

HENRY KISSINGER

DIPLOMACY



In this controversial and monumental book—arguably his most important—Henry Kissinger illuminates just what diplomacy *is*. Moving from a sweeping overview of his own interpretation of history to personal accounts of his negotiations with world leaders, Kissinger describes the ways in which the art of diplomacy and the balance of power have created the world we live in, and shows how Americans, protected by the size and isolation of their country, as well as by their own idealism and mistrust of the Old World, have sought to conduct a unique kind of foreign policy based on the way they wanted the world to be, as opposed to the way it really is.

Spanning more than three centuries of history, from Cardinal Richelieu, the father of the modern state system, to the “New World Order,” in which we live, Kissinger demonstrates how modern diplomacy emerged from the trials and experiences of the balance of power of warfare and peacemaking, and why America, sometimes to its peril, refused to learn its lessons.

His intimate portraits of world leaders, including de Gaulle, Nixon, Chou En-lai, Mao Tse-tung, Reagan, and Gorbachev, based on personal experience and knowledge, provide the reader with a rare window on diplomacy at the summit, together with a wealth of detailed and original observations on the secret negotiations, great events, and the art of statesmanship that have shaped our lives in the decades before, during and since Henry Kissinger was himself at the center of things.

Analyzing the differences in the national *styles*

of diplomacy, Kissinger shows how various societies produce special ways of conducting foreign policy, and how Americans, from the very beginning, sought a distinctive foreign policy based on idealism. He illustrates his points with his own insights and with examples from his own experience, as well as with candid accounts of his breakthrough diplomatic initiatives as Nixon’s foreign policy partner.

Informed by deep historical knowledge, wit, a gift for irony, and a unique understanding of the forces that bind and sunder nations, Kissinger’s *Diplomacy* is must reading for anyone who cares about America’s position in the world.

HENRY ALFRED KISSINGER was sworn in on September 22, 1973, as the fifty-sixth Secretary of State, a position he held until January 20, 1977. He also served as Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs from January 20, 1969, until November 3, 1975.

Among the awards Dr. Kissinger has received have been the Nobel Peace Prize in 1973; the Presidential Medal of Freedom (the nation’s highest civilian award) in 1977; and the Medal of Liberty in 1986.

Dr. Kissinger was born in Fürth, Germany, came to the United States in 1938 and was naturalized a United States citizen in 1943. He served in the Army from 1943 to 1946. He graduated *summa cum laude* from Harvard College in 1950. From 1954 until 1969 he was a member of the faculty of Harvard University. He was Director of the Harvard International Seminar from 1952 to 1969.

Dr. Kissinger is married to the former Nancy Maginnes and is the father of two children by a previous marriage.

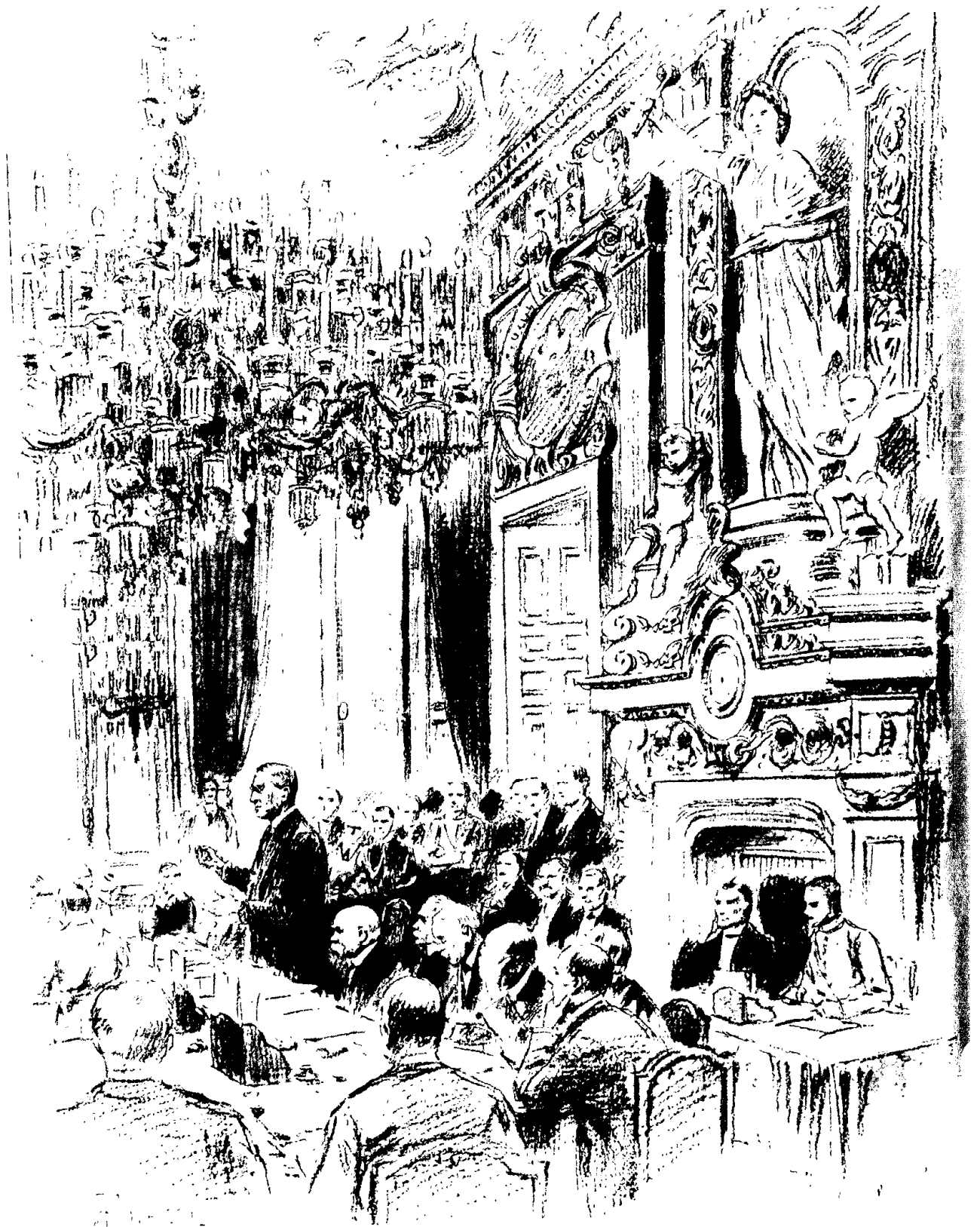
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KISSINGER

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The title *Diplomacy* has been used before.
Both the author and the publisher pay tribute to the late
Sir Harold Nicolson's book (Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1939),
which was quite different in scope, intentions, and ideas.

A leatherbound signed first edition of this book
has been published by The Easton Press.

To the men and women of the Foreign Service of
the United States of America, whose professionalism
and dedication sustain American diplomacy

As a very important source of strength & security, cherish public credit as one method of preserving it is to assist as far as possible the operations of the public credit by cultivating the public mind to remember, and to be prepared for the greater danger which it may be exposed to.



The duty of holding a neutral conduct may be enforced, without any thing more, than the obligation which justice and humanity impose on every Nation, in case, in which it is free to act, to maintain inviolate the relations of peace and amity to wards other Nations.

The value parts of interest for observing that conduct will best be referred to your own reflection, experience, and to the world. To myself, the assurance of my own conscience, is, that I have at least believed myself to be guided by them.

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In private to you, my Countrymen these counsels of an old and affectionate friend, I dare not hope they will make the spur and last impression, I wish - that they will control the usual current of the passions, or prevent our Nation from embarking in a course which has hitherto marked the destiny of Nations. But if I may even flatter myself, that they may be productive of some partial benefit, some occasional good; that they may not recur to moderate the fury of party spirit, to warn against the insidious of foreign Intrigue, to guard against the impostures of pretended patriotism - they will be a full reason for the solicitude for your welfare, by which they have been dictated.

For far as the discharge of my official duties, I have been guided by the principles which have been delineated, the public Records and other evidences of my conduct must witness to you and to the world. To myself, the assurance of my own conscience, is, that I have at least believed myself to be guided by them.

The duty of holding a neutral conduct may be enforced, without any thing more, than the obligation which justice and humanity impose on every Nation, in case, in which it is free to act, to maintain inviolate the relations of peace and amity to wards other Nations.

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Though in reviewing the incidents of my Administration, I am unconscious of intentional error. I am however sensible of many defects, not to think it profane that I have committed many errors. I have endeavored to do each the best I could, and to do it with the assistance of the Almighty to avert or mitigate the consequences. I shall also carry with me the hope that my Country will never cease to view him with indulgence; and that after forty five years of my life dedicated to its service, with an upright zeal, the faults of incompetent abilities will be consigned to oblivion, as myself must soon be to the mansions of rest.

Believe me to be, Sir, your obedient servant, and that I am, Sir, your affectionate friend, George Washington

United States, 1790
19th September

The original of this letter is in the possession of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

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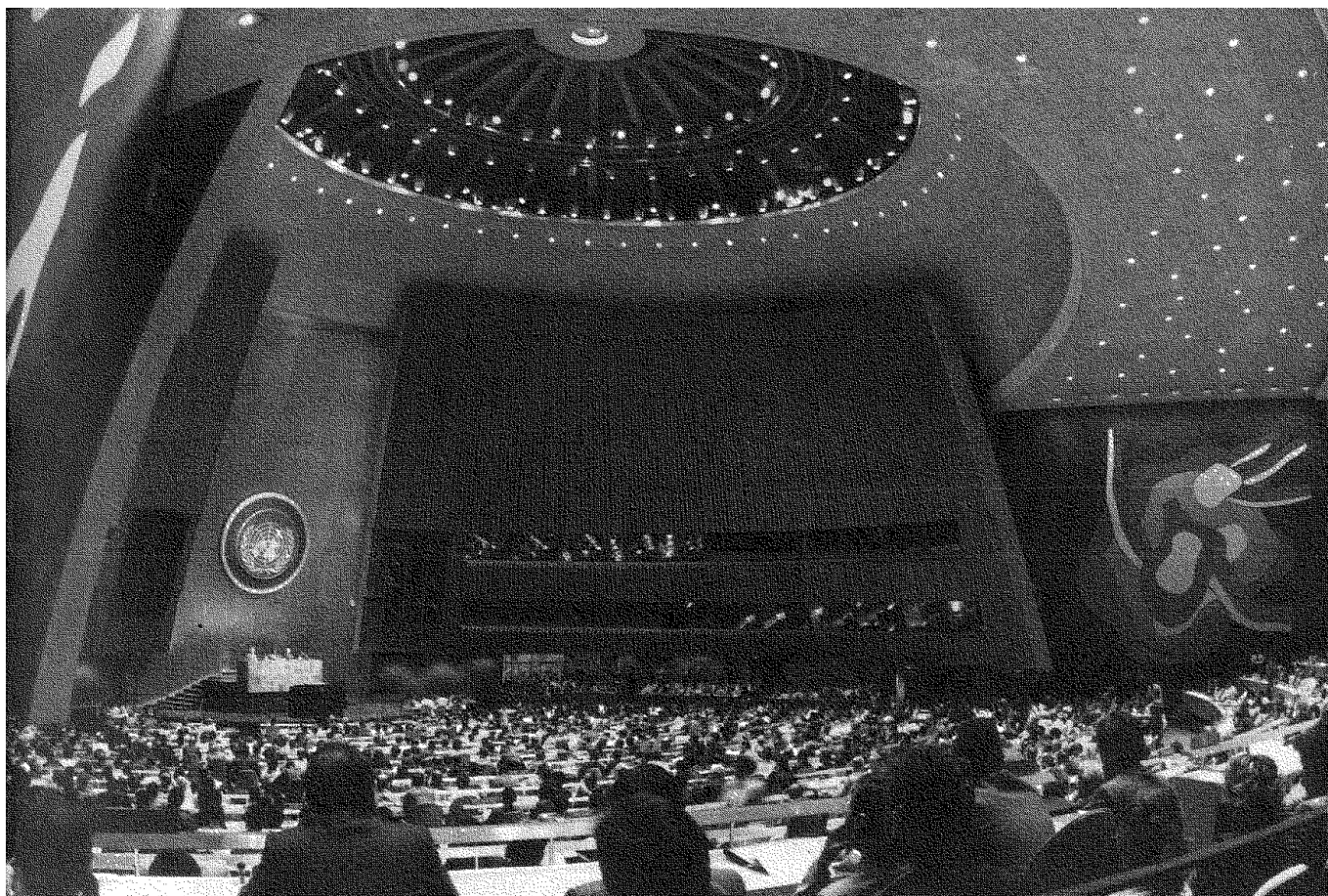
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CHAPTER ONE

The New World Order

Almost as if according to some natural law, in every century there seems to emerge a country with the power, the will, and the intellectual and moral impetus to shape the entire international system in accordance with its own values. In the seventeenth century, France under Cardinal Richelieu introduced the modern approach to international relations, based on the nation-state and motivated by national interest as its ultimate purpose. In the eighteenth century, Great Britain elaborated the concept of the balance of power, which dominated European diplomacy for the next 200 years. In the nineteenth century, Metternich's Austria reconstructed the Concert of Europe and Bismarck's Germany dismantled it, reshaping European diplomacy into a cold-blooded game of power politics.

In the twentieth century, no country has influenced international relations as decisively and at the same time as ambivalently as the United States. No society has more firmly insisted on the inadmissibility of inter-

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vention in the domestic affairs of other states, or more passionately asserted that its own values were universally applicable. No nation has been more pragmatic in the day-to-day conduct of its diplomacy, or more ideological in the pursuit of its historic moral convictions. No country has been more reluctant to engage itself abroad even while undertaking alliances and commitments of unprecedented reach and scope.

The singularities that America has ascribed to itself throughout its history have produced two contradictory attitudes toward foreign policy. The first is that America serves its values best by perfecting democracy at home, thereby acting as a beacon for the rest of mankind; the second, that America's values impose on it an obligation to crusade for them around the world. Torn between nostalgia for a pristine past and yearning for a perfect future, American thought has oscillated between isolationism and commitment, though, since the end of the Second World War, the realities of interdependence have predominated.

Both schools of thought—of America as beacon and of America as crusader—envision as normal a global international order based on democracy, free commerce, and international law. Since no such system has ever existed, its evocation often appears to other societies as utopian, if not naïve. Still, foreign skepticism never dimmed the idealism of Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, or Ronald Reagan, or indeed of all other twentieth-century American presidents. If anything, it has spurred America's faith that history can be overcome and that if the world truly wants peace, it needs to apply America's moral prescriptions.

Both schools of thought were products of the American experience. Though other republics have existed, none had been consciously created to vindicate the idea of liberty. No other country's population had chosen to head for a new continent and tame its wilderness in the name of freedom and prosperity for all. Thus the two approaches, the isolationist and the missionary, so contradictory on the surface, reflected a common underlying faith: that the United States possessed the world's best system of government, and that the rest of mankind could attain peace and prosperity by abandoning traditional diplomacy and adopting America's reverence for international law and democracy.

America's journey through international politics has been a triumph of faith over experience. Since the time America entered the arena of world politics in 1917, it has been so preponderant in strength and so convinced of the rightness of its ideals that this century's major international agreements have been embodiments of American values—from the League of Nations and the Kellogg-Briand Pact to the United Nations Charter and the Helsinki Final Act. The collapse of Soviet communism

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marked the intellectual vindication of American ideals and, ironically, brought America face to face with the kind of world it had been seeking to escape throughout its history. In the emerging international order, nationalism has gained a new lease on life. Nations have pursued self-interest more frequently than high-minded principle, and have competed more than they have cooperated. There is little evidence to suggest that this age-old mode of behavior has changed, or that it is likely to change in the decades ahead.

What *is* new about the emerging world order is that, for the first time, the United States can neither withdraw from the world nor dominate it. America cannot change the way it has perceived its role throughout its history, nor should it want to. When America entered the international arena, it was young and robust and had the power to make the world conform to its vision of international relations. By the end of the Second World War in 1945, the United States was so powerful (at one point about 35 percent of the world's entire economic production was American) that it seemed as if it was destined to shape the world according to its preferences.

John F. Kennedy declared confidently in 1961 that America was strong enough to "pay any price, bear any burden" to ensure the success of liberty. Three decades later, the United States is in less of a position to insist on the immediate realization of all its desires. Other countries have grown into Great Power status. The United States now faces the challenge of reaching its goals in stages, each of which is an amalgam of American values and geopolitical necessities. One of the new necessities is that a world comprising several states of comparable strength must base its order on some concept of equilibrium—an idea with which the United States has never felt comfortable.

When American thinking on foreign policy and European diplomatic traditions encountered each other at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, the differences in historical experience became dramatically evident. The European leaders sought to refurbish the existing system according to familiar methods; the American peacemakers believed that the Great War had resulted not from intractable geopolitical conflicts but from flawed European practices. In his famous Fourteen Points, Woodrow Wilson told the Europeans that, henceforth, the international system should be based not on the balance of power but on ethnic self-determination, that their security should depend not on military alliances but on collective security, and that their diplomacy should no longer be conducted secretly by experts but on the basis of "open agreements, openly arrived at." Clearly, Wilson had come not so much to discuss the terms for ending a war or

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for restoring the existing international order, as he had to recast a whole system of international relations as it had been practiced for nearly three centuries.

For as long as Americans have been reflecting on foreign policy, they have ascribed Europe's travails to the balance-of-power system. And since the time Europe first had to concern itself with American foreign policy, its leaders have looked askance at America's self-appointed mission of global reform. Each side has behaved as if the other had freely chosen its mode of diplomatic behavior and could have, were it wiser or less belligerent, selected some other, more agreeable, method.

In fact, both the American and the European approaches to foreign policy were the products of their own unique circumstances. Americans inhabited a nearly empty continent shielded from predatory powers by two vast oceans and with weak countries as neighbors. Since America confronted no power in need of being balanced, it could hardly have occupied itself with the challenges of equilibrium even if its leaders had been seized by the bizarre notion of replicating European conditions amidst a people who had turned their backs on Europe.

The anguishing dilemmas of security that tormented European nations did not touch America for nearly 150 years. When they did, America twice participated in the world wars which had been started by the nations of Europe. In each instance, by the time America got involved, the balance of power had already failed to operate, producing this paradox: that the balance of power, which most Americans disdained, in fact assured American security as long as it functioned as it was designed; and that it was its breakdown that drew America into international politics.

The nations of Europe did not choose the balance of power as the means for regulating their relations out of innate quarrelsomeness or an Old World love of intrigue. If the emphasis on democracy and international law was the product of America's unique sense of security, European diplomacy had been forged in the school of hard knocks.

Europe was thrown into balance-of-power politics when its first choice, the medieval dream of universal empire, collapsed and a host of states of more or less equal strength arose from the ashes of that ancient aspiration. When a group of states so constituted are obliged to deal with one another, there are only two possible outcomes: either one state becomes so strong that it dominates all the others and creates an empire, or no state is ever quite powerful enough to achieve that goal. In the latter case, the pretensions of the most aggressive member of the international community are kept in check by a combination of the others; in other words, by the operation of a balance of power.

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The balance-of-power system did not purport to avoid crises or even wars. When working properly, it was meant to limit both the ability of states to dominate others and the scope of conflicts. Its goal was not peace so much as stability and moderation. By definition, a balance-of-power arrangement cannot satisfy every member of the international system completely; it works best when it keeps dissatisfaction below the level at which the aggrieved party will seek to overthrow the international order.

Theorists of the balance of power often leave the impression that it is the natural form of international relations. In fact, balance-of-power systems have existed only rarely in human history. The Western Hemisphere has never known one, nor has the territory of contemporary China since the end of the period of the warring states, over 2,000 years ago. For the greatest part of humanity and the longest periods of history, empire has been the typical mode of government. Empires have no interest in operating within an international system; they aspire to *be* the international system. Empires have no need for a balance of power. That is how the United States has conducted its foreign policy in the Americas, and China through most of its history in Asia.

In the West, the only examples of functioning balance-of-power systems were among the city-states of ancient Greece and Renaissance Italy, and the European state system which arose out of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. The distinguishing feature of these systems was to elevate a fact of life—the existence of a number of states of substantially equal strength—into a guiding principle of world order.

Intellectually, the concept of the balance of power reflected the convictions of all the major political thinkers of the Enlightenment. In their view, the universe, including the political sphere, operated according to rational principles which balanced each other. Seemingly random acts by reasonable men would, in their totality, tend toward the common good, though the proof of this proposition was elusive in the century of almost constant conflict that followed the Thirty Years' War.

Adam Smith, in *The Wealth of Nations*, maintained that an “invisible hand” would distill general economic well-being out of selfish individual economic actions. In *The Federalist Papers*, Madison argued that, in a large enough republic, the various political “factions” selfishly pursuing their own interests would, by a kind of automatic mechanism, forge a proper domestic harmony. The concepts of the separation of powers and of checks and balances, as conceived by Montesquieu and embodied in the American Constitution, reflected an identical view. The purpose of the separation of powers was to avoid despotism, not to achieve harmonious government; each branch of the government, in the pursuit of its own

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interests, would restrain excess and thereby serve the common good. The same principles were applied to international affairs. By pursuing its own selfish interests, each state was presumed to contribute to progress, as if some unseen hand were guaranteeing that freedom of choice for each state assured well-being for all.

For over a century, this expectation seemed to be fulfilled. After the dislocations caused by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, the leaders of Europe restored the balance of power at the Congress of Vienna in 1815 and softened the brutal reliance on power by seeking to moderate international conduct through moral and legal bonds. Yet by the end of the nineteenth century, the European balance-of-power system returned to the principles of power politics and in a far more unforgiving environment. Facing down the adversary became the standard method of diplomacy, leading to one test of strength after another. Finally, in 1914, a crisis arose from which no one shrank. Europe never fully recovered world leadership after the catastrophe of the First World War. The United States emerged as the dominant player but Woodrow Wilson soon made it clear that his country refused to play by European rules.

At no time in its history has America participated in a balance-of-power system. Before the two world wars, America benefited from the operation of the balance of power without being involved in its maneuvers, and while enjoying the luxury of castigating it at will. During the Cold War, America was engaged in an ideological, political, and strategic struggle with the Soviet Union in which a two-power world operated according to principles quite different from those of a balance-of-power system. In a two-power world, there can be no pretense that conflict leads to the common good; any gain for one side is a loss for the other. Victory without war was in fact what America achieved in the Cold War, a victory which has now obliged it to confront the dilemma described by George Bernard Shaw: "There are two tragedies in life. One is to lose your heart's desire. The other is to gain it."

American leaders have taken their values so much for granted that they rarely recognize how revolutionary and unsettling these values can appear to others. No other society has asserted that the principles of ethical conduct apply to international conduct in the same way that they do to the individual—a notion that is the exact opposite of Richelieu's *raison d'état*. America has maintained that the prevention of war is as much a legal as a diplomatic challenge, and that what it resists is not change as such but the method of change, especially the use of force. A Bismarck or a Disraeli would have ridiculed the proposition that foreign policy is about method rather than substance, if indeed he had understood it. No

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nation has ever imposed the moral demands on itself that America has. And no country has so tormented itself over the gap between its moral values, which are by definition absolute, and the imperfection inherent in the concrete situations to which they must be applied.

During the Cold War, the unique American approach to foreign policy was remarkably appropriate to the challenge at hand. There was a deep ideological conflict, and only one country, the United States, possessed the full panoply of means—political, economic, and military—to organize the defense of the noncommunist world. A nation in such a position is able to insist on its views and can often avoid the problem facing the statesmen of less favored societies: that their means oblige them to pursue goals less ambitious than their hopes, and that their circumstances require them to approach even those goals in stages.

In the Cold War world, the traditional concepts of power had substantially broken down. Most of history has displayed a synthesis of military, political, and economic strength, which in general has proved to be symmetrical. In the Cold War period, the various elements of power became quite distinct. The former Soviet Union was a military superpower and at the same time an economic dwarf. It was also possible for a country to be an economic giant but to be militarily irrelevant, as was the case with Japan.

In the post-Cold War world, the various elements are likely to grow more congruent and more symmetrical. The relative military power of the United States will gradually decline. The absence of a clear-cut adversary will produce domestic pressure to shift resources from defense to other priorities—a process which has already started. When there is no longer a single threat and each country perceives its perils from its own national perspective, those societies which had nestled under American protection will feel compelled to assume greater responsibility for their own security. Thus, the operation of the new international system will move toward equilibrium even in the military field, though it may take some decades to reach that point. These tendencies will be even more pronounced in economics, where American predominance is already declining, and where it has become safer to challenge the United States.

The international system of the twenty-first century will be marked by a seeming contradiction: on the one hand, fragmentation; on the other, growing globalization. On the level of the relations among states, the new order will be more like the European state system of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries than the rigid patterns of the Cold War. It will contain at least six major powers—the United States, Europe, China, Japan, Russia, and probably India—as well as a multiplicity of medium-sized

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and smaller countries. At the same time, international relations have become truly global for the first time. Communications are instantaneous; the world economy operates on all continents simultaneously. A whole set of issues has surfaced that can only be dealt with on a worldwide basis, such as nuclear proliferation, the environment, the population explosion, and economic interdependence.

For America, reconciling differing values and very different historical experiences among countries of comparable significance will be a novel experience and a major departure from either the isolation of the last century or the *de facto* hegemony of the Cold War, in ways which this book seeks to illuminate. Equally, the other major players are facing difficulties in adjusting to the emerging world order.

Europe, the only part of the modern world ever to operate a multistate system, invented the concepts of the nation-state, sovereignty, and the balance of power. These ideas dominated international affairs for the better part of three centuries. But none of Europe's erstwhile practitioners of *raison d'état* are now strong enough to act as principals in the emerging international order. They are attempting to compensate for this relative weakness by creating a unified Europe, an effort which absorbs much of their energies. But even if they were to succeed, no automatic guidelines for the conduct of a unified Europe on the global stage would be at hand, since such a political entity has never existed before.

Throughout its history, Russia has been a special case. It arrived late on the European scene—well after France and Great Britain had been consolidated—and none of the traditional principles of European diplomacy seemed to apply to it. Bordering on three different cultural spheres—Europe, Asia, and the Muslim world—Russia contained populations of each, and hence was never a national state in the European sense. Constantly changing shape as its rulers annexed contiguous territories, Russia was an empire out of scale in comparison with any of the European countries. Moreover, with every new conquest, the character of the state changed as it incorporated another brand-new, restive, non-Russian ethnic group. This was one of the reasons Russia felt obliged to maintain huge armies whose size was unrelated to any plausible threat to its external security.

Torn between obsessive insecurity and proselytizing zeal, between the requirements of Europe and the temptations of Asia, the Russian Empire always had a role in the European equilibrium but was never emotionally a part of it. The requirements of conquest and of security became merged in the minds of Russian leaders. Since the Congress of Vienna, the Russian Empire has placed its military forces on foreign soil more often than any

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other major power. Analysts frequently explain Russian expansionism as stemming from a sense of insecurity. But Russian writers have far more often justified Russia's outward thrust as a messianic vocation. Russia on the march rarely showed a sense of limits; thwarted, it tended to withdraw into sullen resentment. For most of its history, Russia has been a cause looking for opportunity.

Postcommunist Russia finds itself within borders which reflect no historical precedent. Like Europe, it will have to devote much of its energy to redefining its identity. Will it seek to return to its historical rhythm and restore the lost empire? Will it shift its center of gravity eastward and become a more active participant in Asian diplomacy? By what principles and methods will it react to the upheavals around its borders, especially in the volatile Middle East? Russia will always be essential to world order and, in the inevitable turmoil associated with answering these questions, a potential menace to it.

China too faces a world order that is new to it. For 2,000 years, the Chinese Empire had united its world under a single imperial rule. To be sure, that rule had faltered at times. Wars occurred in China no less frequently than they did in Europe. But since they generally took place among contenders for the imperial authority, they were more in the nature of civil rather than international wars, and, sooner or later, invariably led to the emergence of some new central power.

Before the nineteenth century, China never had a neighbor capable of contesting its pre-eminence and never imagined that such a state could arise. Conquerors from abroad overthrew Chinese dynasties, only to be absorbed into Chinese culture to such an extent that they continued the traditions of the Middle Kingdom. The notion of the sovereign equality of states did not exist in China; outsiders were considered barbarians and were relegated to a tributary relationship—that was how the first British envoy to Beijing was received in the eighteenth century. China disdained sending ambassadors abroad but was not above using distant barbarians to overcome the ones nearby. Yet this was a strategy for emergencies, not a day-to-day operational system like the European balance of power, and it failed to produce the sort of permanent diplomatic establishment characteristic of Europe. After China became a humiliated subject of European colonialism in the nineteenth century, it re-emerged only recently—since the Second World War—into a multipolar world unprecedented in its history.

Japan had also cut itself off from all contact with the outside world. For 500 years before it was forcibly opened by Commodore Matthew Perry in 1854, Japan did not even deign to balance the barbarians off against each

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other or to invent tributary relationships, as the Chinese had. Closed off from the outside world, Japan prided itself on its unique customs, gratified its military tradition by civil war, and rested its internal structure on the conviction that its unique culture was impervious to foreign influence, superior to it, and, in the end, would defeat it rather than absorb it.

In the Cold War, when the Soviet Union was the dominant security threat, Japan was able to identify its foreign policy with America, thousands of miles away. The new world order, with its multiplicity of challenges, will almost certainly oblige a country with so proud a past to re-examine its reliance on a single ally. Japan is bound to become more sensitive to the Asian balance of power than is possible for America, in a different hemisphere and facing in three directions—across the Atlantic, across the Pacific, and toward South America. China, Korea, and Southeast Asia will acquire quite a different significance for Japan than for the United States, and will inaugurate a more autonomous and more self-reliant Japanese foreign policy.

As for India, which is now emerging as the major power in South Asia, its foreign policy is in many ways the last vestige of the heyday of European imperialism, leavened by the traditions of an ancient culture. Before the arrival of the British, the subcontinent had not been ruled as a single political unit for millennia. British colonization was accomplished with small military forces because, at first, the local population saw these as the replacement of one set of conquerors by another. But after it established unified rule, the British Empire was undermined by the very values of popular government and cultural nationalism it had imported into India. Yet, as a nation-state, India is a newcomer. Absorbed by the struggle to feed its vast population, India dabbled in the Nonaligned movement during the Cold War. But it has yet to assume a role commensurate with its size on the international political stage.

Thus, in effect, none of the most important countries which must build a new world order have had any experience with the multistate system that is emerging. Never before has a new world order had to be assembled from so many different perceptions, or on so global a scale. Nor has any previous order had to combine the attributes of the historic balance-of-power systems with global democratic opinion and the exploding technology of the contemporary period.

In retrospect, all international systems appear to have an inevitable symmetry. Once they are established, it is difficult to imagine how history might have evolved had other choices been made, or indeed whether any other choices had been possible. When an international order first comes into being, many choices may be open to it. But each choice constricts

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the universe of remaining options. Because complexity inhibits flexibility, early choices are especially crucial. Whether an international order is relatively stable, like the one that emerged from the Congress of Vienna, or highly volatile, like those that emerged from the Peace of Westphalia and the Treaty of Versailles, depends on the degree to which they reconcile what makes the constituent societies feel secure with what they consider just.

