CHAPTER THREE

From Universality to Equilibrium: Richelieu, William of Orange, and Pitt

What historians describe today as the European balance-of-power system emerged in the seventeenth century from the final collapse of the medieval aspiration to universality—a concept of world order that represented a blending of the traditions of the Roman Empire and the Catholic Church. The world was conceived as mirroring the Heavens. Just as one God ruled in Heaven, so one emperor would rule over the secular world, and one pope over the Universal Church.

In this spirit, the feudal states of Germany and Northern Italy were grouped under the rule of the Holy Roman Emperor. Into the seventeenth century, this empire had the potential to dominate Europe. France, whose frontier was far west of the Rhine River, and England were peripheral states with respect to it. Had the Holy Roman Emperor ever succeeded in establishing central control over all the territories technically

under his jurisdiction, the relations of the Western European states to it might have been similar to those of China's neighbors to the Middle Kingdom, with France comparable to Vietnam or Korea, and England to Japan.

For most of the medieval period, however, the Holy Roman Emperor never achieved that degree of central control. One reason was the lack of adequate transportation and communication systems, making it difficult to tie together such extensive territories. But the most important reason was that the Holy Roman Empire had separated control of the church from control of the government. Unlike a pháraoh or a caesar, the Holy Roman Emperor was not deemed to possess divine attributes. Everywhere outside Western Europe, even in the regions governed by the Eastern Church, religion and government were unified in the sense that key appointments to each were subject to the central government; religious authorities had neither the means nor the authority to assert the autonomous position demanded by Western Christianity as a matter of right.

In Western Europe, the potential and, from time to time, actual conflict between pope and emperor established the conditions for eventual constitutionalism and the separation of powers which are the basis of modern democracy. It enabled the various feudal rulers to enhance their autonomy by exacting a price from both contending factions. This, in turn, led to a fractionated Europe—a patchwork of duchies, counties, cities, and bishoprics. Though in theory all the feudal lords owed fealty to the emperor, in practice they did what they pleased. Various dynasties claimed the imperial crown, and central authority almost disappeared. The emperors maintained the old vision of universal rule without any possibility of realizing it. At the fringes of Europe, France, England, and Spain did not accept the authority of the Holy Roman Empire, though they remained part of the Universal Church.

Not until the Habsburg dynasty had laid near-permanent claim to the imperial crown in the fifteenth century and, through prudent marriages, acquired the Spanish crown and its vast resources, did it become possible for the Holy Roman Emperor to aspire to translate his universal claims into a political system. In the first half of the sixteenth century, Emperor Charles V revived the imperial authority to a point which raised the prospect of a Central European empire, composed of what is today Germany, Austria, Northern Italy, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Eastern France, Belgium, and the Netherlands—a grouping so potentially dominant as to prevent the emergence of anything resembling the European balance of power.

At that very moment, the weakening of the Papacy under the impact of

the Reformation thwarted the prospect of a hegemonic European empire. When strong, the Papacy had been a thorn in the side of the Holy Roman Emperor and a formidable rival. When on the decline in the sixteenth century, the Papacy proved equally a bane to the idea of empire. Emperors wanted to see themselves, and wanted others to see them, as the agents of God. But in the sixteenth century, the emperor came to be perceived in Protestant lands less as an agent of God than as a Viennese warlord tied to a decadent pope. The Reformation gave rebellious princes a new freedom of action, in both the religious and the political realms. Their break with Rome was a break with religious universality; their struggle with the Habsburg emperor demonstrated that the princes no longer saw fealty to the empire as a religious duty.

With the concept of unity collapsing, the emerging states of Europe needed some principle to justify their heresy and to regulate their relations. They found it in the concepts of *raison d'état* and the balance of power. Each depended on the other. *Raison d'état* asserted that the well-being of the state justified whatever means were employed to further it; the national interest supplanted the medieval notion of a universal morality. The balance of power replaced the nostalgia for universal monarchy with the consolation that each state, in pursuing its own selfish interests, would somehow contribute to the safety and progress of all the others.

The earliest and most comprehensive formulation of this new approach came from France, which was also one of the first nation-states in Europe. France was the country that stood to lose the most by the reinvigoration of the Holy Roman Empire, because it might well—to use modern terminology—have been "Finlandized" by it. As religious restraints weakened, France began to exploit the rivalries that the Reformation had generated among its neighbors. French rulers recognized that the progressive weakening of the Holy Roman Empire (and even more its disintegration) would enhance France's security and, with good fortune, enable it to expand eastward.

The principal agent for this French policy was an improbable figure, a prince of the Church, Armand Jean du Plessis, Cardinal de Richelieu, First Minister of France from 1624 to 1642. Upon learning of Cardinal Richelieu's death, Pope Urban VIII is alleged to have said, "If there is a God, the Cardinal de Richelieu will have much to answer for. If not . . . well, he had a successful life."[1] This ambivalent epitaph would no doubt have pleased the statesman, who achieved vast successes by ignoring, and indeed transcending, the essential pieties of his age.

Few statesmen can claim a greater impact on history. Richelieu was the father of the modern state system. He promulgated the concept of *raison*

d'état and practiced it relentlessly for the benefit of his own country. Under his auspices, *raison d'état* replaced the medieval concept of universal moral values as the operating principle of French policy. Initially, he sought to prevent Habsburg domination of Europe, but ultimately left a legacy that for the next two centuries tempted his successors to establish French primacy in Europe. Out of the failure of these ambitions, a balance of power emerged, first as a fact of life, then as a system for organizing international relations.

Richelieu came into office in 1624, when the Habsburg Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand II was attempting to revive Catholic universality, stamp out Protestantism, and establish imperial control over the princes of Central Europe. This process, the Counter-Reformation, led to what was later called the Thirty Years' War, which erupted in Central Europe in 1618 and turned into one of the most brutal and destructive wars in the history of mankind.

