

Territory and Commitment: The Concert of Europe as Self-Enforcing Equilibrium

BRANISLAV L. SLANTCHEV

The pattern of cooperative behavior seen in the Concert of Europe during the first half of the nineteenth century resulted from a commitment to uphold the settlement, which hinged on the credibility of enforcement threats and a distribution of benefits commensurate with military capabilities. The equilibrium was self-enforcing because the powers that could oppose an alteration of the system had incentives to do so, and the powers that could upset it did not have incentives to do so. This behavior is markedly different from eighteenth-century practices, although no change in state preferences is necessary to explain the change in behavior.

Why does peace occur? For all the work on the causes of war, very little has been done on the causes of peace. Studying periods of peace, however, can be particularly useful in examining the consequences of structural change, especially following major wars. When players do not change themselves but do change their behavior, we must carefully examine the environment in which strategic interaction takes place, for variations in structure can explain different behavior when actors are very much the same.¹

The fifty-odd years after the Napoleonic wars, usually referred to as the “Concert of Europe,” have been either lauded for their stable peace or denounced for their reactionary anti-liberalism.² Several arguments have

Branislav L. Slantchev is an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of California, San Diego.

The author would like to thank Robert Walker for numerous insightful discussions, as well as Fred Halliday, Duncan Snidal, and Matthew Rendall for useful comments on previous drafts. Previous versions of this article were presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, 30 August – 2 September 2001, and at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Chicago, 20–24 February 2001. This research has been supported by the National Science Foundation (grant SES-0518222) and by the Watson Center for Conflict and Cooperation at the University of Rochester.

¹ Kenneth N. Waltz, “The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory,” in *The Origin and Prevention of Major Wars*, ed. Robert I. Rotberg and Theodore K. Rabb (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

² These, of course, are not mutually exclusive. For excellent histories of the period, see Charles K. Webster, *The Congress of Vienna, 1814–1815* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1934); Harold Nicolson, *The Congress of Vienna: A Study in Allied Unity, 1812–1822* (London: Constable, 1946); and Tim Chapman, *The Congress of Vienna: Origins, Processes, and Results* (London: Routledge, 1998). Paul W. Schroeder,

been advanced to explain their stability: balance of power, fear of provoking revolution and self-conscious management, assimilation, change in preferences, and general system legitimacy. This article provides an alternative explanation (narrow self-interest) of why the great powers were able to reach a mutually acceptable territorial distribution and how that arrangement sustained their cooperative behavior for almost half a century.

The Concert worked without an overarching principle, a formal organization to resolve disputes, or a system of collective security to enforce its rules. The Vienna territorial settlement structured incentives in such a way as to make enforcement endogenous—it generated credible commitments to uphold it because it delineated spheres of influence such that any significant changes would impinge directly on the interests of enough powers to allow them to counter any such revisionism. This interpretation points to the credibility of the enforcement threats as the essential feature of the Concert, and the potentially fatal consequences of their loss. As such, it is a significant departure from traditional accounts of the Concert that identify nationalism and liberalism as the reasons for its destruction.

This article focuses on the territorial distribution, the incentives it generated, and the resulting patterns of behavior. To explain the workings of the Concert, I first characterize the problems of credible commitments and endogenous enforcement that the designers sought to solve. To compare the new arrangement with its eighteenth-century analogue, I outline the basic features of the Utrecht system and show how it failed to generate such commitment, which resulted in almost constant warfare. I then show how, given the opportunity, means, motives, and capability, the great powers bargained to achieve a territorial distribution that altered the incentives of the member states in a manner desired by the victorious allies. These changes reflected an explicit attempt to deter revanchist attempts by the defeated French, discourage possible revisionist tendencies, invest others with interest in cooperation, and make credible the commitment to uphold the system.

As evidence of this thesis, I study the territorial arrangements and the pattern of interlocking interests associated with them. In the eighteenth century, conflict over territory was the principal source of war. In the first half of the nineteenth century, territory ceased to be a significant source of friction, and war between the great powers did not occur. Since it is unlikely that the character of states had changed, this sharp change in their behavior had to reflect their strategic interaction in the new context, in which threats to enforce the settlement were perceived as credible. The evidence shows how these expectations were borne out when some states attempted to depart from the cooperative equilibrium. The evidence also shows that the system

“The 19th-Century International System: Changes in the Structure,” *World Politics* 39 (October 1986): 1–26, summarizes why the first half of the nineteenth century must rightfully be regarded as profoundly different in the scope of what the great powers managed to achieve compared to the eighteenth century.

was capable of absorbing changes in the territorial distribution as long as these changes did not alter the basic set of incentives. Peace and stability could arise only if the incentives to challenge them were sufficiently altered.

THE ARGUMENT

This section presents the argument, identifies implications for observable behavior that would constitute evidence in its support, and enumerates several types of events that could potentially falsify the explanation offered. First, I need to define the concept of “self-enforcing equilibrium” as used in this article. An equilibrium comprises a set of strategies and beliefs in which each actor’s behavior is conditioned on expectations about how other actors will react to its actions, and in which beliefs are derived from past behavior of other actors. Actions and expectations must be consistent with utility maximization—that is, they must be rational. In equilibrium, no actor has a unilateral incentive to change its behavior or revise its beliefs. An equilibrium is self-enforcing if the enforcement of its rules is endogenous. In other words, the rules themselves are not taken for granted but arise out of the self-interested behavior of the actors. Such an equilibrium may be, but does not have to be, implemented by a formal organization (indeed, as we shall see, the Concert did not depend on such an organization despite the initial periodic meetings of the great powers).³

The concept of anarchy in the international realm subsumes two logically distinct features of that system: the use of coercive power by states to obtain their objectives, and states’ inability to commit credibly to particular agreements even after such agreements are reached by bargaining.⁴ To simplify matters considerably, long peace and stability require that states forgo the use of force as a means of resolving their disputes and refrain from exploiting the weakness of other states. To this end, states must be able to commit credibly to uphold the distribution of benefits generated by the configuration of the system. Although such commitment may permit small changes in the structure as long as these changes do not threaten the position of the individual members, it is essentially conservative in that it explicitly seeks to protect these positions. Any explanation under conditions of anarchy must

³ Andrew Schotter, *The Economic Theory of Social Institutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); and Randall L. Calvert, “Rational Actors, Equilibrium, and Social Institutions,” manuscript (University of Rochester, 1998), elaborate on the idea of self-enforcing equilibrium and actually define institutions with these special types of equilibria. In order to avoid confusion, I will eschew the term “institution” for the clunkier, but more expressive, “self-enforcing equilibrium.”

⁴ This dichotomization is due to Robert Powell, “Guns, Butter, and Anarchy,” *American Political Science Review* 87, no. 1 (March 1993): 115–32. See David A. Lake, “Anarchy, Hierarchy, and the Variety of International Relations,” *International Organization* 50, no. 1 (winter 1996): 1–33, for an argument about alternative security relations in the international system. The two features of anarchy used here apply for his hierarchical model as well, as long as we restrict interest to great powers.

account for endogenous enforcement of agreements, since force is always potentially available to states.

States can credibly promise to refrain from using force if they are either satisfied by the benefits that the system provides them or if they expect that using force would not result in an improvement in their position. In other words, satisfied states do not seek a revision of the status quo because they like it, and dissatisfied states do not attempt a revision because they are deterred. Deterrence crucially depends on the credibility of the enforcement threat. Credibility is usually taken to be synonymous with believability and therefore rationality.⁵ Here I take it to mean something slightly more inclusive: a credible threat is one that is (a) in the interests of the threatening party to carry out, and (b) capable of inflicting sufficient pain on the target should it be carried out. Obviously, a threat that does not cause enough damage will not deter a challenge no matter how believable it is. I use “credible threats” as a shorthand to encompass both requirements. Endogenous enforcement means that for any potential challenge, there exists a state or a group of states whose interests would be directly affected if such a revision were to occur, and that have the capability to make the attempt sufficiently unpleasant for the challenger. The first requirement implies that the threat to resist revision is rational, and the second ensures that it is capable: such a threat is credible.

During the period under consideration, territory was the main source of state power and of benefits associated with the systems.⁶ Both interests and capabilities were, to a large extent, derived from the territories one controlled either through direct rule or indirect influence. Hence, one’s share in the territorial distribution determined one’s position in the system and was the primary source of satisfaction and conflict within it. (Of course, this does not mean that everything can be reduced to the aggregate amount of territory under one’s control: type of terrain, population, strategic location, and presence of navigable waterways all would determine the value and vulnerability of one’s position in the system.) A challenge, then, would inevitably have taken the form of a demand for a territorial revision and successful deterrence would have required that any such demand affect enough states with opposing interests that their combined capabilities would be sufficiently formidable. Similarly, satisfaction would have required that benefits correspond to the interests and capabilities of the state. All of this means that an explanation of peace under anarchy during this period must crucially depend on how the territorial distribution was structured appropriately to either satisfy the powerful or deter the less fortunate.

⁵ Frank C. Zagare and D. Marc Kilgour, *Perfect Deterrence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁶ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Vintage, 1989), 86.

Although states may have strong incentives to agree to some bargain, the incentives after the fact may no longer be compatible with upholding that agreement. If states can anticipate such inconsistencies beforehand, they will attempt to structure the incentives in a way that promotes compliance. Thus, a necessary condition for such an optimal “contract” is that states have the opportunity to create one.⁷ Since endogenous credible commitments depend on the territorial distribution, states must have had the means and opportunity to redesign the map of Europe appropriately. The aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars left central Europe an essentially blank slate (as we shall see, many existing claims to legitimacy of pre-Napoleonic rule were brushed aside), with the victorious great powers able to redraw essential borders. Because the negotiated outcome at the Congress of Vienna reflected the relative capabilities of the participants, the resulting territorial distribution could be structured to provide for satisfaction of the more powerful and the credible deterrence of the rest, thereby eliminating features that would undermine the incentive to uphold the new system.

The Vienna settlement was the creation of a “contract” that enabled participants to commit credibly to upholding the Concert. The agreement reduced problems of compliance because the territorial distribution it created structured incentives such that they produced a credible deterrent to potential revisionists, facilitated cooperation in protecting the new boundaries, and ensured the satisfaction of the most powerful actors. In an anarchic environment, such an agreement could have succeeded only if it had been self-enforcing, which in turn implies that it must have been reached through a bargaining process in which each party’s gain was consistent with its strengths.⁸ The process of negotiation in Vienna produced a territorial distribution whose basic features generated the appropriate incentives precisely because each party was able to extract benefits roughly corresponding to its military capabilities.

This approach emphasizes that there exist several necessary conditions if peace and stability are to obtain as a result of an agreement between states. First, states must anticipate that incentives that are incompatible with stability will result in later conflict even if an agreement is reached. Second, states must be able to design the contract such that it structures the incentives appropriately. During the eighteenth and most of the nineteenth centuries, this could be achieved through altering the geopolitical situation of the parties—territories and population—which is why the focus here is on the territorial distribution. Third, the distribution of benefits from the status quo must be consistent with the expected benefits from the use of force.⁹

⁷ Lake, “Anarchy-Hierarchy,” offers an especially illuminating application of contracts to security.

⁸ See James D. Fearon, “Bargaining, Enforcement, and International Cooperation,” *International Organization* 52, no. 2 (spring 1998): 269–305, on how anticipated benefits from an agreement affect the intensity of bargaining during its negotiation.

⁹ Robert Powell, “Stability and the Distribution of Power,” *World Politics* 48 (January 1996): 239–67.

All these conditions obtained during the Concert of Europe in a significant departure from the eighteenth-century international organization. Statesmen generally recognized the problem of incentive incompatibility and tried to find solutions to address it. They explicitly repudiated the fleeting alliances of the previous century (a demonstration of the commitment problem and of the inadequacy of reputational concerns as a remedy) and were able to design the contract because Napoleon had destroyed most of the small states of central Europe.

To summarize, the years of peace (defined as the absence of great-power war in Europe) obtained because leaders understood that the territorial distribution must provide disincentives to the use of force, either by satisfying the strong or by deterring the weak, and because they had an opportunity to restructure it appropriately in 1815. Peace and stability were characteristics of the cooperative equilibrium, which was sustained through endogenous enforcement threats and satisfaction with the status quo. The dependent variable, therefore, is the maintenance of the essential features of the territorial settlement through peaceful means.