The two international systems that were the most stable—that of the Congress of Vienna and the one dominated by the United States after the Second World War—had the advantage of uniform perceptions. The statesmen at Vienna were aristocrats who saw intangibles in the same way, and agreed on fundamentals; the American leaders who shaped the postwar world emerged from an intellectual tradition of extraordinary coherence and vitality.

The order that is now emerging will have to be built by statesmen who represent vastly different cultures. They run huge bureaucracies of such complexity that, often, the energy of these statesmen is more consumed by serving the administrative machinery than by defining a purpose. They rise to eminence by means of qualities that are not necessarily those needed to govern, and are even less suited to building an international order. And the only available model of a multistate system was one built by Western societies, which many of the participants may reject.

Yet the rise and fall of previous world orders based on many states—from the Peace of Westphalia to our time—is the only experience on which one can draw in trying to understand the challenges facing contemporary statesmen. The study of history offers no manual of instructions that can be applied automatically; history teaches by analogy, shedding light on the likely consequences of comparable situations. But each generation must determine for itself which circumstances are in fact comparable.

Intellectuals analyze the operations of international systems; statesmen build them. And there is a vast difference between the perspective of an analyst and that of a statesman. The analyst can choose which problem he wishes to study, whereas the statesman's problems are imposed on him. The analyst can allot whatever time is necessary to come to a clear conclusion; the overwhelming challenge to the statesman is the pressure of time. The analyst runs no risk. If his conclusions prove wrong, he can write another treatise. The statesman is permitted only one guess; his mistakes are irretrievable. The analyst has available to him all the facts; he will be judged on his intellectual power. The statesman must act on assessments that cannot be proved at the time that he is making them; he

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will be judged by history on the basis of how wisely he managed the inevitable change and, above all, by how well he preserves the peace. That is why examining how statesmen have dealt with the problem of world order—what worked or failed and why—is not the end of understanding contemporary diplomacy, though it may be its beginning.



CHAPTER TWO

The Hinge: Theodore Roosevelt or Woodrow Wilson

Until early in this century, the isolationist tendency prevailed in American foreign policy. Then, two factors projected America into world affairs: its rapidly expanding power, and the gradual collapse of the international system centered on Europe. Two watershed presidencies marked this progression: Theodore Roosevelt's and Woodrow Wilson's. These men held the reins of government when world affairs were drawing a reluctant nation into their vortex. Both recognized that America had a crucial role to play in world affairs though they justified its emergence from isolation with opposite philosophies.

Roosevelt was a sophisticated analyst of the balance of power. He in-

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sisted on an international role for America because its national interest demanded it, and because a global balance of power was inconceivable to him without American participation. For Wilson, the justification of America's international role was messianic: America had an obligation, not to the balance of power, but to spread its principles throughout the world. During the Wilson Administration, America emerged as a key player in world affairs, proclaiming principles which, while reflecting the truisms of American thought, nonetheless marked a revolutionary departure for Old World diplomats. These principles held that peace depends on the spread of democracy, that states should be judged by the same ethical criteria as individuals, and that the national interest consists of adhering to a universal system of law.

To hardened veterans of a European diplomacy based on the balance of power, Wilson's views about the ultimately moral foundations of foreign policy appeared strange, even hypocritical. Yet Wilsonianism has survived while history has bypassed the reservations of his contemporaries. Wilson was the originator of the vision of a universal world organization, the League of Nations, which would keep the peace through collective security rather than alliances. Though Wilson could not convince his own country of its merit, the idea lived on. It is above all to the drumbeat of Wilsonian idealism that American foreign policy has marched since his watershed presidency, and continues to march to this day.

America's singular approach to international affairs did not develop all at once, or as the consequence of a solitary inspiration. In the early years of the Republic, American foreign policy was in fact a sophisticated reflection of the American national interest, which was, simply, to fortify the new nation's independence. Since no European country was capable of posing an actual threat so long as it had to contend with rivals, the Founding Fathers showed themselves quite ready to manipulate the despised balance of power when it suited their needs; indeed, they could be extraordinarily skillful at maneuvering between France and Great Britain not only to preserve America's independence but to enlarge its frontiers. Because they really wanted neither side to win a decisive victory in the wars of the French Revolution, they declared neutrality. Jefferson defined the Napoleonic Wars as a contest between the tyrant on the land (France) and the tyrant of the ocean (England)¹—in other words, the parties in the European struggle were morally equivalent. Practicing an early form of nonalignment, the new nation discovered the benefit of neutrality as a bargaining tool, just as many an emerging nation has since.

At the same time, the United States did not carry its rejection of Old

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World ways to the point of forgoing territorial expansion. On the contrary, from the very beginning, the United States pursued expansion in the Americas with extraordinary singleness of purpose. After 1794, a series of treaties settled the borders with Canada and Florida in America's favor, opened the Mississippi River to American trade, and began to establish an American commercial interest in the British West Indies. This culminated in the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, which brought to the young country a huge, undefined territory west of the Mississippi River from France along with claims to Spanish territory in Florida and Texas—the foundation from which to develop into a great power.

The French Emperor who made the sale, Napoleon Bonaparte, advanced an Old World explanation for such a one-sided transaction: "This accession of territory affirms forever the power of the United States, and I have just given England a maritime rival that sooner or later will lay low her pride."² American statesmen did not care what justification France used to sell her possessions. To them, condemnation of Old World power politics did not appear inconsistent with American territorial expansion across North America. For they considered America's westward thrust as America's internal affair rather than as a matter of foreign policy.

In this spirit, James Madison condemned war as the germ of all evils—as the precursor of taxes and armies and all other "instruments for bringing the many under the domination of the few."³ His successor, James Monroe, saw no contradiction in defending westward expansion on the ground that it was necessary to turn America into a great power:

It must be obvious to all, that the further the expansion is carried, provided it be not beyond the just limit, the greater will be the freedom of action to both [state and federal] Governments, and the more perfect their security; and, in all other respects, the better the effect will be to the whole American people. Extent of territory, whether it be great or small, gives to a nation many of its characteristics. It marks the extent of its resources, of its population, of its physical force. It marks, in short, the difference between a great and a small power.⁴

Still, while occasionally using the methods of European power politics, the leaders of the new nation remained committed to the principles that had made their country exceptional. The European powers fought innumerable wars to prevent potentially dominant powers from arising. In America, the combination of strength and distance inspired a confidence that any challenge could be overcome *after* it had presented itself. European nations, with much narrower margins of survival, formed coali-

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tions against the *possibility* of change; America was sufficiently remote to gear its policy to resisting the *actuality* of change.

This was the geopolitical basis of George Washington's warning against "entangling" alliances for any cause whatsoever. It would be unwise, he said,

to implicate ourselves, by artificial ties, in the ordinary vicissitudes of her [European] politics, or the ordinary combinations and collisions of her friendships or enmities. Our detached and distant situation invites and enables us to pursue a different course.⁵

The new nation did not treat Washington's advice as a practical, geopolitical judgment but as a moral maxim. As the repository of the principle of liberty, America found it natural to interpret the security conferred on it by great oceans as a sign of divine providence, and to attribute its actions to superior moral insight instead of to a margin of security not shared by any other nation.

A staple of the early Republic's foreign policy was the conviction that Europe's constant wars were the result of its cynical methods of statecraft. Whereas the European leaders based their international system on the conviction that harmony could be distilled from a competition of selfish interests, their American colleagues envisioned a world in which states would act as cooperative partners, not as distrustful rivals. American leaders rejected the European idea that the morality of states should be judged by different criteria than the morality of individuals. According to Jefferson, there existed

but one system of ethics for men and for nations—to be grateful, to be faithful to all engagements under all circumstances, to be open and generous, promoting in the long run even the interests of both.⁶

The righteousness of America's tone—at times so grating to foreigners—reflected the reality that America had in fact rebelled not simply against the legal ties that had bound it to the old country but against Europe's system and values. America ascribed the frequency of European wars to the prevalence of governmental institutions which denied the values of freedom and human dignity. "As war is the system of government on the old construction," wrote Thomas Paine, "the animosity which nations reciprocally entertain, is nothing more than what the policy of their governments excites, to keep up the spirit of the system. . . . Man is not the

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enemy of man, but through the medium of a false system of government.”⁷

The idea that peace depends above all on promoting democratic institutions has remained a staple of American thought to the present day. Conventional American wisdom has consistently maintained that democracies do not make war against each other. Alexander Hamilton, for one, challenged the premise that republics were essentially more peaceful than other forms of government:

Sparta, Athens, Rome, and Carthage were all republics; two of them, Athens and Carthage, of the commercial kind. Yet were they as often engaged in wars, offensive and defensive, as the neighboring monarchies of the same times. . . . In the government of Britain the representatives of the people compose one branch of the national legislature. Commerce has been for ages the predominant pursuit of that country. Few nations, nevertheless, have been more frequently engaged in war. . . .⁸

Hamilton, however, represented a tiny minority. The overwhelming majority of America’s leaders were as convinced then as they are now that America has a special responsibility to spread its values as its contribution to world peace. Then, as now, disagreements had to do with method. Should America actively promote the spread of free institutions as a principal objective of its foreign policy? Or should it rely on the impact of its example?

The dominant view in the early days of the Republic was that the nascent American nation could best serve the cause of democracy by practicing its virtues at home. In the words of Thomas Jefferson, a “just and solid republican government” in America would be “a standing monument and example” for all the peoples of the world.⁹ A year later, Jefferson returned to the theme that America was, in effect, “acting for all mankind”:

. . . that circumstances denied to others, but indulged to us, have imposed on us the duty of proving what is the degree of freedom and self-government in which a society may venture to leave its individual members.¹⁰

The emphasis American leaders placed on the moral foundations of America’s conduct and on its significance as a symbol of freedom led to a rejection of the truisms of European diplomacy: that the balance of

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power distilled an ultimate harmony out of the competition of selfish interests; and that security considerations overrode the principles of civil law; in other words, that the ends of the state justified the means.

These unprecedented ideas were being put forward by a country which was prospering throughout the nineteenth century, its institutions in good working order and its values vindicated. America was aware of no conflict between high-minded principle and the necessities of survival. In time, the invocation of morality as the means for solving international disputes produced a unique kind of ambivalence and a very American type of anguish. If Americans were obliged to invest their foreign policy with the same degree of rectitude as they did their personal lives, how was security to be analyzed; indeed, in the extreme, did this mean that survival was subordinate to morality? Or did America's devotion to free institutions confer an automatic aura of morality on even the most seemingly self-serving acts? And if this was true, how did it differ from the European concept of *raison d'état*, which asserted that a state's actions can only be judged by their success?

Professors Robert Tucker and David Hendrickson brilliantly analyzed this ambivalence in American thought:

The great dilemma of Jefferson's statecraft lay in his apparent renunciation of the means on which states had always ultimately relied to ensure their security and to satisfy their ambitions, and his simultaneous unwillingness to renounce the ambitions that normally led to the use of these means. He wished, in other words, that America could have it both ways—that it could enjoy the fruits of power without falling victim to the normal consequences of its exercise.¹¹

To this day, the push and pull of these two approaches has been one of the major themes of American foreign policy. By 1820, the United States found a compromise between the two approaches which enabled it to have it both ways until after the Second World War. It continued to castigate what went on across the oceans as the reprehensible result of balance-of-power politics while treating its own expansion across North America as "manifest destiny."

Until the turn of the twentieth century, American foreign policy was basically quite simple: to fulfill the country's manifest destiny, and to remain free of entanglements overseas. America favored democratic governments wherever possible, but abjured action to vindicate its preferences. John Quincy Adams, then Secretary of State, summed up this attitude in 1821:

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Wherever the standard of freedom and independence has been or shall be unfurled, there will her [America's] heart, her benedictions and her prayers be. But she goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own.¹²

The reverse side of this policy of American self-restraint was the decision to exclude European power politics from the Western Hemisphere, if necessary by using some of the methods of European diplomacy. The Monroe Doctrine, which proclaimed this policy, arose from the attempt of the Holy Alliance—composed of Prussia, Russia, and Austria—to suppress the revolution in Spain in the 1820s. Opposed to intervention in domestic affairs in principle, Great Britain was equally unwilling to countenance the Holy Alliance in the Western Hemisphere.

British Foreign Secretary George Canning proposed joint action to the United States in order to keep Spain's colonies in the Americas out of the grasp of the Holy Alliance. He wanted to make sure that, regardless of what happened in Spain, no European power controlled Latin America. Deprived of its colonies, Spain would not be much of a prize, Canning reasoned, and this would either discourage intervention or make it irrelevant.

John Quincy Adams understood the British theory, but did not trust British motives. It was too soon after the 1812 British occupation of Washington for America to side with the erstwhile mother country. Accordingly, Adams urged President Monroe to exclude European colonialism from the Americas as a unilateral American decision.

The Monroe Doctrine, proclaimed in 1823, made a moat of the ocean which separated the United States from Europe. Up to that time, the cardinal rule of American foreign policy had been that the United States would not become entangled in European struggles for power. The Monroe Doctrine went the next step by declaring that Europe must not become entangled in American affairs. And Monroe's idea of what constituted American affairs—the whole Western Hemisphere—was expansive indeed.

The Monroe Doctrine, moreover, did not limit itself to declarations of principle. Daringly, it warned the European powers that the new nation would go to war to uphold the inviolability of the Western Hemisphere. It declared that the United States would regard any extension of European power "to any portion of this hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and safety."¹³

Finally, in language less eloquent but more explicit than that of his

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Secretary of State two years earlier, President Monroe abjured any intervention in European controversies: "In the wars of the European powers in matters relating to themselves we have never taken any part, nor does it comport with our policy so to do."¹⁴

America was at one and the same time turning its back on Europe, and freeing its hands to expand in the Western Hemisphere. Under the umbrella of the Monroe Doctrine, America could pursue policies which were not all that different from the dreams of any European king—expanding its commerce and influence, annexing territory—in short, turning itself into a Great Power without being required to practice power politics. America's desire for expansion and its belief that it was a more pure and principled country than any in Europe never clashed. Since it did not regard its expansion as foreign policy, the United States could use its power to prevail—over the Indians, over Mexico, in Texas—and to do so in good conscience. In a nutshell, the foreign policy of the United States was not to have a foreign policy.

Like Napoleon with respect to the Louisiana Purchase, Canning had a right to boast that he had brought the New World into being to redress the balance of the Old, for Great Britain indicated that it would back the Monroe Doctrine with the Royal Navy. America, however, would redress the European balance of power only to the extent of keeping the Holy Alliance out of the Western Hemisphere. For the rest, the European powers would have to maintain their equilibrium without American participation.

For the rest of the century, the principal theme of American foreign policy was to expand the application of the Monroe Doctrine. In 1823, the Monroe Doctrine had warned the European powers to keep out of the Western Hemisphere. By the time of the Monroe Doctrine's centennial, its meaning had been gradually expanded to justify American hegemony in the Western Hemisphere. In 1845, President Polk explained the incorporation of Texas into the United States as necessary to prevent an independent state from becoming "an ally or dependency of some foreign nation more powerful than herself" and hence a threat to American security.¹⁵ In other words, the Monroe Doctrine justified American intervention not only against an existing threat but against any possibility of an overt challenge—much as the European balance of power did.

The Civil War briefly interrupted America's preoccupation with territorial expansion. Washington's primary foreign-policy concern now was to prevent the Confederacy from being recognized by European nations lest a multistate system emerge on the soil of North America and with it the balance-of-power politics of European diplomacy. But by 1868, President

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Andrew Johnson was back at the old stand of justifying expansion by the Monroe Doctrine, this time in the purchase of Alaska:

Foreign possession or control of those communities has hitherto hindered the growth and impaired the influence of the United States. Chronic revolution and anarchy there would be equally injurious.¹⁶

Something more fundamental than expansion across the American continent was taking place, though it went practically unnoticed by the so-called Great Powers—a new member was joining their club as the United States became the world's most powerful nation. By 1885, the United States had surpassed Great Britain, then considered the world's major industrial power, in manufacturing output. By the turn of the century, it was consuming more energy than Germany, France, Austria-Hungary, Russia, Japan, and Italy combined.¹⁷ Between the Civil War and the turn of the century, American coal production rose by 800 percent, steel rails by 523 percent, railway track mileage by 567 percent, and wheat production by 256 percent. Immigration contributed to the doubling of the American population. And the process of growth was likely to accelerate.

No nation has ever experienced such an increase in its power without seeking to translate it into global influence. America's leaders were tempted. President Andrew Johnson's Secretary of State, Seward, dreamed of an empire including Canada and much of Mexico and extending deep into the Pacific. The Grant Administration wanted to annex the Dominican Republic and toyed with the acquisition of Cuba. These were the kinds of initiatives which contemporary European leaders, Disraeli or Bismarck, would have understood and approved of.

But the American Senate remained focused on domestic priorities and thwarted all expansionist projects. It kept the army small (25,000 men) and the navy weak. Until 1890, the American army ranked fourteenth in the world, after Bulgaria's, and the American navy was smaller than Italy's even though America's industrial strength was thirteen times that of Italy. America did not participate in international conferences and was treated as a second-rank power. In 1880, when Turkey reduced its diplomatic establishment, it eliminated its embassies in Sweden, Belgium, the Netherlands, and the United States. At the same time, a German diplomat in Madrid offered to take a cut in salary rather than be posted to Washington.¹⁸

But once a country has reached the level of power of post-Civil War America, it will not forever resist the temptation of translating it into a position of importance in the international arena. In the late 1880s,

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America began to build up its navy, which, as late as 1880, was smaller than Chile's, Brazil's, or Argentina's. By 1889, Secretary of the Navy Benjamin Tracy was lobbying for a battleship navy and the contemporary naval historian Alfred Thayer Mahan developed a rationale for it.¹⁹

Though in fact the British Royal Navy protected America from depredations by European powers, American leaders did not perceive Great Britain as their country's protector. Throughout the nineteenth century, Great Britain was considered the greatest challenge to American interests, and the Royal Navy the most serious strategic threat. No wonder that, when America began to flex its muscles, it sought to expel Great Britain's influence from the Western Hemisphere, invoking the Monroe Doctrine which Great Britain had been so instrumental in encouraging.

The United States was none too delicate about the challenge. In 1895, Secretary of State Richard Olney invoked the Monroe Doctrine to warn Great Britain with a pointed reference to the inequalities of power. "To-day," he wrote, "the United States is practically sovereign on this continent, and its fiat is law upon the subjects to which it confines its interposition." America's "infinite resources combined with its isolated position render it master of the situation and practically invulnerable as against any or all other powers."²⁰ America's renunciation of power politics clearly did not apply to the Western Hemisphere. By 1902, Great Britain had abandoned its claim to a major role in Central America.

Supreme in the Western Hemisphere, the United States began to enter the wider arena of international affairs. America had grown into a world power almost despite itself. Expanding across the continent, it had established its pre-eminence all around its shores while insisting that it had no wish to conduct the foreign policy of a Great Power. At the end of the process, America found itself commanding the sort of power which made it a major international factor, no matter what its preferences. America's leaders might continue to insist that its basic foreign policy was to serve as a "beacon" for the rest of mankind, but there could be no denying that some of them were also becoming aware that America's power entitled it to be heard on the issues of the day, and that it did not need to wait until all of mankind had become democratic to make itself a part of the international system.

No one articulated this reasoning more trenchantly than Theodore Roosevelt. He was the first president to insist that it was America's duty to make its influence felt globally, and to relate America to the world in terms of a concept of national interest. Like his predecessors, Roosevelt was convinced of America's beneficent role in the world. But unlike them, Roosevelt held that America had real foreign policy interests that went far

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beyond its interest in remaining unentangled. Roosevelt started from the premise that the United States was a power like any other, not a singular incarnation of virtue. If its interests collided with those of other countries, America had the obligation to draw on its strength to prevail.

As a first step, Roosevelt gave the Monroe Doctrine its most interventionist interpretation by identifying it with imperialist doctrines of the period. In what he called a "Corollary" to the Monroe Doctrine, he proclaimed on December 6, 1904, a general right of intervention by "some civilized nation" which, in the Western Hemisphere, the United States alone had a right to exercise: "... in the Western Hemisphere the adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine may force the United States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of such wrong-doing or impotence, to the exercise of an international police power."²¹

Roosevelt's practice preceded his preaching. In 1902, America had forced Haiti to clear up its debts with European banks. In 1903, it fanned unrest in Panama into a full-scale insurrection. With American help, the local population wrested independence from Colombia, but not before Washington had established the Canal Zone under United States sovereignty on both sides of what was to become the Panama Canal. In 1905, the United States established a financial protectorate over the Dominican Republic. And in 1906, American troops occupied Cuba.

For Roosevelt, muscular diplomacy in the Western Hemisphere was part of America's new global role. The two oceans were no longer wide enough to insulate America from the rest of the world. The United States had to become an actor on the international stage. Roosevelt said as much in a 1902 message to the Congress: "More and more, the increasing interdependence and complexity of international political and economic relations render it incumbent on all civilized and orderly powers to insist on the proper policing of the world."²²

Roosevelt commands a unique historical position in America's approach to international relations. No other president defined America's world role so completely in terms of national interest, or identified the national interest so comprehensively with the balance of power. Roosevelt shared the view of his countrymen, that America was the best hope for the world. But unlike most of them, he did not believe that it could preserve the peace or fulfill its destiny simply by practicing civic virtues. In his perception of the nature of world order, he was much closer to Palmerston or Disraeli than to Thomas Jefferson.

A great president must be an educator, bridging the gap between his people's future and its experience. Roosevelt taught an especially stern doctrine for a people brought up in the belief that peace is the normal

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condition among nations, that there is no difference between personal and public morality, and that America was safely insulated from the upheavals affecting the rest of the world. For Roosevelt rebutted each of these propositions. To him, international life meant struggle, and Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest was a better guide to history than personal morality. In Roosevelt's view, the meek inherited the earth only if they were strong. To Roosevelt, America was not a cause but a great power—potentially the greatest. He hoped to be the president destined to usher his nation onto the world scene so that it might shape the twentieth century in the way Great Britain had dominated the nineteenth—as a country of vast strengths which had enlisted itself, with moderation and wisdom, to work on behalf of stability, peace, and progress.

Roosevelt was impatient with many of the pieties which dominated American thinking on foreign policy. He disavowed the efficacy of international law. What a nation could not protect by its own power could not be safeguarded by the international community. He rejected disarmament, which was just then emerging as an international topic:

As yet there is no likelihood of establishing any kind of international power . . . which can effectively check wrong-doing, and in these circumstances it would be both foolish and an evil thing for a great and free nation to deprive itself of the power to protect its own rights and even in exceptional cases to stand up for the rights of others. Nothing would more promote iniquity . . . than for the free and enlightened peoples . . . deliberately to render themselves powerless while leaving every despotism and barbarism armed.²³

Roosevelt was even more scathing when it came to talk about world government:

I regard the Wilson-Bryan attitude of trusting to fantastic peace treaties, to impossible promises, to all kinds of scraps of paper without any backing in efficient force, as abhorrent. It is infinitely better for a nation and for the world to have the Frederick the Great and Bismarck tradition as regards foreign policy than to have the Bryan or Bryan-Wilson attitude as a permanent national attitude. . . . A milk-and-water righteousness unbacked by force is to the full as wicked as and even more mischievous than force divorced from righteousness.²⁴

In a world regulated by power, Roosevelt believed that the natural order of things was reflected in the concept of "spheres of influence," which assigned preponderant influence over large regions to specific powers,

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for example, to the United States in the Western Hemisphere or to Great Britain on the Indian subcontinent. In 1908, Roosevelt acquiesced to the Japanese occupation of Korea because, to his way of thinking, Japanese-Korean relations had to be determined by the relative power of each country, not by the provisions of a treaty or by international law:

Korea is absolutely Japan's. To be sure, by treaty it was solemnly covenanted that Korea should remain independent. But Korea was itself helpless to enforce the treaty, and it was out of the question to suppose that any other nation . . . would attempt to do for the Koreans what they were utterly unable to do for themselves.²⁵

With Roosevelt holding such European-style views, it was not surprising that he approached the global balance of power with a sophistication matched by no other American president and approached only by Richard Nixon. Roosevelt at first saw no need to engage America in the specifics of the European balance of power because he considered it more or less self-regulating. But he left little doubt that, if such a judgment were to prove wrong, he would urge America to engage itself to re-establish the equilibrium. Roosevelt gradually came to see Germany as a threat to the European balance and began to identify America's national interest with those of Great Britain and France.

This was demonstrated in 1906, during the Algeiras Conference, the purpose of which was to settle the future of Morocco. Germany, which insisted on an "open door" to forestall French domination, urged the inclusion of an American representative, because it believed America to have significant trading interests there. In the event, the American consul in Morocco attended, but the role he played disappointed the Germans. Roosevelt subordinated America's commercial interests—which in any event were not large—to his geopolitical view. These were expressed by Henry Cabot Lodge in a letter to Roosevelt at the height of the Moroccan crisis. "France," he said, "ought to be with us and England—in our zone and our combination. It is the sound arrangement economically and politically."²⁶

Whereas in Europe, Roosevelt considered Germany the principal threat, in Asia he was concerned with Russian aspirations and thus favored Japan, Russia's principal rival. "There is no nation in the world which, more than Russia, holds in its hands the fate of the coming years," Roosevelt declared.²⁷ In 1904, Japan, protected by an alliance with Great Britain, attacked Russia. Though Roosevelt proclaimed American neutrality, he leaned toward Japan. A Russian victory, he argued, would be "a blow to

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civilization.”²⁸ And when Japan destroyed the Russian fleet, he rejoiced: “I was thoroughly pleased with the Japanese victory, for Japan is playing our game.”²⁹

He wanted Russia to be weakened rather than altogether eliminated from the balance of power—for, according to the maxims of balance-of-power diplomacy, an excessive weakening of Russia would have merely substituted a Japanese for the Russian threat. Roosevelt perceived that the outcome which served America best would be one in which Russia “should be left face to face with Japan so that each may have a moderative action on the other.”³⁰

On the basis of geopolitical realism rather than high-minded altruism, Roosevelt invited the two belligerents to send representatives to his Oyster Bay home to work out a peace treaty that limited the Japanese victory and preserved equilibrium in the Far East. As a result, Roosevelt became the first American to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, for producing a settlement based on maxims like balance of power and spheres of influence which, after his successor, Wilson, would appear quite un-American.

In 1914, Roosevelt initially took a relatively clinical view of Germany’s invasion of Belgium and Luxembourg, though it was in flagrant violation of treaties which had established the neutrality of these two countries:

I am not taking sides one way or the other as concerns the violation or disregard of these treaties. When giants are engaged in a death wrestle, as they reel to and fro they are certain to trample on whoever gets in the way of either of the huge, straining combatants, *unless it is dangerous to do so*.³¹

A few months after the outbreak of war in Europe, Roosevelt reversed his initial judgment about the violation of Belgian neutrality, though, characteristically, it was not the illegality of the German invasion that concerned him but the threat it posed to the balance of power: “. . . do you not believe that if Germany won in this war, smashed the English Fleet and destroyed the British Empire, within a year or two she would insist upon taking the dominant position in South and Central America . . . ?”³²

He urged massive rearmament so that America might throw its weight behind the Triple Entente. He regarded a German victory as both possible and dangerous for the United States. A victory for the Central Powers would have forfeited the protection of the British Royal Navy, permitting German imperialism to assert itself in the Western Hemisphere.

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That Roosevelt should have considered British naval control of the Atlantic safer than German hegemony was due to such intangible non-power factors as cultural affinity and historical experience. Indeed, there were strong cultural ties between England and America for which there was no counterpart in U.S.-German relations. Moreover, the United States was used to Great Britain ruling the seas and was comfortable with the idea, and no longer suspected Great Britain of expansionist designs in the Americas. Germany, however, was regarded with apprehension. On October 3, 1914, Roosevelt wrote to the British ambassador to Washington (conveniently forgetting his earlier judgment about the inevitability of Germany's disregard of Belgian neutrality) that:

If I had been President, I should have acted [against Germany] on the thirtieth or thirty-first of July.³³

In a letter to Rudyard Kipling a month later, Roosevelt admitted to the difficulty of bringing American power to bear on the European war on the basis of his convictions. The American people were unwilling to follow a course of action cast so strictly in terms of power politics:

If I should advocate all that I myself believe, I would do no good among our people, because they would not follow me. Our people are short-sighted, and they do not understand international matters. Your people have been short-sighted, but they are not as short-sighted as ours in these matters. . . . Thanks to the width of the ocean, our people believe that they have nothing to fear from the present contest, and that they have no responsibility concerning it.³⁴

Had American thinking on foreign policy culminated in Theodore Roosevelt, it would have been described as an evolution adapting traditional principles of European statecraft to the American condition. Roosevelt would have been seen as the president who was in office when the United States, having established a dominant position in the Americas, began to make its weight felt as a world power. But American foreign-policy thinking did not end with Roosevelt, nor could it have done so. A leader who confines his role to his people's experience dooms himself to stagnation; a leader who outstrips his people's experience runs the risk of not being understood. Neither its experience nor its values prepared America for the role assigned to it by Roosevelt.

In one of history's ironies, America did in the end fulfill the leading role Roosevelt had envisioned for it, and within Roosevelt's lifetime, but

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it did so on behalf of principles Roosevelt derided, and under the guidance of a president whom Roosevelt despised. Woodrow Wilson was the embodiment of the tradition of American exceptionalism, and originated what would become the dominant intellectual school of American foreign policy—a school whose precepts Roosevelt considered at best irrelevant and at worst inimical to America's long-range interests.

In terms of all established principles of statecraft, Roosevelt had by far the better of the argument between these two of America's greatest presidents. Nevertheless, it was Wilson who prevailed: a century later, Roosevelt is remembered for his achievements, but it was Wilson who shaped American thought. Roosevelt understood how international politics worked among the nations then conducting world affairs—no American president has had a more acute insight into the operation of international systems. Yet Wilson grasped the mainsprings of American motivation, perhaps the principal one being that America simply did not see itself as a nation like any other. It lacked both the theoretical and the practical basis for the European-style diplomacy of constant adjustment of the nuances of power from a posture of moral neutrality for the sole purpose of preserving an ever-shifting balance. Whatever the realities and the lessons of power, the American people's abiding conviction has been that its exceptional character resides in the practice and propagation of freedom.

Americans could be moved to great deeds only through a vision that coincided with their perception of their country as exceptional. However intellectually attuned to the way the diplomacy of the Great Powers actually operated, Roosevelt's approach failed to persuade his countrymen that they needed to enter the First World War. Wilson, on the other hand, tapped his people's emotions with arguments that were as morally elevated as they were largely incomprehensible to foreign leaders.

Wilson's was an astonishing achievement. Rejecting power politics, he knew how to move the American people. An academic who arrived in politics relatively late, he was elected due to a split in the Republican Party between Taft and Roosevelt. Wilson grasped that America's instinctive isolationism could be overcome only by an appeal to its belief in the exceptional nature of its ideals. Step by step, he took an isolationist country into war, after he had first demonstrated his Administration's devotion to peace by a passionate advocacy of neutrality. And he did so while abjuring any selfish national interests, and by affirming that America sought no other benefit than vindication of its principles.

In Wilson's first State of the Union Address, on December 2, 1913, he laid down the outline of what later came to be known as Wilsonianism.