By 1618, the German-speaking territory of Central Europe, most of which was part of the Holy Roman Empire, was divided into two armed camps—the Protestants and the Catholics. The fuse that set off the war was lit that same year in Prague, and before long all of Germany was drawn into the conflict. As Germany was progressively bled white, its principalities became easy prey for outside invaders. Soon Danish and Swedish armies were cutting their way through Central Europe, and eventually the French army joined the fray. By the time the war ended in 1648, Central Europe had been devastated and Germany had lost almost a third of its population. In the crucible of this tragic conflict, Cardinal Richelieu grafted the principle of *raison d'état* onto French foreign policy, a principle that the other European states adopted in the century that followed.

As a prince of the Church, Richelieu ought to have welcomed Ferdinand's drive to restore Catholic orthodoxy. But Richelieu put the French national interest above any religious goals. His vocation as cardinal did not keep Richelieu from seeing the Habsburg attempt to re-establish the Catholic religion as a geopolitical threat to France's security. To him, it was not a religious act but a political maneuver by Austria to achieve dominance in Central Europe and thereby to reduce France to second-class status.

Richelieu's fear was not without foundation. A glance at the map of Europe shows that France was surrounded by Habsburg lands on all sides: Spain to the south; the Northern Italian city-states, dominated mostly by Spain, in the southeast; Franche-Comté (today the region above Lyon and Savoy), also under Spanish control, in the east, and the Spanish Netherlands in the north. The few frontiers not under the rule of the Spanish Habsburgs were subject to the Austrian branch of the family.

The Duchy of Lorraine owed fealty to the Austrian Holy Roman Emperor, as did strategically important areas along the Rhine in what is present-day Alsace. If Northern Germany were also to fall under Habsburg rule, France would become perilously weak in relation to the Holy Roman Empire.

Richelieu derived little comfort from the fact that Spain and Austria shared France's Catholic faith. Quite to the contrary, a victory for the Counter-Reformation was exactly what Richelieu was determined to prevent. In pursuit of what would today be called a national security interest and was then labeled—for the first time—*raison d'état,* Richelieu was prepared to side with the Protestant princes and exploit the schism within the Universal Church.

Had the Habsburg emperors played according to the same rules or understood the emerging world of *raison d'état,* they would have seen how well placed they were to achieve what Richelieu feared most—the pre-eminence of Austria and the emergence of the Holy Roman Empire as the dominant power on the Continent. Through the centuries, however, the enemies of the Habsburgs benefited from the dynasty's rigidity in adjusting to tactical necessities or understanding future trends. The Habsburg rulers were men of principle. They never compromised their convictions except in defeat. At the start of this political odyssey, therefore, they were quite defenseless against the ruthless Cardinal's machinations.

Emperor Ferdinand II, Richelieu's foil, had almost certainly never heard of *raison d'état.* Even if he had, he would have rejected it as blasphemy, for he saw his secular mission as carrying out the will of God, and always stressed the "holy" in his title as Holy Roman Emperor. Never would he have conceded that divine ends could be achieved by less than moral means. Never would he have thought of concluding treaties with the Protestant Swedes or the Muslim Turks, measures which the Cardinal pursued as a matter of course. Ferdinand's adviser, the Jesuit Lamormaini, thus summarized the Emperor's outlook:

> The false and corrupt policies, which are widespread in these times, he, in his wisdom, condemned from the start. He held that those who followed such policies could not be dealt with, since they practice falsehood and misuse God and religion. It would be a great folly for one to try to strengthen a kingdom, which God alone has granted, with means that God hates.[2]

A ruler committed to such absolute values found it impossible to compromise, let alone to manipulate, his bargaining position. In 1596, while still

an archduke, Ferdinand declared, "I would rather die than grant any concessions to the sectarians when it comes to religion."[3] To the detriment of his empire, he certainly lived up to his words. Since he was less concerned with the Empire's welfare than with obeisance to the will of God, he considered himself duty-bound to crush Protestantism even though some accommodation with it clearly would have been in his best interests. In modern terms, he was a fanatic. The words of one of the imperial advisers, Caspar Scioppius, highlight the Emperor's beliefs: "Woe to the king who ignores the voice of God beseeching him to kill the heretics. You should not wage war for yourself, but for God" (*Bellum non tuum, sed Dei esse statuas*).[4] For Ferdinand, the state existed in order to serve religion, not vice versa: "In matters of state, which are so important for our holy confession, one cannot always take into account human considerations; rather, he must hope . . . in God . . . and trust only in Him."[5]

Richelieu treated Ferdinand's faith as a strategic challenge. Though privately religious, he viewed his duties as minister in entirely secular terms. Salvation might be his personal objective, but to Richelieu, the statesman, it was irrelevant. "Man is immortal, his salvation is hereafter," he once said. "The state has no immortality, its salvation is now or never."[6] In other words, states do not receive credit in any world for doing what is right; they are only rewarded for being strong enough to do what is necessary.

Richelieu would never have permitted himself to miss the opportunity which presented itself to Ferdinand in 1629, the eleventh year of the war. The Protestant princes were ready to accept Habsburg political preeminence provided they remained free to pursue the religion of their choice and to retain the Church lands they had seized during the Reformation. But Ferdinand would not subordinate his religious vocation to his political needs. Rejecting what would have been a vast triumph and the guarantee of his Empire, determined to stamp out the Protestant heresy, he issued the Edict of Restitution, which demanded that Protestant sovereigns restore all the lands they had seized from the Church since 1555. It was a triumph of zeal over expediency, a classic case in which faith overrode calculations of political self-interest. And it guaranteed a battle to the finish.

Handed this opening, Richelieu was determined to prolong the war until Central Europe had been bled white. He put aside religious scruples with respect to domestic policy as well. In the Grace of Alais of 1629, he granted to French Protestants freedom of worship, the very same freedom the Emperor was fighting to deny the German princes. Having protected his country against the domestic upheavals rending Central Europe, Ri-

chelieu set out to exploit Ferdinand's religious fervor in the service of French national ends.