What does this argument require as evidence? Both deterrence and cooperation depend critically on unobserved behavior—that is, on expectations about how the other players will react to an alternative action. If deterrence is successful, there is no application of force in practice, but only because the threat to use it is credible. Similarly, if states do not deviate from cooperation, it is because of beliefs that such deviation would not be profitable. This presents a problem for analysis because observed behavior depends on beliefs about actions that are never taken. Fortunately, there is no need to rely exclusively on counterfactual reasoning. Because international interaction takes place in an environment of incomplete information, states must periodically check the consistency of their beliefs. Thus, one should expect to see actions that affirm expectations (signaling) or test their validity (probing). It is on the basis of these occurrences that one may judge the credibility of threats, and therefore of the argument advanced here.¹⁰

For example, potential revisionists would periodically initiate limited probes to test whether the interests of the opposing states would still impel them to resist. Leaders of these states would retreat as soon as the credibility of the deterrent threat was confirmed by the reaction of the others, and would not press their demands any further. Hence, France attempting some

¹⁰ Since threats are never realized in equilibrium, they are off the equilibrium path. Expectations about such behavior are called “off-the-equilibrium-path beliefs.” Their use in counterfactual reasoning can be very fruitful, as demonstrated by Barry R. Weingast, “Off-the-Path Behavior: A Game-Theoretic Approach to Counterfactuals and Its Implications for Political and Historical Analysis,” in *Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics: Logical, Methodological, and Psychological Perspectives*, ed. Philip E. Tetlock and Aarno Belkin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

adjustments in the east and Prussia in the center must be expected. Further, satisfied states must exercise restraint in their dealings with the others in order to avoid disrupting the system, even if doing so would mean forgoing some immediate benefit: long-term considerations should outweigh short-term temptations. Hence, Russia should refrain from exploiting the Austro-Prussian rivalry in Germany, in a significant departure from its earlier policies under Catherine the Great. Also, because one cannot expect a completely static system, it should be able to accommodate changes that do not alter its fundamental features. Hence, Belgium could become independent as long as it remained neutral and not joined to France. On the other hand, we should expect to see relative freedom of action for the great powers in their own spheres of influence as long as such activities are not aimed at altering the territorial distribution. The strongest evidence in support of the thesis are challenges that would have been made in the absence of the threats but were not made because the actors perceived the consequences correctly.

To avoid circularity, one must ask how this interpretation can be falsified in principle. Because I will argue that Britain and Russia were satisfied powers, any attempt by either one to revise the territorial status quo should be evidence against this assertion. Moreover, to show that I do not simply define satisfaction based on their subsequent behavior, I will demonstrate that they managed to obtain their demands at Vienna because they were the two most powerful states at the time. If Russia was frustrated there, then the settlement could not have satisfied it. Further, eighteenth-century-style opportunism (for example, because of nationalism, revolutionary movements, or rivalries with other powers), especially from Russia or Austria, would imply lack of restraint required by the cooperative equilibrium. Similarly, unopposed French or Prussian attempts to alter the territorial settlement would constitute evidence that borders were not crucial to the maintenance of the system. If statesmen showed no explicit concern with how changes might affect incentives, we would also have to discount the plausibility of the explanation advanced here.

Another type of evidence that would undermine the thesis can come from perceptions of participants as revealed in correspondence, public statements, or memoirs. Although often self-serving and made for strategic purposes, these statements may reveal what actors expected to occur if they undertook alternative courses of action. The equilibrium interpretation critically depends on these off-the-path beliefs because they in turn sustain optimal cooperative behavior. In other words, if we do not find that statesmen from potential revisionists worried about countervailing coalitions forming to block their attempts to break out of the system, then we have *prima facie* evidence that the threat did not exist. If we find them worrying but without altering their behavior as a consequence, then we know the threat was not credible. Similarly, if the satisfied powers did not feel capable of pressing

their demands in the face of opposition from others, then we know that threats against them were perceived as credible, and it was not satisfaction that kept them in line.

Finally, it is worth noting that the very features of the system that produced peace in Europe probably doomed it in the long run. First, because of its dependence on a fixed territorial distribution, it could not account for technological changes that would alter the value of some pieces of territory. Nobody could anticipate in 1815 that the “useless” lands assigned to Prussia would provide the basis of its industrialization fifty years later.¹¹ Second, the Vienna settlement disposed of only European lands; it excluded similar arrangements outside the continent. In particular, it did not deal with territories in the east, where Britain and Russia could come into conflict with each other. It was not possible to handle these lands in 1815 because the Ottoman Empire had not been a participant in the Napoleonic Wars, much less a defeated state whose possessions could be partitioned at will.¹² This meant that events outside of Europe could impinge on the cooperative equilibrium there, especially if one of the potential revisionists hit upon the idea of antagonizing either one of the two dominant powers sufficiently to cause it to withdraw its support for the system in order to redirect it to the east. As we shall see, the Crimean War allowed France to do just that to Russia, essentially spelling the demise of the Concert. But even without this war, the Concert may not have been able to contain Prussia for much longer. At any rate, peace in Europe did not outlast the collapse of the Concert system by long.

¹¹ See David S. Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus: Technological Change and Industrial Development in Western Europe from 1750 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); and William H. McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force, and Society since A.D. 1000* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982). Note especially pp. 203–4 in the former on the startling increase of coal output in the Ruhr. Prussia received territories in the west and was “immensely increased on the Rhine” when Russia forced the settlement in the east. Edward Vose Gulick, *Europe’s Classical Balance of Power: A Case History of the Theory and Practice of One of the Great Concepts of European Statecraft* (New York: Norton, 1967), 257.

¹² Matthew Rendall, “Russia, the Concert of Europe, and Greece, 1821–29: A Test of Hypotheses about the Vienna System,” *Security Studies* 9, no. 4 (summer 2000): 52–90, observes that the great powers often disagreed whether the norms of the concert should even be applied to the Near East. Enno E. Kraehe, “A Bipolar Balance of Power,” *American Historical Review* 97, no. 3 (June 1992): 707–15, 712, emphasizes that the Anglo-Russian rivalry there was “real, keenly felt, and on Russia’s side at any rate vigorously pressed.” Alexander I himself ominously protested in 1821 that the “Ottoman dominions were not protected by the Vienna Treaty.” Charles K. Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Castlereagh, 1815–1822* (London: G. Bell, 1958), 373. Also see Edward Ingram, “Bellicism as Boomerang: The Eastern Question during the Vienna System,” in *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763–1848: Episode or Model in Modern History?* ed. Peter Krüger and Paul W. Schröder (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2002), 206. He charges that “the Vienna Settlement, which left out too much and put in too little, defined Europe too narrowly by leaving out the Ottoman Empire.” I agree with his assessment that “the challenge from the periphery that transformed the European subsystem in the mid-nineteenth century was implicit in the map drawn at the Congress of Vienna.” He seems to be stretching the point, however, by insisting that the European powers simply exported their bellicosity to the periphery, and hence that the European peace can be explained by warfare outside the system.

ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

Before turning to an examination of the settlement and subsequent behavior, it is useful to account briefly for several alternative explanations. In general, there are two broad explanations for the remarkable stability during the first half or the nineteenth century: balance of power and fundamental change either of preferences or of conditions after war caused by a bid for hegemony.

Balance of power (BOP) is perhaps the most common, and certainly the most venerable, explanation.¹³ Although “balance of power” is a notoriously protean concept, a common point of departure based on a minimal definition of the term appears plausible. Robert Jervis enumerates four assumptions that constitute the foundations of BOP: all states must want to survive, they are able to form alliances with each other based on short-term interests, war is a legitimate instrument of statecraft, and several of the actors have relatively equal military capabilities.¹⁴ In such a system, the growth in any one state’s power will eventually be checked by a countervailing coalition of others who become fearful of its expansion and the eventual threat it will pose to the system as it makes its bid for hegemony. From here there are two divergent traditions: one maintains that balancing is automatic, a side effect, a consequence of state behavior but not its goal, and the other sees states as actively pursuing strategies designed to maintain the balance.¹⁵

As its name implies, the distribution of power, usually defined in terms of military capabilities, is central to BOP. In particular, rough equality among several competing actors is frequently posed as a necessary feature of such a system. Even though the “invisible hand” of BOP regulates the system, statesmen must be animated by an explicit concern with checks and balances as they struggle to block the rise of a potential hegemonic power. None of these features can be discerned during the Concert period.

As Paul Schroeder has persuasively argued, there was no rough equality in the distribution of power. Britain and Russia dominated the system unequivocally: the former at sea, with its commercial and financial empire, and the latter on land, with its enormous armies. There could be no balancing (deterrence based on power) against either state because there existed no coalition of central European states that could threaten the hegemonic

¹³ The list is too long to enumerate. Among the authoritative statements are Webster, *Foreign Policy of Castlereagh*; Gulick, *Op. Cit.*, Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1964); and René Albrecht-Carrié, *A Diplomatic History of Europe since the Congress of Vienna rev. ed.* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

¹⁴ Robert Jervis, “From Balance to Concert: A Study of International Security Cooperation,” *World Politics* 38, no. 1 (October 1985): 58–79.

¹⁵ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), is the most eloquent statement of the autopilot version. Paul W. Schroeder, “Did the Vienna Settlement Rest on a Balance of Power?” *American Historical Review* 97, no. 3 (June 1992): 683–706, seems to be using the theory common to historians, which requires explicit balancing.

condominium. "Nothing prevented Britain and Russia, whenever they chose, from combining to impose their will on the rest of Europe, regardless of the feeling, the interests, and even, in certain instances, the independence and integrity of other members."¹⁶ Prussia and Austria were vulnerable strategically and had to depend on one of the flanking powers for protection. In practice, this duty devolved to Russia, which took advantage of this dependence and abandoned Catherine II's earlier strategy of promoting antagonism between the two Germanic states, replacing it with support for their cooperation. It should be noted that even after Otto von Bismarck's successful unification of Germany, the new state was not regarded as a threat by the Russians. France similarly had to rely on external support and frequently sought alliances with both the British and the Russians, usually without much success.

In many instances no checks and balances were possible if one of the two hegemonic powers decided to act. As the Greek case demonstrates, Russia could act unilaterally in the Near East, and the rest could not do much beyond damage control. That is, they could plead with the tsar to exercise restraint and could offer in return allied sanction for his plans. Analogously, despite the severe displeasure of the two central powers (and Russia's withdrawal), Britain and France could impose Belgian independence when they so wished. In a similar fashion, Austria's influence in Italy was mostly unchecked despite French desire to exploit Italian restiveness, and Prussia dominated the north of the German confederation, even as France could enjoy enormous influence in Spain.

It must be clear that whatever the precise definition of BOP theory, two of the assumptions crucial to any BOP specification were violated in the post-Vienna era. This, of course, does not mean that the theory is wrong, but that it did not apply and therefore cannot explain behavior during the period.

Jervis also notes that BOP fails as an explanation of the Concert and offers an alternative theory. According to this view, concert systems arise after, and only after, hegemonic wars. Because these wars tend to be exceedingly costly, they undermine two of the factors on which BOP depends. First, war is no longer perceived as a normal tool of statecraft because winners are highly sensitized to its costs, destructiveness, and accompanying large-scale social unrest. Second, short-term alliances are no longer an option because of the "unusually close bonds among the states of the counter-hegemonic coalition," and because the defeated aspirant to hegemony is not perceived as a normal state, but one that is "especially likely to disturb the status quo," and hence not suitable for partnership.¹⁷

That the system originated after France was defeated in its bid for mastery of Europe was crucial to its functioning, but not in the way Jervis envisions. As we shall see, the aftermath of the wars left central Europe in such a state that

¹⁶ *Idem*, 692.

¹⁷ Jervis, "From Balance to Concert," 60–61.

the victorious powers could redraw the maps to cope with the demands of security and interests in a way that reflected their vulnerabilities and military capabilities. Victory did not lead to particularly cordial relations between the winning states. If anything, the most important period of the Congress of Vienna was constantly perturbed by the bitter antagonism, mutual suspicions, and shared jealousies of the great powers. The disagreements, which brought them to the verge of war in January, in fact helped France into the inner circle and reconstituted it as an important player. This also contradicts the assertion that “the defeated hegemon [was] not a normal state.”¹⁸ In many ways, the continued existence of France as a viable great power had been recognized by the allies even before they overthrew Napoleon. Further, although it is true that it was no longer possible to form alliances of the eighteenth-century type, singling out France as the cause is somewhat stretching it. Two other consequences of the Vienna settlement operated to produce this: there were now simply fewer states with which to ally, especially in central Europe, and the division of the continent into spheres of influence effectively precluded an “outsider” from offering assistance to a small state within another power’s sphere.

The point about war weariness is debatable too, as has been repeatedly demonstrated.¹⁹ War was supposedly not acceptable as a way of resolving disputes because the “experience of fighting a long, difficult war forged unusual bonds among the states . . . normal practices of diplomacy were [abandoned],” and there was a shared interest in avoiding large wars.²⁰ It is very doubtful that this was the case. The memory of a painful war recedes quickly with the economic recovery of the state. Many great wars (1648, 1763, 1914–19) did not produce such war weariness and did not lead to the abandonment of the military instrument. Although nineteenth-century statesmen probably correctly perceived the inherent dangers of prolonged wars—economic strain leading to domestic discontent that could destabilize their rule—it does not follow that they would not resort to arms at all, just that they would have seek to limit the conflicts they start. War remained a legitimate tool of statecraft well into the twentieth century and was used as such by generations of European statesmen.

The explanation offered by Jervis also poses rather demanding requirements on what was necessary to create and maintain the system. For example, since “the change cannot . . . be seen as operating only at the level of individual states and statesmen . . . the new approach had to be adopted by most if not all of them if it was to succeed.”²¹ In other words, every leader had

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁹ Schroeder, “The 19th-Century International System.”

²⁰ Robert Jervis, “A Political Science Perspective on the Balance of Power and the Concert,” *American Historical Review* 97, no. 3 (June 1992): 716–24, 719. Also see Jervis, “From Balance to Concert,” 61.