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Universal law and not equilibrium, national trustworthiness and not national self-assertion were, in Wilson's view, the foundations of international order. Recommending the ratification of several treaties of arbitration, Wilson argued that binding arbitration, not force, should become the method for resolving international disputes:

There is only one possible standard by which to determine controversies between the United States and other nations, and that is compounded of these two elements: Our own honor and our obligations to the peace of the world. A test so compounded ought easily to be made to govern both the establishment of new treaty obligations and the interpretation of those already assumed.³⁵

Nothing annoyed Roosevelt as much as high-sounding principles backed by neither the power nor the will to implement them. He wrote to a friend: "If I must choose between a policy of blood and iron and one of milk and water . . . why I am for the policy of blood and iron. It is better not only for the nation but in the long run for the world."³⁶

By the same token, Roosevelt's proposal to respond to the war in Europe by increasing defense spending made no sense to Wilson. In his second State of the Union address on December 8, 1914, and after the European war had been raging for four months, Wilson rejected an increase in America's armaments, because this would signal that "we had lost our self-possession" as the result of a war "whose causes cannot touch us, whose very existence affords us opportunities for friendship and disinterested service. . . ."³⁷

America's influence, in Wilson's view, depended on its unselfishness; it had to preserve itself so that, in the end, it could step forward as a credible arbiter between the warring parties. Roosevelt had asserted that the war in Europe, and especially a German victory, would ultimately threaten American security. Wilson maintained that America was essentially disinterested, hence should emerge as mediator. Because of America's faith in values higher than the balance of power, the war in Europe now afforded it an extraordinary opportunity to proselytize for a new and better approach to international affairs.

Roosevelt ridiculed such ideas and accused Wilson of pandering to isolationist sentiments to help his re-election in 1916. In fact, the thrust of Wilson's policy was quite the opposite of isolationism. What Wilson was proclaiming was not America's withdrawal from the world but the universal applicability of its values and, in time, America's commitment to spreading them. Wilson restated what had become the conventional

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American wisdom since Jefferson, but put it in the service of a crusading ideology:

- America's special mission transcends day-to-day diplomacy and obliges it to serve as a beacon of liberty for the rest of mankind.
- The foreign policies of democracies are morally superior because the people are inherently peace-loving.
- Foreign policy should reflect the same moral standards as personal ethics.
- The state has no right to claim a separate morality for itself.

Wilson endowed these assertions of American moral exceptionalism with a universal dimension:

Dread of the power of any other nation we are incapable of. We are not jealous of rivalry in the fields of commerce or of any other peaceful achievement. We mean to live our own lives as we will; but we mean also to let live. We are, indeed, a true friend to all the nations of the world, because we threaten none, covet the possessions of none, desire the overthrow of none.³⁸

No other nation has ever rested its claim to international leadership on its altruism. All other nations have sought to be judged by the compatibility of their national interests with those of other societies. Yet, from Woodrow Wilson through George Bush, American presidents have invoked their country's unselfishness as the crucial attribute of its leadership role. Neither Wilson nor his later disciples, through the present, have been willing to face the fact that, to foreign leaders imbued with less elevated maxims, America's claim to altruism evokes a certain aura of unpredictability; whereas the national interest can be calculated, altruism depends on the definition of its practitioner.

To Wilson, however, the altruistic nature of American society was proof of divine favor:

It was as if in the Providence of God a continent had been kept unused and waiting for a peaceful people who loved liberty and the rights of men more than they loved anything else, to come and set up an unselfish commonwealth.³⁹

The claim that American goals represented providential dispensation implied a global role for America that would prove far more sweeping than

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any Roosevelt had ever imagined. For he had wanted no more than to improve the balance of power and to invest America's role in it with the importance commensurate with its growing strength. In Roosevelt's conception, America would have been one nation among many—more powerful than most and part of an elite group of great powers—but still subject to the historic ground rules of equilibrium.

Wilson moved America onto a plane entirely remote from such considerations. Disdaining the balance of power, he insisted that America's role was "not to prove . . . our selfishness, but our greatness."⁴⁰ If that was true, America had no right to hoard its values for itself. As early as 1915, Wilson put forward the unprecedented doctrine that the security of America was inseparable from the security of *all* the rest of mankind. This implied that it was henceforth America's duty to oppose aggression *everywhere*:

. . . because we demand unmolested development and the undisturbed government of our own lives upon our own principles of right and liberty, we resent, from whatever quarter it may come, the aggression we ourselves will not practice. We insist upon security in prosecuting our self-chosen lines of national development. We do more than that. We demand it also for others. We do not confine our enthusiasm for individual liberty and free national development to the incidents and movements of affairs which affect only ourselves. We feel it wherever there is a people that tries to walk in these difficult paths of independence and right.⁴¹

Envisioning America as a beneficent global policeman, this foreshadowed the containment policy, which would be developed after the Second World War.

Even at his most exuberant, Roosevelt would never have dreamt of so sweeping a sentiment portending global interventionism. But, then, he was the warrior-statesman; Wilson was the prophet-priest. Statesmen, even warriors, focus on the world in which they live; to prophets, the "real" world is the one they want to bring into being.

Wilson transformed what had started out as a reaffirmation of American neutrality into a set of propositions laying the foundations for a global crusade. In Wilson's view, there was no essential difference between freedom for America and freedom for the world. Proving that the time spent in faculty meetings, where hairsplitting exegesis reigns supreme, had not been wasted, he developed an extraordinary interpretation of what George Washington had really meant when he warned against for-

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eign entanglements. Wilson redefined “foreign” in a way that would surely have astonished the first president. What Washington meant, according to Wilson, was that America must avoid becoming entangled in the *purposes* of others. But, Wilson argued, nothing that concerns humanity “can be foreign or indifferent to us.”⁴² Hence America had an unlimited charter to involve itself abroad.

What extraordinary conceit to derive a charter for global intervention from a Founding Father’s injunction against foreign entanglements, and to elaborate a philosophy of neutrality that made involvement in war inevitable! As Wilson edged his country ever closer to the world war by articulating his visions of a better world, he evoked a vitality and an idealism that seemed to justify America’s hibernation for a century just so it could now enter the international arena with a dynamism and an innocence unknown to its more seasoned partners. European diplomacy had been hardened, and humbled, in the crucible of history; its statesmen saw events through the prism of many dreams proved fragile, of high hopes dashed and ideals lost to the fragility of human foresight. America knew no such limitations, boldly proclaiming, if not the end of history, then surely its irrelevance, as it moved to transform values heretofore considered unique to America into universal principles applicable to all. Wilson was thus able to overcome, at least for a time, the tension in American thinking between America the secure and America the unsullied. America could only approach entry into World War I as an engagement on behalf of peoples everywhere, not just itself, and in the role of the crusader for universal liberties.

Germany’s announcement of unrestricted submarine warfare and its sinking of the *Lusitania* became the proximate cause of America’s declaration of war. But Wilson did not justify America’s entry into the war on the grounds of specific grievances. National interests were irrelevant; Belgium’s violation and the balance of power had nothing to do with it. Rather, the war had a moral foundation, whose primary objective was a new and more just international order. “It is a fearful thing,” Wilson reflected in the speech asking for a declaration of war,

to lead this great peaceful people into war, into the most terrible and disastrous of all wars, civilization itself seeming to be in the balance. But right is more precious than peace, and we shall fight for the things which we have always carried nearest our hearts, for democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own governments, for the rights and liberties of small nations, for a universal dominion of right by such a concert of free peoples as shall bring peace and safety to all nations and make the world itself at last free.⁴³

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In a war on behalf of such principles, there could be no compromise. Total victory was the only valid goal. Roosevelt would almost certainly have expressed America's war aims in political and strategic terms; Wilson, flaunting American disinterest, defined America's war aims in entirely moral categories. In Wilson's view, the war was not the consequence of clashing national interests pursued without restraint, but of Germany's unprovoked assault on the international order. More specifically, the true culprit was not the German nation, but the German Emperor himself. In urging a declaration of war, Wilson argued:

We have no quarrel with the German people. We have no feeling towards them but one of sympathy and friendship. It was not upon their impulse that their government acted in entering this war. It was not with their previous knowledge or approval. It was a war determined upon as wars used to be determined upon in the old, unhappy days when peoples were nowhere consulted by their rulers and wars were provoked and waged in the interest of dynasties.⁴⁴

Though William II had long been regarded as a loose cannon on the European stage, no European statesman had ever advocated deposing him; nobody had viewed the overthrow of the Emperor or of his dynasty as the key to peace in Europe. But once the issue of Germany's domestic structure had been advanced, the war could no longer end in the sort of compromise balancing conflicting interests that Roosevelt had achieved between Japan and Russia ten years earlier. On January 22, 1917, before America had entered the war, Wilson proclaimed its goal to be "peace without victory."⁴⁵ What Wilson proposed, however, when America did enter the war was a peace achievable only by total victory.

Wilson's pronouncements soon became conventional wisdom. Even as experienced a figure as Herbert Hoover began to describe the German ruling class as inherently wicked, preying "upon the life blood of other peoples."⁴⁶ The mood of the times was aptly expressed by Jacob Schurman, President of Cornell University, who saw the war as a struggle between the "Kingdom of Heaven" and the "Kingdom of Hun-land, which is force and frightfulness."⁴⁷

Yet the overthrow of a single dynasty could not possibly bring about all that Wilson's rhetoric implied. In urging a declaration of war, Wilson extended his moral reach to the entire world; not only Germany but all other nations had to be made safe for democracy; for peace would require "a partnership of democratic nations."⁴⁸ In another speech, Wilson went even further by saying that America's power would atrophy unless the United States spread freedom around the globe:

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We set this Nation up to make men free, and we did not confine our conception and purpose to America, and now we will make men free. If we did not do that, all the fame of America would be gone, and all her power would be dissipated.⁴⁹

The closest Wilson ever came to stating his war aims in detail was in the Fourteen Points, which will be dealt with in chapter 9. Wilson's historic achievement lies in his recognition that Americans cannot sustain major international engagements that are not justified by their moral faith. His downfall was in treating the tragedies of history as aberrations, or as due to the shortsightedness and the evil of individual leaders, and in his rejection of any objective basis for peace other than the force of public opinion and the worldwide spread of democratic institutions. In the process, he would ask the nations of Europe to undertake something for which they were neither philosophically nor historically prepared, and right after a war which had drained them of substance.

For 300 years, the European nations had based their world order on a balancing of national interests, and their foreign policies on a quest for security, treating every additional benefit as a bonus. Wilson asked the nations of Europe to base their foreign policy on moral convictions, leaving security to result incidentally, if at all. But Europe had no conceptual apparatus for such a disinterested policy, and it still remained to be seen whether America, having just emerged from a century of isolation, could sustain the permanent involvement in international affairs that Wilson's theories implied.

Wilson's appearance on the scene was a watershed for America, one of those rare examples of a leader who fundamentally alters the course of his country's history. Had Roosevelt or his ideas prevailed in 1912, the question of war aims would have been based on an inquiry into the nature of American national interest. Roosevelt would have rested America's entry into the war on the proposition—which he in fact advanced—that, unless America joined the Triple Entente, the Central Powers would win the war and, sooner or later, pose a threat to American security.

The American national interest, so defined, would, over time, have led America to adopt a global policy comparable to Great Britain's toward Continental Europe. For three centuries, British leaders had operated from the assumption that, if Europe's resources were marshaled by a single dominant power, that country would then have the resources to challenge Great Britain's command of the seas, and thus threaten its independence. Geopolitically, the United States, also an island off the shores of Eurasia, should, by the same reasoning, have felt obliged to

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resist the domination of Europe or Asia by any one power and, even more, the control of *both* continents by the *same* power. In these terms, it should have been the extent of Germany's geopolitical reach and not its moral transgressions that provided the principal *casus belli*.

However, such an Old World approach ran counter to the wellspring of American emotions being tapped by Wilson—as it does to this day. Not even Roosevelt could have managed the power politics he advocated, though he died convinced that he could have. At any rate, Roosevelt was no longer the president, and Wilson had made it clear, even before America entered the war, that he would resist any attempt to base the postwar order on established principles of international politics.

Wilson saw the causes of the war not only in the wickedness of the German leadership but in the European balance-of-power system as well. On January 22, 1917, he attacked the international order which had preceded the war as a system of “organized rivalries”:

The question upon which the whole future peace and policy of the world depends is this: Is the present war a struggle for a just and secure peace, or only for a new balance of power? . . . There must be, not a balance of power, but a community of power; not organized rivalries, but an organized common peace.⁵⁰

What Wilson meant by “community of power” was an entirely new concept that later became known as “collective security” (though William Gladstone in Great Britain had put forward a stillborn variation of it in the course of 1880).⁵¹ Convinced that all the nations of the world had an equal interest in peace and would therefore unite to punish those who disturbed it, Wilson proposed to defend the international order by the moral consensus of the peace-loving:

. . . this age is an age . . . which rejects the standards of national selfishness that once governed the counsels of nations and demands that they shall give way to a new order of things in which the only questions will be: “Is it right?” “Is it just?” “Is it in the interest of mankind?”⁵²

To institutionalize this consensus, Wilson put forward the League of Nations, a quintessentially American institution. Under the auspices of this world organization, power would yield to morality and the force of arms to the dictates of public opinion. Wilson kept emphasizing that, had the public been adequately informed, the war would never have occurred—ignoring the passionate demonstrations of joy and relief

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which had greeted the onset of war in *all* capitals, including those of democratic Great Britain and France. If the new theory was to work, in Wilson's view, at least two changes in international governance had to take place: first, the spread of democratic governments throughout the world, and, next, the elaboration of a "new and more wholesome diplomacy" based on "the same high code of honor that we demand of individuals."⁵³

In 1918, Wilson stated as a requirement of peace the hitherto unheard-of and breathtakingly ambitious goal of "the destruction of every arbitrary power anywhere that can separately, secretly and of its single choice disturb the peace of the world; or, if it cannot be presently destroyed, at the least its reduction to virtual impotence."⁵⁴ A League of Nations so composed and animated by such attitudes would resolve crises without war, Wilson told the Peace Conference on February 14, 1919:

... throughout this instrument [the League Covenant] we are depending primarily and chiefly upon one great force, and that is the moral force of the public opinion of the world—the cleansing and clarifying and compelling influences of publicity... so that those things that are destroyed by the light may be properly destroyed by the overwhelming light of the universal expression of the condemnation of the world.⁵⁵

The preservation of peace would no longer spring from the traditional calculus of power but from worldwide consensus backed up by a policing mechanism. A universal grouping of largely democratic nations would act as the "trustee of peace," and replace the old balance-of-power and alliance systems.

Such exalted sentiments had never before been put forward by any nation, let alone been implemented. Nevertheless, in the hands of American idealism they were turned into the common currency of national thinking on foreign policy. Every American president since Wilson has advanced variations of Wilson's theme. Domestic debates have more often dealt with the failure to fulfill Wilson's ideals (soon so commonplace that they were no longer even identified with him) than with whether they were in fact lending adequate guidance in meeting the occasionally brutal challenges of a turbulent world. For three generations, critics have savaged Wilson's analysis and conclusions; and yet, in all this time, Wilson's principles have remained the bedrock of American foreign-policy thinking.

And yet Wilson's intermingling of power and principle also set the stage for decades of ambivalence as the American conscience tried to reconcile its principles with its necessities. The basic premise of collective

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security was that all nations would view every threat to security in the same way *and* be prepared to run the same risks in resisting it. Not only had nothing like it ever actually occurred, nothing like it was destined to occur in the entire history of both the League of Nations and the United Nations. Only when a threat is truly overwhelming and genuinely affects all, or most, societies is such a consensus possible—as it was during the two world wars and, on a regional basis, in the Cold War. But in the vast majority of cases—and in nearly all of the difficult ones—the nations of the world tend to disagree either about the nature of the threat or about the type of sacrifice they are prepared to make to meet it. This was the case from Italy's aggressions against Abyssinia in 1935 to the Bosnian crisis in 1992. And when it has been a matter of achieving positive objectives or remedying perceived injustices, global consensus has proved even more difficult to achieve. Ironically, in the post-Cold War world, which has no overwhelming ideological or military threat and which pays more lip service to democracy than has any previous era, these difficulties have only increased.

Wilsonianism also accentuated another latent split in American thought on international affairs. Did America have any security interests it needed to defend regardless of the methods by which they were challenged? Or should America resist only changes which could fairly be described as illegal? Was it the fact or the method of international transformation that concerned America? Did America reject the principles of geopolitics altogether? Or did they need to be reinterpreted through the filter of American values? And if these should clash, which would prevail?

The implication of Wilsonianism has been that America resisted, above all, the method of change, and that it had no strategic interests worth defending if they were threatened by apparently legal methods. As late as the Gulf War, President Bush insisted that he was not so much defending vital oil supplies as resisting the principle of aggression. And during the Cold War, some of the domestic American debate concerned the question whether America, with all its failings, had a moral right to organize resistance to the Moscow threat.

Theodore Roosevelt would have had no doubt as to the answer to these questions. To assume that nations would perceive threats identically or be prepared to react to them uniformly represented a denial of everything he had ever stood for. Nor could he envision any world organization to which victim and aggressor could comfortably belong at the same time. In November 1918, he wrote in a letter:

I am for such a League provided we don't expect too much from it. . . .
I am not willing to play the part which even Aesop held up to derision

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when he wrote of how the wolves and the sheep agreed to disarm, and how the sheep as a guarantee of good faith sent away the watchdogs, and were then forthwith eaten by the wolves.⁵⁶

The following month, he wrote this to Senator Knox of Pennsylvania:

The League of Nations may do a little good, but the more pompous it is and the more it pretends to do, the less it will really accomplish. The talk about it has a grimly humorous suggestion of the talk about the Holy Alliance a hundred years ago, which had as its main purpose the perpetual maintenance of peace. The Czar Alexander by the way, was the President Wilson of this particular movement a century ago.⁵⁷

In Roosevelt's estimation, only mystics, dreamers, and intellectuals held the view that peace was man's natural condition and that it could be maintained by disinterested consensus. To him, peace was inherently fragile and could be preserved only by eternal vigilance, by the arms of the strong, and by alliances among the like-minded.

But Roosevelt lived either a century too late or a century too early. His approach to international affairs died with him in 1919; no significant school of American thought on foreign policy has invoked him since. On the other hand, it is surely the measure of Wilson's intellectual triumph that even Richard Nixon, whose foreign policy in fact embodied many of Roosevelt's precepts, considered himself above all a disciple of Wilson's internationalism, and hung a portrait of the wartime president in the Cabinet Room.

The League of Nations failed to take hold in America because the country was not yet ready for so global a role. Nevertheless, Wilson's intellectual victory proved more seminal than any political triumph could have been. For, whenever America has faced the task of constructing a new world order, it has returned in one way or another to Woodrow Wilson's precepts. At the end of World War II, it helped build the United Nations on the same principles as those of the League, hoping to found peace on a concord of the victors. When this hope died, America waged the Cold War not as a conflict between two superpowers but as a moral struggle for democracy. When communism collapsed, the Wilsonian idea that the road to peace lay in collective security, coupled with the worldwide spread of democratic institutions, was adopted by administrations of both major American political parties.

In Wilsonianism was incarnate the central drama of America on the world stage: America's ideology has, in a sense, been revolutionary while,

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domestically, Americans have considered themselves satisfied with the *status quo*. Tending to turn foreign-policy issues into a struggle between good and evil, Americans have generally felt ill at ease with compromise, as they have with partial or inconclusive outcomes. The fact that America has shied away from seeking vast geopolitical transformations has often associated it with defense of the territorial, and sometimes the political, *status quo*. Trusting in the rule of law, it has found it difficult to reconcile its faith in peaceful change with the historical fact that almost all significant changes in history have involved violence and upheaval.

America found that it would have to implement its ideals in a world less blessed than its own and in concert with states possessed of narrower margins of survival, more limited objectives, and far less self-confidence. And yet America has persevered. The postwar world became largely America's creation, so that, in the end, it did come to play the role Wilson had envisioned for it—as a beacon to follow, and a hope to attain.



CHAPTER THREE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



CHAPTER FOUR

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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interest of this country, without making elaborate calculations for the future.”²⁹

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

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

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

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

One of the general principles which Her Majesty's Government wish to observe as a guide for their conduct in dealing with the relations between England and other States, is, that changes which foreign Nations may chuse to make in their internal Constitution and form of Government, are to be looked upon as matters with which England has no business to interfere by force of arms. . . .

But an attempt of one Nation to seize and to appropriate to itself territory which belongs to another Nation, is a different matter; because such an attempt leads to a derangement of the existing Balance of Power, and by altering the relative strength of States, may tend to create danger to other Powers; and such attempts therefore, the British Government holds itself at full liberty to resist. . . .³¹

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



CHAPTER FIVE

Two Revolutionaries: Napoleon III and Bismarck

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

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

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leon III and Otto von Bismarck. These two men ignored Metternich's old pieties: that in the interest of stability the legitimate crowned heads of the states of Europe had to be preserved, that national and liberal movements had to be suppressed, and that, above all, relations among states had to be determined by consensus among like-minded rulers. They based their policy on *Realpolitik*—the notion that relations among states are determined by raw power and that the mighty will prevail.

The nephew of the great Bonaparte who had ravaged Europe, Napoleon III had been in his youth a member of Italian secret societies fighting against Austrian dominance in Italy. Elected President in 1848, Napoleon, as a result of a coup, had himself declared Emperor in 1852. Otto von Bismarck was the scion of an eminent Prussian family and a passionate opponent of the liberal Revolution of 1848 in Prussia. Bismarck became *Ministerpräsident* (Prime Minister) in 1862 only because the reluctant King saw no other recourse to overcome a deadlock with a fractious Parliament over military appropriations.

Between them, Napoleon III and Bismarck managed to overturn the Vienna settlement, most significantly the sense of self-restraint which emanated from a shared belief in conservative values. No two more disparate personalities than Bismarck and Napoleon III could be imagined. The Iron Chancellor and the Sphinx of the Tuileries were united in their aversion to the Vienna system. Both felt that the order established by Metternich at Vienna in 1815 was an albatross. Napoleon III hated the Vienna system because it had been expressly designed to contain France. Though Napoleon III did not have the megalomaniac ambitions of his uncle, this enigmatic leader felt that France was entitled to an occasional territorial gain and did not want a united Europe standing in his way. He furthermore thought that nationalism and liberalism were values that the world identified with France, and that the Vienna system, by repressing them, put a rein on his ambitions. Bismarck resented Metternich's handiwork because it locked Prussia into being Austria's junior partner in the German Confederation, and he was convinced that the Confederation preserved so many tiny German sovereigns that it shackled Prussia. If Prussia were going to realize its destiny and unify Germany, the Vienna system had to be destroyed.

While sharing a mutual disdain for the established order, the two revolutionaries ended up at diametrically opposite poles in terms of their achievements. Napoleon brought about the reverse of what he set out to accomplish. Fancying himself the destroyer of the Vienna settlement and the inspiration of European nationalism, he threw European diplomacy into a state of turmoil from which France gained nothing in the long run and other nations benefited. Napoleon made possible the unification of

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Italy and unintentionally abetted the unification of Germany, two events which weakened France geopolitically and destroyed the historical basis for the dominant French influence in Central Europe. Thwarting either event would have been beyond France's capabilities, yet Napoleon's erratic policy did much to accelerate the process while simultaneously dissipating France's capacity to shape the new international order according to its long-term interests. Napoleon tried to wreck the Vienna system because he thought it isolated France—which to some extent was true—yet by the time his rule had ended in 1870, France was more isolated than it had been during the Metternich period.

Bismarck's legacy was quite the opposite. Few statesmen have so altered the course of history. Before Bismarck took office, German unity was expected to occur through the kind of parliamentary, constitutional government which had been the thrust of the Revolution of 1848. Five years later, Bismarck was well on his way to solving the problem of German unification, which had confounded three generations of Germans, but he did so on the basis of the pre-eminence of Prussian power, not through a process of democratic constitutionalism. Bismarck's solution had never been advocated by any significant constituency. Too democratic for conservatives, too authoritarian for liberals, too power-oriented for legitimists, the new Germany was tailored to a genius who proposed to direct the forces he had unleashed, both foreign and domestic, by manipulating their antagonisms—a task he mastered but which proved beyond the capacity of his successors.

During his lifetime, Napoleon III was called the "Sphinx of the Tuileries" because he was believed to be hatching vast and brilliant designs, the nature of which no one could discern until they gradually unfolded. He was deemed to be enigmatically clever for having ended France's diplomatic isolation under the Vienna system and for having triggered the disintegration of the Holy Alliance by means of the Crimean War. Only one European leader, Otto von Bismarck, saw through him from the beginning. In the 1850s, his sardonic description of Napoleon had been: "His intelligence is overrated at the expense of his sentimentality."

Like his uncle, Napoleon III was obsessed by his lack of legitimate credentials. Though he considered himself a revolutionary, he yearned to be accepted by the legitimate kings of Europe. Of course, had the Holy Alliance still had its original convictions, it would have tried to overthrow the republican institutions which had replaced French royal rule in 1848. The bloody excesses of the French Revolution were still within living memory but so, too, was the fact that foreign intervention in France had

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unleashed French revolutionary armies on the nations of Europe in 1792. At the same time, an identical fear of foreign intervention had made republican France loath to export her revolution. Out of this stalemate of inhibitions, the conservative powers reluctantly brought themselves to recognize republican France, which was ruled first by the poet and statesman Alphonse de Lamartine, then by Napoleon as elected President, and, finally, by Napoleon "III" as Emperor, in 1852, after his coup the previous December to overturn the constitutional prohibition against his re-election.

No sooner had Napoleon III proclaimed the Second Empire than the question of recognition arose again. This time it concerned whether to recognize Napoleon as Emperor, since the Vienna settlement had specifically proscribed the Bonaparte family from the French throne. Austria was the first to accept what could not be changed. The Austrian Ambassador to Paris, Baron Hübner, reported a characteristically cynical comment from his chief, Prince Schwarzenberg, dated December 31, 1851, that underlined the end of the Metternich era: "The days of principles are gone."¹

Napoleon's next big worry was whether the other monarchs would address him with the appellation "brother," which they used toward each other, or some lesser form of address. In the end, the Austrian and Prussian monarchs yielded to Napoleon's preference, though Tsar Nicholas I remained adamant, refusing to go beyond the address of "friend." Given the Tsar's views of revolutionaries, he no doubt felt he had already rewarded Napoleon beyond his due. Hübner recorded the injured feelings in the Tuileries:

One has the feeling of being snubbed by the old continental courts. This is the worm that eats at the heart of Emperor Napoleon.²

Whether these snubs were real or imagined, they revealed the gulf between Napoleon and the other European monarchs, which was one of the psychological roots of Napoleon's reckless and relentless assault on European diplomacy.

The irony of Napoleon's life was that he was much better suited for domestic policy, which basically bored him, than he was for foreign adventures, for which he lacked both the daring and the insight. Whenever he took a breather from his self-appointed revolutionary mission, Napoleon made major contributions to France's development. He brought the Industrial Revolution to France. His encouragement of large credit institutions played a crucial role in France's economic development. And he rebuilt Paris into its grandiose modern appearance. In the

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early nineteenth century, Paris was still a medieval city with narrow, winding streets. Napoleon provided his close adviser, Baron Haussmann, with the authority and the budget to create the modern city of broad boulevards, great public buildings, and sweeping vistas. That one purpose of the broad avenues was to provide a clear field of fire to discourage revolutions does not detract from the magnificence and the permanence of the achievement.

But foreign policy was Napoleon's passion, and there he found himself torn by conflicting emotions. On the one hand, he realized he would never be able to fulfill his quest for legitimacy, because a monarch's legitimacy is a birthright that cannot be conferred. On the other hand, he did not really want to go down in history as a legitimist. He had been an Italian Carbonari (independence fighter), and considered himself a defender of national self-determination. At the same time, he was averse to running great risks. Napoleon's ultimate goal was to abrogate the territorial clauses of the Vienna settlement and to alter the state system on which it had been based. But he never understood that achieving his goal would also result in a unified Germany, which would forever end French aspirations to dominate Central Europe.

The erratic nature of his policy was therefore a reflection of his personal ambivalence. Distrustful of his "brother" monarchs, Napoleon was driven to dependence on public opinion, and his policy fluctuated with his assessment of what was needed to sustain his popularity. In 1857, the ubiquitous Baron Hübner wrote to the Austrian Emperor:

In his [Napoleon's] eyes foreign policy is only an instrument he uses to secure his rule in France, to legitimize his throne, to found his dynasty. . . . [H]e would not shrink from any means, from any combination which suited itself to making him popular at home.³

In the process, Napoleon made himself the prisoner of crises he had himself engineered, because he lacked the inner compass to keep him on course. Time and again, he would encourage a crisis—now in Italy, now in Poland, later in Germany—only to recoil before its ultimate consequences. He possessed his uncle's ambition but not his nerve, genius, or, for that matter, raw power. He supported Italian nationalism as long as it was confined to Northern Italy, and advocated Polish independence as long as it involved no risk of war. As for Germany, he simply did not know on which side to place his bet. Having expected a protracted struggle between Austria and Prussia, Napoleon made himself ridiculous by asking Prussia, the victor, to compensate him after the event for his own inability to discern the winner.

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What most suited Napoleon's style was a European Congress to redraw the map of Europe, for there he might shine at minimum risk. Nor did Napoleon have any clear idea of just how he wanted the borders altered. In any event, no other Great Power was willing to arrange such a forum to accommodate his domestic needs. No nation agrees to redraw its borders—especially to its own disadvantage—unless there is an overwhelming necessity to do so. As it turned out, the only Congress at which Napoleon presided—the Congress of Paris, which ended the Crimean War—did not redraw the map of Europe; it merely ratified what had been achieved in the war. Russia was forbidden to maintain a navy in the Black Sea and was thus deprived of a defensive capability against another British assault. Russia was also forced to return Bessarabia and the territory of Kars, on the eastern coast of the Black Sea, to Turkey. Additionally, the Tsar was compelled to renounce his claim to be the Protector of the Ottoman Christians, which had been the immediate cause of the war. The Congress of Paris symbolized the splintering of the Holy Alliance, but no participant was prepared to undertake the revision of the map of Europe.

Napoleon never succeeded in assembling another congress to redraw the map of Europe, for one basic reason, which the British ambassador, Lord Clarendon, pointed out to him: a country that seeks great changes and lacks the willingness to run great risks dooms itself to futility.

I see that the idea of a European Congress is germinating in the Emperor's mind, and with it the *arrondissement* of the French frontier, the abolition of obsolete Treaties, and other *remaniements* as may be necessary. I *improvised* a longish catalogue of dangers and difficulties that such a Congress would entail, unless its decisions were unanimous, which was not probable, or one or two of the strongest Powers were to go to war for what they wanted.⁴

Palmerston once summed up Napoleon's statesmanship by saying: "... ideas proliferated in his head like rabbits in a hutch."⁵ The trouble was that these ideas did not relate to any overriding concept. In the disarray of the collapsing Metternich system, France had two strategic options. It could pursue the policy of Richelieu and strive to keep Central Europe divided. This option would have required Napoleon to subordinate his revolutionary convictions, at least within Germany, in favor of the existing legitimate rulers, who were eager to maintain the fragmentation of Central Europe. Or Napoleon could have put himself at the head of a republican crusade, as his uncle had done, in the expectation that France would thereby gain the gratitude of the nationalists and perhaps even the political leadership of Europe.