The Habsburg Emperor's inability to understand his national interests —indeed, his refusal to accept the validity of any such concept—gave France's First Minister the opportunity to support and to subsidize the Protestant German princes against the Holy Roman Emperor. The role of defender of the liberties of the Protestant princes against the centralizing goals of the Holy Roman Emperor was an unlikely one for a French prelate and his Catholic French King, Louis XIII. That a prince of the Church was subsidizing the Protestant King of Sweden, Gustavus Adolphus, to make war against the Holy Roman Emperor had revolutionary implications as profound as the upheavals of the French Revolution 150 years later.

In an age still dominated by religious zeal and ideological fanaticism, a dispassionate foreign policy free of moral imperatives stood out like a snow-covered Alp in the desert. Richelieu's objective was to end what he considered the encirclement of France, to exhaust the Habsburgs, and to prevent the emergence of a major power on the borders of France—especially the German border. His only criterion in making alliances was that they served France's interests, and this he did at first with the Protestant states and, later, even with the Muslim Ottoman Empire. In order to exhaust the belligerents and to prolong the war, Richelieu subsidized the enemies of his enemies, bribed, fomented insurrections, and mobilized an extraordinary array of dynastic and legal arguments. He succeeded so well that the war that had begun in 1618 dragged on decade after decade until, finally, history found no more appropriate name for it than its duration—the Thirty Years' War.

France stood on the sidelines while Germany was devastated, until 1635, when sheer exhaustion seemed once again to portend an end to the hostilities and a compromise peace. Richelieu, however, had no interest in compromise until the French King had become as powerful as the Habsburg Emperor, and preferably stronger. In pursuit of this goal, Richelieu convinced his sovereign, in the seventeenth year of the war, of the necessity of entering the fray on the side of the Protestant princes—and with no better justification than the opportunity to exploit France's growing power:

> If it is a sign of singular prudence to have held down the forces opposed to your state for a period of ten years with the forces of your allies, by putting your hand in your pocket and not on your sword, then to engage in open warfare when your allies can no longer exist without

> you is a sign of courage and great wisdom; which shows that, in husbanding the peace of your kingdom, you have behaved like those economists who, having taken great care to amass money, also know how to spend it. . . .[7]

The success of a policy of *raison d'état* depends above all on the ability to assess power relationships. Universal values are defined by their perception and are not in need of constant reinterpretation; indeed they are inconsistent with it. But determining the limits of power requires a blend of experience and insight, and constant adjustment to circumstance. In theory, of course, the balance of power should be quite calculable; in practice, it has proved extremely difficult to work out realistically. Even more complicated is harmonizing one's calculations with those of other states, which is the precondition for the operation of a balance of power. Consensus on the nature of the equilibrium is usually established by periodic conflict.

Richelieu had no doubt about his ability to master the challenge, convinced as he was that it was possible to relate means to ends with nearly mathematical precision. "Logic," he wrote in his *Political Testament,* "requires that the thing that is to be supported and the force that is to support it should stand in geometrical proportion to each other."[8] Fate had made him a prince of the Church; conviction put him in the intellectual company of rationalists like Descartes and Spinoza, who thought that human action could be scientifically charted; opportunity had enabled him to transform the international order to the vast advantage of his country. For once, a statesman's estimate of himself was accurate. Richelieu had a penetrating perception of his goals, but he—and his ideas—would not have prevailed had he not been able to gear his tactics to his strategy.

So novel and so cold-blooded a doctrine could not possibly pass without challenge. However dominant the doctrine of balance of power was to become in later years, it was deeply offensive to the universalist tradition founded on the primacy of moral law. One of the most telling critiques came from the renowned scholar Jansenius, who attacked a policy cut loose from all moral moorings:

> Do they believe that a secular, perishable state should outweigh religion and the Church? . . . Should not the Most Christian King believe that in the guidance and administration of his realm there is nothing that obliges him to extend and protect that of Jesus Christ, his Lord? . . . Would he dare say to God: Let your power and glory and the religion

> which teaches men to adore You be lost and destroyed, provided my state is protected and free of risks?[9]

That, of course, was precisely what Richelieu was saying to his contemporaries and, for all we know, to his God. It was the measure of the revolution he had brought about that what his critics thought was a *reductio ad absurdum* (an argument so immoral and dangerous that it refutes itself) was, in fact, a highly accurate summary of Richelieu's thought. As the King's First Minister, he subsumed both religion and morality to *raison d'état,* his guiding light.

Demonstrating how well they had absorbed the cynical methods of the master himself, Richelieu's defenders turned the argument of their critics against them. A policy of national self-interest, they argued, represented the highest moral law; it was Richelieu's critics who were in violation of ethical principle, not he.

It fell to Daniel de Priezac, a scholar close to the royal administration, to make the formal rebuttal, almost certainly with Richelieu's own imprimatur. In classically Machiavellian fashion, Priezac challenged the premise that Richelieu was committing mortal sin by pursuing policies which seemed to favor the spread of heresy. Rather, he argued, it was Richelieu's critics whose souls were at risk. Since France was the most pure and devoted of the European Catholic powers, Richelieu, in serving the interests of France, was serving as well the interests of the Catholic religion.

Priezac did not explain how he had reached the conclusion that France had been endowed with such a unique religious vocation. However, it followed from his premise that strengthening the French state was in the interest of the well-being of the Catholic Church; hence Richelieu's policy was highly moral. Indeed, the Habsburg encirclement posed so great a threat to France's security that it had to be broken, exonerating the French King in whatever methods he chose to pursue that ultimately moral goal.

> He seeks peace by means of war, and if in waging it something happens contrary to his desires, it is not a crime of will but of necessity whose laws are most harsh and commands most cruel. . . . A war is just when the intention that causes it to be undertaken is just. . . . The will is therefore the principal element that must be considered, not the means. . . . [He] who intends to kill the guilty sometimes faultlessly sheds the blood of the innocent.[10]

Not to put too fine a point on it, the end justified the means.