²¹ Jervis, “A Political Science Perspective,” 723.

to exercise restraint and forgo short-term opportunities to gain an advantage for his country, and he had to be sure that others would do the same, and that everyone else knew that he would behave in that way and knew that they knew, and so on. Jervis himself offers no evidence that this was the case but asserts that “higher levels of communication and more frequent meetings among national leaders increased transparency, lowered the level of debilitating suspicions that plague many attempts at cooperation, and made it less likely that any statesman could think that he could successfully cheat on understandings with others.”²² But this reading exaggerates what transpired at the meetings of the great powers—meetings that were often nerve-racking and very bitter, and that not infrequently ended quite acrimoniously. If anything, the only reason suspicions could be alleviated was because the clear preponderance of power of some states virtually guaranteed that they did not have to engage in deception to gain their ends. Further, as Matthew Rendall has observed for the Greek case and Korina Kagan for the Eastern Question, relations between the great powers were not particularly cooperative or harmonious.²³ Even Dan Lindley, who makes a sustained argument that the Concert did increase transparency in the relations between the great powers, does not share the normatively benign view. Instead, he offers evidence that transparency reduced the dangers of miscalculation and thereby made realpolitik coercive diplomacy more successful and less prone to end in fighting.²⁴

Still, the interpretation Jervis proposes does have several attractive features that the analysis in this article shares. I already mentioned two: a hegemonic war is necessary for a concert to arise, and it is not possible to form profitable short-term alliances. Overall, I share the general thrust of his argument in seeking an explanation based on narrow self-interest where “significant changes in behavior [were] produced by changes in the dangers and opportunities presented by the environment.”²⁵

This puts Jervis (and me) at odds with the third explanation of the period: the most sweeping alternative proposed by Schroeder.²⁶ Although his analysis excels in refuting the BOP interpretation, the alternative he proposes

²² Ibid., 721.

²³ Rendall, “Russia, the Concert of Europe”; and Korina Kagan, “The Myth of the European Concert: The Realist-Institutionalist Debate and Great Power Behavior in the Eastern Question, 1821–41,” *Security Studies* 7, no. 2 (winter 1998): 1–57.

²⁴ Dan Lindley, “Avoiding Tragedy in Power Politics: The Concert of Europe, Transparency, and Crisis Management,” *Security Studies*, 13, no. 2 (winter 2004): 195–229.

²⁵ Jervis, “A Political-Science Perspective,” 722.

²⁶ The most comprehensive treatment is Paul W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763–1848* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994). For his incisive, if somewhat controversial, critique of traditional historical interpretations, see Schroeder, “Did the Vienna-Settlement Rest”; and the responses to it: Kraehe, “Bipolar Balance,” Wolf D. Gruner, “Was There a Reformed Balance of Power System or Cooperative Great Power-Hegemony?” *American Historical Review* 97, no. 3 (June 1992): 725–32; and Jervis, “A Political Science Perspective”; Paul W. Schroeder, “A Mild Rejoinder,” *American Historical Review* 97, no. 3 (June 1992): 733–6, responds (sometimes less than convincingly) to these critics. The debate continues. See the excellent collection in Krüger and Schröder, *Transformation of European Politics*.

does not appear compelling. He begins by noting the dual Anglo-Russian hegemony that made BOP impossible, and that stability was predicated on the exercise of sub-hegemonies in each great power's sphere of interest. Hegemonic stability theory does posit that some leading state organizes the international system with its specific interests in mind and provides public goods, such as peace and stability.²⁷

The presence of the flanking hegemonies was very important, but not the entire story. The Anglo-Russian condominium did not impose its rules on Europe and, in fact, Russia's ability to do so unilaterally has been greatly exaggerated. Russia did not, and perhaps could not, do what Catherine II had done. British withdrawal from active participation in continental affairs by 1822 also presents a problem for this explanation. Russia did not jump at the opportunity to bully the now fatally weakened Austrians. If anything, Russian imperial policy showed restraint that was not commensurate with its military strength. It reflected general satisfaction with the distribution of benefits on the continent, and Russia's conflicting interests with Britain on the Eastern Question also made it unlikely that the two could gang up on the rest.

In omitting these considerations, Schroeder creates another puzzle: Why didn't these two simply impose their rules on the rest? Although he comes close to suggesting that they almost did, Schroeder prefers to assert that restraint and stability arose from "mutual consensus on norms and rules, respect for law, and an overall balance among the various actors in terms of rights, security, status, claims, duties, and satisfactions rather than power."²⁸ That is, statesmen had learned the hard lessons of the Napoleonic Wars, and as a consequence internalized new norms of international behavior that were very different from traditional eighteenth-century balance-of-power politics, a transformation of European politics.²⁹ However, as Enno Kraehe has observed, the evidence for such profound transformation is rather slim, frequently dependent on interpretation of phrases and statements instead of analysis of cold, hard facts.³⁰ For example, France was not absorbed so quickly because it was the right thing to do. After the Hundred Days, Russia endeavored to dictate to the government in Paris, and Prussia attempted to detach Alsace-Lorraine from France. It was only when the real possibility of

²⁷ Charles P. Kindleberger, *The World in Depression, 1929–39* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973); and Robert Gilpin, *The Political Economy of International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

²⁸ Schroeder, "Did the Vienna Settlement Rest," 694. Russian normative self-restraint is central to Schroeder's thesis but can really only explain Alexander I's behavior, and not without some caveats. Rendall, "Russia, the Concert of Europe", stresses the importance of the tsar's idiosyncratic personality. For the limitations of the benevolent Russian self-restraint hypothesis, see Kagan, "Myth"; and Matthew Rendall, "Restraint or Self-Restraint of Russia: Nicholas I, the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi, and the Vienna System, 1832–1841," *International History Review* 24, no. 1 (March 2002): 37–63.

²⁹ Schroeder, *Transformation*.

³⁰ Kraehe, "Bipolar Balance."

a Russo-French entente emerged that the British foreign secretary Viscount Castlereagh joined the Austrian foreign minister Klemens von Metternich in preventing it from happening.

Returning to our question, Anglo-Russian restraint is even more puzzling in light of how the two states had behaved barely thirty years earlier: how can a system based on hegemonies be peaceful when a similar one had promoted near constant warfare from 1792 on? Schroeder's reply is that "the answer is easy: the character and spirit of post-1815 hegemonies . . . were drastically different—selfish and predatory before, relatively benign, inactive, and tolerable thereafter."³¹ This is not an explanation, but a description. The "evidence" that follows this assertion merely describes the behavior of Russia with respect to central Europe, Britain with respect to its colonial empire and France, and the Austro-Prussian cooperation in Germany. What remains frustratingly elusive is the cause of such profound changes in preferences of all these actors.

Further, the idea that hegemonies could explain everything is missing an essential ingredient. All great powers (with the possible exception of France) remained capable of threatening their neighbors. By Schroeder's own definition, Britain and Russia were especially menacing: the former could threaten any nation that was vulnerable by sea, and the latter could do so to Turkey, among others. But the same went for others: Austria could threaten the small Italian states, and Prussia could bully its German neighbors. What we need, then, is an explanation of why such threats never materialized. Why did the great powers refrain from destroying the independence of smaller states?

Schroeder answers that even though the great powers were mindful of these threats, "the allies chose moral, legal, and political means rather than balance of power measures to maintain a balance in this vital respect."³² But did they? If the threat to block such an attempt is credible, then we would not observe war, as states would limit themselves to periodic probes. Restraint may have been due to voluntary acceptance of new norms or it may have been simply due to making revisionism too costly. One way to ensure stability is to allow each great power to maintain its own sphere of influence without (or with minimal) interference from the others. If Sardinia could not depend on French support because the pentarchy had sanctioned Austrian dominance in Italy, then it may have been loath to challenge Austria. And if Austria knew that, it could maintain its rule in the region with minimal violence and without having to absorb or destabilize smaller states. And with respect to Russia, why would such a dominant country agree to be bound by such rules?

³¹ Schroeder, "Did the Vienna Settlement Rest," 701.

³² *Ibid.*, 698.

The main problem with Schroeder's account is that it is even more demanding than the one proposed by Jervis: in arguing that BOP cannot explain the Concert, Schroeder asserts that statesmen had undergone a profound transformation in their preferences. This view is particularly untenable because it does not explain how that mutual consensus arose, or why states were able to agree on it. Even worse, the argument reduces to an unwarranted assumption that is derived from observable behavior. When some evidence contradicts the assumption, it is summarily dismissed. For example, Schroeder characterizes the Polish-Saxon crisis at the Congress of Vienna as "the occasion when the old eighteenth-century balance of power politics flared up most dangerously . . . but failed in the end to prevail."³³ Why such a bold dismissal? Because this was an instance when Russia asserted its right of conquest and was able to obtain whatever it wished at the expense of the other states, contrary to the supposed norms governing and restraining behavior. As we shall see, Russia's ability to fulfill its wishes at Vienna goes a long way toward explaining its subsequent satisfaction with that system, which in turn helps account for Russia's unwillingness to challenge it.

In this connection, it is worth noting that both Kraehe and Schroeder reject "intelligent design" at Vienna because, despite the rhetoric they preached, the "equilibrists" pursued singularly hegemonic goals. Yet this supports my point that the system worked precisely because the territorial settlement was based on capabilities and interests rather than some illusory system of normative and legalistic checks and balances for everyone involved.

In the end, Schroeder's account, although better than balance of power, requires that we assume a change in preferences. It is not apparent to me that such a profound transformation occurred. Schroeder's book offers a sweeping and erudite narrative of the period, yet nowhere does it explain the reasons for such a change. Given the alacrity with which statesmen reverted to using the military instrument after the demise of the Concert (and they never abandoned it outside Europe even during the Concert), it is doubtful that such an explanation can be maintained: after all, one has to wonder what caused the regression.³⁴ Hence, the onus must be on demonstrating the source and factual reality of a change in preferences. In the absence of such evidence, more parsimonious explanations would have to take precedence.

My analysis assumes that state preferences were essentially the same as during the eighteenth century. The new strategic context, however, prescribed behavior that was remarkably different. Changes in observable behavior need not implicate new preferences as their source. In this, both Jervis and I agree with Charles Lipson's assessment that the Concert succeeded

³³ *Ibid.*, 702–3. Kraehe, "Bipolar Balance" 710–11, presents a particularly disarming counter to Schroeder's version of events.

³⁴ Jervis, "From Balance to Concert," 724, does wonder: "The system as described is vulnerable to a return to a more predatory stance on the part of one or more of the major states."

“without the need for elaborate new institutions and without transforming the self-interested behavior of states.”³⁵ Even while maintaining the narrow self-interest interpretation, I disagree with Jervis that the Concert required “explicit and self-conscious management.”³⁶ Further, contrary to the “autopilot” version of BOP, the system did need a specific structure of incentives to ensure satisfaction and credible deterrence; there was nothing natural about it. Finally, this account also helps us understand why peace and stability collapsed: it was not because yet another mysterious transformation of preferences took place, but because the Crimean War altered the system of incentives such that maintaining the European status quo was no longer optimal for potential revisionists.

THE UTRECHT SYSTEM, 1713–1814

To appreciate the innovations at the Congress of Vienna and the Concert system that it produced, it is helpful to outline briefly several important characteristics of the violent eighteenth century. The Treaties of Utrecht (1713) and Rastatt (1714) ended the final bid for European hegemony by France under Louis XIV, the War of the Spanish Succession. Although Philip V retained the Spanish throne, he was removed from the French line of succession, preventing a future union of the two countries. Austria secured the Spanish Netherlands, as well as Naples, Milan, and Sardinia in Italy. Britain walked away with Gibraltar, Minorca, and a thirty-year monopoly on the slave trade in Spanish America. France escaped adjustment to its European holdings, although it did give up colonial possessions in North America.

Superficially, there are many similarities in the situation and behavior of European states in the aftermath of the War of the Spanish Succession and the Napoleonic Wars. In both cases, a coalition of great powers defeated a state with hegemonic designs. Both at Utrecht and at Vienna, the victorious states signed a series of treaties to create a new European order. In both cases, defeated France was admitted back into the “family of states” fairly quickly. In both cases, the great powers established a quadruple alliance to enforce the particulars of the treaties. And in both cases, they tried to manage the system collectively through conferences. The results, however, differed dramatically. The eighteenth century can be characterized as a period of almost incessant warfare, mainly among the great powers, and overwhelmingly over territorial disputes, whereas the fifty years that followed the Congress of Vienna were quite peaceful.³⁷ Four central features distinguish the Utrecht period from

³⁵ Charles Lipson, “Is the Future of Collective Security Like Its Past?” in *Collective Security beyond the Cold War*, ed. George W. Downs (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 119.

³⁶ Jervis, “From Balance to Concert,” 724.

³⁷ Kalevi J. Holsti, *Peace and War: Armed Conflicts and International Order 1648–1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 85–87, lists thirty-four European conflicts between 1715 and 1814,

the Concert of Europe: (1) inability to fight a decisive war, (2) the territorial fragmentation of the Germanic great powers, (3) a great number of small states, and (4) principles of territorial compensation and exchange. These combined to prevent states from credibly committing to any territorial distribution, and this inability resulted in opportunism and what Talleyrand called the “fleeting alliances” that produced frequent conflict.