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Unfortunately for France, Napoleon pursued both strategies simultaneously. An advocate of national self-determination, he seemed oblivious to the geopolitical risk this position posed for France in Central Europe. He supported the Polish Revolution but recoiled when confronted by its consequences. He opposed the Vienna settlement as an affront to France without understanding until it was too late that the Vienna world order was the best available security guarantee for France as well.

For the German Confederation was designed to act as a unit only against an overwhelming external danger. Its component states were explicitly forbidden to join together for offensive purposes, and would never have been able to agree on an offensive strategy—as was shown by the fact that the subject had never even been broached in the half-century of the Confederation's existence. France's Rhine frontier, inviolable so long as the Vienna settlement was intact, would not prove to be secure for a century after the collapse of the Confederation, which Napoleon's policy made possible.

Napoleon never grasped this key element of French security. As late as the outbreak of the Austro-Prussian War in 1866—the conflict which ended the Confederation—he wrote to the Austrian Emperor:

I must confess that it was not without a certain satisfaction that I witnessed the dissolution of the German Confederation organized mainly against France.⁶

The Habsburg responded far more perceptively: “. . . the German Confederation, organized with purely defensive motives, had never, during the half-century of its existence, given its neighbors cause for alarm.”⁷ The alternative to the German Confederation was not Richelieu's fragmented Central Europe but a unified Germany with a population exceeding that of France and an industrial capacity soon to overshadow it. By attacking the Vienna settlement, Napoleon was transforming a defensive obstacle into a potential offensive threat to French security.

A statesman's test is whether he can discern from the swirl of tactical decisions the true long-term interests of his country and devise an appropriate strategy for achieving them. Napoleon could have basked in the acclaim given to his clever tactics during the Crimean War (which were helped along by Austrian shortsightedness), and in the increased diplomatic options now opening before him. France's interest would have been to stay close to Austria and Great Britain, the two countries most likely to sustain the territorial settlement of Central Europe.

The Emperor's policy, however, was largely idiosyncratic and driven

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by his mercurial nature. As a Bonaparte, he never felt comfortable cooperating with Austria, whatever *raison d'état* might dictate. In 1858, Napoleon told a Piedmontese diplomat: "Austria is a cabinet for whom I have always felt, and still feel, the most lively repugnance."⁸ His penchant for revolutionary projects caused him to go to war with Austria over Italy in 1859. Napoleon alienated Great Britain by annexing Savoy and Nice in the aftermath of the war as well as by his repeated proposals for a European Congress to redraw the frontiers of Europe. To complete his isolation, Napoleon sacrificed his option of allying France with Russia by supporting the Polish Revolution in 1863. Having brought European diplomacy to a state of flux under the banner of national self-determination, Napoleon now suddenly found himself alone when, out of the turmoil he had done so much to cause, a German nation materialized to spell the end of French primacy in Europe.

The Emperor made his first post-Crimea move in Italy in 1859, three years after the Congress of Paris. Nobody had expected Napoleon to return to the vocation of his youth in seeking to liberate Northern Italy from Austrian rule. France would have had little to gain from such an adventure. If it succeeded, it would create a state in a much stronger position to block the traditional French invasion route; if it failed, the humiliation would be compounded by the vagueness of the objective. And whether it succeeded or failed, French armies in Italy would disquiet Europe.

For all these reasons, the British Ambassador, Lord Henry Cowley, was convinced that a French war in Italy was beyond all probability. "It is not in his interests to fight a war," Hübner reported Cowley as saying. "The alliance with England, although shaken for a moment, and still quite dormant, remains the basis of Napoleon III's policy."⁹ Some three decades later, Hübner was to offer these reflections:

We could scarcely comprehend that this man, having reached the pinnacle of honor, unless he was mad, or afflicted with the madness of gamblers, seriously could consider, having no understandable motive, joining in another adventure.¹⁰

Yet Napoleon surprised all the diplomats with the exception of his ultimate nemesis, Bismarck, who had predicted a French war against Austria and indeed hoped for it as a means of weakening Austria's position in Germany.

In July 1858, Napoleon concluded a secret understanding with Camillo Benso di Cavour, the Prime Minister of Piedmont (Sardinia), the strongest

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Italian state, to cooperate in a war against Austria. It was a purely Machiavellian move in which Cavour would unify Northern Italy and Napoleon would receive as his reward Nice and Savoy from Piedmont. By May 1859, a suitable pretext had been found. Austria, always short of steady nerves, permitted itself to be provoked by Piedmontese harassment into declaring war. Napoleon let it be known that this amounted to a declaration of war against France, and launched his armies into Italy.

Oddly enough, in Napoleon's time, when Frenchmen talked of the consolidation of nation-states as the wave of the future, they thought primarily of Italy and not of the much stronger Germany. The French had a sympathy and cultural affinity for Italy that was lacking vis-à-vis their ominous Eastern neighbor. In addition, the mighty economic boom which was to take Germany to the forefront of the European Powers was only just beginning; hence it was not yet obvious that Italy would be any less powerful than Germany. Prussia's cautiousness during the Crimean War strengthened Napoleon's view that Prussia was the weakest of the Great Powers and incapable of strong action without Russian support. Thus, in Napoleon's mind, an Italian war weakening Austria would reduce the power of France's most dangerous German opponent and enhance France's significance in Italy—an egregious misjudgment on both counts.

Napoleon kept open two contradictory options. In the better case, Napoleon could play European statesman: Northern Italy would throw off the Austrian yoke, and the European Powers would gather at a congress under Napoleon's sponsorship and agree to the large-scale territorial revisions he had failed to achieve at the Congress of Paris. In the worse case, the war would reach a stalemate and Napoleon would play the Machiavellian manipulator of *raison d'état*, gaining some advantage from Austria at Piedmont's expense in return for ending the war.

Napoleon pursued the two objectives simultaneously. French armies were victorious at Magenta and Solferino but unleashed such a tide of anti-French sentiment in Germany that, for a time, it appeared as if the smaller German states, fearing a new Napoleonic onslaught, would force Prussia to intervene on Austria's side. Jolted by this first sign of German nationalism and shaken by his visit to the battlefield at Solferino, Napoleon concluded an armistice with Austria at Villafranca on July 11, 1859, without informing his Piedmontese allies.

Not only had Napoleon failed to achieve either of his objectives, he had seriously weakened his country's position in the international arena. Henceforth, the Italian nationalists would carry the principles he had espoused to lengths he had never envisioned. Napoleon's goal of estab-

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lishing a medium-sized satellite in an Italy divided into perhaps five states annoyed Piedmont, which was not about to abandon its national vocation. Austria remained as adamant about holding on to Venetia as Napoleon was about returning it to Italy, creating yet another insoluble dispute involving no conceivable French interest. Great Britain interpreted the annexation of Savoy and Nice as the beginning of another period of Napoleonic conquests and refused all French initiatives for Napoleon's favorite obsession of holding a European congress. And all the while, German nationalists saw in Europe's turmoil a window of opportunity to advance their own hopes for national unity.

Napoleon's conduct during the Polish revolt of 1863 advanced his journey into isolation. Reviving the Bonaparte tradition of friendship with Poland, Napoleon first tried to convince Russia to make some concessions to its rebellious subjects. But the Tsar would not even discuss such a proposal. Next, Napoleon tried to organize a joint effort with Great Britain, but Palmerston was too wary of the mercurial French Emperor. Finally, Napoleon turned to Austria with the proposition that it give up its own Polish provinces to a not-yet-created Polish state and Venetia to Italy, while seeking compensation in Silesia and the Balkans. The idea held no obvious appeal for Austria, which was being asked to risk war with Prussia and Russia for the privilege of seeing a French satellite emerge on its borders.

Frivolity is a costly indulgence for a statesman, and its price must eventually be paid. Actions geared to the mood of the moment and unrelated to any overall strategy cannot be sustained indefinitely. Under Napoleon, France lost influence over the internal arrangements of Germany, which had been the mainstay of French policy since Richelieu. Whereas Richelieu had understood that a weak Central Europe was the key to French security, Napoleon's policy, driven by his quest for publicity, concentrated on the periphery of Europe, the only place where gains could be made at minimum risk. With the center of gravity of European policy moving toward Germany, France found itself alone.

An ominous event occurred in 1864. For the first time since the Congress of Vienna, Austria and Prussia jointly disrupted the tranquillity of Central Europe, starting a war on behalf of a German cause against a non-German power. The issue at hand was the future of the Elbe duchies of Schleswig and Holstein, which were dynastically linked to the Danish crown but were also members of the German Confederation. The death of the Danish ruler had produced such a complex tangle of political, dynastic, and national issues that Palmerston was prompted to quip that only three people had ever understood it: of these, one was dead, the

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second was in a lunatic asylum, and he himself was the third but he had forgotten it.

The substance of the dispute was far less important than the coalition of two key German states waging war on tiny Denmark in order to force it to relinquish two ancient German territories linked with the Danish crown. It proved that Germany was capable of offensive action after all and that, should Confederation machinery turn out to be too cumbersome, the two German superpowers might simply ignore it.

According to the traditions of the Vienna system, at this point the Great Powers should have assembled in Congress to restore an approximation of the *status quo ante*. Yet Europe was now in disarray largely due to the actions of the French Emperor. Russia was not prepared to antagonize the two countries which had stood aside while it quelled the Polish revolt. Great Britain was uneasy about the attack on Denmark but would need a Continental ally to intervene, and France, its only feasible partner, inspired little confidence.

History, ideology, and *raison d'état* should have warned Napoleon that events would soon develop a momentum of their own. Yet he wavered between upholding the principles of traditional French foreign policy, which was designed to keep Germany divided, and supporting the principle of nationality, which had been the inspiration of his youth. French Foreign Minister Drouyn de Lhuys wrote to La Tour d'Auvergne, the French Ambassador to London:

Placed between the rights of a country for which we have long sympathized, and the aspirations of the German population, which we equally have to take into account, we have to act with a greater degree of circumspection than does England.¹¹

The responsibility of statesmen, however, is to resolve complexity rather than to contemplate it. For leaders unable to choose among their alternatives, circumspection becomes an alibi for inaction. Napoleon had become convinced of the wisdom of inaction, enabling Prussia and Austria to settle the future of the Elbe duchies. They detached Schleswig-Holstein from Denmark and occupied them jointly while the rest of Europe stood by—a solution which would have been unthinkable under the Metternich system. France's nightmare of German unity was approaching, something Napoleon had been dodging for a decade.

Bismarck was not about to share the leadership of Germany. He turned the joint war for Schleswig-Holstein into another of Austria's seemingly endless series of blunders, which for a decade marked the progressive

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erosion of its position as a Great Power. The reason these errors occurred was always the same—Austria's appeasing a self-proclaimed opponent by offering to cooperate with it. The strategy of appeasement worked no better with Prussia than it had a decade earlier, during the Crimean War, vis-à-vis France. Far from buying Austria's release from Prussian pressures, the joint victory over Denmark provided a new and highly disadvantageous forum for harassment. Austria was now left to administer the Elbe duchies with a Prussian ally whose Prime Minister, Bismarck, was determined to use the opportunity to bring about a long-desired showdown in a territory hundreds of miles from Austrian soil and adjoining Prussia's principal possessions.

As the tension mounted, Napoleon's ambivalence came into sharper focus. He dreaded German unification but was sympathetic to German nationalism and dithered about solving that insoluble dilemma. He considered Prussia the most genuinely national German state, writing in 1860 that:

Prussia personifies the German nationality, religious reform, commercial progress, liberal constitutionalism. It is the largest of the truly German monarchies; it has more freedom of conscience, more enlightenment, grants more political rights, than most other German states.¹²

Bismarck would have subscribed to every word. However, for Bismarck, Napoleon's affirmation of Prussia's unique position was the key to Prussia's eventual triumph. In the end, Napoleon's avowed admiration for Prussia amounted to one more alibi for doing nothing. Rationalizing indecision as so much clever maneuvering, Napoleon in fact encouraged an Austro-Prussian war, partly because he was convinced that Prussia would lose. He told Alexandre Walewski, his erstwhile Foreign Minister, in December 1865: "Believe me dear friend, war between Austria and Prussia constitutes one of those un hoped-for eventualities which can bring us more than one advantage."¹³ Curiously, in the course of Napoleon's encouragement of the drift toward war, he never seemed to have asked himself why Bismarck was so determined on war if Prussia was so likely to be defeated.

Four months before the Austro-Prussian War started, Napoleon went beyond the tacit to the explicit. In effect urging war, he told the Prussian Ambassador to Paris, Count von der Goltz, in February 1866:

I ask you to tell the King [of Prussia] that he can always count on my amity. In case of a conflict between Prussia and Austria, I will maintain

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the most absolute neutrality. I desire the reunion of the Duchies [Schleswig-Holstein] with Prussia. . . . Should the struggle take on dimensions that one can't yet foresee, I am convinced that I could always reach an understanding with Prussia, whose interests in a great number of questions are identical with those of France, while I see no turf on which I could agree with Austria.¹⁴

What did Napoleon really want? Was he convinced of the likelihood of a stalemate that would enhance his bargaining position? He was clearly hoping for some Prussian concessions in exchange for his neutrality. Bismarck understood this game. If Napoleon remained neutral, he offered to take a benevolent attitude to French seizure of Belgium, which would have had the additional benefit of embroiling France with Great Britain. Napoleon probably did not take this offer too seriously since he expected Prussia to lose; his moves were designed more to keep Prussia on its course to war than to bargain for benefits. Some years later, Count Armand, the French Foreign Minister's top assistant, admitted:

The only worry that we had at the Foreign Office was that Prussia would be crushed and humiliated to too great an extent, and we were determined to prevent this through timely intervention. The Emperor wanted to let Prussia be defeated, then to intervene and to construct Germany according to his fantasies.¹⁵

What Napoleon had in mind was an updating of Richelieu's machinations. Prussia was expected to offer France compensation in the West for extrication from its defeat, Venetia would be given to Italy, and a new German arrangement would result in the creation of a North German Confederation under Prussian auspices and a South German grouping supported by France and Austria. The only thing wrong with this scheme was that, whereas the Cardinal knew how to judge the relation of forces and was willing to fight for his judgments, Napoleon was prepared to do neither.

Napoleon procrastinated, hoping for a turn of events that would present him with his deepest desires at no risk. The device he used was his standard ploy of calling for a European congress to avert the threat of war. The reaction by now was equally standard. The other powers, fearful of Napoleon's designs, refused to attend. Wherever he turned, his dilemma awaited him: he could defend the *status quo* by abandoning his support of the nationality principle; or he could encourage revisionism and nationalism and in the process jeopardize the national interests of

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France as they had been historically conceived. Napoleon sought refuge in hinting to Prussia about “compensations” without specifying what they were, which convinced Bismarck that French neutrality was a question of price, not principle. Goltz wrote to Bismarck:

The only difficulty that the Emperor finds in a common stand of Prussia, France and Italy in a congress is the lack of a compensation to be offered to France. One knows what we want; one knows what Italy wants; but the Emperor can't say what France wants, and we can't offer him any suggestion in this regard.¹⁶

Great Britain made its attendance at the Congress dependent on a prior French agreement to the *status quo*. Instead of seizing upon this consecration of the German arrangements which owed so much to French leadership and to which France owed its security, Napoleon backed off, insisting that, “to maintain the peace, it is necessary to take into account the national passions and requirements.”¹⁷ In short, Napoleon was willing to risk an Austro-Prussian war and a unified Germany in order to gain vague spoils in Italy, which affected no real French national interests, and for gains in Western Europe, which he was reluctant to specify. But in Bismarck he was up against a master who insisted on the power of realities, and who exploited for his own ends the cosmetic maneuvers at which Napoleon excelled.

There were French leaders who understood the risks Napoleon was running, and who realized that the so-called compensation he was aiming for involved no basic French interest. In a brilliant speech on May 3, 1866, Adolphe Thiers, a staunch republican opponent of Napoleon and later President of France, predicted correctly that Prussia was likely to emerge as the dominant force in Germany:

One will see a return of the Empire of Charles V, which formerly resided in Vienna, and now will reside in Berlin which will be close to our border, and will apply pressure to it. . . . You have a right to resist this policy in the name of the interest of France, for France is too important for such a revolution not to menace her gravely. And when she had struggled for two centuries . . . to destroy this colossus, is she prepared to watch as it re-establishes itself before her eyes?!¹⁸

Thiers argued that, in place of Napoleon's vague musings, France should adopt a clear policy of opposition to Prussia and invoke as a pretext the defense of the independence of the German states—the old Richelieu

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formula. France, he claimed, had the right to resist German unification “first in the name of the independence of the German states . . . second, in the name of her own independence, and, finally in the name of the European balance, which is the interest of all, the interest of universal society. . . . Today one tries to heap ridicule on the term ‘European balance’ . . . but, what is the European balance? It is the independence of Europe.”¹⁹

It was nearly too late to head off the war between Prussia and Austria that would irrevocably alter the European balance. Analytically, Thiers was correct but the premises for such a policy ought to have been established a decade earlier. Even now, Bismarck might have been brought up short if France had issued a strong warning that it would not permit Austria to be defeated or traditional principalities like the Kingdom of Hanover to be destroyed. But Napoleon rejected such a course because he expected Austria to win, and because he seemed to prize undoing the Vienna settlement and fulfilling the Bonaparte tradition above any analysis of historic French national interests. He replied to Thiers three days later: “I detest those treaties of 1815 which nowadays people want to make the sole basis of our policy.”²⁰

Little more than a month after Thiers’s speech, Prussia and Austria were at war. Against all Napoleon’s expectations, Prussia won decisively and quickly. By the rules of Richelieu’s diplomacy, Napoleon should have assisted the loser and prevented a clear-cut Prussian victory. But, though he moved an army corps of “observation” to the Rhine, he dithered. Bismarck threw Napoleon the sop of letting him mediate the peace, though this empty gesture could not obscure France’s growing irrelevance to German arrangements. At the Treaty of Prague of August 1866, Austria was forced to withdraw from Germany. Two states, Hanover and Hesse-Cassel, which had sided with Austria during the war, were annexed by Prussia along with Schleswig-Holstein and the free city of Frankfurt. By deposing their rulers, Bismarck made it clear that Prussia, once a linchpin of the Holy Alliance, had abandoned legitimacy as the guiding principle of the international order.

The North German states which retained their independence were incorporated into Bismarck’s new creation, the North German Confederation, subject to Prussian leadership in everything from trade legislation to foreign policy. The South German states of Bavaria, Baden, and Württemberg were allowed to retain their independence at the price of treaties with Prussia that brought their armies under Prussian military leadership in the event of a war with an outside power. The unification of Germany was now just one crisis away.

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Napoleon had maneuvered his country into a dead end from which extrication proved impossible. Too late, he tried for an alliance with Austria, which he had expelled from Italy by military action and from Germany by neutrality. But Austria had lost interest in recovering either position, preferring to concentrate first on rebuilding its empire as a dual monarchy based in Vienna and Budapest, and then on its possessions in the Balkans. Great Britain was put off by France's designs on Luxembourg and Belgium; and Russia never forgave Napoleon his conduct over Poland.

France was now obliged to tend to the collapse of its historic European pre-eminence all by itself. The more hopeless its position, the more Napoleon sought to recoup it by some brilliant move, like a gambler who doubles his bet after each loss. Bismarck had encouraged Napoleon's neutrality in the Austro-Prussian War by dangling before him the prospect of territorial acquisitions—first in Belgium, then in Luxembourg. These prospects vanished whenever Napoleon tried to snatch them because Napoleon wanted his "compensation" handed to him, and because Bismarck saw no reason to run risks when he had already harvested the fruits of Napoleon's indecisiveness.

Humiliated by these demonstrations of impotence, and above all by the increasingly obvious tilt of the European balance against France, Napoleon sought to compensate for his miscalculation that Austria would win the Austro-Prussian War by making an issue of the succession to the Spanish throne, which had become vacant. He demanded an assurance from the Prussian King that no Hohenzollern prince (the Prussian dynasty) would seek the throne. It was another empty gesture capable of producing at best a prestige success without any relevance to the power relationships in Central Europe.

Nobody ever outmaneuvered Bismarck in a fluid diplomacy. In one of his craftier moves, Bismarck used Napoleon's posturing to lure him into declaring war on Prussia in 1870. The French demand that the Prussian King renounce any member of his family ever seeking the Spanish crown was indeed provocative. But the stately old King William, rather than losing his temper, patiently and correctly refused the French ambassador sent to secure the pledge. The King sent his account of the affair to Bismarck, who edited his telegram—taking out any language conveying the patience and propriety with which the King had in fact treated the French ambassador.²¹ Bismarck, well ahead of his time, then resorted to a technique which subsequent statesmen developed into an art form: he leaked the so-called Ems Dispatch to the press. The edited version of the King's telegram looked like a royal snub of France. Outraged, the French public demanded war, which Napoleon gave them.

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Prussia won quickly and decisively with the assistance of all the other German states. The road now lay clear for completing the unification of Germany, proclaimed rather tactlessly by the Prussian leadership on January 18, 1871, in the Hall of Mirrors of Versailles.

Napoleon had wrought the revolution which he had sought, though its consequences were quite the opposite of what he had intended. The map of Europe had indeed been redrawn, but the new arrangement had irreparably weakened France's influence without bringing Napoleon the renown he craved.

Napoleon had encouraged revolution without understanding its likely outcome. Unable to assess the relationship of forces and to enlist it in fulfilling his long-term goals, Napoleon failed this test. His foreign policy collapsed not because he lacked ideas but because he was unable to establish any order among his multitude of aspirations or any relationship between them and the reality emerging all around him. Questing for publicity, Napoleon never had a single line of policy to guide him. Instead, he was driven by a web of objectives, some of them quite contradictory. When he confronted the crucial crisis of his career, the various impulses canceled each other out.

Napoleon saw the Metternich system as humiliating to France and as a constraint upon its ambitions. He was successful in disrupting the Holy Alliance by driving a wedge between Austria and Russia during the Crimean War. But he did not know what to do with his triumph. From 1853 to 1871 relative chaos prevailed as the European order was reorganized. When this period ended, Germany emerged as the strongest power on the Continent. Legitimacy—the principle of the unity of conservative rulers that had mitigated the harshness of the balance-of-power system during the Metternich years—turned into an empty slogan. Napoleon himself had contributed to all these developments. Overestimating France's strength, he had encouraged every upheaval, convinced that he could turn it to France's benefit.

In the end, international politics came to be based on raw power. And in such a world, there was an inherent gap between France's image of itself as the dominant nation of Europe and its capacity to live up to it—a gap that has blighted French policy to this day. During Napoleon's reign, this was evidenced by the Emperor's inability to implement his endless proposals for holding a European congress to revise the map of Europe. Napoleon called for a congress after the Crimean War in 1856, before the Italian War in 1859, during the Polish revolt in 1863, during the Danish War in 1864, and before the Austro-Prussian War in 1866—always seeking to gain at the conference table the revision of frontiers which he never precisely defined and for which he was not prepared to run the risk of

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war. Napoleon's problem was that he was not strong enough to insist, and that his schemes were too radical to command consensus.

France's penchant for associating with countries ready to accept its leadership has been a constant factor in French foreign policy since the Crimean War. Unable to dominate an alliance with Great Britain, Germany, Russia, or the United States, and considering junior status incompatible with its notions of national grandeur and its messianic role in the world, France has sought leadership in pacts with lesser powers—with Sardinia, Romania, and the middle German states in the nineteenth century, with Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Romania in the interwar period.

The same attitude could be found in post-de Gaulle French foreign policy. A century after the Franco-Prussian War, the problem of a more powerful Germany remained France's nightmare. France made the courageous choice of seeking friendship with its feared and admired neighbor. Nevertheless, geopolitical logic would have suggested that France seek close ties with the United States—if only to increase its options. French pride, however, prevented this from happening, leading France to search, sometimes quixotically, for a grouping—occasionally almost *any* grouping—to balance the United States with a European consortium, even at the price of eventual German pre-eminence. In the modern period, France acted at times as a kind of parliamentary opposition to American leadership, trying to build the European Community into an alternative world leader and cultivating ties with nations it could dominate, or thought it could dominate.

Since the end of Napoleon III's reign, France has lacked the power to impose the universalist aspirations it inherited from the French Revolution, or the arena to find an adequate outlet for its missionary zeal. For over a century, France has been finding it difficult to accept the fact that the objective conditions for the pre-eminence Richelieu had brought it disappeared once national consolidation had been achieved in Europe. Much of the prickly style of its diplomacy has been due to attempts by its leaders to perpetuate its role as the center of European policy in an environment increasingly uncongenial to such aspirations. It is ironic that the country that invented *raison d'état* should have had to occupy itself, for the better part of a century, with trying to bring its aspirations in line with its capabilities.

The destruction of the Vienna system, which Napoleon had begun, was completed by Bismarck. Bismarck achieved political prominence as the archconservative opponent of the liberal Revolution of 1848. He was also

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the first leader to introduce universal male suffrage to Europe, along with the most comprehensive system of social welfare the world would see for sixty years. In 1848, Bismarck strenuously fought the elected Parliament's offer of the German imperial crown to the Prussian King. But a little more than two decades later, he himself would hand that imperial crown to a Prussian king at the end of the process of unifying the German nation on the basis of opposition to liberal principles, and of Prussia's capacity to impose its will by force. This astonishing achievement caused the international order to revert to the unrestrained contests of the eighteenth century, now made all the more dangerous by industrial technology and the capacity to mobilize vast national resources. No longer was there talk of the unity of crowned heads or of harmony among the ancient states of Europe. Under Bismarck's *Realpolitik*, foreign policy became a contest of strength.

Bismarck's accomplishments were as unexpected as his personality. The man of "blood and iron" wrote prose of extraordinary simplicity and beauty, loved poetry, and copied pages of Byron in his diary. The statesman who extolled *Realpolitik* possessed an extraordinary sense of proportion which turned power into an instrument of self-restraint.

What is a revolutionary? If the answer to that question were without ambiguity, few revolutionaries would ever succeed. For revolutionaries almost always start from a position of inferior strength. They prevail because the established order is unable to grasp its own vulnerability. This is especially true when the revolutionary challenge emerges not with a march on the Bastille but in conservative garb. Few institutions have defenses against those who evoke the expectation that they will preserve them.

So it was with Otto von Bismarck. His life began during the flowering of the Metternich system, in a world consisting of three major elements: the European balance of power; an internal German equilibrium between Austria and Prussia; and a system of alliances based on the unity of conservative values. For a generation after the Vienna settlement, international tensions remained low because all the major states perceived a stake in their mutual survival, and because the so-called Eastern Courts of Prussia, Austria, and Russia were committed to each other's values.

Bismarck challenged each of these premises.²² He was convinced that Prussia had become the strongest German state and did not need the Holy Alliance as a link to Russia. In his view, shared national interests would supply an adequate bond, and Prussian *Realpolitik* could substitute for conservative unity. Bismarck considered Austria an obstacle to Prussia's German mission, not a partner in it. Contrary to the views of nearly all his contemporaries, except perhaps the Piedmontese Prime Minister

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Cavour, Bismarck treated Napoleon's restless diplomacy as a strategic opportunity rather than as a threat.

When Bismarck delivered a speech in 1850 attacking the conventional wisdom that German unity required the establishment of parliamentary institutions, his conservative supporters at first did not realize that what they were hearing was above all a challenge to the conservative premises of the Metternich system.

Prussia's honor does not consist in our playing all over Germany the Don Quixote for vexed parliamentary celebrities, who consider their local constitution threatened. I seek Prussia's honor in keeping Prussia apart from any disgraceful connection with democracy and never admitting that anything occur in Germany without Prussia's permission. . . .²³

On the surface, Bismarck's attack on liberalism was an application of the Metternich philosophy. Yet it contained a decisive difference in emphasis. The Metternich system had been based on the premise that Prussia and Austria shared a commitment to conservative institutions and needed each other to defeat liberal democratic trends. Bismarck was implying that Prussia could impose its preferences unilaterally; that Prussia could be conservative at home without tying itself to Austria or any other conservative state in foreign policy; and that it needed no alliances to cope with domestic upheaval. In Bismarck, the Habsburgs faced the same challenge with which Richelieu had presented them—a policy divorced from any value system except the glory of the state. And, just as with Richelieu, they did not know how to deal with it or even how to comprehend its nature.

But how was Prussia to sustain *Realpolitik* all alone in the center of the Continent? Since 1815, Prussia's answer had been adherence to the Holy Alliance at almost any price; Bismarck's answer was the exact opposite—to forge alliances and relationships in all directions, so that Prussia would always be closer to each of the contending parties than they were to one another. In this manner, a position of seeming isolation would enable Prussia to manipulate the commitments of the other powers and to sell its support to the highest bidder.

In Bismarck's view, Prussia would be in a strong position to implement such a policy, because it had few foreign-policy interests other than enhancing its own position within Germany. Every other power had more complicated involvements: Great Britain had not only its empire but the overall balance of power to worry about; Russia was simultaneously pressing into Eastern Europe, Asia, and the Ottoman Empire; France had a newfound empire, ambitions in Italy, and an adventure in Mexico on its

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hands; and Austria was preoccupied with Italy and the Balkans, and with its leadership role in the German Confederation. Because Prussia's policy was so focused on Germany, it really had no major disagreements with any other power except Austria, and at that point the disagreement with Austria was primarily in Bismarck's own mind. Nonalignment, to use a modern term, was the functional equivalent of Bismarck's policy of selling Prussia's cooperation in what he perceived to be a seller's market:

The present situation forces us not to commit ourselves in advance of the other powers. We are not able to shape the relations of the Great Powers to each other as we wish, but we can maintain freedom of action to utilize to our advantage those relationships which do come about. . . . Our relations to Austria, Britain and Russia do not furnish an obstacle to a rapprochement with any of these powers. Only our relations with France require careful attention so that we keep open the option of going with France as easily as with the other powers. . . .²⁴

This hint of rapprochement with Bonaparte France implied a readiness to throw ideology to the wind—in order to free Prussia to ally itself with any country (whatever its domestic institutions) that could advance its interests. Bismarck's policy marked a return to the principles of Richelieu, who, though a Cardinal of the Church, had opposed the Catholic Holy Roman Emperor when it was required by the interests of France. Similarly, Bismarck, though conservative by personal conviction, parted company with his conservative mentors whenever it seemed that their legitimist principles would constrain Prussia's freedom of action.

This implicit disagreement came to a head when, in 1856, Bismarck, then Prussian ambassador to the German Confederation, amplified his view that Prussia be more forthcoming toward Napoleon III, who, in the eyes of Prussia's conservatives, was a usurper of the legitimate king's prerogatives.

Putting Napoleon forward as a potential Prussian interlocutor went beyond what Bismarck's conservative constituency, which had launched and fostered his diplomatic career, could tolerate. It greeted Bismarck's emerging philosophy with the same outraged disbelief among his erstwhile supporters that Richelieu had encountered two centuries earlier when he had advanced the then revolutionary thesis that *raison d'état* should have precedence over religion, and the same which would in our time greet Richard Nixon's policy of détente with the Soviet Union. To conservatives, Napoleon III spelled the threat of a new round of French expansionism and, even more importantly, symbolized a reaffirmation of the hated principles of the French Revolution.