Another of Richelieu's critics, Mathieu de Morgues, accused the Car-

dinal of manipulating religion "as your preceptor Machiavelli showed the ancient Romans doing, shaping it . . . explaining it and applying it as far as it aids the advancement of your designs."[11]

De Morgues's criticism was as telling as that of Jansenius, and as ineffective. Richelieu was indeed the manipulator described, and did use religion precisely in the manner being alleged. He would no doubt have replied that he had merely analyzed the world as it was, much as Machiavelli had. Like Machiavelli, he might well have preferred a world of more refined moral sensibilities, but he was convinced that history would judge his statesmanship by how well he had used the conditions and the factors he was given to work with. Indeed, if, in evaluating a statesman, reaching the goals he sets for himself is a test, Richelieu must be remembered as one of the seminal figures of modern history. For he left behind him a world radically different from the one he had found, and set in motion the policy France would follow for the next three centuries.

In this manner, France became the dominant country in Europe and vastly expanded its territory. In the century following the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, ending the Thirty Years' War, the doctrine of *raison d'état* grew into the guiding principle of European diplomacy. Neither the respect in which statesmen of later centuries would hold Richelieu nor the oblivion which was the fate of his opponent, Ferdinand II, would have surprised the Cardinal, who was utterly without illusions, even about himself. "In matters of state," wrote Richelieu in his *Political Testament,* "he who has the power often has the right, and he who is weak can only with difficulty keep from being wrong in the opinion of the majority of the world"—a maxim rarely contradicted in the intervening centuries.[12]

Richelieu's impact on the history of Central Europe was the reverse of the achievements he garnered on France's behalf. He feared a unified Central Europe and prevented it from coming about. In all likelihood, he delayed German unification by some two centuries. The initial phase of the Thirty Years' War can be viewed as a Habsburg attempt to act as the dynastic unifiers of Germany—much as England had become a nation-state under the tutelage of a Norman dynasty and, a few centuries later, the French had followed suit under the Capetians. Richelieu thwarted the Habsburgs and the Holy Roman Empire was divided among more than 300 sovereigns, each free to conduct an independent foreign policy. Germany failed to become a nation-state; absorbed in petty dynastic quarrels, it turned inward. As a result, Germany developed no national political culture and calcified into a provincialism from which it did not emerge until late in the nineteenth century when Bismarck unified it. Germany was turned into the battleground of most European wars, many of which

were initiated by France, and missed the early wave of European overseas colonization. When Germany did finally unify, it had so little experience with defining its national interest that it produced many of this century's worst tragedies.

But the gods often punish man by fulfilling his wishes too completely. The Cardinal's analysis that success of the Counter-Reformation would reduce France to an appendage of an increasingly centralized Holy Roman Empire was almost certainly correct, especially if one assumed, as he must have done, that the age of the nation-state had arrived. But whereas the nemesis of Wilsonian idealism is the gap between its professions and reality, the nemesis of *raison d'état* is overextension—except in the hands of a master, and it probably is even then.

For Richelieu's concept of *raison d'état* had no built-in limitations. How far would one go before the interests of the state were deemed satisfied? How many wars were needed to achieve security? Wilsonian idealism, proclaiming a selfless policy, is possessed of the constant danger of neglecting the interests of state; Richelieu's *raison d'état* threatens self-destructive *tours de force.* That is what happened to France after Louis XIV assumed the throne. Richelieu had bequeathed to the French kings a preponderantly strong state with a weak and divided Germany and a decadent Spain on its borders. But Louis XIV gained no peace of mind from security; he saw in it an opportunity for conquest. In his overzealous pursuit of *raison d'état,* Louis XIV alarmed the rest of Europe and brought together an anti-French coalition which, in the end, thwarted his design.

Nevertheless, for 200 years after Richelieu, France was the most influential country in Europe, and has remained a major factor in international politics to this day. Few statesmen of any country can claim an equal achievement. Still, Richelieu's greatest successes occurred when he was the only statesman to jettison the moral and religious restraints of the medieval period. Inevitably, Richelieu's successors inherited the task of managing a system in which most states were operating from his premises. Thereby, France lost the advantage of having adversaries constrained by moral considerations, as Ferdinand had been in the time of Richelieu. Once all states played by the same rules, gains became much more difficult to achieve. For all the glory *raison d'état* brought France, it amounted to a treadmill, a never-ending effort to push France's boundaries outward, to become the arbiter of the conflicts among the German states and thereby to dominate Central Europe until France was drained by the effort and progressively lost the ability to shape Europe according to its design.

Raison d'état provided a rationale for the behavior of individual states,

but it supplied no answer to the challenge of world order. *Raison d'état* can lead to a quest for primacy or to establishment of equilibrium. But, rarely does equilibrium emerge from the conscious design. Usually it results from the process of thwarting a particular country's attempt to dominate, as the European balance of power emerged from the effort to contain France.

In the world inaugurated by Richelieu, states were no longer restrained by the pretense of a moral code. If the good of the state was the highest value, the duty of the ruler was the aggrandizement and promotion of his glory. The stronger would seek to dominate, and the weaker would resist by forming coalitions to augment their individual strengths. If the coalition was powerful enough to check the aggressor, a balance of power emerged; if not, some country would achieve hegemony. The outcome was not foreordained and was therefore tested by frequent wars. At its beginning, the outcome could as easily have been empire—French or German—as equilibrium. This is why it took over a hundred years to establish a European order based explicitly on the balance of power. At first, the balance of power was an almost incidental fact of life, not a goal of international politics.

Curiously enough, this is not how it was perceived by the philosophers of the period. Products of the Enlightenment, they mirrored the eighteenth-century faith that out of a clash of competing interests harmony and fairness would emerge. The concept of the balance of power was simply an extension of conventional wisdom. Its primary goal was to prevent domination by one state and to preserve the international order; it was not designed to prevent conflicts, but to limit them. To the hard-headed statesmen of the eighteenth century, the elimination of conflict (or of ambition or of greed) was utopian; the solution was to harness or counterpoise the inherent flaws of human nature to produce the best possible long-term outcome.