The eighteenth century saw great developments in the style and way of waging war, or what one historian has aptly named the “bureaucratization of violence.”³⁸ The process of replacing the armies whose obligations derived from feudal or commercial contracts with professional armed forces in the service of the state was complete and resulted in a new relationship between the military and society.³⁹ The expenses associated with recruitment, training, and maintenance of professional armies made states reluctant to sacrifice them in pitched battles. The wars of the century were therefore characterized by marches and sieges, with the attending logistic and supply problems.⁴⁰

The rise of professional armies, however, had a profound impact on state ability and desire to fight decisive wars. There are two reasons why European monarchs were generally unable to reach decisive victories. First, as I mentioned, it was exceedingly difficult to raise and train a high-quality army, which meant that officers sought ways to preserve it rather than engage in protracted fighting. Second, it was expensive to maintain a regular army. Generally, the upkeep cost between 40 and 50 percent of total expenditure in peacetime, and this figure could jump to 80 to 90 percent in war.⁴¹ Only the larger states, such as Britain and France, could afford such extravagance, and even they could not sustain it for long. The smaller powers, such as Austria and Prussia, had little hope of meeting such costs on their own. Although roughly proportional to the wealth of the countries, the armies were not wildly dissimilar in size.⁴² These two factors reduced the incentive and ability to fight decisive wars. Since no war could be considered final, the settlements they produced were often provisional and contingent on the continuation of the good fortunes of the victor. Opportunism resulted in dramatic shifts as states chose to expand local conflicts, re-entered wars to steal more territories from exhausted sides, or switched allies as expectations of success

of which twenty-three were fought over territory, with eight fights to undo previous settlements. Great powers fought among themselves twenty times. In contrast, during the Concert era European states fought thirteen times, with territorial claims involved in five of these disputes. Great powers went to war among themselves only once in 1853–56.

³⁸ McNeill, *Pursuit of Power*, 144.

³⁹ Michael Howard, *War in European History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 54.

⁴⁰ Barry R. Posen, “Nationalism, the Mass Army, and Military Power,” *International Security* 18, no. 2 (fall 1993): 80–124.

⁴¹ Kennedy, *Rise and Fall*, 85.

⁴² See *Ibid.*, 99, table 4. It is instructive to note that in the middle of the century, the smallest of the great-power armies (Prussia’s) was 60 percent of the size of the largest (France’s and Russia’s).

changed.⁴³ Many of the wars resulted from efforts to recover territories lost in earlier fights.

Two factors exacerbated these problems by providing need, means, and opportunity to engage in destabilizing behavior. First, the territorial fragmentation of the two Germanic powers placed them in precarious strategic positions. The far-flung Habsburg holdings were difficult to defend and tempting for aspiring conquerors, who tended to be predatory powers on the lookout for moments of Austrian weakness. The effort to maintain the inheritance “required a nightmarish diplomatic and military juggling.”⁴⁴ Prussia’s position was very similar: the separation of Brandenburg from East Prussia virtually guaranteed efforts to consolidate the holdings, predictably at Polish expense.

Second, the sheer number of small states made diplomacy a Byzantine business whose maze is difficult to follow even today. Although the smaller European states no longer played the active role they had in the seventeenth century, they became objects of aggression as the great powers traded territories or found themselves in need of allies or money. Saxony is an egregious example of shifting allegiance (although it gained little for its troubles, as most benefit went to its more powerful neighbors). As William McNeill noted, “the multiplicity of European states produced an enormous political confusion. Diplomatic and military alignments shifted from time to time in kaleidoscopic fashion.”⁴⁵

If there is a key to the diplomatic practice of the eighteenth century, it is the combined principles of territorial compensation and exchange. Territory was essential because it defined strategic boundaries, held population (soldiers and tax base) and raw materials, and provided access to and control of trade routes. I do not want to diminish the role of other factors, such as economic and fiscal strength or organizational efficiency, but territory was seen as the prime determining factor of state power. In a significant departure from the legal Westphalian principles, “dynasts ceased to think of territory in terms of family patrimony, regarding it instead as a commodity that could be employed for a variety of domestic and foreign policy purposes.”⁴⁶ This flexibility was useful in state efforts to consolidate holdings, enhance security, and acquire new sources of revenue.

Since territory had become a strategic commodity, it is not surprising that the principle of “compensation” was widely applied throughout the period. According to this principle, a gain by any one state had to be matched by corresponding gains by others. Because wars were so expensive, rulers

⁴³ An example of all aspects of such behavior is the War of the Austrian Succession. As Reed Browning, *The War of the Austrian Succession* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1993), 367–68, notes, the war might have ended in any of the years it lasted had it not been for the opportunism of the warring parties.

⁴⁴ Kennedy, *Rise and Fall*, 90.

⁴⁵ McNeill, *Pursuit of Power*, 148.

⁴⁶ Holsti, *Peace and War*, 90.

generally preferred to achieve their ends through bargaining. Negotiations, however, were unlikely to be successful unless both sides had something, usually territory, that they could exchange. This dictated the acquisition of territories that were of little intrinsic interest but that could be valuable either for a trade or as a bargaining chip should the country find itself in need of assistance. The end result of these practices was that “territories were shuffled around, swapped and bartered in unscrupulous fashion.”⁴⁷ The fleeting alliances were one of the manifestations of the resulting opportunism. They were concluded for particular objectives, were thus short-term, and were not expected to outlast a change in circumstances. There was thus no particular distribution of territories that could not be undone by some coalition of states. “Territorial aggrandisement was the principal object of the greater Powers, and any means were considered justifiable in order to secure those aims.”⁴⁸

THE CONGRESS OF VIENNA

To understand the new Concert, it is necessary to see the problems that it was designed to solve. The bloody wars that had engulfed Europe for two decades made containment of French aggression a natural focal point of the four victorious powers. The Utrecht system had failed to prevent the hegemonic drive of the very state it was supposed to neutralize. Thus, the territorial settlement reflected the concerns with possible French revanchism, Russian westward expansion, future Austro-French conflict in Italy, and Prussian aggrandizing tendencies.

There were four main features of the settlement. First, the great powers arrogated to themselves the authority to decide the new European order and were determined to impose the solution on the smaller states. The secret Article I of the First Peace of Paris signed 30 May 1814 specified that “the disposal of the Territories . . . shall be regulated . . . by the Allied Powers among themselves.”⁴⁹ The problem with this became immediately apparent when all minor powers, allied, neutral, or belligerent, sent their delegations to the Congress of Vienna under the impression that they would be allowed to make their cases and press territorial claims. For all of Talleyrand’s protestations that France was safeguarding the rights of the smaller powers, the moment France gained entry to the council of the other four, he abandoned the pretense. Lacking legitimate precedent for usurping the division of the spoils, the great powers negotiated informally among themselves, with decisions

⁴⁷ Evan Luard, *The Balance of Power: The System of International Relations, 1648–1815* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1992), 202.

⁴⁸ Arthur Hassall, *Balance of Power, 1715–1789* (London: Macmillan, 1896), 5.

⁴⁹ Quotations from various treaties refer to texts in Edward Hertslet, ed., *The Map of Europe by Treaty* (London: Harrison, 1875), unless otherwise noted.

rubber-stamped by the Committee of Eight.⁵⁰ The “great power tutelage” was a new, if not surprising, development in European politics.⁵¹ This doctrine, forcefully upheld by the British foreign minister, Palmerston, in 1846, was to endure.⁵²

Second, France was quickly assimilated into the new system.⁵³ Two points about this are worth noting. First, to prevent French revisionism, the allies settled (twice) on lenient terms. Even after Napoleon’s second bid for power, France did not lose much territory (scaled back to its 1790 borders), and although it had to pay an indemnity of 700 million francs and support an occupational army, the army was withdrawn ahead of schedule. These terms were indeed remarkably generous considering the turmoil and general destruction that France had caused.⁵⁴ Second, the acrimonious negotiations over Poland and Saxony exposed Austria’s weakness and the need to rely on French support to counter Russo-Prussian scheming. The rift between Russia (with Prussia) and Austria (with Britain) caused a deadlock over the Polish-Saxon question in Vienna.⁵⁵ Castlereagh protested that Tsar Alexander I “would not be satisfied to rest his pretensions on a title of conquest in opposition to the general sentiments of Europe,” which is exactly what the tsar ended up doing.⁵⁶ Faced with Russian intransigence and Prussian belligerence, Austria and Britain signed a secret treaty with France on 3 January 1815 with the express purpose of checking Prussia’s designs on Saxony. Having carried the day on the Polish issue, Alexander abandoned Prussian chancellor Karl von Hardenberg, who had to back down, much to the

⁵⁰ Nicolson, *Congress of Vienna*, 137–47. The eight were the signatories to the 1814 Treaty of Paris, and included the Big Four, Sweden, Portugal, Spain, and, of course, France.

⁵¹ Richard B. Elrod, “The Concert of Europe: A Fresh Look at an International System,” *World Politics* 28 (January 1976): 159–74, 6–7.

⁵² Palmerston stated that it was impossible to change the territorial order “in a manner inconsistent with the Treaty of Vienna without the concurrence of the other powers who were party to that Treaty.” Cited in F. R. Bridge and Roger Bullen, *The Great Powers and the European States System, 1815–1914* (London: Longman, 1980), 4.

⁵³ See Charles F. Doran, *The Politics of Assimilation: Hegemony and Its Aftermath* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), pt. 4, for an analysis that concentrates exclusively on containment of French revisionist tendencies. It seems to me that such a view is too limiting because, as this analysis shows, French aggression was by far not the only concern of the statesmen at Vienna.

⁵⁴ Wellington argued that if France was stripped of too much territory, peace would last only until it found “a suitable opportunity of endeavoring to regain what she has lost; and . . . we shall find how little useful the cessions we have acquired will be against a national effort to regain them.” Cited in Andreas Osiander, *The States System of Europe, 1640–1990* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 202.

⁵⁵ Gulick, *Europe’s Classical Balance*, 200–4.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Webster, *Congress of Vienna*, 120. Alexander’s attitude was, “I have two hundred thousand men in the Duchy of Warsaw. Let them drive me out if they can. . . . Your public law is nothing to me: I don’t understand all that. What do you think are all your parchments and treaties to me?” Alexander to Talleyrand, from a letter to King Louis XVIII, in Duc de Broglie, *Memoirs of the Prince de Talleyrand*, 2 vols., trans. Raphael de Beaufort (New York: Putnam, 1891), vol. 2: 277; also quoted in Doran, *Politics of Assimilation* 166; and Lindley, “Avoiding Tragedy.”

chagrin of the Prussian army. On 12 January, the Council of Five had its first meeting.⁵⁷

Third, the great powers “divided the commons” into spheres of influence with nearly complete disregard of national sentiment, legal dynastic claims, or moral obligations. The great powers did set up a Statistical Committee to quantify the populations, but it was exclusively concerned with numbers, not with any national, educational, or religious characteristics. Talleyrand complained that this “enumeration of souls” did not take into account the qualitative value of the territories, but he was rebuffed.⁵⁸ The most glaring example of this practice is the fact that the Vienna settlement reconstituted only 38 of the more than 350 German states. Although the allies had to reward the princes who had fought on their side, they recognized that German disunity had greatly facilitated Napoleon’s conquests.

The principle of dynastic legitimacy was set aside. The fates of the Saxon and Neapolitan rulers are illustrative. To secure Saxony for Prussia, Hardenberg had come up with the infamous plan to give the king of Saxony an entirely new kingdom to the west, all the way to the French border. Nobody objected to the transportation scheme on the basis of its illegitimacy. Instead it was the weakness of the new state that raised problems because it would not work as a buffer against France.⁵⁹ Similarly pragmatic concerns decided the fate of Naples. Its king, Murat, had been guaranteed his throne by Austria (with the connivance of the British and the Russians) in exchange for deserting Napoleon, which proved a great boon in the war. However, as the deposed emperor’s brother-in-law, Murat was abhorrent to Louis XVIII and very inconvenient for Metternich, who had expansive plans for Austrian dominance in Italy. To secure French support on the Saxon and German settlements, Castlereagh and Metternich conspired to sacrifice Murat. Only the king’s defection to Napoleon during the Hundred Days saved the conspiracy from embarrassing exposure.

Fourth, the settlement reflected the bargaining strength of the parties. The ability of Russia to get away with usurping territories against the wishes of the other three states was very different from the eighteenth-century indecisive standstill. The emergence of Britain and Russia as the dominant sea and land powers, respectively, fundamentally altered the strategic calculations of

⁵⁷ The Council of Five (the Big Four and France) was the most important body that made the crucial decisions, often with no more than token consultation with the smaller allies. Webster, *Congress of Vienna*, 203–4.

⁵⁸ Nicolson, *Congress of Vienna*, 146. See also Webster, *Congress of Vienna*, 207; and Gulick, *Europe’s Classical Balance* 248–51. It must be noted that much of the alleged trafficking of souls did not occur at the Congress. It was Napoleon who did the initial reduction in numbers when he distributed all the ecclesiastical states and free cities to the secular princes in 1803 and abolished the Holy Roman Empire in 1806 after defeating Austria.

