usual for England to enter into engagements with reference to cases which have not actually arisen, or which are not immediately in prospect. . . .[32]

Nearly thirty years later, Gladstone brought up the same principle in a letter to Queen Victoria:

> England should keep entire in her own hands the means of estimating her own obligations upon the various states of facts as they arise; she should not foreclose and narrow her own liberty of choice by declarations made to other Powers, in their real or supposed interests, of which they would claim to be at least joint interpreters. . . .[33]

Insisting on freedom of action, British statesmen as a rule rejected all variations on the theme of collective security. What later came to be called "splendid isolation" reflected England's conviction that it stood to lose more than it could gain from alliances. So aloof an approach could be entertained only by a country that was sufficiently strong to stand alone, that foresaw no dangers for which it might need the assistance of allies, and that felt certain that any extremity threatening it would threaten its potential allies even more. Great Britain's role as the nation that maintained the European equilibrium gave it all the options its leaders either wanted or needed. This policy was sustainable because it strove for no territorial gains in Europe; England could pick and choose the European quarrels in which to intervene because its only European interest was equilibrium (however voracious the British appetite for colonial acquisitions overseas).

Nonetheless, Great Britain's "splendid isolation" did not keep it from entering into temporary arrangements with other countries to deal with special circumstances. As a sea power without a large standing army, Great Britain occasionally had to cooperate with a continental ally, which it always preferred to choose as the need arose. On such occasions British leaders could show themselves remarkably impervious to past animosities. In the course of Belgium's secession from Holland in 1830, Palmerston first threatened France with war if it sought to dominate the new state, then, a few years later, offered to ally with it to guarantee Belgium's independence: "England alone cannot carry her points on the Continent; she must have allies as instruments to work with."[34]

Of course, Great Britain's various *ad hoc* allies had objectives of their own, which usually involved an extension of influence or territory in Europe. When they went beyond what England considered appropriate, England switched sides or organized new coalitions against erstwhile allies in defense of the equilibrium. Its unsentimental persistence and self-centered determination earned Great Britain the epithet "Perfidious Albion." This type of diplomacy may not have reflected a particularly elevated attitude, but it preserved the peace of Europe, especially after the Metternich system began fraying at the edges.

The nineteenth century marked the apogee of British influence. Great Britain was self-confident and had every right to be. It was the leading industrial nation and the Royal Navy commanded the seas. In an age of domestic upheavals, British internal politics were remarkably serene. When it came to the big issues of the nineteenth century—intervention or nonintervention, defense of the *status quo* or cooperating with change —British leaders refused to be bound by dogma. In the war for Greek independence in the 1820s, Great Britain sympathized with Greece's independence from Ottoman rule as long as doing so did not threaten its strategic position in the Eastern Mediterranean by increasing Russian influence. But by 1840, Great Britain would intervene to contain Russia, thereby supporting the *status quo* in the Ottoman Empire. In the Hungarian Revolution of 1848, Great Britain, formally noninterventionist, in fact welcomed Russia's restoration of the *status quo*. When Italy revolted against Habsburg rule in the 1850s, Great Britain was sympathetic but noninterventionist. To defend the balance of power, Great Britain was neither categorically interventionist nor noninterventionist, neither a bulwark of the Viennese order nor a revisionist power. Its style was relentlessly pragmatic, and the British people took pride in their ability to muddle through.

Yet any pragmatic policy—indeed, especially a pragmatic policy—must be based on some fixed principle in order to prevent tactical skill from dissipating into a random thrashing about. And the fixed principle of British foreign policy, whether acknowledged or not, was its role as protector of the balance of power, which in general meant supporting the weaker against the stronger. By Palmerston's time, the balance of power had grown into such an immutable principle of British policy that it needed no theoretical defense; whatever policy was being pursued at any given moment became inevitably described in terms of protecting the balance of power. Extraordinary flexibility was conjoined to a number of fixed and practical objectives. For instance, the determination to keep the Low Countries out of the hands of a major power did not change between

the time of William III and the outbreak of World War I. In 1870, Disraeli reaffirmed that principle:

> It had always been held by the Government of this country that it was for the interest of England that the countries on the European Coast extending from Dunkirk and Ostend to the islands of the North Sea should be possessed by free and flourishing communities, practicing the arts of peace, enjoying the rights of liberty and following those pursuits of commerce which tend to the civilization of man, and should not be in the possession of a great military Power. . . .[35]

It was a measure of how isolated German leaders had become that they were genuinely surprised when, in 1914, Great Britain reacted to the German invasion of Belgium with a declaration of war.

Well into the nineteenth century, the preservation of Austria was considered an important British objective. In the eighteenth century, Marlborough, Carteret, and Pitt had fought several wars to prevent France from weakening Austria. Though Austria had less to fear from French aggression in the nineteenth century, the British still viewed Austria as a useful counterweight to Russian expansion toward the Straits. When the Revolution of 1848 threatened to cause the disintegration of Austria, Palmerston said:

> Austria stands in the centre of Europe, a barrier against encroachment on the one side, and against invasion on the other. The political independence and liberties of Europe are bound up, in my opinion, with the maintenance and integrity of Austria as a great European Power; and therefore anything which tends by direct, or even remote, contingency, to weaken and to cripple Austria, but still more to reduce her from the position of a first-rate Power to that of a secondary State, must be a great calamity to Europe, and one which every Englishman ought to deprecate, and to try to prevent.[36]

After the Revolution of 1848, Austria became progressively weaker and its policy increasingly erratic, diminishing its usefulness as a key element in British policy in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The focus of England's policy was to prevent Russia from occupying the Dardanelles. Austro-Russian rivalries largely involved Russian designs on Austria's Slavic provinces, which did not seriously concern Great Britain, while control of the Dardanelles was not a vital Austrian interest. Great Britain therefore came to judge Austria an unsuitable counterweight to Russia. This was why Great Britain stood by when Austria was

defeated by Piedmont in Italy and by Prussia in the contest over primacy in Germany—an indifference which would not have been conceivable a generation before. After the turn of the century, fear of Germany would dominate British policy, and Austria, Germany's ally, for the first time emerged as an opponent in British calculations.