The philosophers of the Enlightenment viewed the international system as part of a universe operating like a great clockwork which, never standing still, inexorably advanced toward a better world. In 1751, Voltaire described a "Christian Europe" as "a sort of great republic divided into several states, some monarchical, the others mixed . . . but all in harmony with each other . . . all possessing the same principles of public and political law, unknown in other parts of the world." These states were "above all . . . at one in the wise policy of maintaining among themselves as far as possible an equal balance of power."[13]

Montesquieu took up the same theme. For him, the balance of power distilled unity out of diversity:

> The state of things in Europe is that all the states depend on each other. . . . Europe is a single state composed of several provinces.[14]

As these lines were being written, the eighteenth century had already endured two wars over the Spanish succession, a war over the Polish succession, and a series of wars over the Austrian succession.

In the same spirit, the philosopher of history Emmerich de Vattel could write in 1758, the second year of the Seven Years' War, that:

> The continual negotiations that take place, make modern Europe a sort of republic, whose members—each independent, but all bound together by a common interest—unite for the maintenance of order and the preservation of liberty. This is what has given rise to the well-known principle of the balance of power, by which is meant an arrangement of affairs so that no state shall be in a position to have absolute mastery and dominate over the others.[15]

The philosophers were confusing the result with the intent. Throughout the eighteenth century, the princes of Europe fought innumerable wars without there being a shred of evidence that the conscious goal was to implement any general notion of international order. At the precise moment when international relations came to be based on power, so many new factors emerged that calculations became increasingly unmanageable.

The various dynasties henceforth concentrated on enhancing their security by territorial expansion. In the process, the relative power positions of several of them altered drastically. Spain and Sweden were sinking into second-rank status. Poland began its slide toward extinction. Russia (which had been entirely absent from the Peace of Westphalia) and Prussia (which played an insignificant role) were emerging as major powers. The balance of power is difficult enough to analyze when its components are relatively fixed. The task of assessing it and reconciling the assessments of the various powers becomes hopelessly intricate when the relative mights of the powers are in constant flux.

The vacuum created in Central Europe by the Thirty Years' War tempted the surrounding countries to encroach upon it. France kept pressing from the west. Russia was on the march in the east. Prussia expanded in the center of the Continent. None of the key Continental countries felt any special obligation to the balance of power so lauded by the philosophers. Russia thought of itself as too distant. Prussia, as the smallest of the Great Powers, was still too weak to affect the general

equilibrium. Every king consoled himself with the thought that strengthening his own rule was the greatest possible contribution to the general peace, and left it to the ubiquitous invisible hand to justify his exertions without limiting his ambitions.

The nature of *raison d'état* as an essentially risk-benefit calculation was shown by the way Frederick the Great justified his seizure of Silesia from Austria, despite Prussia's heretofore amicable relations with that state and despite its being bound by treaty to respect Austria's territorial integrity:

> The superiority of our troops, the promptitude with which we can set them in motion, in a word, the clear advantage we have over our neighbors, gives us in this unexpected emergency an infinite superiority over all other powers of Europe. . . . England and France are foes. If France should meddle in the affairs of the empire, England could not allow it, so I can always make a good alliance with one or the other. England could not be jealous of my getting Silesia, which would do her no harm, and she needs allies. Holland will not care, all the more since the loans of the Amsterdam business world secured on Silesia will be guaranteed. If we cannot arrange with England and Holland, we can certainly make a deal with France, who cannot frustrate our designs and will welcome the abasement of the imperial house. Russia alone might give us trouble. If the empress lives . . . we can bribe the leading counsellors. If she dies, the Russians will be so occupied that they will have no time for foreign affairs. . . .[16]

Frederick the Great treated international affairs as if it were a game of chess. He wanted to seize Silesia in order to expand the power of Prussia. The only obstacle he would recognize to his designs was resistance from superior powers, not moral scruples. His was a risk/reward analysis: if he conquered Silesia, would other states retaliate or seek compensation?

Frederick resolved the calculation in his favor. His conquest of Silesia made Prussia a *bona fide* Great Power, but it also set off a series of wars as other countries tried to adjust to this new player. The first was the War of the Austrian Succession, from 1740 to 1748. In it, Prussia was joined by France, Spain, Bavaria, and Saxony—which in 1743 switched sides—while Great Britain supported Austria. In the second war—the Seven Years' War, from 1756 to 1763—the roles were reversed. Austria was now joined by Russia, France, Saxony, and Sweden, while Great Britain and Hanover supported Prussia. The change of sides was the result of pure calculations of immediate benefit and specific compensations, not of any overriding principle of international order.

Yet a sort of equilibrium gradually emerged out of this seeming anar-

chy and rapine in which each state sought single-mindedly to augment its own power. It was due not to self-restraint but to the fact that no state, not even France, was strong enough to impose its will on all the others and thus form an empire. When any state threatened to become dominant, its neighbors formed a coalition—not in pursuit of a theory of international relations but out of pure self-interest to block the ambitions of the most powerful.

These constant wars did not lead to the devastations of the religious wars for two reasons. Paradoxically, the absolute rulers of the eighteenth century were in a less strong position to mobilize resources for war than was the case when religion or ideology or popular government could stir the emotions. They were restrained by tradition and perhaps by their own insecurity from imposing income taxes and many other modern exactions, limiting the amount of national wealth potentially devoted to war, and weapons technology was rudimentary.

Above all, the equilibrium on the Continent was reinforced and in fact managed by the appearance of a state whose foreign policy was explicitly dedicated to maintaining the balance. England's policy was based on throwing its weight as the occasion required to the weaker and more threatened side to redress the equilibrium. The original engineer of this policy was King William III of England, a stern and worldly Dutchman by birth. In his native Holland he had suffered from the ambitions of the French Sun King and, when he became King of England, set about forging coalitions to thwart Louis XIV at every turn. England was the one European country whose *raison d'état* did not require it to expand in Europe. Perceiving its national interest to be in the preservation of the European balance, it was the one country which sought no more for itself on the Continent than preventing the domination of Europe by a single power. In pursuit of that objective, it made itself available to any combination of nations opposing such an enterprise.