⁵⁹ Idem, 242. Eventually, the exiled king was deprived of half his kingdom, and when he became infuriated, he was told that “the three had come, not to have his opinion, but his consent.” Osiander, *States System*, 245–46.

the other players. Neither of the three continental powers could hope to survive without the assistance of either of the flanking powers. The size difference is quite substantial, even considering only military personnel. In 1816, Russia had 800,000 men, followed by Britain with 255,000 and Austria with 220,000. France and Prussia trailed with 132,000 and 130,000 men, respectively.⁶⁰

The resolute action of the Fourth Coalition during the Hundred Days held the settlement together. It established a credible threat that any future revanchist attempts would be met with a common front. The specifics of the conditions that would trigger that response were laid out in the Quadruple Alliance, which was signed on 20 November 1815, the same day as the Second Peace of Paris. Article III, which was a straightforward renewal of the Treaty of Chaumont, was the one solely directed against French aggression. Even when the Quintuple Alliance was signed with France in 1818 at the Aix-la-Chapelle Congress, the original Quadruple Alliance was renewed.⁶¹

I now turn to the territorial settlement. Some contemporary observers were puzzled by Britain's apparent failure to ensure its predominance on the continent or pursue its interests with more vigor.⁶² This betrays confusion about the extent to which Castlereagh achieved British goals. To begin with, he managed to exclude the crucially important maritime rights and colonial questions from consideration at the Congress altogether. Britain's most important territorial gains lay outside Europe. The naval supremacy of its fleet established at Trafalgar allowed the capture of almost all of the French, Dutch, and Danish colonies. Although Castlereagh was not averse to bargaining away colonies that supplied raw materials, he refused to do so with the ones that housed naval bases. Britain retained its unchallenged sea power and could position itself to appear as the mediator in continental disputes.⁶³

Britain did not desire territorial aggrandisement in Europe and had a single overriding objective: to prevent any one power from dominating Europe. In practice, this meant the containment of France and Russia. As part of the French containment scheme, Castlereagh envisioned the creation of a large united kingdom of the Netherlands under British influence. To that

⁶⁰ Kennedy, *Rise and Fall*, 154, table 8. Although the enormous number of Russian troops belied their military preparedness, the gap was overwhelming. Britain was also not nearly as close to Austria as the numbers suggest, primarily due to the former's naval preponderance.

⁶¹ Most historians acknowledge the importance of the renewal of the Chaumont Treaty in 1815. See, for example, Webster, *Congress of Vienna*, 162–63; Gulick, *Europe's Classical Balance*, 209; and Holsti, *Peace and War*, 129. For a dissenting (as usual) view, see A.J.P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848–1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), 1–2.

⁶² Friedrich von Gentz, for example, professed bewilderment over Castlereagh's "neutral attitude . . . being in the position to become the arbiter of Europe, he only afforded her weak and partial assistance." He could not understand why Britain would fail to profit from its successes and the part it had played in the coalition. Cited by Nicolson, *Congress of Vienna*, 128.

⁶³ Webster, *Congress of Vienna*, 200.

end, the money from the British compensations to Holland was earmarked for construction of fortresses on the Belgian border to strengthen the cordon.⁶⁴ When his initial plan of a united Austro-Prussian center fell through, he worked on the rapprochement between Austria and France as a counterweight to Russia and Prussia. The various territorial transfers eventually ensured that through the client states of Holland and Hanover, Britain “had something to say about every river, large or small, which flowed into the North Sea from Dunkirk to Denmark. For a country committed to sea power, these arrangements were little short of heaven.”⁶⁵ As Harold Nicolson concluded, the assertions that Britain failed to seize the opportunity to gain its ends at Vienna “display a misapprehension, on the one hand of the true nature of British ambitions, and on the other hand of the very valuable assets which were, in fact, obtained.”⁶⁶

The key to understanding the territorial settlement is the Russian acquisition of the lion's share of the Duchy of Warsaw, which had a domino effect on the other divisions. With Alexander I prevailing on the Polish issue, Austria opposed Prussian annexation of Saxony, which meant Prussia had to be compensated in the Rhineland. Austria, which renounced possession of the Netherlands, had to be compensated in Italy. This had to contend with opposition from France. Britain, of course, insisted on Holland and Hanover as strategic checks on France in the north.

The tough bargaining tactics of Alexander on Poland and the subsequent war scare over Saxony showed that Russia could obtain anything it wanted for itself, even though it may not have wanted to risk war on behalf of a weaker friend. By early December, Austria and Britain had conceded defeat on the Polish question: Russia was going to have its way there and nothing could alter that. Schroeder's assessment is as correct as it is blunt: “The initial confrontation, which pitted Russia against Austria supported by Britain and France and momentarily by Prussia, was won by Russia hands down.”⁶⁷ Having achieved his territorial and constitutional goals in Poland, Alexander joined the other three powers in coercing Prussia into accepting less than half of its demands in Saxony. There was no sense in undermining a system in which Russia could enjoy the fruits of conquest for the sake of a junior partner.

⁶⁴ Chapman, *Congress of Vienna*, 51–53.

⁶⁵ Gulick, *Europe's Classical Balance*, 252.

⁶⁶ Nicolson, *Congress of Vienna*, 205.

⁶⁷ Schroeder, *Transformation*, 537. It could not have been otherwise for, as he notes later, “balance-of-power tactics, like God, favour the *beati possidentes* and the big battalions.” This episode also undermines in part his thesis that Russia was willing to restrain itself. Rendall offers a more detailed assessment of the expectations of the various sides about the desirability of war against Russia over Poland and reaches the same conclusion. See Matthew Rendall, “Between Power and Preferences: Realism, Idealism and the Concert of Europe,” Manuscript, School of Politics, University of Nottingham (2005).

Although the plan to hold Russia could not work, building the “arc of constraint” around France proved more successful. The idea was to surround France with a buffer of medium states, the cordon sanitaire, consisting of a strong Kingdom of the Netherlands (closely allied with Britain) to the north, hostile German states (Prussian presence in the Rhineland, Bavaria, and Baden) in the center, the new Swiss Confederation (declared neutral in perpetuity), and Sardinia rounding off the cordon to the south (substantially strengthened by the annexation of Savoy), with Austria controlling most of Italy. Replacing the multitude of small and vulnerable German states from the pre-Napoleonic era with medium-sized and relatively closely aligned ones would prevent French attempts to expand eastward for at least two reasons. First, retaining the small German states in near-perpetual chaos would be tempting to both Prussia and Austria, exacerbate their antagonism, and undermine the anti-French deterrent posture. Second, a larger state could put up a much better defense even if it could not hope to prevail by itself. Even so, the German states were not really expected to defend themselves against a French attack, but were to rely on the assistance of Britain, Prussia, and Austria. Finally, the defeat and conquest of a larger state would mean an abrupt and significant change in the territorial distribution and French strategic position, giving the attacked state’s allies much more reason to intervene in its defense. After France had shown its potential for aggression during the Hundred Days, the allies further weakened it to improve the defenses of its neighbors.⁶⁸

Austria’s gains from the Vienna settlement were a mixed blessing. On one hand, it did not recuperate the spoils of 1796, mostly for strategic reasons. Austria renounced its claim on Belgium, which would have been troublesome and difficult to defend. It also advocated partitioning of the Vorlande between Bavaria, Württemberg, and Baden, which would improve Austria’s position and influence in southern Germany. It was also forced to forgo any territorial gains in Poland (except Galicia), which was consolidated as the Congress placed Poland under Russian rule. Thus, Austria lost mostly poorly developed lands and possessions it would have found costly to maintain.⁶⁹

On the other hand, Austria clung to its territories in Italy: Venetia, which was acquired as compensation for the Austrian Netherlands in 1797, and

⁶⁸ See Gulick, *Europe’s Classical Balance*, 258–59; Roger Bullen, “France and Europe, 1815–48: The Problems of Defeat and Recovery,” in *Europe’s Balance of Power, 1815–1848*, ed. Alan Sked (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1979), 123; and Schroeder, *Transformation*, 556. The destabilizing impact of the loss of the buffer states in the low countries, Germany, and Italy between 1859 and 1871 is discussed at length in Paul W. Schroeder, “The Lost Intermediaries: The Impact of 1870 on the European System,” *International History Review* 6 (February 1984): 1–27. This is not meant to suggest that these states were unequivocally beneficial for the system. The wars of the 1860s (in Italy and against Denmark) arose, in part, from machinations of Sardinia and the German Confederation. See F. R. Bridge, “Transformations of the European States System, 1856–1914,” in Krüger and Schröder “*Transformation of European Politics, 1763–1848*.”

⁶⁹ Robert A. Kann, *A History of the Habsburg Empire, 1526–1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

Lombardy, which was taken after the war of the Spanish Succession. Austria received these because Italy was the only place in Europe for which the Fourth Coalition allies did not have opposing claims. Not only was it the only territory available to compensate Austria for (in)voluntary losses, but Austria was the least troublesome state to take possession of it. Since France wanted Italy, Britain wanted to keep France out of there, and Russia, in turn, wanted to keep Britain out. Austria was the safe choice; both Russia and Britain treated it more gently in diplomatic affairs because of this. French influence in Italy was curbed and the territory was recognized as an Austrian preserve.

The settlement was hardly in Prussia's favor. Losing the Polish lands, inhabited by obedient serfs, and getting the territories on the left bank of the Rhine, populated with Roman Catholics spoiled by twenty years of French liberalism, spelled trouble. Deprived of half of Saxony and all of Poland (except Posen), Prussia acquired a region in the west, which was separated from the eastern part by Hanover and Hesse. As Taylor wryly noted, "It was, as it were, a practical joke played by the Great Powers on the weakest of their numbers."⁷⁰ As Austria withdrew to the southeast corner of Germany, Prussia immersed itself deeper westward. Whereas Hungary and the Italian kingdoms were not part of the Austrian share in the German Confederation, Prussia received substantial compensation along the Mosel, the Saar, and the central region of the Rhine. This consolidated territory made it easier to halt possible French challenges, a position vigorously supported by Britain. The result of losing some of its former territories, such as Poland, meant that Prussia now became "more a specifically German state than it had been in 1807."⁷¹ These gains led one historian to conclude that "among the German states, Prussia was doubtlessly the big winner."⁷²

The German compromise reflected the political and strategic limitations of the period. The great challenge at Vienna was to find a way to contain France without creating a dangerously centralized German confederation that could fall under the influence of Prussia or Austria or that would rival them. This accorded well with the wishes of the smaller states whose rulers did not relish being subservient to either Frederick William or Francis I. What emerged from the Congress was a loose confederation under the formal leadership of Austria, but with implicit Prussian hegemony in the north

⁷⁰ A. J. P. Taylor, *The Course of German History* (New York: Capricorn, 1946), 47.

⁷¹ W. H. Koch, *A History of Prussia* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1978).

⁷² James J. Sheehan, *German History, 1770–1866* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 401. Nicolson, *Congress of Vienna*, 196–99, faults Metternich for "almost total ignorance of, and indifference to, economic factors," which prevented him from foreseeing "the immense economic domination which Prussia would acquire through her control of roads, waterways and markets." Although this assessment is doubtless correct, it is equally correct to note that at that time the Prussians themselves had no idea that this would happen. From the vantage point of 1815, Prussia was somewhat of a loser as much as it turned out to have been a winner fifty years later.

(over the objections of Bavaria and Württemberg). Flirtation with pro-French liberalism threatened Habsburg rule, which rested on traditional dynastic rights. Nascent German nationalism threatened the Hohenzollern dynasty even more because many Germans continued to regard the Austrian emperor as the natural head of Germany, which meant that the Prussian king would scarcely survive a unification.⁷³ It is thus not surprising that the two monarchies cooperated in Germany in an arrangement where “Prussia did all the work and Austria enjoyed the distinction.”⁷⁴ As Sheehan correctly observed, one of the most important elements in the arrangement was that it was “part of an international settlement, guaranteed by the major states of East and West.”⁷⁵ This allowed the Germans to manage their internal affairs and prevented great-power interference as long as they remained nonthreatening to the system.

The great powers did anticipate many potential problems that could arise from alternative distributions of territory, and they bargained strenuously to avoid them, even when that meant abandoning appeals to legitimacy and sometimes relying on naked threats to use force. The final settlement tracked rather closely their relative military capabilities. Britain and Russia could not be challenged militarily and consequently managed to achieve most of their goals, ensuring their relative satisfaction with the new status quo. The French diplomat Talleyrand was unusually prescient here. Whereas Castlereagh initially thought about the European “just equilibrium” almost entirely in balance-of-power terms, Talleyrand realized that any arrangement would need the forbearance of the most powerful states in order to survive. Although he imagined this restraint arising from “a spirit of moderation and justice,” it was more likely that it came from self-interested behavior largely resting on satisfaction with the status quo.⁷⁶ On the other hand, Prussia, Austria, and France repeatedly had to agree to territorial compromises. However, the careful delineation of borders gave Austria enough stake in the system while ensuring that France and Prussia would find attempts to overturn it too costly.

THE CONCERT IN PRACTICE

The explanation offered here hinges on showing that the Concert system was self-enforcing to the degree that the territorial distribution structured the

⁷³ Taylor, *Course of German History*, 51–52.

⁷⁴ A.J.P. Taylor, *The Habsburg Monarchy, 1809–1918* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 34–35.

⁷⁵ Sheehan, *German History*, 410.

⁷⁶ See Nicolson, *Congress of Vienna*, 154–55, for Talleyrand’s distinction between an equilibrium based on “absolute equality of power between all the States,” which he correctly said could never exist, and a partial 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.”

incentives of the great powers such that their equilibrium behavior was to maintain the Vienna settlement. Although in some cases it is easy to explain the unwillingness to challenge the status quo with the simple fact that a country could not obtain positive benefits from doing so (for example, Britain had nothing to gain from territorial conquest on the continent), it is necessary to account for the behavior of others that could potentially benefit. The success of deterrence rests on the credibility of the threat to take action against the state that deviates from the cooperative equilibrium and on the attractiveness of the existing distribution of benefits.