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Bismarck did not dispute the conservative analysis of Napoleon any more than Nixon challenged the conservative interpretation of communist motives. Bismarck saw in the restless French ruler, as Nixon did in the decrepit Soviet leadership (see chapter 28), both an opportunity and a danger. He considered Prussia less vulnerable than Austria to either French expansionism or revolution. Nor did Bismarck accept the prevailing opinion of Napoleon's cunning, noting sarcastically that the ability to admire others was not his most highly developed trait. The more Austria feared Napoleon, the more it would have to make concessions to Prussia, and the greater would become Prussia's diplomatic flexibility.

The reasons for Bismarck's break with the Prussian conservatives were much the same as those for Richelieu's debate with his clerical critics, the chief difference being that the Prussian conservatives insisted on universal political principles, rather than universal religious principles. Bismarck asserted that power supplied its own legitimacy; the conservatives argued that legitimacy represented a value beyond calculations of power. Bismarck believed that a correct evaluation of power implied a doctrine of self-limitation; the conservatives insisted that only moral principles could ultimately limit the claims of power.

The conflict evoked a poignant exchange of letters in the late 1850s between Bismarck and his old mentor, Leopold von Gerlach, the Prussian King's military adjutant, to whom Bismarck owed everything—his first diplomatic appointment, his access to the court, his entire career.

The exchange of letters between the two men began when Bismarck sent Gerlach a recommendation that Prussia develop a diplomatic option toward France along with a covering letter in which he placed utility above ideology:

I cannot escape the mathematical logic of the fact that present-day Austria cannot be our friend. As long as Austria does not agree to a delimitation of spheres of influence in Germany, we must anticipate a contest with it, by means of diplomacy and lies in peace time, with the utilization of every opportunity to give a *coup de grâce*.²⁵

Gerlach, however, could not bring himself to accept the proposition that strategic advantage could justify abandoning principle, especially when it involved a Bonaparte. He urged the Metternich remedy—that Prussia bring Austria and Russia closer together and restore the Holy Alliance to enforce the isolation of France.²⁶

What Gerlach found even more incomprehensible was another Bismarck proposal to the effect that Napoleon be invited to the maneuvers

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of a Prussian army corps because “this proof of good relations with France . . . would increase our influence in all diplomatic relations.”²⁷

The suggestion that a Bonaparte participate in Prussian maneuvers provoked a veritable outburst from Gerlach: “How can a man of your intelligence sacrifice his principles to such an individual as Napoleon. Napoleon is our natural enemy.”²⁸ Had Gerlach seen Bismarck’s cynical marginalia — “What of it?” — he might have saved himself the next letter, in which he reiterated his antirevolutionary principles of a lifetime, the same that had led him to support the Holy Alliance and to sponsor Bismarck’s early career:

My political principle is and remains the war against revolution. You will not convince Bonaparte that he is not on the revolutionary side. And he will not stand on any other side because he clearly derives advantage from this. . . . So if my principle of opposing revolution is right . . . it also has to be adhered to in practice.²⁹

Yet Bismarck disagreed with Gerlach not because he did not understand him, as Gerlach supposed, but because he understood him only too well. *Realpolitik* for Bismarck depended on flexibility and on the ability to exploit every available option without the constraint of ideology. Just as Richelieu’s defenders had done, Bismarck transferred the debate to the one principle he and Gerlach did share, and one that would leave Gerlach at a distinct disadvantage—the overriding importance of Prussian patriotism. Gerlach’s insistence on the unity of conservative interests was, according to Bismarck, incompatible with loyalty to their country:

France interests me only insofar as it affects the situation of my country and we can make policy only with the France which exists. . . . As a romantic I can shed a tear for the fate of Henry V (the Bourbon pretender); as a diplomat I would be his servant if I were French, but as things stand, France, irrespective of the accident who leads it, is for me an unavoidable pawn on the chessboard of diplomacy, where I have no other duty than to serve *my* king and *my* country [Bismarck’s emphasis]. I cannot reconcile personal sympathies and antipathies toward foreign powers with my sense of duty in foreign affairs; indeed I see in them the embryo of disloyalty toward the Sovereign and the country I serve.³⁰

How was a traditional Prussian to respond to the proposition that Prussian patriotism transcended the principle of legitimacy and that, if circumstances should require it, a generation’s faith in the unity of conservative values could verge on disloyalty? Bismarck implacably cut off every intel-

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lectual escape route, rejecting in advance Gerlach's argument that legitimacy *was* Prussia's national interest and that therefore Napoleon was Prussia's permanent enemy:

... I could deny this—but even if you were right I would not consider it politically wise to let other states know of our fears in peace time. Until the break you predict occurs I would think it useful to encourage the belief... that the tension with France is not an organic fault of our nature...³¹

In other words, *Realpolitik* demanded tactical flexibility, and the Prussian national interest required keeping open the option of making a deal with France. The bargaining position of a country depends on the options it is perceived to have. Closing them off eases the adversary's calculations, and constricts those of the practitioners of *Realpolitik*.

The break between Gerlach and Bismarck became irrevocable in 1860 over the issue of Prussia's attitude toward France's war with Austria over Italy. To Gerlach, the war had eliminated all doubt that Napoleon's true purpose was to set the stage for aggression in the style of the first Bonaparte. Gerlach therefore urged Prussia to support Austria. Bismarck saw instead the opportunity—that if Austria were forced to retreat from Italy, it could serve as the precursor of its eventual expulsion from Germany as well. To Bismarck, the convictions of the generation of Metternich had turned into a dangerous set of inhibitions:

I stand or fall with my own Sovereign, even if in my opinion he ruins himself stupidly, but for me France will remain France, whether it is governed by Napoleon or by St. Louis and Austria is for me a foreign country... I know that you will reply that fact and right cannot be separated, that a properly conceived Prussian policy requires chastity in foreign affairs even from the point of view of utility. I am prepared to discuss the point of utility with you; but if you pose antinomies between right and revolution; Christianity and infidelity; God and the devil; I can argue no longer and can merely say, "I am not of your opinion and you judge in me what is not yours to judge."³²

This bitter declaration of faith was the functional equivalent of Richelieu's assertion that, since the soul is immortal, man must submit to the judgment of God but that states, being mortal, can only be judged by what works. Like Richelieu, Bismarck did not reject Gerlach's moral views as personal articles of faith—he probably shared most of them; but he de-

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nied their relevance to the duties of statesmanship by way of elaborating the distinction between personal belief and *Realpolitik*:

I did not seek the service of the King. . . . The God who unexpectedly placed me into it will probably rather show me the way out than let my soul perish. I would overestimate the value of this life strangely . . . should I not be convinced that after thirty years it will be irrelevant to me what political successes I or my country have achieved in Europe. I can even think out the idea that some day “unbelieving Jesuits” will rule over the Mark Brandenburg [core of Prussia] together with a Bonapartist absolutism. . . . I am a child of different times than you, but as honest a one of mine as you of yours.³³

This eerie premonition of Prussia’s fate a century later never received an answer from the man to whom Bismarck owed his career.

Bismarck was indeed the child of a different era from that of his erstwhile mentor. Bismarck belonged to the age of *Realpolitik*; Gerlach had been shaped by the period of Metternich. The Metternich system had reflected the eighteenth-century conception of the universe as a great clockwork of intricately meshing parts in which disruption of one part meant upsetting the interaction of the others. Bismarck represented the new age in both science and politics. He perceived the universe not as a mechanical balance, but in its modern version—as consisting of particles in flux whose impact on each other creates what is perceived as reality. Its kindred biological philosophy was Darwin’s theory of evolution based on the survival of the fittest.

Driven by such convictions, Bismarck proclaimed the relativity of *all* belief, including even the belief in the permanence of his own country. In the world of *Realpolitik*, it was the statesman’s duty to evaluate ideas as forces in relation to all the other forces relevant to making a decision; and the various elements needed to be judged by how well they could serve the national interest, not by preconceived ideologies.

Still, however hard-boiled Bismarck’s philosophy might have appeared, it was built on an article of faith as unprovable as Gerlach’s premises—namely, that a careful analysis of a given set of circumstances would necessarily lead all statesmen to the same conclusions. Just as Gerlach found it inconceivable that the principle of legitimacy could inspire more than one interpretation, it was beyond Bismarck’s comprehension that statesmen might differ in the way they assessed the national interest. Because of his magnificent grasp of the nuances of power and its ramifications, Bismarck was able in his lifetime to replace the philosophical

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constraints of the Metternich system with a policy of self-restraint. Because these nuances were not as self-evident to Bismarck's successors and imitators, the literal application of *Realpolitik* led to their excessive dependence on military power, and from there to an armament race and two world wars.

Success is often so elusive that statesmen pursuing it rarely bother to consider that it may impose its own penalties. Thus, at the beginning of his career, Bismarck was chiefly preoccupied with applying *Realpolitik* to destroying the world he found, which was still very much dominated by Metternich's principles. This required weaning Prussia from the idea that Austrian leadership in Germany was vital to Prussia's security and to the preservation of conservative values. However true this might have been at the time of the Congress of Vienna, in the middle of the nineteenth century Prussia no longer needed the Austrian alliance to preserve domestic stability or European tranquillity. Indeed, according to Bismarck, the illusion of the need for an Austrian alliance served above all to inhibit Prussia from pursuing its ultimate goal of unifying Germany.

As Bismarck saw it, Prussian history was resplendent with evidence that supported his claim of its primacy within Germany and of its ability to stand alone. For Prussia was not just another German state. Whatever its conservative domestic policies, they could not dim the national luster it had garnered through its tremendous sacrifices in the wars of liberation from Napoleon. It was as if Prussia's very outlines—a series of oddly shaped enclaves stretching across the North German plain from the Vistula to west of the Rhine—had destined it to lead the quest for German unity, even in the eyes of the liberals.

But Bismarck went further. He challenged the conventional wisdom which identified nationalism with liberalism, or at least with the proposition that German unity could only be realized through liberal institutions:

Prussia has become great not through liberalism and free-thinking but through a succession of powerful, decisive and wise regents who carefully husbanded the military and financial resources of the state and kept them together in their own hands in order to throw them with ruthless courage into the scale of European politics as soon as a favorable opportunity presented itself. . . .³⁴

Bismarck relied not on conservative principles but on the unique character of Prussian institutions; he rested Prussia's claim to leadership in Germany on its strength rather than on universal values. In Bismarck's view, Prussian institutions were so impervious to outside influence that

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Prussia could exploit the democratic currents of the period as instruments of foreign policy by threatening to encourage greater freedom of expression at home—never mind that no Prussian king had practiced such a policy for four decades, if ever:

The sense of security that the King remains master in his country even if the whole army is abroad is not shared with Prussia by any other continental state and above all by no other German power. It provides the opportunity to accept a development of public affairs much more in conformity with present requirements. . . . The royal authority in Prussia is so firmly based that the government can without risk encourage a much more lively parliamentary activity and thereby exert pressure on conditions in Germany.³⁵

Bismarck rejected the Metternich view that a shared sense of their domestic vulnerability required the close association of the three Eastern Courts. Quite the opposite was the case. Since Prussia was not threatened by domestic upheaval, its very cohesiveness could serve as a weapon to undermine the Vienna settlement by threatening the other powers, especially Austria, with policies fomenting domestic upheavals. For Bismarck, the strength of Prussia's governmental, military, and financial institutions opened the road to Prussian primacy in Germany.

When he was appointed ambassador to the Assembly of the Confederation in 1852 and ambassador to St. Petersburg in 1858, Bismarck ascended to positions which enabled him to advocate his policies. His reports, brilliantly written and remarkably consistent, urged a foreign policy based on neither sentiment nor legitimacy but on the correct assessment of power. In this manner, Bismarck returned to the tradition of such eighteenth-century rulers as Louis XIV and Frederick the Great. Enhancing the influence of the state became the principal, if not the only, objective, restrained solely by the forces massed against it:

. . . A sentimental policy knows no reciprocity. It is an exclusively Prussian peculiarity.³⁶

. . . For heaven's sake no sentimental alliances in which the consciousness of having performed a good deed furnishes the sole reward for our sacrifice.³⁷

. . . Policy is the art of the possible, the science of the relative.³⁸

Not even the King has the right to subordinate the interests of the state to his personal sympathies or antipathies.³⁹

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In Bismarck's estimation, foreign policy had a nearly scientific basis, making it possible to analyze the national interest in terms of objective criteria. In such a calculation, Austria emerged as a foreign, not a fraternal, country, and above all as an obstacle to Prussia's rightful place in Germany: "Our policy has no other parade ground than Germany and this is precisely the one which Austria believes it badly requires for itself. . . . We deprive each other of the air we need to breathe. . . . This is a fact which cannot be ignored however unwelcome it may be."⁴⁰

The first Prussian king whom Bismarck served as ambassador, Frederick William IV, was torn between Gerlach's legitimist conservatism and the opportunities inherent in Bismarck's *Realpolitik*. Bismarck insisted that his King's personal regard for the traditionally pre-eminent German state must not inhibit Prussian policy. Since Austria would never accept Prussian hegemony in Germany, Bismarck's strategy was to weaken Austria at every turn. In 1854, during the Crimean War, Bismarck urged that Prussia exploit Austria's break with Russia and attack what was still Prussia's partner in the Holy Alliance without any better justification than the auspiciousness of the occasion:

Could we succeed in getting Vienna to the point where it does not consider an attack by Prussia on Austria as something outside of all possibility we would soon hear more sensible things from there. . . .⁴¹

In 1859, during Austria's war with France and Piedmont, Bismarck returned to the same theme:

The present situation once more presents us with the great prize if we let the war between Austria and France become well established and then move south with our army taking the border posts in our field packs not to impale them again until we reach Lake Constance or at least the regions where the Protestant confession ceases to predominate.⁴²

Metternich would have considered this heresy, but Frederick the Great would have applauded a disciple's clever adaptation of his own rationale for conquering Silesia.

Bismarck subjected the European balance of power to the same cold-blooded, relativistic analysis as he did the internal German situation. At the height of the Crimean War, Bismarck outlined the principal options for Prussia:

We have three threats available: (1) An alliance with Russia; and it is nonsense always to swear at once that we will never go with Russia.

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- Even if it were true, we should retain the option to use it as a threat.
- (2) A policy in which we throw ourselves into Austria's arms and compensate ourselves at the expense of perfidious [German] confederates.
 - (3) A change of cabinets to the left whereby we would soon become so "Western" as to outmaneuver Austria completely.⁴³

In the same dispatch were listed as equally valid Prussian options: an alliance with Russia against France (presumably on the basis of a community of conservative interests); an arrangement with Austria against the secondary German states (and presumably against Russia); and a shift toward liberalism domestically directed against Austria and Russia (presumably in combination with France). Like Richelieu, Bismarck felt unfettered in his choice of partners, being prepared to ally himself with Russia, Austria, or France; the choice would depend entirely on which could best serve the Prussian national interest. Though a bitter opponent of Austria, Bismarck was prepared to explore an arrangement with Vienna in return for appropriate compensation in Germany. And although he was an arch-conservative in domestic affairs, Bismarck saw no obstacle to shifting Prussia's domestic policy to the left as long as it served a foreign policy purpose. For domestic policy, too, was a tool of *Realpolitik*.

Attempts to tilt the balance of power had, of course, occurred even in the heyday of the Metternich system. But then every effort would have been made to legitimize the change by means of European consensus. The Metternich system sought adjustments through European congresses rather than through a foreign policy of threat and counterthreat. Bismarck would have been the last person to reject the efficacy of moral consensus. But to him, it was only one element of power among many. The stability of the international order depended precisely on this nuance. Pressuring for change without so much as paying lip service to existing treaty relationships, shared values, or the Concert of Europe marked a diplomatic revolution. In time, turning power into the only criterion induced all nations to conduct armament races and foreign policies of confrontation.

Bismarck's views remained academic as long as the key element of the Vienna settlement—the unity of the conservative courts of Prussia, Austria, and Russia—was still intact, and as long as Prussia by itself did not dare to rupture that unity. The Holy Alliance disintegrated unexpectedly and quite rapidly after the Crimean War, when Austria abandoned the deft anonymity by which Metternich had deflected crises from his rickety empire and, after many vacillations, sided with Russia's enemies. Bismarck understood at once that the Crimean War had wrought a diplomatic revolution. "The day of reckoning," he said, "is sure to come even if a few years pass."⁴⁴

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Indeed, perhaps the most important document relating to the Crimean War was a dispatch from Bismarck analyzing the situation upon the conclusion of the war in 1856. Characteristically, the dispatch assumed perfect flexibility of diplomatic method and a total absence of scruple in the pursuit of opportunity. German historiography has aptly named Bismarck's dispatch the "*Prachtbericht*," or the "Master Dispatch." For assembled therein was the essence of *Realpolitik*, though it was still too daring for its addressee, the Prussian Prime Minister, Otto von Manteuffel, whose numerous marginal comments indicate that he was far from persuaded by it.

Bismarck opened with an exposition of Napoleon's extraordinarily favorable position at the end of the Crimean War. Henceforth, he noted, all the states of Europe would be seeking France's friendship, none with a greater prospect of success than Russia:

An alliance between France and Russia is too natural that it should not come to pass. . . . Up to now the firmness of the Holy Alliance . . . has kept the two states apart; but with the Tsar Nicholas dead and the Holy Alliance dissolved by Austria, nothing remains to arrest the natural rapprochement of two states with nary a conflicting interest.⁴⁵

Bismarck predicted that Austria had maneuvered itself into a trap from which it would not be able to escape by racing the Tsar to Paris. For in order to retain the support of his army, Napoleon would require some issue which could furnish him at a moment's notice with "a not too arbitrary and unjust pretext for intervention. Italy is ideally suited for this role. The ambitions of Sardinia, the memories of Bonaparte and Murat, furnish sufficient excuses and the hatred of Austria will smooth its way."⁴⁶ This was, of course, exactly what happened three years later.

How should Prussia position itself in light of the inevitability of tacit Franco-Russian cooperation and the likelihood of a Franco-Austrian conflict? According to the Metternich system, Prussia should have tightened its alliance with conservative Austria, strengthened the German Confederation, established close relations with Great Britain, and sought to wean Russia away from Napoleon.

Bismarck demolished each of these options in turn. Great Britain's land forces were too negligible to be of use against a Franco-Russian alliance. Austria and Prussia would end up having to bear the brunt of the fighting. Nor could the German Confederation add any real strength:

Aided by Russia, Prussia, and Austria, the German Confederation would probably hold together, because it would believe in victory even without its support; but in the case of a two-front war toward East and West,

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those princes who are not under the control of our bayonets would attempt to save themselves through declarations of neutrality, if they did not appear in the field against us. . . .⁴⁷

Although Austria had been Prussia's principal ally for over a generation, it now presented a rather incongruous partner in Bismarck's eyes. It had become the main obstacle to Prussia's growth: "Germany is too small for the two of us . . . , as long as we plough the same furrow, Austria is the only state against which we can make a permanent gain and to which we can suffer a permanent loss."⁴⁸

Whatever aspect of international relations he considered, Bismarck resolved it by the argument that Prussia needed to break its confederate bond to Austria and reverse the policies of the Metternich period in order to weaken its erstwhile ally at every opportunity: "When Austria hitches a horse in front, we hitch one behind."⁴⁹

The bane of stable international systems is their nearly total inability to envision mortal challenge. The blind spot of revolutionaries is their conviction that they can combine all the benefits of their goals with the best of what they are overthrowing. But the forces unleashed by revolution have their own momentum, and the direction in which they are moving cannot necessarily be deduced from the proclamations of their advocates.

So it was with Bismarck. Within five years of coming to power in 1862, he eliminated the Austrian obstacle to German unity by implementing his own advice of the previous decade. Through the three wars described earlier in this chapter, he expelled Austria from Germany and destroyed lingering Richelieuan illusions in France.

The new united Germany did not embody the ideals of the two generations of Germans who had aspired to build a constitutional, democratic state. In fact, it reflected no previous significant strain of German thinking, having come into being as a diplomatic compact among German sovereigns rather than as an expression of popular will. Its legitimacy derived from Prussia's power, not from the principle of national self-determination. Though Bismarck achieved what he had set out to do, the very magnitude of his triumph mortgaged the future of Germany and, indeed, of the European world order. To be sure, he was as moderate in concluding his wars as he had been ruthless in preparing them. As soon as Germany had achieved the borders he considered vital to its security, Bismarck conducted a prudent and stabilizing foreign policy. For two decades, he maneuvered Europe's commitments and interests in masterly fashion on the basis of *Realpolitik* and to the benefit of the peace of Europe.

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But, once called forth, the spirits of power refused to be banished by juggling acts, however spectacular or restrained these were. Germany had been unified as the result of a diplomacy presupposing infinite adaptability; yet the very success of that policy removed all flexibility from the international system. There were now fewer participants. And when the number of players declines, the capacity to make adjustments diminishes. The new international system contained both fewer and weightier components, making it difficult to negotiate a generally acceptable balance or to sustain it without constant tests of strength.

These structural problems were magnified by the scope of Prussia's victory in the Franco-Prussian War and by the nature of the peace that concluded it. The German annexation of Alsace-Lorraine produced irreconcilable French antagonism, which eliminated any German diplomatic option toward France.

In the 1850s, Bismarck had considered the French option so essential that he had sacrificed his friendship with Gerlach to promote it. After the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, French enmity grew into the "organic fault of our nature" against which Bismarck had warned so insistently. And it precluded the policy of his "Master Dispatch" of remaining aloof until other powers were already committed, then selling Prussia's support to whoever offered it the most.

The German Confederation had succeeded in acting as a unit only in the face of threats so overwhelming that they had obliterated the rivalries among the various states; and joint offensive action was structurally impossible. The tenuousness of these arrangements was indeed one of the reasons Bismarck had insisted that German unification be organized under Prussian leadership. But he also paid a price for the new arrangement. Once Germany was transformed from a potential victim of aggression to a threat to the European equilibrium, the remote contingency of the other states of Europe uniting against Germany became a real possibility. And that nightmare in turn drove a German policy that was soon to split Europe into two hostile camps.

The European statesman who grasped the impact of German unification most quickly was Benjamin Disraeli, who was about to become British Prime Minister. In 1871, he said the following about the Franco-Prussian War:

The war represents the German revolution, a greater political event than the French Revolution of the last century. . . . There is not a diplomatic tradition which has not been swept away. You have a new world. . . . The balance of power has been entirely destroyed.⁵⁰

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While Bismarck was at the helm, these dilemmas were obscured by his intricate and subtle diplomacy. Yet in the long term, the very complexity of Bismarck's arrangements doomed them. Disraeli was right on the mark. Bismarck had recast the map of Europe and the pattern of international relations, but in the end he was not able to establish a design his successors could follow. Once the novelty of Bismarck's tactics had worn off, his successors and competitors sought safety in multiplying arms as a way of reducing their reliance on the baffling intangibles of diplomacy. The Iron Chancellor's inability to institutionalize his policies forced Germany onto a diplomatic treadmill it could only escape, first by an arms race, and then by war.

In his domestic policy as well, Bismarck was unable to establish a design his successors could follow. Bismarck, a solitary figure in his lifetime, was even less understood after he passed from the scene and attained mythic proportions. His compatriots remembered the three wars which had achieved German unity but forgot the painstaking preparations that had made them possible, and the moderation required to reap their fruits. They had seen displays of power but without discerning the subtle analysis on which these had been based.

The constitution which Bismarck had designed for Germany compounded these tendencies. Though based on the first universal male suffrage in Europe, the Parliament (the Reichstag) did not control the government, which was appointed by the Emperor and could only be removed by him. The Chancellor was closer to both the Emperor and the Reichstag than each was to the other. Therefore, within limits, Bismarck could play Germany's domestic institutions off against each other, much as he did the other states in his foreign policy. None of Bismarck's successors possessed the skill or the daring to do so. The result was that nationalism unleavened by democracy turned increasingly chauvinistic, while democracy without responsibility grew sterile. The essence of Bismarck's life was perhaps best expressed by the Iron Chancellor himself in a letter he had written to his then still future wife:

That which is imposing here on earth . . . has always something of the quality of the fallen angel who is beautiful but without peace, great in his conceptions and exertions but without success, proud and lonely.⁵¹

The two revolutionaries who stood at the beginning of the contemporary European state system incarnated many of the dilemmas of the modern period. Napoleon, the reluctant revolutionary, represented the trend of

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gearing policy to public relations. Bismarck, the conservative revolutionary, reflected the tendency to identify policy with the analysis of power.

Napoleon had revolutionary ideas but recoiled before their implications. Having spent his youth in what the twentieth century would call protest, he never bridged the gap between the formulation of an idea and its implementation. Insecure about his purposes and indeed his legitimacy, he relied on public opinion to bridge that gap. Napoleon conducted his foreign policy in the style of modern political leaders who measure their success by the reaction of the television evening news. Like them, Napoleon made himself a prisoner of the purely tactical, focusing on short-term objectives and immediate results, seeking to impress his public by magnifying the pressures he had set out to create. In the process, he confused foreign policy with the moves of a conjurer. For in the end, it is reality, not publicity, that determines whether a leader has made a difference.

The public does not in the long run respect leaders who mirror its own insecurities or see only the symptoms of crises rather than the long-term trends. The role of the leader is to assume the burden of acting on the basis of a confidence in his own assessment of the direction of events and how they can be influenced. Failing that, crises will multiply, which is another way of saying that a leader has lost control over events. Napoleon turned out to be the precursor of a strange modern phenomenon—the political figure who desperately seeks to determine what the public wants, yet ends up rejected and perhaps even despised by it.

Bismarck did not lack the confidence to act on his own judgments. He brilliantly analyzed the underlying reality and Prussia's opportunity. He built so well that the Germany he created survived defeat in two world wars, two foreign occupations, and two generations as a divided country. Where Bismarck failed was in having doomed his society to a style of policy which could only have been carried on had a great man emerged in every generation. This is rarely the case, and the institutions of imperial Germany militated against it. In this sense, Bismarck sowed the seeds not only of his country's achievements, but of its twentieth-century tragedies. "No one eats with impunity from the tree of immortality,"⁵² wrote Bismarck's friend von Roon about him.

Napoleon's tragedy was that his ambitions surpassed his capacities; Bismarck's tragedy was that his capacities exceeded his society's ability to absorb them. The legacy Napoleon left France was strategic paralysis; the legacy Bismarck left Germany was unassimilable greatness.



CHAPTER SIX

Realpolitik Turns on Itself

Realpolitik—foreign policy based on calculations of power and the national interest—brought about the unification of Germany. And the unification of Germany caused *Realpolitik* to turn on itself, accomplishing the opposite of what it was meant to achieve. For the practice of *Realpolitik* avoids armaments races and war only if the major players of an international system are free to adjust their relations in accordance with changing circumstances or are restrained by a system of shared values, or both.

After its unification, Germany became the strongest country on the Continent, and was growing stronger with every decade, thereby revolutionizing European diplomacy. Ever since the emergence of the modern state system in Richelieu's time, the powers at the edge of Europe—Great Britain, France, and Russia—had been exerting pressure on the center. Now, for the first time, the center of Europe was becoming sufficiently powerful to press on the periphery. How would Europe deal with this new giant in its midst?

Geography had created an insoluble dilemma. According to all the traditions of *Realpolitik*, European coalitions were likely to arise to con-

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tain Germany's growing, potentially dominant, power. Since Germany was located in the center of the Continent, it stood in constant danger of what Bismarck called "*le cauchemar des coalitions*"—the nightmare of hostile, encircling coalitions. But if Germany tried to protect itself against a coalition of all its neighbors—East and West—simultaneously, it was certain to threaten them individually, speeding up the formation of coalitions. Self-fulfilling prophecies became a part of the international system. What was still called the Concert of Europe was in fact riven by two sets of animosities: the enmity between France and Germany, and the growing hostility between the Austro-Hungarian and the Russian Empires.

As for France and Germany, the magnitude of Prussia's victory in the 1870 war had produced a permanent French desire for *revanche*, and German annexation of Alsace-Lorraine gave this resentment a tangible focal point. Resentment soon mixed with fear as French leaders began to sense that the war of 1870–71 had marked the end of the era of French predominance and an irrevocable change in the alignment of forces. The Richelieu system of playing the various German states off against each other in a fragmented Central Europe no longer applied. Torn between memory and ambition, France sublimated its frustrations for nearly fifty years in the single-minded pursuit of regaining Alsace-Lorraine, never considering that success in this effort could do no more than salve French pride without altering the underlying strategic reality. By itself, France was no longer strong enough to contain Germany; henceforth it would always need allies to defend itself. By the same token, France made itself permanently available as the potential ally of any enemy of Germany, thereby restricting the flexibility of German diplomacy and escalating any crisis involving Germany.

The second European schism, between the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Russia, also resulted from German unification. Upon becoming *Ministerpräsident* in 1862, Bismarck had asked the Austrian ambassador to convey to his Emperor the startling proposition that Austria, the capital of the ancient Holy Roman Empire, move its center of gravity from Vienna to Budapest. The ambassador considered the idea so preposterous that, in his report to Vienna, he ascribed it to nervous exhaustion on the part of Bismarck. Yet, once defeated in the struggle for pre-eminence in Germany, Austria had no choice but to act on Bismarck's suggestion. Budapest became an equal, occasionally dominant partner in the newly created Dual Monarchy.

After its expulsion from Germany, the new Austro-Hungarian Empire had no place to expand except into the Balkans. Since Austria had not participated in overseas colonialism, its leaders had come to view the Balkans, with its Slavic population, as the natural arena for Austrian geo-

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political ambitions—if only to keep pace with the other Great Powers. Inherent in such a policy was conflict with Russia.

Common sense should have cautioned Austrian leaders against provoking Balkan nationalism, or taking on Russia as a permanent enemy. But common sense was not in abundant supply in Vienna, and even less so in Budapest. Jingoistic nationalism prevailed. The Cabinet in Vienna continued on its course of inertia at home and fits of hysteria in foreign policy, which had progressively isolated it since Metternich's time.

Germany perceived no national interest in the Balkans. But it did perceive a major interest in the preservation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. For the collapse of the Dual Monarchy would have risked undoing Bismarck's entire German policy. The German-speaking Catholic segment of the empire would seek to join Germany, jeopardizing the pre-eminence of Protestant Prussia, for which Bismarck had struggled so tenaciously. And the disintegration of the Austrian Empire would leave Germany without a single dependable ally. On the other hand, though Bismarck wanted to preserve Austria, he had no desire to challenge Russia. It was a conundrum he could obscure for some decades, but never quite overcome.

To make matters worse, the Ottoman Empire was in the throes of a slow disintegration, creating frequent clashes between the Great Powers over the division of the spoils. Bismarck once said that, in a combination of five players, it is always desirable to be on the side of the three. But since, of the five Great Powers—England, France, Russia, Austria, and Germany—France was hostile, Great Britain unavailable due to its policy of "splendid isolation," and Russia ambivalent because of its conflict with Austria, Germany needed an alliance with both Russia *and* Austria for such a grouping of three. Only a statesman possessed of Bismarck's willpower and skill could even have conceived such a precarious balancing act. Thus, the relationship between Germany and Russia became the key to the peace of Europe.