A balance of power gradually emerged by means of shifting coalitions under British leadership against French attempts to dominate Europe. This dynamic lay at the core of almost every war fought in the eighteenth century and every British-led coalition against French hegemony fought in the name of the selfsame European liberties which Richelieu had first invoked in Germany against the Habsburgs. The balance of power held because the nations resisting French domination were too strong to be overcome, and because a century and a half of expansionism progressively drained France of its wealth.

Great Britain's role as the balancer reflected a geopolitical fact of life. The survival of a relatively small island off the coast of Europe would have been jeopardized had all the resources of the Continent been mobi-

lized under a single ruler. For, in such a case, England (as it was before its union with Scotland in 1707) possessed much smaller resources and population and would have sooner or later been at the mercy of a Continental empire.

England's Glorious Revolution of 1688 forced it into an immediate confrontation with Louis XIV of France. The Glorious Revolution had deposed the Catholic King, James II. Searching for a Protestant replacement on the Continent, England chose William of Orange, ruler *(Stadthalter)* of the Netherlands, who had a tenuous claim to the British throne through his marriage to Mary, the daughter of the deposed King. With William, England imported an ongoing war with Louis XIV over what later became Belgium, a land full of important fortresses and harbors within perilously easy reach of the British coast (though this concern developed only over time). William knew that if Louis XIV succeeded in occupying these fortresses, the Netherlands would lose their independence, the prospects for French domination in Europe would multiply, and England would be directly threatened. William's resolve to send English troops to fight for present-day Belgium against France was a precursor of the British decision to fight for Belgium in 1914 when the Germans invaded it.

Henceforth, William would spearhead the fight against Louis XIV. Short, hunchbacked, and asthmatic, William did not at first glance appear to be the man destined to humble the Sun King. But the Prince of Orange possessed an iron will combined with extraordinary mental agility. He convinced himself—almost certainly correctly—that if Louis XIV, already the most powerful monarch in Europe, were permitted to conquer the Spanish Netherlands (present-day Belgium), England would be at risk. A coalition capable of reining in the French King had to be forged, not as a matter of the abstract theory of balance of power but for the sake of the independence of both the Netherlands and of England. William recognized that Louis XIV's designs on Spain and its possessions, if realized, would turn France into a superpower that no combination of states would be able to challenge. To forestall that danger, he sought out partners and soon found them. Sweden, Spain, Savoy, the Austrian Emperor, Saxony, the Dutch Republic, and England formed the Grand Alliance—the greatest coalition of forces aligned against a single power that modern Europe had ever seen. For about a quarter of a century (1688–1713), Louis waged almost constant wars against this coalition. In the end, however, France's pursuit of *raison d'état* was reined in by the self-interest of Europe's other states. France would remain the strongest state in Europe, but it would not become dominant. It was a textbook case of the functioning of the balance of power.

William's hostility to Louis XIV was neither personal nor based on any anti-French sentiment; it reflected his cold assessment of the Sun King's power and boundless ambition. William once confided to an aide that, had he lived in the 1550s, when the Habsburgs were threatening to become dominant, he would have been "as much a Frenchman as he was now a Spaniard"[17]—a precursor of Winston Churchill's reply in the 1930s to the charge that he was anti-German: "If the circumstances were reversed, we could equally be pro-German and anti-French."[18]

William was perfectly willing to negotiate with Louis XIV when he felt the balance of power could best be served by doing so. For William, the simple calculation was that England would try to maintain a rough balance between the Habsburgs and the Bourbons, so that whoever was weaker would maintain, with British help, the equilibrium of Europe. Ever since Richelieu, the weaker side had been Austria, and therefore Great Britain aligned itself with the Habsburgs against French expansionism.

The idea of acting as the balancer did not commend itself to the British public when it first made its appearance. In the late seventeenth century, British public opinion was isolationist, much like that of America two centuries later. The prevailing argument had it that there would be time enough to resist a threat, when and if the threat presented itself. There was no need to fight conjectural dangers based on what some country *might* do later on.

William played the equivalent of Theodore Roosevelt's later role in America, warning his essentially isolationist people that their safety depended on participation in a balance of power overseas. And his countrymen accepted his views far more quickly than Americans embraced Roosevelt's. Some twenty years after William's death, *The Craftsman,* a newspaper typically representative of the opposition, noted that the balance of power was one of "the original, everlasting principles of British politics," and that peace on the Continent was "so essential a circumstance to the prosperity of a trading island, that . . . it ought to be the constant endeavor of a British ministry to preserve it themselves, and to restore it, when broken or disturbed by others."[19]

Agreeing on the importance of the balance of power did not, however, still British disputes about the best strategy to implement the policy. There were two schools of thought, representing the two major political parties in Parliament, and substantially paralleling a similar disagreement in the United States after the two world wars. The Whigs argued that Great Britain should engage itself only when the balance was actually threatened, and then only long enough to remove the threat. By contrast,

the Tories believed that Great Britain's main duty was to *shape* and not simply to protect the balance of power. The Whigs were of the view that there would be plenty of time to resist an assault on the Low Countries after it had actually occurred; the Tories reasoned that a policy of wait-and-see might allow an aggressor to weaken the balance irreparably. Therefore, if Great Britain wished to avoid fighting in Dover, it had to resist aggression along the Rhine or wherever else in Europe the balance of power seemed to be threatened. The Whigs considered alliances as temporary expedients, to be terminated once victory had rendered the common purpose moot, whereas the Tories urged British participation in permanent cooperative arrangements to enable Great Britain to help shape events and to preserve the peace.