Although the Vienna and Paris treaties established the territorial division, they did not generate an obligation to defend it. This point is well expressed in the memorandum by the British plenipotentiaries at the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle:

There is no doubt that a breach of the covenant by any one State is an injury which all other States may, if they shall think fit, either separately or collectively resent, but the treaties do not impose, by express stipulation, the doing so as a matter of positive obligation. . . . [T]hose who framed these Acts did not probably see how the whole Confederacy could, without the utmost inconvenience, be made collectively to enforce the observance of these treaties, *the execution of this duty seems to have been deliberately left to arise out of the circumstances of the time and of the case, and the offending State to be brought to reason by such of the injured States as might at the moment think fit to charge themselves with the task of defending their own rights thus invaded.*⁷⁷

The British clearly recognized that any collective enforcement would suffer from inevitable credibility problems when divergent interests prevented consensus or when states attempted to free ride on the efforts of others. The two things that the treaties succeeded in doing, however, were to delineate spheres of influence and to establish a set of interlocking interests. The result was that some territories were not open for contestation, and that for every potentially contestable territory, there existed some coalition of states that had a clear interest in blocking undesirable changes.

It is important to realize that no one mechanism operated to deter every challenge, and neither was there a condominium of five great powers vigilant and ready to defend the status quo. Instead, coalitions emerged on the basis of the actual danger, with members self-selected by their own interests. The territorial division ensured that some such coalition would always form and that it would be sufficiently strong to deter the challenger. The Concert was self-enforcing precisely because it was not a system of collective security. Under collective security, a challenge must be resisted by all members

⁷⁷ The document is in Webster, *Congress of Vienna*, appdx. 8 (emphasis added).

of the system.⁷⁸ Incentives to free ride and divergent interests would normally hamper cooperation in organizing for such defense. Enforcement in the Concert was credible because it was taken up by parties with clearly defined interests in the matter, and these interests were defined in large part by the territorial division. Even though Jervis called the concert a “nascent collective security system,” there was no provision or even expectation for collective enforcement.⁷⁹

Cooperation on Territorial Adjustments: Greece and Belgium

The basic features of the Concert are best demonstrated by great-power cooperation, sometimes reluctant, in resolving disputes between weaker states, and finding ways for the system to absorb small territorial adjustments. The great powers were guided in these matters by the concern that, if the borders were altered, these external developments could upset the system of incentives that kept the Concert in place. Therefore, they set out to impose solutions that preserved this system intact.

The Greek rebellion against the Ottoman Empire broke out in 1821. Russia was the only country willing to intervene, but the rest did not want to sanction yet another Russo-Turkish war or Russian occupation of some Ottoman territory that could result, in Castlereagh’s words, in “a new Partition, a repetition of Poland!”⁸⁰ Despite sending an early ultimatum to Turkey, Alexander consented not to act without a mandate, which he seems to have expected to obtain from the alliance. Even though there was no chance of a balancing coalition forming against Russia had it gone to war against the Ottoman Empire, the tsar seems to have preferred to restrain himself rather than upset the system that maintained stability in Europe.⁸¹ However, when Alexander died in 1825, his successor, Nicholas I, decided to pursue a more proactive policy in the Balkans. Originally, the great powers tried to

⁷⁸ Charles A. Kupchan and Clifford A. Kupchan, “Concerts, Collective Security, and the Future of Europe,” *International Security* 16, no. 1 (summer 1991): 114–61.

⁷⁹ Jervis, “From Balance to Concert,” 78. Many others see the Concert as a type of collective security system with membership restricted to the great powers. For example, Elrod, “Concert of Europe” Andrew Bennett and Joseph Lepgold, “Reinventing Collective Security after the Cold War and Gulf Conflict,” *Political Science Quarterly*, 108, no. 2 (summer 1993) 213–37; and Lipson, “Future,” all share this view. For a harsher view of the period and the scarcity of great power cooperation on the eastern question, see Kagan, “Myth.” The British position quoted earlier also supports an ad hoc principle rather than grand collective design.

⁸⁰ Cited in Webster, *Castlereagh*, 384. See Rendall, *Op. Cit.* for an in-depth look at the policies pursued by the various participants.

⁸¹ Schroeder, *Transformation*, 617–19; and Kissinger, *A World Restored*, 287–89. Austria threatened to withhold moral support and Britain threatened to remain neutral, not exactly the best way to go about coercing the Russians. Later on, the great powers even refused to meet with the Greek representative in Verona in 1824 and declared the uprising a “rash and criminal enterprise,” cited in Chapman, *Congress of Vienna*, 73. See Rendall, “Between Power and Preferences,” for an internal memorandum to Nicholas I detailing why Alexander chose to exercise restraint.

get the Ottoman Empire to quell the rebellion, which the Porte obligingly attempted but failed and was compelled to call on Egypt for help. In 1826, Russia extracted the Treaty of Akkerman, securing for itself advantages in the Caucasus and the Danubian principalities.

The British had already begun damage control earlier with the Petersburg Protocol of April, 4. They had agreed, out of fear that Russia would act unilaterally, to cooperate in seeking autonomy for Greece. Now they intensified their attempt to remove any pretext for further expansion of Russian influence. The Treaty of London, signed by Britain, France, and Russia in July 1827, provided for an autonomous vassal state in Greece and the imposition of an armistice should the two Balkan parties fail to agree to the terms.⁸² The allied fleet dispatched to enforce the latter provision ended up sinking the Turko-Egyptian fleet at Navarino, an unfortunate event that was the result of confusion, not deliberate planning. The incensed Mahmud declared jihad against Russia, which responded by going to war with Turkey on April, 26 1828. Although the Russian victory was not immediate, the Sultan was forced to accept the Treaty of Adrianople in September of 1829. Article X of that treaty made clear that this constituted an “adhesion to the stipulations of [the] Treaty concluded at London.”⁸³

The eventual solution was to create an independent Greek state and install a ruler who was not a member of any of the ruling families of the London signatories. The three powers also agreed to forgo unilateral intervention in newly established Greece.⁸⁴ Thus, Britain, France, and Russia managed an external development that threatened to alter the set of interlocking interests. When it became clear that the Ottoman Empire was unable to restore stability in the region, which was a source of temptation for Russia, the great powers imposed a solution that preserved the features of the system. Russia exercised moderation not because it was afraid of some counter-coalition but because it clearly recognized that even a victorious war against the Ottoman Empire would inevitably lead to the collapse of the prized European system, which it was satisfied.⁸⁵

The settlement of the Belgian question was very similar in that respect. Spurred by the July revolution in France and resentful of King William’s heavy-handed treatment, the Belgians revolted and proclaimed independence in October of 1830. The great powers realized that the union of

⁸² Significantly, the great powers agreed not to “seek, in these arrangements, any augmentation of territory, any exclusive influence, or any commercial advantage.” Text of the treaty and the additional article that contains the ultimatum are in René Albrecht-Carrié, ed., *The Concert of Europe* (New York: Walker, 1968), 107–10.

⁸³ Hertslet, *Map of Europe*, 820–21.

⁸⁴ Paragraph 8 of Protocol No. 1 of the London Conference, February, 3 1830, reprinted in Albrecht-Carrié, *Concert of Europe*, 115–19.

⁸⁵ Rendall, “Russia, the Concert of Europe, 84–85; Rendall, “Between Power and Preferences”; and Schroeder, *Transformation*, 658–59.

Belgium and Holland had failed to result in a “perfect and complete amalgamation” and therefore contrived a solution, which would permit their separation but preserve the system of incentives. It was not easy. On one hand, the revolt provided temptations for both France (in support of the Belgians) and Prussia (in support of the Dutch). On the other, the British preferred a strong Dutch state and were naturally suspicious that the Belgians might gravitate toward France. Yet they were not going to tolerate an expansion of Prussia and would have aligned with France if the two had fought. To top it all off, Tsar Nicholas regarded the revolt as an illegitimate attempt to deprive a fellow sovereign of his possessions, and he mobilized troops to quell the rebellion. The territorial arrangement in the Low Countries created a particularly intricate pattern of interlocking interests that illustrates both deterrence and cooperation.

Initially, the Russians seemed keen on implementing their threat, but they could not reach the territory without marching through Prussia, and this made King Frederick William III’s support necessary. Prussia had a direct interest in preventing the independence of Belgium and could have used the occasion to begin a war for national unification. (Bismarck later charged that Prussia had missed that chance in 1830.) Prussia, however, not only did not seize the opportunity but prevented Russia from sending the troops already mobilized, and then acquiesced to the separation of Belgium along with a French intervention to ensure it.

Prussia decided against expansionism because France had warned that it would resist an intervention, that threat was deemed credible, and Prussia was not willing to fight without the support of the other powers. Of these, only the Russians seemed eager, but even they got distracted soon by the Warsaw insurrection in late November. With the Russians busy putting down the coup of the nationalist Polish cadets, no political will was left for a military intervention in support of The Hague. Prussia preferred the status quo to a war with France and resolved that it would cooperate with the other great powers to solve the problem. Here is a clear instance of interlocking interests providing for a credible threat that deterred potential revisionism by Prussia.⁸⁶

France also could have profited from expansion into Belgium but its “government knew that any attempt to annex a major part of Belgium would mean war with all of Europe.”⁸⁷ Louis-Philippe, having recently come to

⁸⁶ As the French ambassador reported in 1832, “[at the Prussian Cabinet], all the advantages derived from the *status quo* are fully appreciated and will not be forfeited.” Cited in Rendall, “Between Power and Preferences,” which also notes the important influence of domestic politics but still makes a strong case for deterrence. At any rate, it is not clear just how committed to war over Belgium the Russians were. The tsar’s main grievance was really about Louis-Philippe’s July Monarchy. For the Russian designs and the consequences of the Polish revolt, see Clive H. Church, *Europe in 1830: Revolution and Political Change* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983); and H.A.C. Collingham, *The July Monarchy: A Political History of France, 1830–1848* (London: Longman, 1988). This can only have made the Prussians more careful.

⁸⁷ Schroeder, *Transformation*, 677. Bullen, “France and Europe,” 140, also notes Talleyrand’s expectation that a French unilateral action in Belgium would precipitate a war with the other powers.

power under inauspicious circumstances, was anxious to demonstrate restraint. The new king had tried to assure the European powers that the July Revolution would not export unrest and that the fall of Charles X did not mean repudiation of France's existing obligations. As soon as the new regime disavowed any designs on the Rhineland, Prussia moved to recognize it, and Britain soon followed suit. Tsar Nicholas, who had previously broken diplomatic relations with Paris, relented as well. Only Metternich was not convinced. When he failed to stir up active opposition to the July monarchy, he threatened that Austria would go to war if France attempted to foment revolutions elsewhere, especially in Italy, where the French advocated non-intervention. When the Austrian troops invaded Parma and Modena, Louis-Philippe had to acquiesce to an embarrassing diplomatic defeat and was forced to dismiss his cabinet. Consequently, the French threw their weight behind a great-power mediation, and Louis-Philippe brushed aside a Belgian proposal to put his second son on the Belgian throne.⁸⁸

With potential revisionist attempts by France and Prussia deflected by credible threats to oppose them, the five powers met in London and resolved on a de-facto separation of Belgium from the Netherlands. The conference sent a collective ultimatum to the king on January, 9 1831, and then to the Belgians.⁸⁹ The heretofore recalcitrant Belgians, no doubt forewarned by the crushing of the Polish and Italian revolts, cooperated and, after some more wrangling over terms, elected Leopold of Saxe-Coburg as king in July. However, William did not accept the proposed compromise. In August, the Dutch launched a surprise attack in the south, whereupon the French intervened to drive them out. France claimed that there was no time for an additional consultation with the other powers. Even though the great powers were wary of French presence in Belgium, they authorized the French intervention conditional on a withdrawal when the task was accomplished. When the Dutch retreated, France followed suit soon thereafter. It is worth noting that the French did attempt to use their success for a small territorial adjustment but gave up very quickly when the British opposed it, settling instead for the demolition of several border forts.⁹⁰

The Treaty of London established an independent Belgian state, under perpetual neutrality (and hence a loss to both French and German influence). The Dutch, however, still refused to relinquish Antwerp, and in October 1832, France invaded Holland again, this time assisted by a British blockade of Dutch ports. Three days after the Dutch surrender, the French forces

⁸⁸ Church, *Europe in 1830*, 35, 42–51; and Collingham, *July Monarchy*, 186–98.

⁸⁹ Documents 11 and 12 in Albrecht-Carrié, *Concert of Europe*, 70–79. The great powers committed “not to seek in the arrangements relative to Belgium, under whatever circumstances that may present themselves, any augmentation of territory, any exclusive influence,—any isolated advantages.” Article 5 of Protocol 11 of the conference. Protocol 19 also stated that “treaties do not lose their force, whatever changes may take place in the internal organization of nations.”

⁹⁰ Collingham, *July Monarchy*, 192.

marched home. Although it took William five more years to resign himself to losing part of his kingdom, the “mediation” of the great powers managed the emergence of a new state in a way that left the essential features of the system unchanged. Belgium’s neutrality was as much a check on France as was the united Netherlands, and its position was cemented by the guarantee of all the great powers.

These episodes illustrate the success of great-power cooperation in terms of both finding mutually satisfactory solutions and preventing opportunistic behavior. First, armed interventions demonstrated the credibility of enforcement. In Belgium, possible Prussian ambitions were checked by an Anglo-French threat, whereas French expansionism itself was checked by the unified opposition of the four other powers. In Greece, Russia was willing to forgo some advantages in the Near East in order to preserve the system it was benefitting from. Even so, its willingness to do so had its limits, and when Nicholas demonstrated that, the British hastened to meet most of the Russian demands. Second, the great powers imposed their solutions by force, and the weaker states had to submit to their judgment. Thus, despite the change in border demarcations, the system of incentives remained essentially the same and the equilibrium remained.