Once Russia entered the international arena, it established a dominant position with astonishing speed. At the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, Russia had not yet been deemed sufficiently important to be represented. From 1750 onward, however, Russia became an active participant in every significant European war. By the middle of the eighteenth century, Russia was already inspiring a vague uneasiness in Western observers. In 1762, the French *chargé d'affaires* in St. Petersburg reported:

If Russian ambition is not checked, its effects may be fatal to the neighboring powers. . . . I know that the degree of Russian power should not be measured by its expanse and that its domination of eastern territories is more an imposing phantom than a source of real strength. But I

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also suspect that a nation which is capable of braving the intemperance of the seasons better than any other because of the rigor of its native climate, which is accustomed to servile obedience, which needs little to live and is therefore able to wage war at little cost . . . such a nation, I suspect, is likely to conquer. . . .¹

By the time the Congress of Vienna took place, Russia was arguably the most powerful country on the Continent. By the middle of the twentieth century, it had achieved the rank of one of only two global superpowers before imploding, nearly forty years later, losing many of its vast gains of the previous two centuries in a matter of months.

The absolute nature of the tsar's power enabled Russia's rulers to conduct foreign policy both arbitrarily and idiosyncratically. In the space of six years, between 1756 and 1762, Russia entered the Seven Years' War on the side of Austria and invaded Prussia, switched to Prussia's side at the death of Empress Elizabeth in January 1762, and then withdrew into neutrality when Catherine the Great overthrew her husband in June 1762. Fifty years later, Metternich would point out that Tsar Alexander I had never held a single set of beliefs for longer than five years. Metternich's adviser, Friedrich von Gentz, described the position of the Tsar as follows: "None of the obstacles that restrain and thwart the other sovereigns—divided authority, constitutional forms, public opinion, etc.—exists for the Emperor of Russia. What he dreams of at night he can carry out in the morning."²

Paradox was Russia's most distinguishing feature. Constantly at war and expanding in every direction, it nevertheless considered itself permanently threatened. The more polyglot the empire became, the more vulnerable Russia felt, partly because of its need to isolate the various nationalities from their neighbors. To sustain their rule and to surmount the tensions among the empire's various populations, all of Russia's rulers invoked the myth of some vast, foreign threat, which, in time, turned into another of the self-fulfilling prophecies that doomed the stability of Europe.

As Russia expanded from the area around Moscow toward the center of Europe, the shores of the Pacific, and into Central Asia, its quest for security evolved into expansion for its own sake. The Russian historian Vasili Kliuchevsky described the process as follows: ". . . these wars, defensive in their origin, imperceptibly and unintentionally on the part of the Muscovite politicians became wars of aggression—a direct continuation of the unifying policy of the old [pre-Romanov] dynasty, a struggle for Russian territory that had never belonged to the Muscovite state."³

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Russia gradually turned into as much of a threat to the balance of power in Europe as it did to the sovereignty of neighbors around its vast periphery. No matter how much territory it controlled, Russia inexorably pushed its borders outward. This started out as an essentially defensive motivation, as when Prince Potemkin (best known for placing fake villages along the Tsarina's routes) advocated the conquest of the Crimea from Turkey in 1776 on the reasonable ground that this would improve Russia's capacity to defend its realm.⁴ By 1864, however, security had become synonymous with continuous expansion. Chancellor Aleksandr Gorchakov defined Russia's expansion in Central Asia in terms of a permanent obligation to pacify its periphery driven forward by sheer momentum:

The situation of Russia in Central Asia is similar to that of all civilized states that come into contact with half-savage nomadic tribes without a firm social organization. In such cases, the interests of border security and trade relations always require that the more civilized state have a certain authority over its neighbors. . . .

The state therefore must make a choice: either to give up this continuous effort and doom its borders to constant unrest . . . or else to advance farther and farther into the heart of the savage lands . . . where the greatest difficulty lies in being able to stop.⁵

Many historians recalled this passage when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979.

Paradoxically, it is also true that for the past 200 years the European balance of power has been preserved on several occasions by Russian efforts and heroism. Without Russia, Napoleon and Hitler would almost certainly have succeeded in establishing universal empires. Janus-like, Russia was at once a threat to the balance of power and one of its key components, essential to the equilibrium but not fully a part of it. For much of its history, Russia accepted only the limits that were imposed on it by the outside world, and even these grudgingly. And yet there were periods, most notably the forty years after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, when Russia did not take advantage of its vast power, and instead put this power in the service of protecting conservative values in Central and Western Europe.

Even when Russia was pursuing legitimacy, its attitudes were far more messianic—and therefore imperialistic—than those of the other conservative courts. Whereas Western European conservatives defined themselves by philosophies of self-restraint, Russian leaders enlisted them-

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selves in the service of crusades. Because the tsars faced virtually no challenge to their legitimacy, they had little understanding of republican movements beyond deeming them to be immoral. Promoters of the unity of conservative values—at least until the Crimean War—they were also prepared to use legitimacy to expand their own influence, earning Nicholas I the sobriquet of “gendarme of Europe.” At the height of the Holy Alliance, Friedrich von Gentz wrote this about Alexander I:

The Emperor Alexander, despite all the zeal and enthusiasm he has consistently shown for the Grand Alliance, is the sovereign who could most easily get along without it. . . . For him the Grand Alliance is only an implement with which he exercises in general affairs the influence that is one of the main objects of his ambition. . . . His interest in the preservation of the system is not, as is true of Austria, Prussia, or England, an interest based on necessity or fear; it is a free and calculated interest, which he is in a position to renounce as soon as a different system should offer him greater advantages.⁶

Like Americans, Russians thought of their society as exceptional. Encountering only nomadic or feudal societies, Russia’s expansion into Central Asia had many of the features of America’s own westward expansion, and the Russian justification for it, in keeping with the Gorchakov citation above, paralleled the way Americans explained their own “manifest destiny.” But the closer Russia approached India, the more it aroused British suspicions, until, in the second half of the nineteenth century, Russian expansion into Central Asia, unlike America’s westward march, turned into a foreign policy problem.

The openness of each country’s frontiers was among the few common features of American and Russian exceptionalism. America’s sense of uniqueness was based on the concept of liberty; Russia’s sprang from the experience of common suffering. Everyone was eligible to share in America’s values; Russia’s were available only to the Russian nation, to the exclusion of most of its non-Russian subjects. America’s exceptionalism led it to isolationism alternating with occasional moral crusades; Russia’s evoked a sense of mission which often led to military adventures.

The Russian nationalist publicist Mikhail Katkov defined the difference between Western and Russian values as follows:

. . . everything there is based on contractual relations and everything here on faith; this contrast was originally determined by the position the church adopted in the West and that which it adopted in the East. A basic dual authority exists there; a single authority here.⁷

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Nationalist Russian and Pan-Slavic writers and intellectuals invariably ascribed the alleged altruism of the Russian nation to its Orthodox faith. The great novelist and passionate nationalist Fyodor Dostoyevsky interpreted Russian altruism as an obligation to liberate Slavic peoples from foreign rule, if necessary by defying the opposition of the whole of Western Europe. During Russia's 1877 campaign in the Balkans, Dostoyevsky wrote:

Ask the people; ask the soldier; Why are they arising? Why are they going to war and what do they expect from it? They will tell you, as one man, that they are going to serve Christ and to liberate the oppressed brethren. . . . [W]e shall watch over their mutual harmony and protect their liberty and independence, be it even against all Europe.⁸

Unlike the states of Western Europe, which Russia simultaneously admired, despised, and envied, Russia perceived itself not as a nation but as a cause, beyond geopolitics, impelled by faith, and held together by arms. Dostoyevsky did not confine the role of Russia to liberating fellow Slavs and included watching over their harmony—a social undertaking which easily shaded over into domination. To Katkov, Russia was the Third Rome:

The Russian tsar is more than the heir of his ancestors; he is the successor of the caesars of Eastern Rome, of the organizers of the church and of its councils which established the very creed of the Christian faith. With the fall of Byzantium, Moscow arose and the greatness of Russia began.⁹

After the Revolution, the passionate sense of mission was transferred to the Communist International.

The paradox of Russian history lies in the continuing ambivalence between messianic drive and a pervasive sense of insecurity. In its ultimate aberration, this ambivalence generated a fear that, unless the empire expanded, it would implode. Thus, when Russia acted as the prime mover in the partitioning of Poland, it did so partly for security reasons and partly for eighteenth-century-style aggrandizement. A century later, that conquest had taken on an autonomous significance. In 1869, Rostislav Andreievich Fadeyev, a Pan-Slavist officer, wrote in his influential essay, "Opinion on the Eastern Question," that Russia had to continue its westward march to protect its existing conquests:

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The historical move of Russia from the Dnieper to the Vistula [the partition of Poland] was a declaration of war to Europe, which had broken into a part of the Continent which did not belong to her. Russia now stands in the midst of the enemy's lines—such a condition is only temporary: she must either drive back the enemy or abandon the position . . . must either extend her preeminence to the Adriatic or withdraw again beyond the Dnieper. . . .¹⁰

Fadeyev's analysis was not very different from George Kennan's, which was made from the opposite side of the dividing line, in his seminal article on the sources of Soviet conduct. In it, he predicted that if the Soviet Union did not succeed in expanding, it would implode and collapse.¹¹

Russia's exalted view of itself was rarely shared by the outside world. Despite extraordinary achievements in literature and music, Russia never emerged as the same sort of cultural magnet for its conquered peoples as did the mother countries of some of the other colonial empires. Nor was the Russian Empire ever perceived as a model, either by other societies or by its own subjects. To the outside world, Russia was an elemental force—a mysterious, expansionist presence to be feared and contained, by either co-optation or confrontation.

Metternich had tried the route of co-optation and, for a generation, had been largely successful. But after the unification of Germany and Italy, the great ideological causes of the first half of the nineteenth century had lost their unifying force. Nationalism and revolutionary republicanism were no longer perceived as threats to the European order. As nationalism became the prevailing organizing principle, the crowned heads of Russia, Prussia, and Austria had less and less need to join together in a common defense of legitimacy.

Metternich had been able to establish an approximation of European government because the rulers of Europe considered their ideological unity as the indispensable breakwater against revolution. But by the 1870s, either the fear of revolution had subsided or the various governments thought they could defeat it without outside assistance. By now, two generations had passed since the execution of Louis XVI; the liberal revolutions of 1848 had been mastered; France, though a republic, had lost its proselytizing zeal. No common ideological bond now constrained the ever-sharpening conflict between Russia and Austria over the Balkans, or between Germany and France over Alsace-Lorraine. When the Great Powers viewed each other, they no longer saw partners in a common cause but dangerous, even mortal, rivals. Confrontation emerged as the standard diplomatic method.

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In an earlier period, Great Britain had contributed to restraint by acting as the balancer of the European equilibrium. Even now, of all the major European countries, only Great Britain was in a position to conduct a balance-of-power diplomacy unfettered by irreconcilable animosity toward some other power. But Great Britain had grown confused as to what constituted the central threat, and would not regain its bearings for several decades.

The balance of power of the Vienna system, with which Great Britain was familiar, had been radically altered. Unified Germany was achieving the strength to dominate Europe all by itself—an occurrence which Great Britain had always resisted in the past when it came about by conquest. However, most British leaders, Disraeli excepted, saw no reason to oppose a process of national consolidation in Central Europe, which British statesmen had welcomed for decades, especially when its culmination occurred as the result of a war in which France had been technically the aggressor.

Ever since Canning had distanced Great Britain from Metternich's system forty years earlier, Great Britain's policy of splendid isolation had enabled it to play the role of protector of the equilibrium largely because no single country was capable of dominating the Continent by itself. After unification, Germany progressively acquired that capacity. And, confusingly, it did so by means of developing its own national territory and not by conquest. It was Great Britain's style to intervene only when the balance of power was actually under attack and not against the prospect of attack. Since it took decades for the German threat to the European equilibrium to become explicit, Great Britain's foreign policy concerns for the rest of the century were focused on France, whose colonial ambitions clashed with those of Great Britain, especially in Egypt, and on Russia's advance toward the Straits, Persia, India, and later toward China. All of these were colonial issues. In regard to European diplomacy, which produced the crises and wars of the twentieth century, Great Britain continued to practice its policy of splendid isolation.

Bismarck was therefore the dominant figure of European diplomacy until he was dismissed from office in 1890. He wanted peace for the newly created German Empire and sought no confrontation with any other nation. But in the absence of moral bonds among the European states, he faced a Herculean task. He was obliged to keep both Russia and Austria out of the camp of his French enemy. This required preventing Austrian challenges to legitimate Russian objectives and keeping Russia from undermining the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He needed good relations with Russia without antagonizing Great Britain, which was keeping

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a wary eye on Russian designs on Constantinople and India. Even a genius like Bismarck could not have performed such a precarious balancing act indefinitely; the intensifying strains on the international system were becoming less and less manageable. Nevertheless, for the nearly twenty years that Bismarck led Germany, he practiced the *Realpolitik* he had preached with such moderation and subtlety that the balance of power never broke down.

Bismarck's goal was to give no other power—except irreconcilable France—any cause to join an alliance directed against Germany. Professing the unified Germany to be “satiated” and without further territorial ambitions, Bismarck sought to reassure Russia that Germany had no interest in the Balkans; the Balkans, he said, were not worth the bones of a single Pomeranian grenadier. Keeping Great Britain in mind, Bismarck mounted no challenge on the Continent that might trigger a British concern for the equilibrium, and he kept Germany out of the colonial race. “Here is Russia and here is France and here we are in the middle. That is my map of Africa,” was Bismarck's reply to an advocate of German colonialism¹²—a piece of advice domestic politics would later force him to modify.

Reassurance was not enough, however. What Germany needed was an alliance with both Russia and Austria, improbable as that appeared at first glance. Yet Bismarck forged just such an alliance in 1873—the first so-called Three Emperors' League. Proclaiming the unity of the three conservative courts, it looked a great deal like Metternich's Holy Alliance. Had Bismarck suddenly developed an affection for the Metternich system which he had done so much to destroy? The times had changed largely as a result of Bismarck's successes. Though Germany, Russia, and Austria pledged in true Metternich fashion to cooperate in the repression of subversive tendencies in each other's domains, a common aversion to political radicals could no longer hold the Eastern Courts together—above all because each had become confident that domestic upheavals could be repressed without outside aid.

Moreover, Bismarck had lost his solid legitimist credentials. Though his correspondence with Gerlach (see chapter 5) had not been made public, his underlying attitudes were common knowledge. As an advocate of *Realpolitik* throughout his public career, he could not suddenly make dedication to legitimacy credible. The increasingly bitter geopolitical rivalry between Russia and Austria came to transcend the unity of conservative monarchs. Each was in pursuit of the Balkan spoils of the decaying Turkish Empire. Pan-Slavism and old-fashioned expansionism were contributing to an adventurous Russian policy in the Balkans. Plain fear was producing parallel attitudes in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Thus, while

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on paper the German Emperor had an alliance with his fellow conservative monarchs in Russia and Austria, these two brethren were in fact at each other's throats. The challenge of how to deal with two partners who perceived each other as mortal threats was destined to torment Bismarck's alliance system for the remainder of his days.

The first Three Emperors' League taught Bismarck that he could no longer control the forces he had unleashed by appealing to Austria's and Russia's domestic principles. Henceforth, he would attempt to manipulate them by emphasizing power and self-interest.

Two events above all demonstrated that *Realpolitik* had become the dominant trend of the period. The first occurred in 1875 in the form of a pseudo-crisis, a contrived war scare triggered by an editorial in a leading German newspaper bearing the provocative headline "Is War Imminent?" The editorial had been placed in reaction to an increase in French military expenditures and the purchase of a large number of horses by the French military. Bismarck may well have inspired the war scare without intending to go any further, for there was no partial German mobilization or threatening troop movements.

Facing down a nonexistent threat is an easy way to enhance a nation's standing. Clever French diplomacy created the impression that Germany was planning a pre-emptive attack. The French Foreign Office put out the story that, in a conversation with the French Ambassador, the Tsar had indicated he would support France in a Franco-German conflict. Great Britain, ever sensitive to the threat of a single power dominating Europe, began to stir. Prime Minister Disraeli instructed his Foreign Secretary, Lord Derby, to approach Russian Chancellor Gorchakov with the idea of intimidating Berlin:

My own impression is that we should construct some concerted movement to preserve the peace of Europe like Pam [Lord Palmerston] did when he baffled France and expelled the Egyptians from Syria. There might be an alliance between Russia and ourselves for this special purpose; and other powers, as Austria and perhaps Italy might be invited to accede. . . .¹³

That Disraeli, deeply distrustful of Russia's imperial ambitions, could even hint at an Anglo-Russian alliance showed how seriously he took the prospect of German domination of Western Europe. The war scare subsided as quickly as it had blown up, so Disraeli's scheme was never tested. Although Bismarck did not know the details of Disraeli's maneuver, he was too astute not to have sensed Britain's underlying concern.

As George Kennan has demonstrated,¹⁴ there was far less to this crisis

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than the publicity made it seem. Bismarck had no intention of going to war so soon after humiliating France, though he did not object to leaving France with the impression that he might do so if pushed too far. Tsar Alexander II was not about to guarantee republican France, though he did not mind conveying to Bismarck that that option existed.¹⁵ Thus, Disraeli was reacting to what was still a chimera. Still, the combination of British uneasiness, French maneuvering, and Russian ambivalence convinced Bismarck that only an active policy could stave off the coalition-building which would result a generation later in the Triple Entente, aimed at Germany.

The second crisis was real enough. It came in the form of yet another Balkan crisis, which demonstrated that neither philosophical nor ideological bonds could hold the 'Three Emperors' League together in the face of the underlying clash of national interests. Because it laid bare the conflict which would ultimately doom Bismarck's European order and plunge Europe into World War I, it will be treated here in some detail.

The Eastern Question, dormant since the Crimean War, again came to dominate the international agenda in the first series of convoluted imbroglios, which, as the century progressed, would become as stereotyped as Japanese Kabuki plays. Some almost accidental event would trigger a crisis; Russia would make threats and Great Britain would dispatch the Royal Navy. Russia would then occupy some part of the Ottoman Balkans to hold as hostage. Great Britain would threaten war. Negotiations would start, during which Russia would reduce its demands, at which precise point the whole thing would blow up.

In 1876, the Bulgarians, who for centuries had lived under Turkish rule, rebelled and were joined by other Balkan peoples. Turkey responded with appalling brutality, and Russia, swept up by Pan-Slavic sentiments, threatened to intervene.

In London, Russia's response raised the all-too-familiar specter of Russian control of the Straits. Ever since Canning, British statesmen had observed the maxim that, if Russia controlled the Straits, it would dominate the Eastern Mediterranean and the Near East, thereby threatening Great Britain's position in Egypt. Therefore, according to British conventional wisdom, the Ottoman Empire, decrepit and inhuman as it was, had to be preserved even at the risk of war with Russia.

This state of affairs presented Bismarck with a grave dilemma. A Russian advance capable of provoking a British military reaction was also likely to rouse Austria to enter the fray. And if Germany was forced to choose between Austria and Russia, Bismarck's foreign policy would be wrecked along with the Three Emperors' League. Whatever happened, Bismarck

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faced the risk of antagonizing either Austria or Russia, and of quite possibly incurring the wrath of all the parties if he adopted a neutral attitude. "We have always avoided," Bismarck said before the Reichstag in 1878, "in the case of differences of opinion between Austria and Russia, building a majority of two against one by taking the side of one of [the] parties. . . ." ¹⁶

The moderation was classical Bismarck, though it also defined a mounting dilemma as the crisis unfolded. Bismarck's first move was to attempt to tighten the bonds of the Three Emperors' League by seeking to develop a common position. In early 1876, the Three Emperors' League drew up the so-called Berlin Memorandum warning Turkey against continuing its repression. It seemed to imply that, with certain provisos, Russia might intervene in the Balkans on behalf of the Concert of Europe, much as Metternich's Congresses of Verona, Laibach, and Troppau had designated some European power to carry out their decisions.

But there was one enormous difference between taking such action then and doing so now. In Metternich's day, Castlereagh was the British Foreign Secretary and had been sympathetic to intervention by the Holy Alliance, even though Great Britain had refused to participate in it. But now Disraeli was the Prime Minister, and he interpreted the Berlin Memorandum as the first step toward dismantling the Ottoman Empire to the exclusion of Great Britain. This was too close to the European hegemony Great Britain had been opposing for centuries. Complaining to Shuvalov, the Russian Ambassador to London, Disraeli said: "England has been treated as though we were Montenegro or Bosnia." ¹⁷ To his frequent correspondent Lady Bradford, he wrote:

There is no balance and unless we go out of our way to act with the three Northern Powers, they can act without us which is not agreeable for a state like England. ¹⁸

Given the unity being displayed by St. Petersburg, Berlin, and Vienna, it would have been exceedingly difficult for Great Britain to resist whatever they might agree upon. It appeared that Disraeli had no choice but to join the Northern Courts while Russia assaulted Turkey.

However, in the tradition of Palmerston, Disraeli decided to flex British muscles. He moved the Royal Navy to the Eastern Mediterranean and proclaimed his pro-Turkish sentiments—guaranteeing that Turkey would prove obdurate, and forcing whatever latent differences existed in the Three Emperors' League into the open. Never known for excessive modesty, Disraeli declared to Queen Victoria that he had broken the Three Emperors' League. It was, he believed, "virtually extinct, as extinct as the Roman triumvirate." ¹⁹

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Benjamin Disraeli was one of the strangest and most extraordinary figures ever to head a British government. Upon learning that he would be named Prime Minister in 1868, he exulted: "Hurray! Hurray! I've climbed to the top of the greasy pole!" By contrast, when Disraeli's permanent adversary, William Ewart Gladstone, was invited to succeed him that same year, the former penned a prolix reflection on the responsibilities of power and his sacred duties to God, which included the prayer that the Almighty imbue him with the fortitude required to carry out the grave responsibilities of the prime minister's office.

The pronouncements of the two great men who dominated British politics in the second half of the nineteenth century capture their antipodal natures: Disraeli—meretricious, brilliant, and mercurial; Gladstone—learned, pious, and grave. It was no small irony that the Victorian Tory Party, composed of country squires and devoutly Anglican aristocratic families, should have produced as its leader this brilliant Jewish adventurer, and that the party of quintessential insiders should have brought to the forefront of the world's stage the quintessential outsider. No Jew had ever risen to such heights in British politics. A century later, it would again be the seemingly hidebound Tories rather than the self-consciously progressive Labour Party that would bring Margaret Thatcher into office—a greengrocer's daughter who proved to be another remarkable leader and Great Britain's first female prime minister.

Disraeli's had been an unlikely career. A novelist as a young man, he was more a member of the *literati* than a policymaker, and was much more likely to have concluded his life as a scintillating writer and conversationalist than as one of the seminal British political figures of the nineteenth century. Like Bismarck, Disraeli believed in expanding the vote to the common man, convinced that the middle classes in England would vote Conservative.

As Tory leader, Disraeli articulated a new form of imperialism different from the essentially commercial expansion Great Britain had practiced since the seventeenth century—by which, it was said, it had built an empire in a fit of absent-mindedness. For Disraeli, the Empire was not an economic necessity but a spiritual one, and a prerequisite to his country's greatness. "The issue is not a mean one," he proclaimed in his famous 1872 Crystal Palace speech. "It is whether you will be content to be a comfortable England, modeled and molded upon Continental principles and meeting in due course an inevitable fate, or whether you will be a great country—an Imperial country—a country where your sons, when they rise, rise to paramount positions, and obtain not merely the esteem of their countrymen, but command the respect of the world."²⁰

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Adhering to convictions such as these, Disraeli was bound to oppose Russia's threat to the Ottoman Empire. In the name of the European equilibrium, he would not accept the prescriptions of the Three Emperors' League, and in the name of the British Empire, he would oppose Russia as the enforcer of a European consensus on the approaches to Constantinople. For, in the course of the nineteenth century, the notion that Russia was the principal threat to Great Britain's position in the world had taken firm hold. Great Britain perceived its overseas interests menaced by a Russian pincer movement, one prong of which was aimed at Constantinople and the other at India via Central Asia. In the course of its expansion across Central Asia during the second half of the nineteenth century, Russia had elaborated methods of conquest which would become stereotyped. The victim was always so far from the center of world affairs that few Westerners had any precise idea of what was taking place. They could thus fall back on their preconceptions that the tsar was in fact benevolent and his subordinates were bellicose, turning distance and confusion into tools of Russian diplomacy.

Of the European Powers, only Great Britain concerned itself with Central Asia. As Russian expansion pushed ever southward in the direction of India, London's protests were stonewalled by Chancellor Prince Aleksandr Gorchakov, who often did not know what the Russian armies were doing. Lord Augustus Loftus, the British Ambassador in St. Petersburg, speculated that Russia's pressure on India "had not originated with the Sovereign, although he is an absolute monarch, but rather from the dominant part played by the military administration. Where an enormous standing army is maintained, it is absolutely necessary to find employment for it. . . . When a system of conquest sets in, as in Central Asia, one acquisition of territory leads to another, and the difficulty is where to stop."²¹ This observation, of course, practically replicated Gorchakov's own words (see page 141, above). On the other hand, the British Cabinet did not much care whether Russia was threatening India by momentum or out of deliberate imperialism.

The same pattern was repeated again and again. Each year, Russian troops would penetrate deeper into the heart of Central Asia. Great Britain would ask for an explanation and receive all kinds of assurances that the Tsar did not intend to annex one square meter of land. At first, such soothing words were able to put matters to rest. But, inevitably, another Russian advance would reopen the issue. For instance, after the Russian army occupied Samarkand (in present-day Uzbekistan) in May 1868, Gorchakov told the British Ambassador, Sir Andrew Buchanan, "that the Russian Government not only did not wish, but that they deeply regretted,

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the occupation of that city, and he was assured that it would not be permanently retained.”²² Samarkand, of course, remained under Russian sovereignty until the collapse of the Soviet Union more than a century later.

In 1872, the same charade was repeated a few hundred miles to the southeast with respect to the principality of Khiva on the border of present-day Afghanistan. Count Shuvalov, the Tsar’s aide-de-camp, was sent to London to reassure the British that Russia had no intention of annexing additional territory in Central Asia:

Not only was it far from the intention of the Emperor to take possession of Khiva, but positive orders had been prepared to prevent it, and directions given that conditions imposed should be such as could not in any way lead to a prolonged occupation of Khiva.²³

These assurances had hardly been uttered when word arrived that Russian General Kaufmann had crushed Khiva and imposed a treaty which was the dramatic opposite of Shuvalov’s assertions.

In 1875, these methods were applied to Kokand, another principality on the border of Afghanistan. On this occasion, Chancellor Gorchakov felt some need to justify the gap between Russia’s assurances and its actions. Ingeniously, he devised an unprecedented distinction between unilateral assurances (which, according to his definition, had no binding force) and formal, bilateral engagements. “The Cabinet in London,” he wrote in a note, “appears to derive, from the fact of our having on several occasions spontaneously and amicably communicated to them our views with respect to Central Asia, and particularly our firm resolve not to pursue a policy of conquest or annexation, a conviction that we have contracted definite engagements toward them in regard to this matter.”²⁴ In other words, Russia would insist on a free hand in Central Asia, would set its own limits, and not be bound even by its own assurances.

Disraeli was not about to permit a replay of these methods at the approaches to Constantinople. He encouraged the Ottoman Turks to reject the Berlin Memorandum and to continue their depredations in the Balkans. Despite this show of British firmness, Disraeli was under severe domestic pressure. The Turks’ atrocities had turned British public opinion against them, and Gladstone was railing against the amorality of Disraeli’s foreign policy. Disraeli thus felt obliged to accede to the London Protocol of 1877, in which he joined the three Northern courts in calling on Turkey to end the slaughter in the Balkans and to reform its administration in the region. The Sultan, however, convinced that Disraeli was

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on his side no matter what formal demands were made, rejected even this document. Russia's response was a declaration of war.

For a moment, it appeared as if Russia had won the diplomatic game. Not only was it backed by the other two Northern courts, but by France as well, in addition to having a good deal of support in British public opinion. Disraeli's hands were tied; going to war on behalf of Turkey might well bring down his government.

But, as in many previous crises, the Russian leaders overplayed their hand. Led by the brilliant but reckless general and diplomat Nicholas Ignatyev, Russian troops arrived at the gates of Constantinople. Austria began to reconsider its backing of the Russian campaign. Disraeli moved British warships into the Dardanelles. At that point, Ignatyev shocked all of Europe by announcing the terms of the Treaty of San Stefano, which would emasculate Turkey and create a "Big Bulgaria." Extending to the Mediterranean Sea, this enlarged state, it was widely assumed, would be dominated by Russia.

Since 1815, conventional wisdom in Europe had deemed that the fate of the Ottoman Empire could only be resolved by the Concert of Europe as a whole and not by any one power, least of all by Russia. Ignatyev's Treaty of San Stefano raised the possibilities of Russian control of the Straits, which was intolerable to Great Britain, and Russian control of the Balkan Slavs, which was intolerable to Austria. Both Great Britain and Austria-Hungary, therefore, declared that the Treaty was unacceptable.

Suddenly, Disraeli no longer stood alone. To Russia's leaders, his moves signaled the ominous portent of a return of the Crimean War coalition. When Foreign Secretary Lord Salisbury issued his famous Memorandum of April 1878 outlining why the Treaty of San Stefano had to be revised, even Shuvalov, the Russian Ambassador to London and a long-time rival of Ignatyev, agreed. Great Britain threatened war if Russia moved into Constantinople, while Austria threatened war over the division of the spoils in the Balkans.

Bismarck's cherished Three Emperors' League teetered on the verge of collapse. Until this moment, Bismarck had been extraordinarily circumspect. In August 1876, a year before Russian armies moved on Turkey "for the cause of Orthodoxy and Slavdom," Gorchakov had proposed to Bismarck that the Germans host a congress to settle the Balkan crisis. Whereas Metternich or Napoleon III would have jumped at the opportunity to play chief mediator of the Concert of Europe, Bismarck demurred, believing that a congress could only make the differences within the Three Emperors' League explicit. He confided privately that all the participants, including Great Britain, would emerge from such a congress "ill-

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disposed towards us because not one of them would receive from us the support which he expected.”²⁵ Bismarck also thought it unwise to bring Disraeli and Gorchakov together—“ministers of equally dangerous vanity,” was how he described them.

Nevertheless, as it increasingly appeared that the Balkans would become the fuse to set off a general European war, Bismarck reluctantly organized a congress in Berlin, the only capital to which the Russian leaders were willing to come. Yet he preferred to keep his distance from the day-to-day diplomacy, prevailing upon Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister Andrassy to send out the invitations.

The Congress was scheduled to assemble on June 13, 1878. Before it met, however, Great Britain and Russia had already settled the key issues in an agreement between Lord Salisbury and the new Russian Foreign Minister, Shuvalov, signed on May 30. The “Big Bulgaria” created by the Treaty of San Stefano was replaced by three new entities: a much-reduced, independent state of Bulgaria; the state of Eastern Rumelia, an autonomous entity that was technically under a Turkish governor but whose administration would be overseen by a European Commission (a forerunner of United Nations peacekeeping projects of the twentieth century); the rest of Bulgaria reverted to Turkish rule. Russia’s gains in Armenia were reduced. In separate secret agreements, Great Britain promised Austria that it would support Austria’s occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and assured the Sultan that it would guarantee Asiatic Turkey. In return, the Sultan gave England the use of Cyprus as a naval base.

By the time the Congress of Berlin met, the danger of war which had induced Bismarck to agree to host the gathering had largely dissipated. The main function of the Congress was to give Europe’s blessing to what had already been negotiated. One wonders whether Bismarck would have risked placing himself in the inherently precarious role of mediator had he been able to foresee this outcome. Of course, it is likely that the very imminence of a congress had caused Russia and England to settle separately and rapidly, not wishing to expose to the vagaries of a European congress gains which were far more attainable from each other in direct negotiations.