Lord Carteret, Tory Foreign Secretary from 1742 to 1744, made an eloquent case for a permanent engagement in Europe. He denounced the Whigs' inclination "to disregard all the troubles and commotions of the continent, not to leave our own island in search of enemies, but to attend our commerce and our pleasures, and, instead of courting danger in foreign countries, to sleep in security, till we are awakened by an alarm upon our coasts." But Great Britain, he said, needed to face the reality of its permanent interest in bolstering the Habsburgs as a counterweight to France, "for if the French monarch once saw himself freed from a rival on that continent, he would sit secure in possession of his conquests, he might then reduce his garrisons, abandon his fortresses, and discharge his troops; but that treasure which now fills the plains with soldiers, would soon be employed in designs more dangerous to our country. . . . We must consequently, my lords, . . . support the House of Austria which is the only power that can be placed in the balance against the princes of the family of Bourbon."[20]

The difference between the foreign-policy strategies of the Whigs and the Tories was practical, not philosophical; tactical, not strategic; and it reflected each party's assessment of Great Britain's vulnerability. The Whigs' policy of wait-and-see reflected the conviction that Great Britain's margin of safety was wide indeed. The Tories found Great Britain's position more precarious. Almost precisely the same distinction would separate American isolationists and American globalists in the twentieth century. Neither Great Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries nor America in the twentieth found it easy to persuade the citizenry that its safety required permanent commitment rather than isolation.

Periodically, in both countries, a leader would emerge who put before his people the need for permanent engagement. Wilson produced the League of Nations; Carteret flirted with permanent engagements on the

Continent; Castlereagh, Foreign Secretary from 1812 to 1821, advocated a system of European congresses; and Gladstone, Prime Minister in the late nineteenth century, proposed the first version of collective security. In the end, their appeals failed, because, until after the end of the Second World War, neither the English nor the American people could be convinced that they faced a mortal challenge until it was clearly upon them.

In this manner, Great Britain became the balancer of the European equilibrium, first almost by default, later by conscious strategy. Without Great Britain's tenacious commitment to that role, France would almost surely have achieved hegemony over Europe in the eighteenth or nineteenth century, and Germany would have done the same in the modern period. In that sense, Churchill could rightly claim two centuries later that Great Britain had "preserved the liberties of Europe."[21]

Early in the nineteenth century, Great Britain turned its *ad hoc* defense of the balance of power into a conscious design. Until then, it had gone about its policy pragmatically, consistent with the genius of the British people, resisting any country threatening the equilibrium—which, in the eighteenth century, was invariably France. Wars ended with compromise, usually marginally enhancing the position of France but depriving it of the hegemony which was its real goal.

Inevitably, France provided the occasion for the first detailed statement of what Great Britain understood by the balance of power. Having sought pre-eminence for a century and a half in the name of *raison d'état*, France after the Revolution had returned to earlier concepts of universality. No longer did France invoke *raison d'état* for its expansionism, even less the glory of its fallen kings. After the Revolution, France made war on the rest of Europe to preserve its revolution and to spread republican ideals throughout Europe. Once again, a preponderant France was threatening to dominate Europe. Conscript armies and ideological fervor propelled French armies across Europe on behalf of universal principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Under Napoleon, they came within a hairsbreadth of establishing a European commonwealth centered on France. By 1807, French armies had set up satellite kingdoms along the Rhine in Italy and Spain, reduced Prussia to a second-rank power, and gravely weakened Austria. Only Russia stood between Napoleon and France's domination of Europe.

Yet Russia already inspired the ambivalent reaction—part hope and part fear—that was to be its lot until the present day. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Russian frontier had been on the Dnieper; a century later, it reached the Vistula, 500 miles farther west. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Russia had been fighting for its existence

against Sweden at Poltava, deep in present-day Ukraine. By the middle of the century, it was participating in the Seven Years' War, and its troops were at Berlin. By the end of the century, it would be the principal agent in the partition of Poland.

Russia's raw physical power was made all the more ominous by the merciless autocracy of its domestic institutions. Its absolutism was not mitigated by custom or by an assertive and independent aristocracy, as was the case with the monarchs ruling by divine right in Western Europe. In Russia, everything depended on the whim of the tsar. It was entirely possible for Russian foreign policy to veer from liberalism to conservatism depending on the mood of the incumbent tsar—as indeed it did under the reigning Tsar Alexander I. At home, however, no liberal experiment was ever attempted.

In 1804, the mercurial Alexander I, Tsar of all the Russias, approached British Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger, Napoleon's most implacable enemy, with a proposition. Heavily influenced by the philosophers of the Enlightenment, Alexander I imagined himself as the moral conscience of Europe and was in the last phase of his temporary infatuation with liberal institutions. In that frame of mind, he proposed to Pitt a vague scheme for universal peace, calling for all nations to reform their constitutions with a view to ending feudalism and adopting constitutional rule. The reformed states would thereupon abjure force and submit their disputes with one another to arbitration. The Russian autocrat thus became the unlikely precursor of the Wilsonian idea that liberal institutions were the prerequisite to peace, though he never went so far as to seek to translate these principles into practice among his own people. And within a few years, he would move to the opposite conservative extreme of the political spectrum.

Pitt now found himself in much the same position vis-à-vis Alexander as Churchill would find himself vis-à-vis Stalin nearly 150 years later. He desperately needed Russian support against Napoleon, for it was impossible to imagine how Napoleon could be defeated in any other way. On the other hand, Pitt had no more interest than Churchill would later have in replacing one dominant country with another, or in endorsing Russia as the arbiter of Europe. Above all, British domestic inhibitions did not allow any prime minister to commit his country to basing peace on the political and social reform of Europe. No British war had ever been fought for such a cause, because the British people did not feel threatened by social and political upheavals on the Continent, only by changes in the balance of power.

Pitt's reply to Alexander I captured all of these elements. Ignoring the

Russian's call for the political reform of Europe, he outlined the equilibrium that would need to be constructed if peace was to be preserved. A general European settlement was now being envisaged for the first time since the Peace of Westphalia a century and a half before. And, for the first time ever, a settlement would be explicitly based on the principles of the balance of power.

Pitt saw the principal cause for instability in the weakness of Central Europe, which had repeatedly tempted French incursion and attempts at predominance. (He was too polite and too eager for Russian help to point out that a Central Europe strong enough to withstand French pressures would be equally in a position to thwart Russian expansionist temptations.) A European settlement needed to begin by depriving France of all her postrevolutionary conquests and, in the process, restore the independence of the Low Countries, thereby neatly making the chief British concern a principle of settlement.[22]

Reducing French preponderance would be of no use, however, if the 300-odd smaller German states continued to tempt French pressure and intervention. To thwart such ambitions, Pitt thought it necessary to create "great masses" in the center of Europe by consolidating the German principalities into larger groupings. Some of the states which had joined France or collapsed ignominiously would be annexed by Prussia or Austria. Others would be formed into larger units.