In the nineteenth century, no one would have thought it possible that one day Great Britain would be allied with Russia. In Palmerston's view, Russia was "pursuing a system of universal aggression on all sides, partly from the personal character of the Emperor [Nicholas], partly from the permanent system of the government."[37] Twenty-five years later, this view was echoed by Lord Clarendon, who argued that the Crimean War was "a battle of civilization against barbarism."[38] Great Britain spent the better part of the century attempting to check Russian expansion into Persia and on the approaches to Constantinople and India. It would take decades of German bellicosity and insensitivity to shift the major British security concern to Germany, which did not finally occur until after the turn of the century.

British governments changed more frequently than those of the so-called Eastern Powers; none of Britain's major political figures—Palmerston, Gladstone, and Disraeli—enjoyed uninterrupted tenures, as did Metternich, Nicholas I, and Bismarck. Still, Great Britain maintained an extraordinary consistency of purpose. Once embarked on a particular course, it would pursue it with unrelenting tenacity and dogged reliability, which enabled Great Britain to exert a decisive influence on behalf of tranquillity in Europe.

One cause of Great Britain's single-mindedness in times of crisis was the representative nature of its political institutions. Since 1700, public opinion had played an important role in British foreign policy. No other country in eighteenth-century Europe had an "opposition" point of view with respect to foreign policy; in Great Britain, it was inherent in the system. In the eighteenth century, the Tories as a rule represented the King's foreign policy, which leaned toward intervention in Continental disputes; the Whigs, like Sir Robert Walpole, preferred to retain a measure of aloofness from quarrels on the Continent and sought greater emphasis on overseas expansion. By the nineteenth century, their roles had been reversed. The Whigs, like Palmerston, represented an activist policy, while the Tories, like Derby or Salisbury, were wary of foreign entanglements. Radicals such as Richard Cobden were allied with the Conservatives in advocating a noninterventionist British posture.

Because British foreign policy grew out of open debates, the British people displayed extraordinary unity in times of war. On the other hand, so openly partisan a foreign policy made it possible—though highly un-

usual—for foreign policy to be reversed when a prime minister was replaced. For instance, Great Britain's support for Turkey in the 1870s ended abruptly when Gladstone, who regarded the Turks as morally reprehensible, defeated Disraeli in the election of 1880.

At all times, Great Britain treated its representative institutions as unique unto itself. Its policies on the Continent were always justified in terms of the British national interest and not ideology. Whenever Great Britain expressed sympathy for a revolution, as it did in Italy in 1848, it did so on eminently practical grounds. Thus, Palmerston approvingly quoted Canning's own pragmatic adage: "That those who have checked improvement because it is innovation, will one day or other be compelled to accept innovation when it has ceased to be improvement."[39] But this was advice based on experience, not a call for the dissemination of British values or institutions. Throughout the nineteenth century, Great Britain judged other countries by their foreign policies and, but for a brief Gladstonian interlude, remained indifferent to their domestic structures.

Though Great Britain and America shared a certain aloofness from day-to-day involvement in international affairs, Great Britain justified its own version of isolationism on dramatically different grounds. America proclaimed its democratic institutions as an example for the rest of the world; Great Britain treated its parliamentary institutions as devoid of relevance to other societies. America came to believe that the spread of democracy would ensure peace; indeed, that a reliable peace could be achieved in no other way. Great Britain might prefer a particular domestic structure but would run no risks on its behalf.

In 1848, Palmerston subordinated Great Britain's historic misgivings about the overthrow of the French monarchy and the emergence of a new Bonaparte by invoking this practical rule of British statecraft: "The invariable principle on which England acts is to acknowledge as the organ of every nation that organ which each nation may deliberately choose to have."[40]

Palmerston was the principal architect of Great Britain's foreign policy for nearly thirty years. In 1841, Metternich analyzed his pragmatic style with cynical admiration:

> . . . what does Lord Palmerston then want? He wants to make France feel the power of England, by proving to her that the Egyptian affair will only finish as he may wish, and without France having any right to take a hand. He wants to prove to the two German powers that he does not need them, that Russia's help suffices for England. He wants to keep Russia in check and drag her in his train by her permanent anxiety of seeing England draw near to France again.[41]

It was not an inaccurate description of what Great Britain understood by the balance of power. In the end, it enabled Great Britain to traverse the century with only one relatively short war with another major power—the Crimean War. Although it was far from anyone's intent when the war started, it was, however, precisely the Crimean War which led to the collapse of the Metternich order, forged so painstakingly at the Congress of Vienna. The disintegration of unity among the three Eastern monarchs removed the moral element of moderation from European diplomacy. Fifteen years of turmoil followed before a new and much more precarious stability emerged.