Working out the details of an already concluded agreement is not exactly heroic work. All the major countries except Great Britain were represented by their foreign ministers. For the first time in British history, both a prime minister and a foreign minister attended an international congress outside the British Isles because Disraeli did not want to delegate the already largely assured prospect of a major diplomatic achievement to Salisbury. The vain and aged Gorchakov, who had negotiated

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with Metternich at the Congresses of Laibach and Verona more than half a century before, chose the Congress of Berlin for his final appearance on the international stage. "I do not wish to be extinguished like a lamp that is smoking. I want to sink down as though I were a star," he declared upon his arrival in Berlin.²⁶

When asked to reflect on the center of gravity at the Congress, Bismarck pointed to Disraeli: "*Der alte Jude, das ist der Mann*" (The old Jew, he is the man).²⁷ Though their backgrounds could not have been more different, these two men came to admire each other. Both subscribed to *Realpolitik* and hated what they considered moralistic cant. The religious overtones of Gladstone's pronouncements (a man both Disraeli and Bismarck detested) seemed pure humbug to them. Neither Bismarck nor Disraeli had any sympathy for the Balkan Slavs, whom they viewed as chronic and violent troublemakers. Both men were given to biting, cynical quips, broad generalizations, and sarcastic barbs. Bored with nettlesome detail, Bismarck and Disraeli preferred to approach policy in bold, dramatic strokes.

It can be argued that Disraeli was the only statesman who ever got the better of Bismarck. Disraeli arrived at the Congress in the impregnable position of having already achieved his aims—a position which Castlereagh had enjoyed at Vienna, and Stalin after the Second World War. The remaining issues concerned the details of implementing the previous agreement between Great Britain and Russia, and the essentially technical military question of whether Turkey or the new Bulgaria should control the Balkan passes. For Disraeli, the strategic problem at the Congress was to deflect from Great Britain as much as possible Russia's frustration at having to relinquish some of its conquests.

Disraeli succeeded because Bismarck's own position was so complicated. Bismarck perceived no German interest in the Balkans, and basically had no preference with respect to the issues at hand other than that war between Austria and Russia had to be avoided at nearly any cost. He described his role at the Congress as that of the "*ehrlicher Makler*" (honest broker) and introduced almost every statement at the Congress with the words: "*L'Allemagne, qui n'est liée par aucun intérêt direct dans les affaires d'Orient . . .*" (Germany, which has no direct interest of any kind in Eastern questions . . .).²⁸

Though Bismarck understood the game being played all too well, he nevertheless felt like a person in a nightmare who sees danger approaching but is unable to avoid it. When the German parliament urged Bismarck to take a stronger stand, he retorted that he intended to steer clear. Bismarck pointed out the perils of mediation by referring to an

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incident in 1851 when Tsar Nicholas I had intervened between Austria and Prussia, in effect on Austria's side:

Then Tsar Nicholas played the role that [my opponent] now presumes to give Germany; he (Nicholas) came and said: "The first one who shoots, I'll shoot," and as a result peace was maintained. To whose advantage, and to whose disadvantage, that belongs to history, and I don't want to discuss it here. I am simply asking, was this role that Tsar Nicholas played, in which he took one side, ever repaid in gratitude? Certainly not by us in Prussia! . . . Was Tsar Nicholas thanked by Austria? Three years later came the Crimean War, and I don't need to say anything more.²⁹

Nor, he might have added, did the Tsar's intervention prevent Prussia from ultimately consolidating Northern Germany—the real issue in 1851.

Bismarck played the hand he had been dealt as well as possible. His approach was generally to back Russia on questions concerning the eastern part of the Balkans (such as the annexation of Bessarabia) and to support Austria on those relating to the western part (such as the occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina). On only one issue did he come down against Russia. When Disraeli threatened to leave the Congress unless Turkey was left in possession of the mountain passes facing Bulgaria, Bismarck interceded with the Tsar to overrule the Russian negotiator, Shuvalov.

In this manner, Bismarck avoided the estrangement with Russia that had befallen Austria after the Crimean War. But he did not emerge unscathed. Many leading Russians felt cheated of victory. Russia might defer territorial gains for the sake of legitimacy (as Alexander I did in the Greek rebellion in the 1820s, and Nicholas I during the revolutions of 1848), but Russia never relinquished an ultimate objective or accepted compromise as just. Checks to Russian expansionism generally produced sullen resentment.

Thus, after the Congress of Berlin, Russia blamed its failure to achieve all of its aims on the Concert of Europe rather than on its own excessive ambition; not on Disraeli, who had organized the coalition against Russia and threatened war, but on Bismarck, who had managed the Congress in order to avoid a European war. Russia had grown accustomed to British opposition; but that the role of honest broker was being assumed by a traditional ally like Germany was treated by Pan-Slavists as an affront. The Russian nationalist press styled the Congress as a "European coalition against Russia under the leadership of Prince Bismarck,"³⁰ who was

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turned into a scapegoat for Russia's failure to achieve its exorbitant goals.

Shuvalov, the principal Russian negotiator at Berlin, who was therefore in a position to know the real state of affairs, summed up Russian jingoistic attitudes in the aftermath of the Congress:

One prefers to leave people with the mad illusion that Russia's interests have been grievously damaged by the action of certain foreign powers, and in this way one gives sustenance to the most pernicious agitation. Everyone wants peace; the condition of the country urgently demands it, but at the same time one tries to divert to the outside world the effects of the discontents produced, in reality, by the mistakes of one's own policies.³¹

Shuvalov, however, did not reflect Russian public opinion. Though the Tsar himself did not venture as far as his jingoist press or radical Pan-Slavists, neither was he fully reconciled to the outcome of the Congress. In the decades ahead, German perfidy at Berlin would become the staple of many a Russian policy document, including several just prior to the outbreak of World War I. The Three Emperors' League, based on the unity of conservative monarchs, could no longer be maintained. Henceforth, if there was to be any cohesive force in international affairs, it would have to be *Realpolitik* itself.

In the 1850s, Bismarck had advocated a policy which was the Continental equivalent of England's own policy of "splendid isolation." He had urged aloofness from entanglements before throwing Prussia's weight behind whichever side seemed best to serve the Prussian national interest at any given point. This approach avoided alliances, which limited freedom of action, and above all, gave Prussia more options than any potential rival. During the 1870s, Bismarck sought to consolidate the unification of Germany by returning to the traditional alliance with Austria and Russia. But in the 1880s, an unprecedented situation came about. Germany was too strong to stand aloof, for that might unite Europe against it. Nor could it any longer rely on the historic, almost reflexive, support of Russia. Germany was a giant in need of friends.

Bismarck solved this dilemma by completely reversing his previous approach to foreign policy. If he could no longer operate the balance of power by having fewer commitments than any potential adversary, he would arrange more relationships with more countries than any conceivable opponent and thereby be able to choose among many allies, as circumstances required. Abandoning the freedom of maneuver which

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had characterized his diplomacy for the previous twenty years, Bismarck began to build a system of alliances deftly engineered on the one hand to keep Germany's potential adversaries from coalescing and, on the other, to restrain the actions of Germany's partners. In each of Bismarck's sometimes contradictory coalitions, Germany was always closer to the various partners than any of them was to each other; hence Bismarck always had a veto over common action as well as an option of independent action. For a decade he succeeded in maintaining pacts with his allies' adversaries so that he could restrain tension on all sides.

Bismarck initiated his new policy in 1879 by making a secret alliance with Austria. Aware of Russia's resentment after the Congress of Berlin, he now hoped to build a barrier to further Russian expansion. Unwilling, however, to permit Austria to use German backing to challenge Russia, he also secured a veto over Austrian policy in the Balkans. The warmth with which Salisbury greeted the Austro-German alliance—with the biblical good “tidings of great joy”—assured Bismarck that he was not alone in wanting to check Russian expansionism. Salisbury no doubt hoped that henceforth Austria, backed by Germany, would assume Great Britain's burden of resisting Russian expansion toward the Straits. Fighting battles for other countries' national interest was not Bismarck's specialty. He was especially loath to do so in the Balkans, because he felt such deep disdain for that region's quarrels. “One must give these sheep-stealers plainly to understand,” he rumbled about the Balkans on one occasion, “that the European governments have no need to harness themselves to their lusts and their rivalries.”³² Unfortunately for the peace of Europe, his successors would forget these words of caution.

Bismarck proposed to restrain Russia in the Balkans through alliance rather than confrontation. For his part, the Tsar was brought up short at the prospect of isolation. Considering Great Britain to be Russia's chief adversary and France still too weak and, above all, too republican to be a plausible ally, the Tsar agreed to resurrect the Three Emperors' League, this time on the basis of *Realpolitik*.

The benefit of an alliance with his principal opponent was not immediately apparent to the Austrian Emperor. He would have preferred a grouping with Great Britain, with which he shared a common interest in blocking Russia's advance toward the Straits. But Disraeli's defeat in 1880 and Gladstone's advent to power had ended that prospect; Great Britain's participation, even indirectly, in a pro-Turkish, anti-Russian alliance was no longer in the cards.

The second Three Emperors' League made no pretense to any moral concerns. Expressed in the precise conditionality of *Realpolitik*, it committed its signatories to benevolent neutrality in the event that one of

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them engaged in a war with a fourth country—for instance, should England go to war with Russia, or France with Germany. Germany was thus protected against a two-front war, and Russia was protected against the restoration of the Crimean coalition (of Great Britain, France, and Austria), while Germany's commitment to defend Austria against aggression remained intact. Responsibility for resisting Russian expansionism in the Balkans was shifted onto Great Britain by precluding Austria from joining a coalition aimed at Russia—at least on paper. By balancing partially offsetting alliances, Bismarck was able to achieve almost the same freedom of action he had enjoyed in his previous phase of diplomatic aloofness. Above all, he had removed the incentives that might have turned a local crisis into a general war.

In 1882, the year following the second Three Emperors' League, Bismarck cast his net even more widely by persuading Italy to transform the Dual Alliance between Austria and Germany into a Triple Alliance, including Italy. In general, Italy had stayed aloof from the diplomacy of Central Europe, but it now resented the French conquest of Tunisia, which had pre-empted its own designs in North Africa. Likewise, the shaky Italian monarchy thought that some demonstration of Great Power diplomacy might enable it to resist better the rising tide of republicanism. For its part, Austria sought additional insurance should the Three Emperors' League prove incapable of restraining Russia. In forming the Triple Alliance, Germany and Italy pledged mutual assistance against a French attack, while Italy pledged neutrality to Austria-Hungary in case of a war with Russia, easing Austrian worries about a two-front war. Finally, in 1887, Bismarck encouraged his two allies, Austria and Italy, to conclude the so-called Mediterranean Agreements with Great Britain, by which the parties agreed to preserve jointly the *status quo* in the Mediterranean.

Bismarck's diplomacy had produced a series of interlocking alliances, partially overlapping and partially competitive, which ensured Austria against Russian attack, Russia against Austrian adventurism, and Germany against encirclement, and which drew England into resisting Russian expansion toward the Mediterranean. To reduce challenges to his intricate system, Bismarck did his utmost to satisfy French ambitions everywhere except in Alsace-Lorraine. He encouraged French colonial expansion, in part to deflect French energies from Central Europe, but more to embroil France with colonial rivals, especially Great Britain.

For over a decade, that calculation proved accurate. France and Great Britain nearly clashed over Egypt, France became estranged from Italy over Tunisia, and Great Britain continued to oppose Russia in Central Asia and on the approaches to Constantinople. Eager to avoid conflict

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with England, Bismarck eschewed colonial expansion until the mid-1880s, limiting Germany's foreign policy to the Continent, where his aims were to preserve the *status quo*.

But, in the end, the requirements of *Realpolitik* became too intricate to sustain. With the passage of time, the conflict between Austria and Russia in the Balkans became unmanageable. Had the balance of power operated in its purest form, the Balkans would have been divided into Russian and Austrian spheres of influence. But public opinion was already too inflamed for such a policy, even in the most autocratic states. Russia could not agree to spheres of influence which left Slavic populations to Austria, and Austria would not agree to strengthening what it considered Russia's Slavic dependencies in the Balkans.

Bismarck's eighteenth-century-style Cabinet Diplomacy was becoming incompatible with an age of mass public opinion. The two representative governments of Great Britain and France responded to their public opinions as a matter of course. In France, this meant mounting pressure for the recovery of Alsace-Lorraine. But the most striking example of the vital new role of public opinion was in Great Britain, when Gladstone defeated Disraeli in 1880 in the only British election fought largely over foreign policy issues, and then reversed Disraeli's Balkan policy.

Gladstone, perhaps the dominant figure of British politics in the nineteenth century, viewed foreign policy in much the same way as Americans did after Wilson. Judging foreign policy by moral instead of geopolitical criteria, he argued that the national aspirations of the Bulgarians were in fact legitimate, and that, as a fellow Christian nation, Great Britain owed support to Bulgaria against the Muslim Turks. The Turks should be made to behave, argued Gladstone, by a coalition of powers which would then assume responsibility for the administration of Bulgaria. Gladstone put forth the same concept that came to be known under President Wilson as "collective security": Europe needed to act jointly, otherwise Great Britain should not act at all.

It must be done, it can only be done with safety, by the united action of the Powers of Europe. Your power is great; but what is above all things essential is, that the mind and heart of Europe in this matter should be one. I need now only speak of the six whom we call great Powers; of Russia, Germany, Austria, France, England, and Italy. The union of them all is not only important, but almost indispensable for entire success and satisfaction.³³

In 1880, Gladstone, offended by Disraeli's emphasis on geopolitics, launched his landmark Midlothian Campaign, the first whistle-stop cam-

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paign in history and the first in which the issues of foreign policy were taken directly to the people. In his old age, Gladstone suddenly came into his own as a public speaker. Asserting that morality was the only basis for a sound foreign policy, Gladstone insisted that Christian decency and respect for human rights ought to be the guiding lights of British foreign policy, not the balance of power and the national interest. At one stop, he declared:

Remember that the sanctity of life in the hill villages of Afghanistan is as inviolable in the eye of Almighty God as can be your own. Remember that He who has united you as human beings in the same flesh and blood has bound you by the law of mutual love . . . not limited by the boundaries of Christian civilization. . . .³⁴

Gladstone blazed a trail which Wilson later followed when he claimed that there could be no distinction between the morality of the individual and the morality of the state. Like Wilson a generation later, he thought that he had detected a global trend toward peaceful change policed by world public opinion:

Certain it is that a new law of nations is gradually taking hold of the mind, and coming to sway the practice, of the world; a law which recognises independence, which frowns upon aggression, which favours the pacific, not the bloody settlement of disputes, which aims at permanent and not temporary adjustments; above all, which recognises, as a tribunal of paramount authority, the general judgement of civilised mankind.³⁵

Every word in this paragraph could have been uttered by Wilson and the implication of it was certainly very similar to Wilson's League of Nations. In drawing a distinction between his policy and Disraeli's in 1879, Gladstone stressed that, rather than practicing a balance of power, he would strive "to keep the Powers of Europe in union together. And why? Because by keeping all in union together you neutralize and fetter and bind up the selfish aims of each. . . . Common action is fatal to selfish aims. . . ."³⁶ Of course, the inability to keep all of Europe together was the precise cause for mounting tensions. No cause was foreseeable—certainly not the future of Bulgaria—that could heal the breach between France and Germany, or between Austria and Russia.

No British prime minister before Gladstone had used such rhetoric. Castlereagh had treated the Concert of Europe as an instrument for enforcing the Vienna settlement. Palmerston saw it as a tool for preserving

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the balance of power. Far from viewing the Concert of Europe as an enforcer of the *status quo*, Gladstone assigned it the revolutionary role of bringing about an entirely new world order. These ideas were to remain dormant until Wilson appeared on the scene a generation later.

To Bismarck, such views were pure anathema. It is not surprising that these two titanic figures cordially detested each other. Bismarck's attitude toward Gladstone paralleled that of Theodore Roosevelt toward Wilson: he considered the great Victorian part humbug, part menace. Writing to the German Emperor in 1883, the Iron Chancellor noted:

Our task would be easier if in England that race of great statesmen of earlier times who had an understanding of European politics, had not completely died out. With such an incapable politician as Gladstone, who is nothing but a great orator, it is impossible to pursue a policy in which England's position can be counted upon.³⁷

Gladstone's view of his adversary was far more direct, for instance, when he called Bismarck "the incarnation of evil."³⁸

Gladstone's ideas on foreign policy suffered the same fate as Wilson's, in that they stirred his compatriots to withdrawal from global affairs rather than greater participation. On the level of day-to-day diplomacy, Gladstone's coming to power in 1880 made little difference to Great Britain's imperial policy in Egypt and east of Suez. But it did keep England from being a factor in the Balkans and in the European equilibrium in general.

Gladstone's second tenure in office (1880–85) thus had the paradoxical effect of removing the safety net under Bismarck, the most moderate of the Continental statesmen, just as Canning's withdrawal from Europe had driven Metternich toward the Tsar. As long as the Palmerston/Disraeli view dominated British foreign policy, Great Britain could serve as the last resort whenever Russia went too far in the Balkans or on the approaches to Constantinople. With Gladstone, this assurance came to an end, making Bismarck ever more dependent on his increasingly anachronistic triangle with Austria and Russia.

The Eastern Courts—heretofore the bulwark of conservatism—in a way proved even more susceptible to nationalistic public opinion than the representative governments. Germany's domestic structure had been designed by Bismarck to permit him to apply to it the maxims of his balance-of-power diplomacy, yet it also had a strong tendency to invite demagoguery. Despite the fact that the Reichstag was elected by what was the widest suffrage in Europe, German governments were appointed by the emperor and reported to him, not to the Reichstag.

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Thus deprived of responsibility, Reichstag members were at liberty to indulge in the most extreme rhetoric. The fact that the military budget was voted for periods of five years at a time tempted governments to create crises during the crucial year in which the defense program would be voted. Given enough time, this arrangement might well have evolved into a constitutional monarchy with a government responsible to Parliament. But during the crucial, formative years of the new Germany, governments were highly susceptible to nationalist propaganda and too prone to inventing foreign dangers to rally their constituencies.

Russian foreign policy, too, suffered from the rabid propaganda of the Pan-Slavs, whose basic themes were a call for an aggressive policy in the Balkans and a showdown with Germany. A Russian official explained to the Austrian ambassador toward the end of the reign of Alexander II, in 1879:

People here are simply *afraid* of the nationalistic press. . . . It is the flag of nationalism they have pinned upon themselves that protects them and assures them of powerful support. Ever since the nationalistic tendency has come so prominently to the fore, and particularly since it succeeded in prevailing against all better advice, in the question of going to war [against Turkey], the so-called "national" party . . . has become a real power, especially because it embraces the entire army.³⁹

Austria, the other polyglot empire, was in a similar position.

In these circumstances, it became increasingly difficult for Bismarck to execute his precarious balancing act. In 1881, a new tsar, Alexander III, came to the throne in St. Petersburg, unrestrained by conservative ideology like his grandfather, Nicholas I, or by personal affection for the aged German Emperor, like his father, Alexander II. Indolent and autocratic, Alexander III distrusted Bismarck, in part because Bismarck's policy was too complicated for him to understand. On one occasion he even said that, whenever he saw any mention of Bismarck in a dispatch, he placed a cross next to his name. The Tsar's suspicions were reinforced by his Danish wife, who could not forgive Bismarck for taking Schleswig-Holstein from her native country.

The Bulgarian crisis of 1885 brought all these impulses to a head. Another revolt produced the greater Bulgaria which Russia had sought so passionately a decade earlier, and which Great Britain and Austria had feared. Demonstrating how history can falsify the most firmly held expectations, the new Bulgaria, far from being dominated by Russia, was unified under a German prince. The court at St. Petersburg blamed Bismarck for

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what the German chancellor in fact would have far preferred to avoid. The Russian court was outraged and the Pan-Slavs, who saw a conspiracy in every corner west of the Vistula, spread the rumor that Bismarck was behind a diabolical anti-Russian plot. In this atmosphere, Alexander refused to renew the Three Emperors' League in 1887.

Bismarck, however, was not ready to give up on his Russian option. He knew that, left to its own devices, Russia would sooner or later drift into an alliance with France. Yet in the conditions of the 1880s, with Russia and Great Britain permanently on the verge of war, such a course increased Russia's peril vis-à-vis Germany without diminishing British antagonism. Moreover, Germany still had a British option, especially now that Gladstone had left office. Alexander, in any event, had good reason to doubt that France would run the risk of war over the Balkans. In other words, Russo-German ties still reflected a very real, if diminishing, convergence of national interests and not simply Bismarck's predilections—though, without his diplomatic skill, these common interests would not have found formal expression.

Ever ingenious, Bismarck now came up with his last major initiative, the so-called Reinsurance Treaty. Germany and Russia promised each other to stay neutral in a war with a third country unless Germany attacked France, or Russia attacked Austria. Theoretically, Russia and Germany were now guaranteed against a two-front war, provided they stayed on the defensive. However, much depended on how the aggressor was defined, especially since mobilization was becoming increasingly equated with a declaration of war (see chapter 8). Since that question was never posed, there were obvious limits to the Reinsurance Treaty, the utility of which was further impaired by the Tsar's insistence on keeping it secret.

The secrecy of the agreement was the clearest illustration of the conflict between the requirements of cabinet diplomacy and the imperatives of an increasingly democratized foreign policy. Matters had become so complex that two levels of secrecy existed within the secret Reinsurance Treaty. The second level was a particularly confidential codicil in which Bismarck promised not to stand in the way of Russia's attempt to acquire Constantinople, and to help increase Russian influence in Bulgaria. Neither assurance would have gladdened Germany's ally, Austria, not to speak of Great Britain—though Bismarck would hardly have been unhappy had Great Britain and Russia become embroiled over the future of the Straits.

Despite its complexities, the Reinsurance Treaty maintained the indispensable link between St. Petersburg and Berlin. And it reassured St. Petersburg that, though Germany would defend the integrity of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, it would not assist in its expansion at Russia's

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expense. Germany thus achieved at least a delay in a Franco-Russian alliance.

That Bismarck had put his intricate foreign policy into the service of restraint and the preservation of peace was shown by his reaction to pressure from German military leaders urging a pre-emptive war against Russia when the 'Three Emperors' League ended in 1887. Bismarck doused all such speculations in a speech to the Reichstag in which he tried to give St. Petersburg a reputation to uphold as a way of discouraging a Franco-Russian alliance:

Peace with Russia will not be disturbed from our side; and I do not believe Russia will attack us. I also do not believe that the Russians are looking around for alliances in order to attack us in company with others, or that they would be inclined to take advantages of difficulties that we might encounter on another side, in order to attack us with ease.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, for all its dexterity and moderation, Bismarck's balancing act was due to end soon. The maneuvers were becoming too complex to sustain, even for the master. Overlapping alliances designed to ensure restraint led to suspicion instead, while the growing importance of public opinion reduced everyone's flexibility.

However skillful Bismarck's diplomacy, the need for so high a degree of manipulation was proof of the strains which a powerful, unified Germany had placed on the European balance of power. Even while Bismarck was still at the helm, imperial Germany inspired disquiet. Indeed, Bismarck's machinations, which were intended to provide reassurance, over time had an oddly unsettling effect, partly because his contemporaries had such difficulty comprehending their increasingly convoluted nature. Fearful of being outmaneuvered, they tended to hedge their bets. But this course of action also limited flexibility, the mainspring of *Realpolitik* as a substitute for conflict.

Though Bismarck's style of diplomacy was probably doomed by the end of his period in office, it was far from inevitable that it should have been replaced by a mindless armaments race and rigid alliances more comparable to the later Cold War than to a traditional balance of power. For nearly twenty years, Bismarck preserved the peace and eased international tension with his moderation and flexibility. But he paid the price of misunderstood greatness, for his successors and would-be imitators could draw no better lesson from his example than multiplying arms and waging a war which would cause the suicide of European civilization.

By 1890, the concept of the balance of power had reached the end of

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its potential. It had been made necessary in the first place by the multitude of states emerging from the ashes of medieval aspirations to universal empire. In the eighteenth century, its corollary of *raison d'état* had led to frequent wars whose primary function was to prevent the emergence of a dominant power and the resurrection of a European empire. The balance of power had preserved the liberties of states, not the peace of Europe.

Balance-of-power policy reached its zenith in the forty years after the Napoleonic Wars. It operated smoothly during this period because the equilibrium had been deliberately designed to enhance balance, and, as importantly, because it was buttressed by a sense of shared values, at least among the conservative courts. After the Crimean War, that sense of shared values gradually eroded, and matters reverted to eighteenth-century conditions, now made all the more dangerous by modern technology and the growing role of public opinion. Even the despotic states could appeal to their publics by invoking a foreign danger—and by substituting outside threats for democratic consensus. National consolidation of the states of Europe reduced the number of players and the ability to substitute diplomatic combinations for the deployment of power, while the collapse of a shared sense of legitimacy eroded moral restraint.

Despite America's historic aversion to the balance of power, these lessons are relevant to post-Cold War American foreign policy. For the first time in its history, America is currently part of an international system in which it is the strongest country. Though a military superpower, America can no longer impose its will because neither its power nor its ideology lends itself to imperial ambitions. And nuclear weapons, in which America is preponderant militarily, tend toward an equalization of usable power.

The United States therefore finds itself increasingly in a world with numerous similarities to nineteenth-century Europe, albeit on a global scale. One can hope that something akin to the Metternich system evolves, in which a balance of power is reinforced by a shared sense of values. And in the modern age, these values would have to be democratic.

Yet Metternich had not had to create his legitimate order; it essentially already existed. In the contemporary world, democracy is far from universal, and where it is proclaimed it is not necessarily defined in commensurable terms. It is reasonable for the United States to try to buttress equilibrium with moral consensus. To be true to itself, America must try to forge the widest possible moral consensus around a global commitment to democracy. But it dare not neglect the analysis of the balance of power. For the quest for moral consensus becomes self-defeating when it destroys the equilibrium.

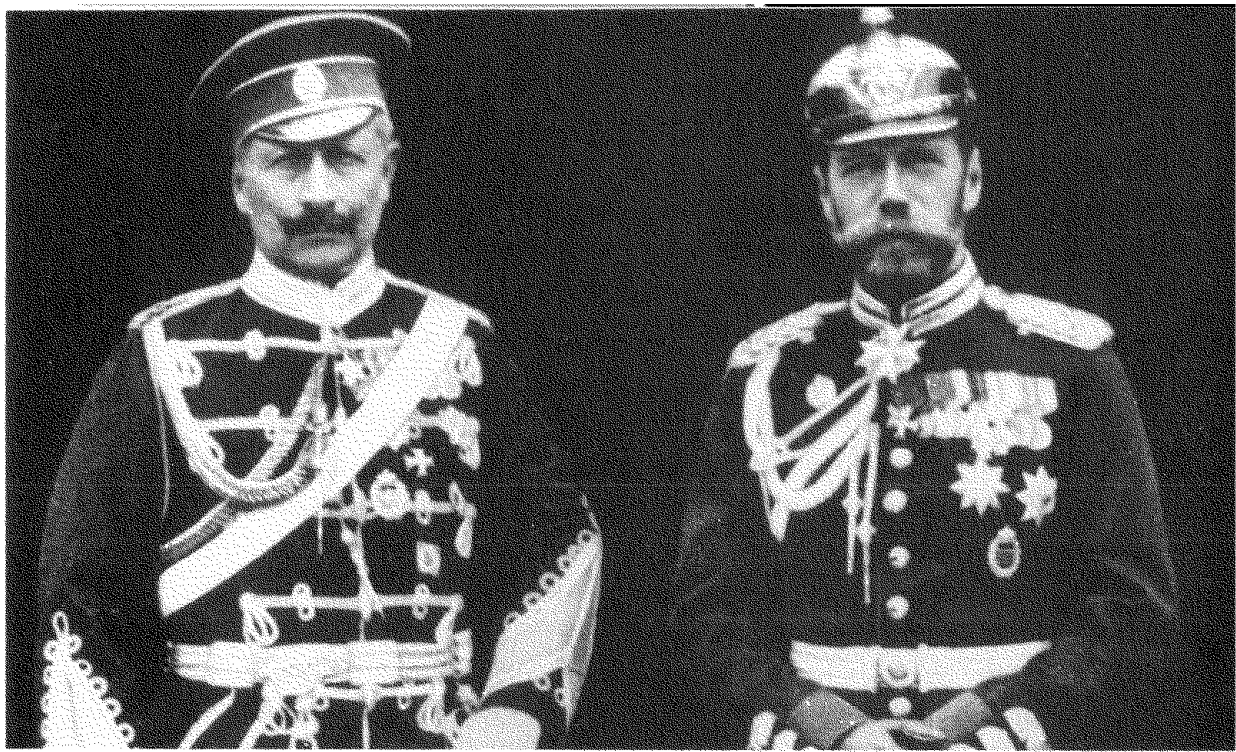
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If a Metternich-type system based on legitimacy is not possible, America will have to learn to operate in a balance-of-power system, however uncongenial it may find such a course. In the nineteenth century, there were two models for balance-of-power systems: the British model exemplified by the Palmerston/Disraeli approach; and Bismarck's model. The British approach was to wait for the balance of power to be threatened directly before engaging itself, and then almost always on the weaker side; Bismarck's approach sought to prevent challenges from arising by establishing close relations with as many parties as possible, by building overlapping alliance systems, and by using the resulting influence to moderate the claims of the contenders.

Strange as it may seem in light of America's experiences with Germany in the course of two world wars, the Bismarck style of operating a balance of power is probably more attuned to the traditional American approach to international relations. The Palmerston/Disraeli method would require a disciplined aloofness from disputes and a ruthless commitment to the equilibrium in the face of threats. Both the disputes and the threats would have to be assessed almost entirely in terms of balance of power. America would find it quite difficult to marshal either the aloofness or the ruthlessness, not to mention the willingness to interpret international affairs strictly in terms of power.

Bismarck's later policy sought to restrain power in advance by some consensus on shared objectives with various groups of countries. In an interdependent world, America will find it difficult to practice Great Britain's splendid isolation. But it is also unlikely that it will be able to establish a comprehensive system of security equally applicable to all parts of the world. The most likely—and constructive—solution would be partially overlapping alliance systems, some focusing on security, others on economic relations. The challenge for America will be to generate objectives growing out of American values that can hold together these various groupings (see chapter 31).

In any event, by the end of the nineteenth century, both of these approaches to foreign policy were fading. Great Britain no longer felt predominant enough to risk isolation. And Bismarck was dismissed from office by an impatient new emperor who set himself the immodest task of improving on the policy of the master. In the process, the balance of power turned rigid, and Europe headed toward a catastrophe all the more devastating because nobody believed it was possible.



CHAPTER SEVEN

A Political Doomsday Machine: European Diplomacy Before the First World War

By the end of the twentieth century's first decade, the Concert of Europe, which had maintained peace for a century, had for all practical purposes ceased to exist. The Great Powers had thrown themselves with blind frivolity into a bipolar struggle that led to petrification into two power blocs, anticipating the pattern of the Cold War fifty years later. There was one important difference, however. In the age of nuclear weapons, the avoidance of war would be a major, perhaps the principal, foreign policy goal. At the beginning of the twentieth century, wars could still be started with a touch of frivolity. Indeed, some European thinkers held that periodic bloodletting was cathartic, a naïve hypothesis that was brutally punctured by the First World War.