Deterrence of Revisionism: France and Prussia

The two powers that could potentially have benefited from a change in the Vienna settlement were France generally and Prussia in Germany. Although neither one openly defied the others, both probed the validity of their expectations about the credibility of enforcement threats. According to this interpretation, one would expect these states to exhibit a pattern of cooperative behavior, with periodic tests of their beliefs at the periphery.

France was anxious to affirm its commitment to the Vienna system despite rhetoric that denounced it. It did not intervene unilaterally in Spain after the revolt in 1820 but instead patiently waited for the sanction of the other great powers, which did not come until two years later in Verona. When the revolution of 1830 brought the “citizen king” to the throne, Louis-Philippe was quick to affirm his allegiance to the territorial system and used the Belgian secession to prove it. In both interventions France carried out the mandate of the other great powers to the letter. When the Parisian revolution of 1848 resulted in the proclamation of the Second Republic and France abrogated its existing treaties, the three eastern courts mobilized to deal with any possible spillover. None was forthcoming, however, as first the revolutionaries, and then the new president, Louis Napoleon, upheld the territorial division. Even as France rebuilt its army after the occupational forces withdrew in 1818, the four members of the victorious coalition maintained a vigilant look: “The greater part of the Austrian army was in northern Italy, the bulk of the Prussian army was on the Rhine. The Russians were ready

to move troops into central Europe in the event of a French attack on the Rhine and British naval plans for war only envisaged conflict with France."⁹¹

Still, the pattern of cooperation did exhibit probing behavior, with the most notable example occasioned by the Turko-Egyptian crisis in 1839. The machinations of Louis-Adolphe Thiers had pitted France (in support of Mehemet Ali) against the four allies (in support of the Turkish sultan).⁹² Some, such as Alexis de Tocqueville, did not believe that Russia and Britain would risk war, and a sizable public opinion clamored for increasing French influence in Syria. The miserable performance of the Sultan's army in the summer energized the French government while hardening British opposition to Mehemet Ali. Thiers, although fearful of war, believed that France could benefit from risking it and correspondingly pursued an aggressive foreign policy, rejecting both British and Austrian proposals for a compromise. France, which relied on cordial relations with Britain, now found itself facing a gradually coalescing Anglo-Russian block, to which Austria and Prussia hastened to lend their support. On July, 15 1840, the four powers revived the Quadruple Alliance and signed a convention against France and Egypt, imposing their solution—a hereditary pashalic in Egypt and Acre for his lifetime—on Mehemet Ali. Two days later, Palmerston informed the French ambassador of the London convention's ultimatum, insultingly expressing regret that France had not been invited to join it. The July note called the French bluff and thereby signified its expulsion from the Concert.⁹³

The news caused an explosion in France, complete with calls to arms against absolutism in Europe, invasions of Italy and the Rhineland, and much venom against Britain. In late July, the monarchy mobilized close to half a million soldiers and authorized funds for the navy. French foreign minister Guizot floated two proposals to the British, one for a joint five-power guarantee of the status quo, and another for a French mediation between Mehemet Ali and the signatories of the London convention. Palmerston, who did not believe France was ready to fight, was unimpressed.⁹⁴ When Anglo-Austrian forces entered the Syrian rebellion in September, the pressure for war in France increased. At this point, Louis-Philippe declared himself in total opposition to it.⁹⁵ Thiers appeared to relent and on October, 8 drew up a note, moderate in tone, that signaled French willingness to back down

⁹¹ Bullen, "France and Europe," 131. He further notes (p. 140) how fears of Austrian intervention (along with the inevitable Prussian and Russian assistance) made France especially cautious in northern Italy. Also see Taylor, *Struggle for Mastery*, 3. The Prussian army on the Rhine was an especially effective deterrent, as evidenced by Polignac's 1828 arguments that France should reconcile to its permanent loss.

⁹² See Collingham, *July Monarchy*, 222–38, for a fuller account of the Syrian crisis from the French perspective; Charles K. Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston, 1830–1841* (New York: Humanities, 1969), chap. 8, for the British side; and Rendall, *Op. Cit.* for the sources of the Russian policy.

⁹³ Schroeder, *Transformation*, 743–44.

⁹⁴ Webster, *Palmerston*, 699–70.

⁹⁵ "Nothing in the world will force me into it; I would abdicate a thousand times rather than consent to it." Cited in Collingham, *July Monarchy*, 233. See also Rendall, "Between-Power and Preferences" on

on the Syrian question.⁹⁶ Thiers continued to believe that the French mobilization and the threat it represented to Austria (in Italy) and Prussia (on the Rhine) could be used to extract concessions, but his risky brinkmanship only increased his political isolation. In late October, the king forced his resignation as foreign minister and installed the anglophile Guizot. As H.A.C. Collingham concluded, “Louis-Philippe was prepared to accept humiliation when he saw that the bluff had failed.”⁹⁷ From this point, the war scare receded as France tacitly accepted the London solution even while refusing to become a formal party to it. On November, 27 Mehemet Ali, his forces defeated, accepted hereditary rule of Egypt and abandoned his claims to Syria. In July 1841, France signed the Straits Convention and was re-admitted to the Concert. Although the refusal to accede to the now-superseded London convention allowed France to claim success, the terms of the new agreement could not disguise the unmitigated disaster of its 1840 policies. The affair demonstrated that the Quadruple Alliance was a credible threat even after twenty-five years, and even when the allies were split on many other issues.

It has already been noted how the French threat deterred Prussia from intervening in Belgium in 1830. Prussia, wedged between France and Russia, was in no position to challenge the system until either one of the flanking threats ceased to exist. It therefore concentrated on internal matters and its role in the German confederation, where it cooperated with Austria in suppressing liberal movements.⁹⁸ The “subterranean struggle” for leadership in Germany provided an opportunity to test the Austrian threat in 1848, when the Frankfurt Parliament proposed a federal German state that excluded non-German parts of Austria. This meant that leadership would naturally devolve to Prussia, but Frederick William IV was unwilling to risk an open confrontation with Austria and declined.⁹⁹ He decided however, to verify the validity of his expectations and called for an assembly at Erfurt that was to consider the creation of a vast central European state. A small incident in Hesse-Cassel led to the mobilization of the Prussian and Austrian forces and an ultimatum issued by Austrian prime minister Felix Schwarzenberg. The “humiliation of Olmütz” established the credibility of the Austrian threat, and Prussia backed down.

the disagreements between Thiers and the king. As Schroeder, *Transformation*, notes on p. 746, the army was also timorous, for it knew it stood no chance against Russia.

⁹⁶ The note specifically renounced seeking any advantages through the Oriental affair and affirmed the desire not to provoke the other powers. Text in Albrecht-Carrie, *Concert of Europe*, 142.

⁹⁷ Collingham, *July Monarchy*, 235.

⁹⁸ Frederick B. Artz, *Reaction and Revolution, 1814–1832* (New York: Harper and Row, 1934, 136–42. In 1818, Friedrich von Gentz provided a very thoughtful analysis of the political situation in post-1815 Europe, and many of his conclusions were borne out by history. Among his insights was the recognition that Austro-Prussian cooperation was essential for the stability of the system. The text is reprinted in Mack Walker, ed., *Metternich's Europe* (New York: Walker 1968), 71–84.

⁹⁹ William L. Langer, *Political and Social Upheaval, 1832–1852* (New York: Harper and Row 1969), 410–20.

These episodes illustrate the success of deterrence both in terms of cooperative behavior of potentially revisionist states and in the mechanism that sustained this cooperation. The territorial settlement had left a cordon of medium states around France arrayed such that French encroachment would necessarily affect some combination of other powers. Prussia had also found itself in a position where it could not effect a revision of the status quo. Therefore, both powers participated in the Vienna system but also tested the credibility of the threat that sustained their behavior. The Concert was self-enforcing because it was in the interest of the other great powers to respond to deviations.

Coordination and Information: Troppau-Laibach and Verona

The Quadruple Alliance had a definite and well-established role in the workings of the Concert in that it embodied the specifics of the enforcement threat against French revanchism. The Holy Alliance was another matter. Conceived by Alexander I as a means of extending his influence in European affairs, it was either derided by opponents or resented by those who had to accede to it. The Holy Alliance could be conveniently invoked as circumstances required, but it did not create an obligation by any party to apply it literally.¹⁰⁰ Metternich dismissed it, saying that the “Holy Alliance . . . never played a role in any issue . . . for the simple reason that, what is in reality nothing can produce only nothing.”¹⁰¹ The alliance, however, worked in tandem with the Troppau Protocol, which authorized intervention in any state where revolution had overthrown the government and where such development could be construed as threatening the stability of the system.

The protocol was signed by the three eastern courts, and although France did not agree to it formally, it soon acted in its spirit in Spain. The British took a dim view of the general principle but did not oppose Austrian intervention in Naples, which they regarded as Austria’s domain.¹⁰² As Metternich remarked, “The political order of things established in 1815 has made Austria the natural warder and protector of public peace in Italy.”¹⁰³ Castlereagh also viewed Austrian reasons for acting in Italy as legitimate but

¹⁰⁰ Castlereagh called the original “a piece of sublime mysticism and nonsense” but was sufficiently alarmed at the Russian proposal for *Alliance Solidaire*, unveiled at Aix-la-Chapelle, which he regarded as an attempt to give teeth to the innocuous treaty. France also acceded to the Holy Alliance, as did all other states except Britain, on constitutional grounds, and the Papal States, the pope presumably in no need to proclaim adherence to Christian norms in a corporeal document (the sultan was, of course, a heathen).

¹⁰¹ Cited in Elrod, *Concert of Europe*, fn. 35. Taylor, *Struggle for Mastery*, 57, also notes that “once the Eastern Question was raised, the Holy Alliance was a ghost, no more.”

¹⁰² This position is well expressed in the Circular Despatch to British Missions at Foreign Courts, January 19, 1821. The text, reprinted in Hertslet, *Map of Europe*, 664–66, contains a de-facto sanction of Austrian intervention provided that it give assurance that such action would not be directed “to purposes of aggrandisement subversive of the Territorial System of Europe, as established by the late Treaties.”

¹⁰³ Cited in E. Lipson, *Europe in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Black, 1916), 166.

drew an important distinction between Naples and Spain.¹⁰⁴ In any case, Austria was free to intervene and restore the monarch of Naples in 1820, crush the insurrections in Modena, Parma, and the Papal States in the 1830s, or defeat Piedmont in 1848, all ostensibly under the sanction of the other powers. It is telling that in these interventions, it followed the mandate and withdrew as soon as the restoration of order was accomplished.

The Troppau-Laibach conferences established the general principle that great powers could intervene within their own spheres of influence to maintain order as they saw fit. This was a far cry from Alexander's designs, which envisioned a system of collective security, doubtless under Russian tutelage. Castlereagh's objections, however, had to do with the agency of the European mandate, which in Spain would naturally devolve to France. His successor, George Canning, extended nonintervention to sanction British intervention in Portugal, where "all Europe recognized Britain's special interests" to support the government against Spain and to prevent an appeal to the Troppau powers.¹⁰⁵ Thus, nonintervention was a vague concept and just as elastic as intervention. Eventually, the Verona conference sanctioned France's restoration of the Bourbon king to the throne of Spain.¹⁰⁶

It is useful to think of the conferences as being coordination devices, such that the interested great powers could devise solutions and find ways of implementing them. The congresses also were an opportunity for the powers to send a signal to potential challengers, although in that they were far less successful. Even though the meetings under the stipulations of Article VI of the Quadruple (and later Quintuple) Alliance ended with Verona, the practice of deciding common issues at conferences continued. Neither the presence nor the agreement of every great power was a necessary condition for the operation of these meetings. The participants nevertheless made sure that those not present were well informed of the intent, measures, and implementation. As Dan Lindley concluded, the Concert did increase transparency, although "the effect was often to facilitate coercive bargaining... [T]ransparency . . . helped realpolitik lead to peaceful outcomes."¹⁰⁷ Despite their salutary effects, the conferences did not quite produce the levels of transparency or their normative impact required by Jervis's interpretation.¹⁰⁸ It is also instructive to note that in every treaty that resulted in territorial adjustment or foreign intervention, the signatories renounced any attempt at territorial

¹⁰⁴ See the report by Prince Lieven, Russian ambassador into Britain, of an interview with Castlereagh, reprinted in Walker, *Metternich's Europe*, 132–36.

¹⁰⁵ Webster, *Castlereagh*, 247–49.

¹⁰⁶ Britain had fought the War of Spanish Succession (1702–13) precisely to prevent the union of France and Spain under Bourbon rule. No such threat existed in 1823, as Canning noted in his famous speech on December, 12 1826, Walker, *Metternich's Europe*, 139–43.

¹⁰⁷ Lindley, "Avoiding Tragedy," 223–24.

¹⁰⁸ Jervis, "Political Science Perspective," 721.

aggrandizement and affirmed that the essential features of the system would remain unaltered.¹⁰⁹

Demise of the Concert: The Crimean War

The gravest defect of the Vienna system was that it needed Russia more than Russia needed it. Satisfaction with the existing distribution of benefits goes a long way toward explaining the Russian restraint during the period. Russia was stronger than any other continental state, and perhaps stronger than any two of them combined.¹¹⁰ Russian interest in territories in the west was satisfied with the acquisition of Poland, which itself proved most troublesome. The general weakness of Austria and Prussia also meant that these two powers had to depend on Russian support if they were to curb French aspirations or, in the Austrian case, restless nationalists. This naturally gave the tsar much influence in German territories. Russia was also mostly content to keep the Ottoman Empire going and prevent the conflict that a disintegration of the “sick man” would inevitably cause. Although the tsars consistently believed that Russia had a rightful place in the Concert system, participation in European affairs was contingent on Russia’s having a voice in them. Because no development in the west could really threaten Russia, it is not surprising that when the other powers defeated the Russians in the limited Crimean War, the tsars turned back on Europe.