Pitt avoided any reference to a European government. Instead, he proposed that Great Britain, Prussia, Austria, and Russia guarantee the new territorial arrangement in Europe by means of a permanent alliance directed against French aggression—just as Franklin D. Roosevelt later tried to base the post–World War II international order on an alliance against Germany and Japan. Neither Great Britain in the Napoleonic period nor America in World War II could imagine that the biggest threat to peace in the future might prove to be the current ally rather than the yet-to-be-defeated enemy. It was a measure of the fear of Napoleon that a British prime minister should have been willing to agree to what heretofore had been so adamantly rejected by his country—a permanent engagement on the Continent—and that Great Britain should impair its tactical flexibility by basing its policy on the assumption of a permanent enemy.

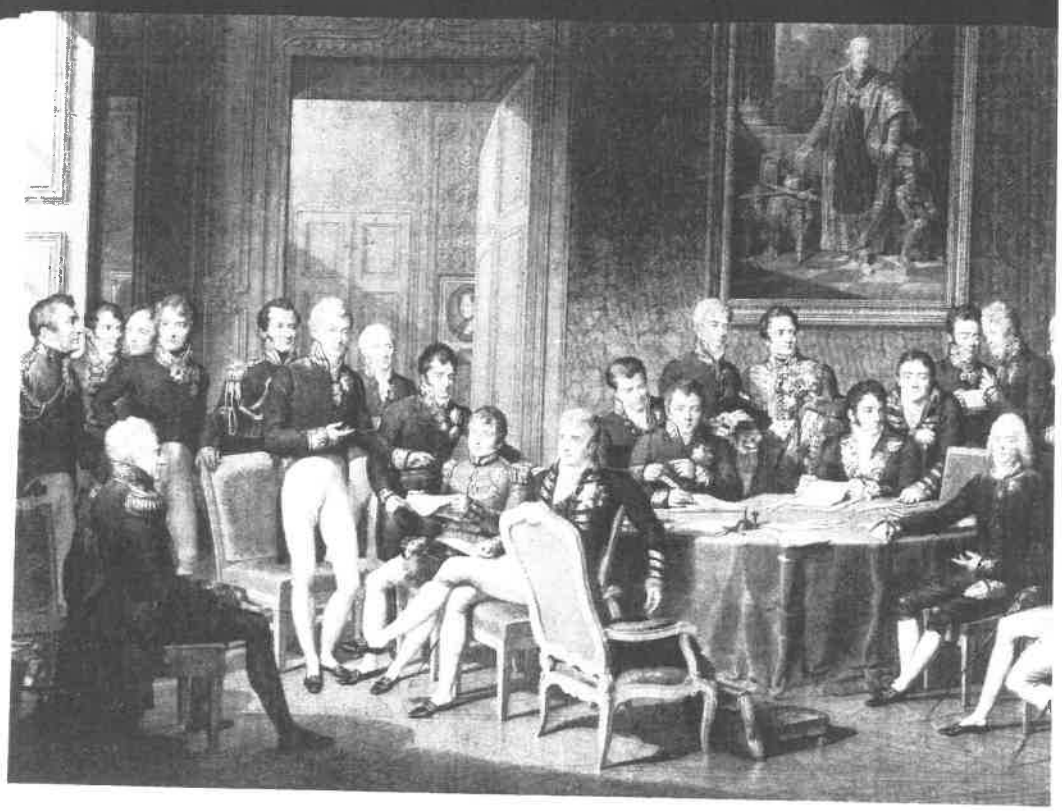
The emergence of the European balance of power in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries parallels certain aspects of the post–Cold War world. Then, as now, a collapsing world order spawned a multitude of states pursuing their national interests, unrestrained by any overriding principles. Then, as now, the states making up the international order were groping for some definition of their international role. Then the

various states decided to rely entirely on asserting their national interest, putting their trust in the so-called unseen hand. The issue is whether the post–Cold War world can find some principle to restrain the assertion of power and self-interest. Of course, in the end a balance of power always comes about *de facto* when several states interact. The question is whether the maintenance of the international system can turn into a conscious design, or whether it will grow out of a series of tests of strength.

By the time the Napoleonic Wars were ending, Europe was ready to design—for the only time in its history—an international order based on the principles of the balance of power. It had been learned in the crucible of the wars of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that the balance of power could not be left to the residue of the collision of the European states. Pitt's plan had outlined a territorial settlement to rectify the weaknesses of the eighteenth-century world order. But Pitt's Continental allies had learned an additional lesson.

Power is too difficult to assess, and the willingness to vindicate it too various, to permit treating it as a reliable guide to international order. Equilibrium works best if it is buttressed by an agreement on common values. The balance of power inhibits the *capacity* to overthrow the international order; agreement on shared values inhibits the *desire* to overthrow the international order. Power without legitimacy tempts tests of strength; legitimacy without power tempts empty posturing.

Combining both elements was the challenge and the success of the Congress of Vienna, which established a century of international order uninterrupted by a general war.



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

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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]

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.

CHAPTER FIVE

Two Revolutionaries: Napoleon III and Bismarck

The collapse of the Metternich system in the wake of the Crimean War produced nearly two decades of conflict: the war of Piedmont and France against Austria of 1859, the war over Schleswig-Holstein of 1864, the Austro-Prussian War of 1866, and the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. Out of this turmoil, a new balance of power emerged in Europe. France, which had participated in three of the wars and encouraged the others, lost its position of predominance to Germany. Even more importantly, the moral restraints of the Metternich system disappeared. This upheaval became symbolized by the use of a new term for unrestrained balance-of-power policy: the German word *Realpolitik* replaced the French term *raison d'état* without, however, changing its meaning.

The new European order was the handiwork of two rather unlikely collaborators who eventually became arch-adversaries—Emperor Napo-