Much of the credibility of commitments to the settlement, however, rested on Russian participation. With British withdrawal from continental affairs, Austria depended more than ever on Russian assistance, as the 1848 Hungarian revolt demonstrated.¹¹¹ French ambitions were also checked mostly by the Anglo-Russian common front. With Russia absent, France could challenge the system openly, which it did in 1859 with a war on Austria in Italy. Prussian restraint was also conditional on the Russian presence—once the Eastern threat was gone, Prussia could concentrate either in the Rhineland against France, or in Germany against Austria (it did both).

¹⁰⁹ See notes, 81 and 88, above. The Troppau Protocol also had a similar assertion.

¹¹⁰ As Gentz observed about the emperor, “Whatever he dreams of at night he can carry out in the morning.” As noted before (note 92) von Gentz was remarkably perceptive—he also predicted that if Russia was the aggressor in a war against the Porte, “the present European system would move inevitably toward catastrophe.” See Walker, *Matternich’s Europe*, 74–80.

¹¹¹ Russia intervened in Transylvania at the behest of the Austrian government, which had trouble dealing with the Hungarians, who had proclaimed a republic. The Russians withdrew after defeating the Hungarians in accordance with their agreement with the Austrians. See Albrecht-Carrié, *Diplomatic History*, 71–75. It must be noted that British withdrawal should not be taken to imply that Britain had been practicing some sort of balancing on the continent before that. As Schroeder persuasively argued, there was never any British balancing in Europe to begin with: “More than once in the nineteenth century, continental statesmen had to exert themselves strenuously to save the balance from British attempts to maintain it.” Paul W. Schroeder, *Austria, Great Britain, and the Crimean War: The Destruction of the European Concert* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), 401–3.

Since France could not challenge the Concert in Europe (as the recent Belgian case had demonstrated), Napoleon III resolved to wreck the system by undermining the Russian desire to support it that was so essential for its maintenance. The Near East question afforded a seemingly perfect opportunity: the Ottoman territories had not been part of the Vienna system (and so were up for grabs, so to speak); Prussia had no interests there; Austria could be counted on at the very least not to actively oppose France and Britain because of Austria's interests in keeping the Danubian principalities out of Russian control; and Britain, which was becoming increasingly nervous and agitated about Russian expansion close to its vital interests in the east, could be relied on for active support. If Russian attention could be redirected away from European affairs, then perhaps France would have a chance to regain its traditional position. Thus, a seemingly minor conflict over championship of Christian rights in the Ottoman Empire could escalate into full-scale war between the great powers.

The event that precipitated the disintegration of the Concert was the Crimean War, a conflict that has been called both useless and unnecessary.¹¹² Nicholas I may have overestimated his ability to act with impunity in the Near East. The War of 1828 may have given him the impression that Russia was free to intervene in the Ottoman Empire. The isolation of France after 1838 may have convinced him that the French would not dare to assert their preferences. His assistance to Austria in 1848 may have led him to believe that it would support him. Whatever the reason, when Russian troops invaded Turkey in July of 1853, it was in response to the sultan's having rebuffed the olive branch of the Vienna Note. (The note was concocted by the four "neutral" states, two of which—Britain and France—actively worked to undermine its intent.) Austria's behavior during the war was shortsighted and narrowminded: it succeeded in antagonizing both sides by refusing to side militarily with the western powers and at the same time expelling the Russians from the Danubian principalities. When the dust settled, Austria was left to fend for itself in Germany, Italy, and the Balkans—something that the decaying empire could scarcely afford.

This abandonment of European affairs by Russia was not a matter of simple pique over being mistreated by its erstwhile partners. Despite the seeming leniency of the Paris terms, Alexander II (who had acceded to the Russian throne after the death of Nicholas on March, 2 1855) had been forced to swallow a bitter pill. The neutralization of the Black Sea was particularly harsh, and it undermined Russia's status as a great power in the region.

¹¹² Useless because it did not halt Russian expansion or eliminate its capacity for aggression. Unnecessary because it accomplished nothing that could not have been achieved by diplomatic means. The monograph by Norman Rich, *Why the Crimean War? A Cautionary Tale* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1985), is an even-handed description of the diplomatic history of the war. Schroeder, *Op. Cit.* provides an account that is highly critical of Britain but that also calls Austria's policy "the most hateful thing of all" (p. 416).

The tsar had to end the war because his armies' miserable performance in it had exposed the perilous strain under which the Russian economy was toiling, which in turn threatened to reveal the weakness of the tsarist regime. Alexander II had domestic problems to attend to, and the defeat instigated sweeping reforms, military and economic, designed to lift the country out of its backwardness.¹¹³ It would take close to two decades for these to bear fruit, during which time Russia concentrated on internal issues. Hence, one natural consequence of losing the Crimean War was that Russia paid much less attention to developments in Europe that could not directly hurt it anyway.

But there was more: Not only was Russia "distracted" by its defeat, it actively turned revisionist because the humiliating Near East settlement could not be allowed to stand.¹¹⁴ Instead of supporting Austria and Prussia to frustrate the French, the Russians now cooperated with Napoleon in overturning the system that was no longer acceptable to either of them.¹¹⁵ Indeed, as soon as France and Prussia were locked into the contest that would end in the war of 1870, Russia repudiated the Black Sea clauses of the Paris Treaty. Eight years later, the reforms allowed it to wage (and win) a major war with the Ottoman Empire.

Perhaps the best illustration of the grave consequences of the Russian defeat in the Crimean War is provided by the two crises arising out of the Schleswig-Holstein question, the first in 1848–51, and the second in 1864.¹¹⁶ The two cases appear almost identical. Both crises were precipitated by Danish efforts to secure the Duchy of Schleswig through the promulgation of a new constitution. In both cases the duchies appealed to the German Confederation and rose in revolt, aided by Prussia. In the settlement of 1851, the Danes promised not to incorporate Schleswig, and in return Austria and Prussia abandoned the pro-German claims of the Schleswig-Holstein party.

The important difference between the two crises, however, is the credibility of the Russian threat. In the crisis of 1848 Russia, backed by Britain and France, warned Prussia against invasion of Denmark and compelled King Frederick William IV to seek an armistice with the Danes even without the authorization of the Frankfurt parliament. A decade later, however, this restraining threat was gone, and in 1864 Prussia combined with Austria to drive the Danes out of Schleswig.

With the withdrawal of Russia from active participation in the Concert, an essential element that ensured the credibility of commitments disappeared.

¹¹³ Rich, *Why the Crimean War*, 206.

¹¹⁴ Bridge and Bullen, *Great Powers*, 83–87.

¹¹⁵ Schroeder, *Why the Crimean War*, 201–7.

¹¹⁶ For details about the complicated problem with the duchies and their relationship to Denmark, to Germany, and between themselves, see Lawrence D. Steefel, *The Schleswig-Holstein Question* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932), an account which is particularly strong in the second phase of the question, and William Carr, *Schleswig-Holstein, 1815–48: A Study in National Conflict* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1963), which concentrates on the first phase.

France had wrecked the Quadruple Alliance, and Austria the Holy Alliance, thus damaging the enforcement mechanism beyond repair. Ironically, “it was not France but Sardinia and Prussia, which were to harvest the fruits of his Crimean victory, and with disastrous consequences for France.”¹¹⁷ In 1859, France assisted Camillo di Cavour in Sardinia’s war with Austria. Although Napoleon III defected when he realized that the rapid military collapse of Austria would unleash forces that would take the Italian question out of his control, the days to the unification were numbered.¹¹⁸ The most significant challenge, however, came from Prussia. The two brief but fateful wars against Austria in 1866 and France itself in 1871 and the subsequent emergence of a unified German state altered the territorial distribution irrevocably.

SOME POLICY IMPLICATIONS

It is the central thesis of this article that the Concert of Europe was an equilibrium, where the cooperative behavior of its principal members (the great powers) was sustained with incentives created by the territorial settlement they designed at Vienna. To the extent that the powers could credibly commit to upholding the system and preserve these interlocking interests, the equilibrium was self-enforcing. I have shown how the innovations at the Congress of Vienna altered the incentives of the great powers such that their actions, which had caused much conflict during the eighteenth century, produced peace and stability during the first half of the nineteenth century.

In lieu of enumerating all the main points again, I turn to policy implications that one might discern from an analysis grounded in self-enforcing equilibrium behavior. The main conclusion is somewhat pessimistic: A stable and peaceful international system like the one created at Vienna in 1815 will be very rare and quite unlikely to emerge. There are several reasons for this. First, it requires a major war whose aftermath provides the opportunity for the victorious states to rearrange the territorial distribution such that it creates a set of interlocking spheres of influence. Since no state would willingly consent to have its possessions partitioned, the military defeat of at least one major power appears to be a necessary requirement for the emergence of such a system.

Second, compared to the preceding centuries, territory is no longer the *sine qua non* of national power. Although one must not belittle the possession of land and resources, the quality of a nation’s population (in terms of education, for example), its governing institutions (that can channel the people’s creative energies more or less successfully), and the new strategic imperatives created by modern military technology (not just nuclear weapons, but

¹¹⁷ Rich, *Why the Crimean War*, 206.

¹¹⁸ Lipson, “Future”, 178–79.

also long-range bombers, for example) all delegate the possession of land to a much lower rank as a determinant of national strength. This implies that a system based on a territorial distribution is unlikely to reflect the benefits its various members enjoy and the vulnerabilities they must contend with to the extent that it could barely a century ago. Still, that does not imply that territory is irrelevant, and since border adjustments may be necessary, the United Nations (UN) Charter, which forbids such changes through the use of force, could prove quite a hindrance.

Another lesson, which is especially relevant when one considers the fate of the League of Nations and the failure of the UN Security Council to restrain the United States before the recent war in Iraq, is that powerful states will not relinquish their special interests for the common good as defined by the rest. The Concert of Europe worked not because its second-tier members (such as the German states and France) could deter Russia or Britain by balancing against either one of them, but because the two most powerful states were satisfied and had more to lose than to gain by undermining that beneficial arrangement.

This further points to two essential features of the Vienna system. First, the settlement must reflect the goals of the most powerful states to ensure their support of the subsequent arrangement. In practice, this means one of two things. Either they will tend to get most of what they demand, certainly with respect to interests they consider important, during negotiations (like Russia did with Poland). Or they will manage to exclude preferential features of the status quo from discussion altogether (like Britain did). Although the rest would have to accommodate these basic demands, they can then use these states as champions of their respective interests. Once satisfied, the powerful are likely to be much more attentive, and skillful diplomats could turn that to their advantage, much like Metternich and Talleyrand did at the Congress. The post World War II settlement provides a telling analogy. The Soviets acquired the protective belt of Eastern European states they desired along with the imposition of their social system on these satellites. At the same time, the Americans retained a free hand in their affairs with Japan, to the exclusion of the USSR despite the latter's entry in the Pacific War.

Second, since the creation of the system requires the military defeat of at least one major power, subsequent stability requires the integration of that state into the system. Assimilation would not automatically make a satisfied member from a previously revisionist one. Indeed, given its bargaining weakness, the loser will have to settle for much less than its ambitions demand. However, just like a Carthaginian peace is likely to be unattainable, a punitive one will be unwise. The defeated power must find the system beneficial enough so that the expected gain of overturning it by force would not tempt it into revanchism. Since it will not be politically possible to satisfy all of its requirements, the new system would have to be able to deter future attempts at piecemeal adjustments. This means not only providing for an acceptable

status quo but also ensuring that the defeated state knows that it has lost the fight for good, and that resorting to military means will not do it any good in the foreseeable future. The failure of the Versailles Treaty in both respects is illustrative: it provided neither for the satisfaction of Germany nor for the proper deterrent to its resulting grievances. Periodic probing behavior is to be expected, but it will not lead to the collapse of the arrangement if it is vigorously resisted.¹¹⁹

This brings me to the final implication. Despite the Concert often being called a collective security system, it was nothing of the sort. The commitment to uphold the Concert was credible precisely because it did not require all major powers to respond in concert to a threat. Instead, it relied on an *ad hoc* enforcement whereby “the offending State [was] brought to reason by such of the injured States as [at the moment thought] fit to charge themselves with the task of defending their own rights.” This enforcement mechanism designed to deter revisionism worked in tandem with the provision of benefits that would simultaneously satisfy the most powerful and undermine the incentives of the weaker to challenge the system by offering them a palatable status quo. The system was dependent on the territorial distribution and the commitment of the satisfied states. As such, it was necessarily conservative, and could not survive either the dislocation occasioned by the drastic economic growth of a potential revisionist, or, as the collapse of the Concert demonstrates, the loss of the support of its most important member.

¹¹⁹ The demise of the Concert also highlights the limitation of any arrangement that excludes zones of potential conflict between its most powerful signatories. Although it is frequently impossible to bring in such considerations (for example, the Ottoman Empire could not be partitioned in 1815), one must at least recognize the potentially debilitating impact of a subsequent clash that may turn a pillar of the system into a revisionist.