For decades, historians have been debating who must bear responsibility for the outbreak of the First World War. Yet no one country can be singled out for that mad dash to disaster. Each of the major powers contributed its quota of shortsightedness and irresponsibility, and did so

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with an insouciance which would never again be possible once the disaster they had wrought entered the collective memory of Europe. They had forgotten Pascal's warning in *Pensées*—if they had ever known it—“We run heedlessly into the abyss after putting something in front of us to stop us seeing it.”

There was surely enough blame to go around. The nations of Europe transformed the balance of power into an armaments race without understanding that modern technology and mass conscription had made general war the greatest threat to their security, and to European civilization as a whole. Though all the nations of Europe contributed to the disaster with their policies, it was Germany and Russia which undermined any sense of restraint by their very natures.

Throughout the process of German unification, there had been little concern about its impact on the balance of power. For 200 years, Germany had been the victim, not the instigator, of the wars of Europe. In the Thirty Years' War, the Germans had suffered casualties estimated as high as 30 percent of their entire population, and all the decisive battles of the dynastic wars of the eighteenth century and of the Napoleonic Wars were fought on German soil.

It was therefore nearly inevitable that a united Germany would aim to prevent the recurrence of these tragedies. But it was not inevitable that the new German state should have approached this challenge largely as a military problem, or that German diplomats after Bismarck should have conducted foreign policy with such bullying assertiveness. Whereas Frederick the Great's Prussia had been the weakest of the Great Powers, soon after unification, Germany became the strongest and as such proved disquieting to its neighbors. In order to participate in the Concert of Europe, it therefore needed to show special restraint in its foreign policy.¹ Unfortunately, after Bismarck's departure, moderation was the quality Germany lacked the most.

The reason German statesmen were obsessed with naked power was that, in contrast to other nation-states, Germany did not possess any integrating philosophical framework. None of the ideals which had shaped the modern nation-state in the rest of Europe was present in Bismarck's construction—not Great Britain's emphasis on traditional liberties, the French Revolution's appeal to universal freedom, or even the benign universalist imperialism of Austria. Strictly speaking, Bismarck's Germany did not embody the aspirations of a nation-state at all, because he had deliberately excluded the Austrian Germans. Bismarck's Reich was an artifice, being foremost a greater Prussia whose principal purpose was to increase its own power.

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The absence of intellectual roots was a principal cause of the aimlessness of German foreign policy. The memory of having served for so long as Europe's main battlefield had produced a deep-seated sense of insecurity in the German people. Though Bismarck's empire was now the strongest power on the Continent, German leaders always felt vaguely threatened, as was evidenced by their obsession with military preparedness compounded by bellicose rhetoric. German military planners always thought in terms of fighting off a combination of *all* of Germany's neighbors simultaneously. In readying themselves for that worst-case scenario, they helped to make it a reality. For a Germany strong enough to defeat a coalition of all its neighbors was obviously also more than capable of overwhelming any of them individually. At the sight of the military colossus on their borders, Germany's neighbors drew together for mutual protection, transforming the German quest for security into an agent of its own insecurity.

A wise and restrained policy might have postponed and perhaps even averted the looming peril. But Bismarck's successors, abandoning his restraint, relied more and more on sheer strength, as expressed in one of their favorite pronouncements—that Germany was to serve as the hammer and not the anvil of European diplomacy. It was as if Germany had expended so much energy on achieving nationhood that it had not had time to think through what purpose the new state should serve. Imperial Germany never managed to develop a concept of its own national interest. Swayed by the emotions of the moment and hampered by an extraordinary lack of sensitivity to foreign psyches, German leaders after Bismarck combined truculence with indecisiveness, hurling their country, first into isolation and then into war.

Bismarck had taken great pains to downplay assertions of German power, using his intricate system of alliances to restrain his many partners and to keep their latent incompatibilities from erupting into war. Bismarck's successors lacked the patience and the subtlety for such complexity. When Emperor William I died in 1888, his son, Frederick (whose liberalism had so worried Bismarck), governed for a mere ninety-eight days before succumbing to throat cancer. He was succeeded by his son, William II, whose histrionic demeanor gave observers the uneasy sense that the ruler of Europe's most powerful nation was both immature and erratic. Psychologists have ascribed William's restless bullying to an attempt to compensate for having been born with a deformed arm—a grave blow to a member of Prussia's royal family with its exalted military traditions. In 1890, the brash young Emperor dismissed Bismarck, refusing to govern in the shadow of so towering a figure. Henceforth, it was

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the Kaiser's diplomacy which would become so central to the peace of Europe. Winston Churchill captured William's essence in sardonic style:

Just strut around and pose and rattle the undrawn sword. All he wished was to feel like Napoleon, and be like him without having had to fight his battles. Surely less than this would not pass muster. If you are the summit of a volcano, the least you can do is smoke. So he smoked, a pillar of cloud by day and the gleam of fire by night, to all who gazed from afar; and slowly and surely these perturbed observers gathered and joined themselves together for mutual protection.

... but underneath all this posing and its trappings, was a very ordinary, vain, but on the whole well-meaning man, hoping to pass himself off as a second Frederick the Great.²

What the Kaiser wanted most was international recognition of Germany's importance and, above all, of its power. He attempted to conduct what he and his entourage called *Weltpolitik*, or global policy, without ever defining that term or its relationship to the German national interest. Beyond the slogans lay an intellectual vacuum: truculent language masked an inner hollowness; vast slogans obscured timidity and the lack of any sense of direction. Boastfulness coupled with irresolution in action reflected the legacy of two centuries of German provincialism. Even if German policy had been wise and responsible, integrating the German colossus into the existing international framework would have been a daunting task. But the explosive mix of personalities and domestic institutions prevented any such course, leading instead to a mindless foreign policy which specialized in bringing down on Germany everything it had always feared.

In the twenty years after Bismarck's dismissal, Germany managed to foster an extraordinary reversal of alliances. In 1898, France and Great Britain had been on the verge of war over Egypt. Animosity between Great Britain and Russia had been a constant factor of international relations for most of the nineteenth century. At various times, Great Britain had been looking for allies against Russia, trying Germany before settling on Japan. No one would have thought that Great Britain, France, and Russia could possibly end up on the same side. Yet, ten years later, that was exactly what came to pass under the impact of insistent and threatening German diplomacy.

For all the complexity of his maneuvers, Bismarck had never attempted to go beyond the traditions of the balance of power. His successors, however, were clearly not comfortable with the balance of power, and

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never seemed to understand that, the more they magnified their own strength, the more they would encourage the compensating coalitions and arms buildups inherent in the system of European equilibrium.

German leaders resented the reluctance of other countries to ally themselves with a nation that was already the strongest in Europe, and whose strength was generating fears of German hegemony. Bullying tactics seemed to Germany's leaders the best way to bring home to their neighbors the limits of their own strength and, presumably, the benefits of Germany's friendship. This taunting approach had quite the opposite effect. Trying to achieve absolute security for their country, German leaders after Bismarck threatened every other European nation with absolute insecurity, triggering countervailing coalitions nearly automatically. There are no diplomatic shortcuts to domination; the only route that leads to it is war, a lesson the provincial leaders of post-Bismarck Germany learned only when it was too late to avoid a global catastrophe.

Ironically, for the greater part of imperial Germany's history, Russia, not Germany, was considered the main threat to peace. First Palmerston and then Disraeli were convinced that Russia intended to penetrate into Egypt and India. By 1913, the corresponding fear among German leaders that they were about to be overrun by the Russian hordes had reached such a pitch that it contributed significantly to their decision to force the fateful showdown a year later.

In fact, there was little hard evidence to substantiate the fear that Russia might seek a European empire. The claims by German military intelligence of having proof that Russia was in fact preparing for such a war were as true as they were irrelevant. All the countries of both alliances, intoxicated with the new technology of railways and mobilization schedules, were constantly engaged in military preparations out of proportion to any of the issues being disputed. But, precisely because these fervid preparations could not be related to any definable objective, they were interpreted as portents of vast, if nebulous, ambitions. Characteristically, Prince von Bülow, German Chancellor from 1900 to 1909, espoused Frederick the Great's view that "of all Prussia's neighbors the Russian Empire is the most dangerous in its strength as well as in its position."³

Throughout, Europe found something decidedly eerie about the vastness and persistence of Russia. All the nations of Europe were seeking aggrandizement by means of threats and counterthreats. But Russia seemed impelled to expand by a rhythm all its own, containable only by the deployment of superior force, and usually by war. Throughout numerous crises, a reasonable settlement often seemed well within Russia's reach, much better in fact than what ultimately emerged. Yet Russia

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always preferred the risk of defeat to compromise. This had been true in the Crimean War of 1854, the Balkan Wars of 1875–78, and prior to the Russo-Japanese War of 1904.

One explanation for these tendencies was that Russia belonged partly to Europe, partly to Asia. In the West, Russia was part of the Concert of Europe and participated in the elaborate rules of the balance of power. But even there, Russian leaders were generally impatient with appeals to the equilibrium and prone to resorting to war if their demands were not met—for example, in the prelude to the Crimean War of 1854, and the Balkan Wars, and again in 1885, when Russia nearly went to war with Bulgaria. In Central Asia, Russia was dealing with weak principalities to which the principle of the balance of power did not apply, and in Siberia—until it ran up against Japan—it was able to expand much as America had across a sparsely populated continent.

In European forums, Russia would listen to the arguments on behalf of the balance of power but did not always abide by its maxims. Whereas the nations of Europe had always maintained that the fate of Turkey and the Balkans had to be settled by the Concert of Europe, Russia, on the other hand, invariably sought to deal with this question unilaterally and by force—in the Treaty of Adrianople in 1829, the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi in 1833, the conflict with Turkey in 1853, and the Balkan Wars of 1875–78 and 1885. Russia expected Europe to look the other way and felt aggrieved when it did not. The same problem would recur after the Second World War, when the Western allies maintained that the fate of Eastern Europe concerned Europe as a whole, while Stalin insisted that Eastern Europe, and especially Poland, were within the Soviet sphere and that therefore their future should be settled without reference to the Western democracies. And, like his tsarist predecessors, Stalin proceeded unilaterally. Inevitably, however, some coalition of Western forces would arise to resist Russia's military thrusts and to undo Russia's impositions on its neighbors. In the post-World War II period, it would take a generation for the historic pattern to reassert itself.

Russia on the march rarely exhibited a sense of limits. Thwarted, it nursed its grievances and bided its time for revenge—against Great Britain through much of the nineteenth century, against Austria after the Crimean War, against Germany after the Congress of Berlin, and against the United States during the Cold War. It remains to be seen how the new post-Soviet Russia will react to the collapse of its historic empire and satellite orbit once it fully absorbs the shock of its disintegration.

In Asia, Russia's sense of mission was even less constrained by political or geographic obstacles. For all of the eighteenth century and most of the

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nineteenth, Russia found itself alone in the Far East. It was the first European power to deal with Japan, and the first to conclude an agreement with China. This expansion, accomplished by relatively few settlers and military adventurers, produced no conflict with the European powers. Sporadic Russian clashes with China proved no more significant. In return for Russian assistance against warring tribes, China conceded large areas of territory to Russian administration in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, giving rise to a series of “unequal treaties” which every Chinese government since then, especially the communist one, has denounced.

Characteristically, Russia’s appetite for Asian territory seemed to grow with each new acquisition. In 1903, Serge Witte, the Russian Finance Minister and a confidant of the Tsar, wrote to Nicholas II: “Given our enormous frontier with China and our exceptionally favorable situation, the absorption by Russia of a considerable part of the Chinese Empire is only a question of time.”⁴ As with the Ottoman Empire, Russia’s leaders took the position that the Far East was Russia’s own business and that the rest of the world had no right to intervene. Russia’s advances on all fronts sometimes occurred simultaneously; more often they shifted back and forth, depending on where expansion seemed least risky.

Imperial Russia’s policymaking apparatus reflected the empire’s dual nature. Russia’s Foreign Office was a department of the Chancery, staffed by independent officials whose orientation was essentially toward the West.⁵ Frequently Baltic Germans, these officials considered Russia a European state with policies which should be implemented in the context of the Concert of Europe. The Chancery’s role, however, was contested by the Asiatic Department, which was equally independent and responsible for Russian policy toward the Ottoman Empire, the Balkans, and the Far East—in other words, for every front where Russia was actually advancing.

Unlike the Chancery, the Asiatic Department did not consider itself a part of the Concert of Europe. Viewing the European nations as obstacles to its designs, the Asiatic Department treated the European nations as irrelevant and, whenever possible, sought to fulfill Russian goals through unilateral treaties or by wars initiated without any reference to Europe. Since Europe insisted that issues concerning the Balkans and the Ottoman Empire be settled in concert, frequent conflicts were inevitable, while Russia’s outrage mounted at being thus thwarted by powers it considered interlopers.

Partly defensive, partly offensive, Russian expansion was always ambiguous, and this ambiguity generated Western debates over Russia’s true intentions that lasted through the Soviet period. One reason for the pe-

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renial difficulty in understanding Russia's purposes was that the Russian government, even in the communist period, always had more in common with an eighteenth-century autocratic court than with a twentieth-century superpower. Neither imperial nor communist Russia ever produced a great foreign minister. Like Nesselrode, Gorchakov, Giers, Lamsdorff, and even Gromyko, its foreign ministers were all accomplished and able but lacked the authority to design long-range policy. They were little more than servants of a volatile and easily distracted autocrat, for whose favor they had to compete amidst many overriding domestic concerns. Imperial Russia had no Bismarck, no Salisbury, no Roosevelt—in short, no hands-on minister with executive powers over all aspects of foreign affairs.

Even when the ruling tsar was a dominant personality, the autocratic system of Russian policymaking inhibited the evolution of a coherent foreign policy. Once the tsars found a foreign minister with whom they felt comfortable, they tended to retain him into his dotage, as was the case with Nesselrode, Gorchakov, and Giers. Among them, these three foreign ministers served for most of the nineteenth century. Even in their extreme old age, they proved invaluable to foreign statesmen, who considered them the only personalities worth seeing in St. Petersburg because they were the only officials with access to the tsar. Protocol prohibited virtually anybody else from seeking an audience with the tsar.

To complicate decision-making further, the tsar's executive power frequently clashed with his aristocratic notions of princely life-style. For example, immediately after the signing of the Reinsurance Treaty, a key period in Russia's foreign affairs, Alexander III left St. Petersburg for four consecutive months, from July through October 1887, to go yachting, observe maneuvers, and visit his in-laws in Denmark. With the only real decision-maker thus out of reach, Russia's foreign policy floundered. Not only were the tsar's policies often driven by the emotions of the moment, they were greatly influenced by the nationalist agitation fanned by the military. Military adventurers, like General Kaufmann in Central Asia, paid hardly any attention to the foreign ministers. Gorchakov was probably telling the truth about how little he knew of Central Asia in his conversations with the British ambassadors described in the previous chapter.

By the time of Nicholas II, who ruled from 1894 to 1917, Russia was forced to pay the price for its arbitrary institutions. Nicholas first took Russia into a disastrous war with Japan and then permitted his country to become captive to an alliance system which made war with Germany virtually inevitable. While Russia's energies had been geared to expansion and consumed by attendant foreign conflicts, its social and political structure had grown brittle. Defeat in the war with Japan in 1905 should

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have served as a warning that the time for domestic consolidation—as advocated by the great reformer, Peter Stolypin—was drawing short. What Russia needed was a respite; what it received was another foreign enterprise. Thwarted in Asia, Russia reverted to its dream of Pan-Slavism and a push toward Constantinople, which, this time, ran out of control.

The irony was that, after a certain point, expansionism no longer enhanced Russia's power but brought about its decline. In 1849, Russia was widely considered the strongest nation in Europe. Seventy years later, its dynasty collapsed and it temporarily disappeared from the ranks of the Great Powers. Between 1848 and 1914, Russia was involved in over half a dozen wars (other than colonial wars), far more than any other major power. In each of these conflicts, except for the intervention in Hungary in 1849, the financial and political costs to Russia far exceeded the possible gains. Though each of these conflicts took its toll, Russia continued to identify Great Power status with territorial expansion; it hungered for more land, which it neither needed nor was able to digest. Tsar Nicholas II's close adviser, Serge Witte, promised him that "from the shores of the Pacific and the heights of the Himalayas Russia would dominate not only the affairs of Asia but those of Europe as well."⁶ Economic, social, and political development would have been far more advantageous to Great Power status in the Industrial Age than a satellite in Bulgaria or a protectorate in Korea.

A few Russian leaders, such as Gorchakov, were wise enough to realize that, for Russia, "the extension of territory was the extension of weakness,"⁷ but their views were never able to moderate the Russian mania for new conquests. In the end, the communist empire collapsed for essentially the same reasons that the tsars' had. The Soviet Union would have been much better off had it stayed within its borders after the Second World War and established relations with what came to be known as the satellite orbit comparable to those it maintained with Finland.

When two colossi—a powerful, impetuous Germany and a huge, relentless Russia—rub up against each other at the center of the Continent, conflict is probable, no matter that Germany had nothing to gain from a war with Russia and that Russia had everything to lose in a war with Germany. The peace of Europe therefore depended on the one country that had played the role of balancer so skillfully and with such moderation throughout the nineteenth century.

In 1890, the term "splendid isolation" still accurately described British foreign policy. British subjects proudly referred to their country as the "balance wheel" of Europe—the weight of which prevented any one of the various coalitions among the Continental powers from becoming

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dominant. Entanglement in these alliances was traditionally nearly as repugnant to British statesmen as it was to American isolationists. Yet only twenty-five years later, Englishmen would be dying by the hundreds of thousands on the muddy fields of Flanders as they fought at the side of a French ally against a German foe.

A remarkable change occurred in British foreign policy between 1890 and 1914. It was no small irony that the man who led Great Britain through the first part of this transition represented everything traditional about Great Britain and British foreign policy. For the Marquis of Salisbury was the ultimate insider. He was the scion of the ancient Cecil family, whose ancestors had served as top ministers to British monarchs since the time of Queen Elizabeth I. King Edward VII, who reigned from 1901 to 1910 and came from an upstart family compared with the Cecils, was known to complain occasionally at the condescending tone Salisbury used toward him.

Salisbury's rise in politics was as effortless as it was foreordained. After an education at Christ Church, Oxford, the young Salisbury toured Europe, perfected his French, and met heads of state. By the age of forty-eight, after serving as viceroy of India, he became Disraeli's Foreign Minister and played a major role at the Congress of Berlin, where he did most of the detailed day-to-day negotiating. After Disraeli's death, he took over the leadership of the Tory Party and, apart from Gladstone's last government of 1892–94, was the dominant figure in British politics during the last fifteen years of the nineteenth century.

In some respects, Salisbury's position was not unlike that of President George Bush, though he served longer in his nation's highest office. Both men bestrode a world which was receding by the time they came to power, though that fact was not obvious to either of them. Both left an impact by knowing how to operate what they had inherited. Bush's view of the world was shaped by the Cold War, in which he had risen to prominence and over whose end he was obliged to preside while at the pinnacle of his career; Salisbury's formative experiences had been in the Palmerston era of unparalleled British power overseas and of intractable Anglo-Russian rivalry, both of which were clearly coming to an end during his leadership.

Salisbury's government had to grapple with the decline in Great Britain's relative standing. Its vast economic power was now matched by Germany's; Russia and France had expanded their imperial efforts and were challenging the British Empire nearly everywhere. Though Great Britain was still pre-eminent, the dominance it had enjoyed in the middle of the nineteenth century was slipping. Just as Bush adjusted skillfully to

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what he had not foreseen, by the 1890s Great Britain's leaders recognized the need to relate traditional policy to unexpected realities.

Overweight and rumped in his physical appearance, Lord Salisbury more adequately embodied Great Britain's contentment with the *status quo* than he did its transformation. As the author of the phrase "splendid isolation," Salisbury, on the face of it, promised to carry on the traditional British policies of holding a firm line overseas against other imperial powers, and of involving Great Britain in Continental alliances only when it was required as a last resort to prevent an aggressor from overturning the balance. For Salisbury, Great Britain's insular position meant that its ideal policy was to be active on the high seas and to remain unentangled in the customary Continental alliances. "We are fish," he bluntly asserted on one occasion.

In the end, Salisbury was obliged to recognize that Great Britain's overextended empire was straining under the pressures of Russia in the Far and Near East, and of France in Africa. Even Germany was entering the colonial race. Though France, Germany, and Russia were frequently in conflict with one another on the Continent, they always clashed with Great Britain overseas. For Great Britain possessed not only India, Canada, and a large portion of Africa, but insisted on dominating vast territories which, for strategic reasons, it wanted to keep from falling into the hands of another power even though it did not seek to control them directly. Salisbury called this claim a "sort of ear-mark upon territory, which, in case of a break-up, England did not want any other power to have."⁸ These areas included the Persian Gulf, China, Turkey, and Morocco. During the 1890s, Great Britain felt beleaguered by endless clashes with Russia in Afghanistan, around the Straits, and in Northern China, and with France in Egypt and Morocco.

With the Mediterranean Agreements of 1887, Great Britain became indirectly associated with the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy in the hope that Italy and Austria might strengthen its hand in dealing with France in North Africa, and with Russia in the Balkans. Yet the Mediterranean Agreements proved to be only a stopgap.

The new German empire, deprived of its master strategist, did not know what to do with its opportunity. Geopolitical realities were gradually drawing Great Britain out of its splendid isolation, though there was enough handwringing about it by traditionalists. The first move toward greater involvement with the Continent was on behalf of warmer relations with imperial Germany. Convinced that Russia and Great Britain desperately needed Germany, German policymakers thought they could drive a hard bargain with both of them simultaneously without specifying the

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nature of the bargain they were seeking or ever imagining that they might be pushing Russia and Great Britain closer together. When rebuffed in these all-or-nothing overtures, German leaders would withdraw into sulkiness, which quickly changed to truculence. This approach was in sharp contrast to that of France, which settled for slow, step-by-step progress, waiting twenty years for Russia and another decade and a half for Great Britain to propose an agreement. For all the noise post-Bismarck Germany made, its foreign policy was overwhelmingly amateurish, shortsighted, and even timid when faced with the confrontations it had itself generated.

William II's first diplomatic move along what turned into a fated course came in 1890, shortly after he had dismissed Bismarck, when he rejected the Tsar's offer to renew the Reinsurance Treaty for another three-year term. By rejecting Russia's overture at the very beginning of his rule, the Kaiser and his advisers pulled the perhaps most important thread out of the fabric of Bismarck's system of overlapping alliances. Three considerations motivated them: first, they wanted to make their policy as "simple and transparent" as possible (the new Chancellor, Caprivi, confessed on one occasion that he simply did not possess Bismarck's ability to keep eight balls in the air at once); second, they wanted to reassure Austria that their alliance with it was their top priority; finally, they considered the Reinsurance Treaty an obstacle to their preferred course of forging an alliance with Great Britain.

Each of these considerations demonstrated the lack of geopolitical understanding by which the Germany of William II progressively isolated itself. Complexity was inherent in Germany's location *and* history; no "simple" policy could take account of its many aspects. It had been precisely the ambiguity of a simultaneous treaty with Russia and an alliance with Austria that had enabled Bismarck to act as a balancer between Austrian fears and Russian ambitions for twenty years without having to break with either or to escalate the endemic Balkan crises. Ending the Reinsurance Treaty brought about exactly the opposite situation: limiting Germany's options promoted Austrian adventurism. Nikolai de Giers, the Russian Foreign Minister, understood this immediately, noting: "Through the dissolution of our treaty [the Reinsurance Treaty], Vienna has been liberated from the wise and well-meaning, but also stern control of Prince Bismarck."⁹

Abandoning the Reinsurance Treaty not only caused Germany to lose leverage vis-à-vis Austria, it above all increased Russia's anxieties. Germany's reliance on Austria was interpreted in St. Petersburg as a new predisposition to support Austria in the Balkans. Once Germany had

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positioned itself as an obstacle to Russian aims in a region that had never before represented a vital German interest, Russia was certain to search for a counterweight, which France was only too eager to supply.

Russia's temptations to move in France's direction were strengthened by a German colonial agreement with Great Britain, which swiftly followed the Kaiser's refusal to renew the Reinsurance Treaty. Great Britain acquired from Germany the sources of the Nile and tracts of land in East Africa, including the island of Zanzibar. As a *quid pro quo*, Germany received a relatively inconsequential strip of land linking South-West Africa to the Zambezi River, the so-called Caprivi Strip, and the island of Helgoland in the North Sea, which was presumed to have some strategic value in safeguarding the German coast from naval attack.

It was not a bad bargain for either side, though it turned into the first of a series of misunderstandings. London undertook the agreement as a means of settling African colonial issues; Germany saw it as a prelude to an Anglo-German alliance; and Russia, going even further, interpreted it as England's first step into the Triple Alliance. Thus Baron Staal, the Russian Ambassador to Berlin, anxiously reported the pact between his country's historic friend, Germany, and its traditional foe, Great Britain, in these terms:

When one is united by numerous interests and positive engagements on one point of the globe, one is almost certain to proceed in concert in all the great questions that may arise in the international field. . . . Virtually the entente with Germany has been accomplished. It cannot help but react upon the relations of England with the other powers of the Triple Alliance.¹⁰

Bismarck's nightmare of coalitions was now in train, for the end of the Reinsurance Treaty had paved the way for a Franco-Russian alliance.

Germany had calculated that France and Russia would never form an alliance, because Russia had no interest in fighting for Alsace-Lorraine, and France had no interest in fighting for the Balkan Slavs. It turned out to be one of the many egregious misconceptions of imperial Germany's post-Bismarck leadership. Once Germany was irrevocably committed to Austria's side, France and Russia in fact needed each other, however divergent their goals, because neither could achieve its own strategic objectives without first defeating, or at least weakening, Germany. France needed to do so because Germany would never relinquish Alsace-Lorraine without war, while Russia knew it would not be able to inherit the Slavic parts of the Austrian Empire without defeating Austria—which

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Germany had made clear it would resist by its refusal to renew the Reinsurance Treaty. And Russia had no chance against Germany without the assistance of France.

Within a year of Germany's refusal to renew the Reinsurance Treaty, France and Russia had signed their *Entente Cordiale*, which provided mutual diplomatic support. Giers, the venerable Russian Foreign Minister, warned that the agreement would not solve the fundamental problem that Great Britain, not Germany, was Russia's principal adversary. Desperate to escape the isolation to which Bismarck had consigned it, France agreed to add a clause to the Franco-Russian agreement obliging France to give Russia diplomatic support in any colonial conflict with Great Britain.

To French leaders, this anti-British clause seemed a small entrance fee to establish what was bound to turn into an anti-German coalition. Thereafter, French efforts would be directed at extending the Franco-Russian agreement into a military alliance. Though Russian nationalists favored such a military pact to speed the dismemberment of the Austrian Empire, Russian traditionalists were uneasy. Giers' eventual successor as Foreign Minister, Count Vladimir Lamsdorff, wrote in his diary in early February 1892:

They (the French) are also preparing to besiege us with proposals for an agreement about joint military actions in case of an attack by a third party. . . . But why overdo a good thing? We need peace and quiet in view of the miseries of the famine, of the unsatisfactory state of our finances, of the uncompleted state of our armaments program, of the desperate state of our transportation system, and finally of the renewed activity in the camp of the nihilists.¹¹

In the end, French leaders overcame Lamsdorff's doubts, or else he was overruled by the Tsar. In 1894, a military convention was signed in which France agreed to aid Russia if Russia was attacked by Germany, or by Austria in combination with Germany. Russia would support France in case of an attack by Germany, or by Germany in combination with Italy. Whereas the Franco-Russian Agreement of 1891 had been a diplomatic instrument and could plausibly have been argued to be aimed at Great Britain as well as at Germany, the sole adversary foreseen by this military convention was Germany. What George Kennan would later call "the fateful alliance" (the entente between France and Russia of 1891, followed by the military convention of 1894) marked a watershed in Europe's rush toward war.

It was the beginning of the end for the operation of the balance of

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power. The balance of power works best if at least one of the following conditions pertains: First, each nation must feel itself free to align with any other state, depending on the circumstances of the moment. Through much of the eighteenth century, the equilibrium was adjusted by constantly shifting alignments; it was also the case in the Bismarck period until 1890. Second, when there are fixed alliances but a balancer sees to it that none of the existing coalitions becomes predominant—the situation after the Franco-Russian treaty, when Great Britain continued to act as balancer and was in fact being wooed by both sides. Third, when there are rigid alliances and no balancer exists, but the cohesion of the alliances is relatively low so that, on any given issue, there are either compromises or changes in alignment.

When none of these conditions prevails, diplomacy turns rigid. A zero sum game develops in which any gain of one side is conceived as a loss for the other. Armaments races and mounting tensions become inevitable. This was the situation during the Cold War, and in Europe tacitly after Great Britain joined the Franco-Russian alliance, thereby forming the Triple Entente starting in 1908.

Unlike during the Cold War, the international order after 1891 did not turn rigid after a single challenge. It took fifteen years before each of the three elements of flexibility was destroyed in sequence. After the formation of the Triple Entente, the balance of power ceased to function. Tests of strength became the rule and not the exception. Diplomacy as the art of compromise ended. It was only a question of time before some crisis would drive events out of control.

But in 1891, as France and Russia lined up against it, Germany still hoped that it could bring about the offsetting alliance with Great Britain for which William II yearned but which his impetuosity made impossible. The colonial agreement of 1890 did not lead to the alliance the Russian Ambassador had feared. Its failure to materialize was partly due to British domestic politics. When the aged Gladstone returned to office in 1892 for the last time, he bruised the Kaiser's tender ego by rejecting any association with autocratic Germany or Austria.

Yet the fundamental reason for the failure of the several attempts to arrange an Anglo-German alliance was the German leadership's persistent incomprehension of traditional British foreign policy as well as of the real requirements of its own security. For a century and a half, Great Britain had refused to commit itself to an open-ended military alliance. It would make only two kinds of engagements: limited military agreements to deal with definable, clearly specified dangers; or entente-type arrangements to cooperate diplomatically on those issues in which interests with

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another country ran parallel. In a sense, the British definition of entente was, of course, a tautology: Great Britain would cooperate when it chose to cooperate. But an entente also had the effect of creating moral and psychological ties and a presumption—if not a legal obligation—of joint action in crises. And it would have kept Great Britain apart from France and Russia, or at least complicated their rapprochement.

Germany refused such informal procedures. William II insisted on what he called a Continental-type alliance. “If England wants allies or aid,” he said in 1895, “she must abandon her non-committal policy and provide continental type guarantees or treaties.”¹² But what could the Kaiser have meant by a Continental-type guarantee? After nearly a century of splendid isolation, Great Britain was clearly not ready to undertake the permanent Continental commitment it had so consistently avoided for 150 years, especially on behalf of Germany, which was fast becoming the strongest country on the Continent.

What made this German pressure for a formal guarantee so self-defeating was that Germany did not really need it, because it was strong enough to defeat any prospective Continental adversary or combination of them, so long as Great Britain did not take their side. What Germany should have asked of Great Britain was not an alliance, but benevolent neutrality in a Continental war—and for that an entente-type arrangement would have been sufficient. By asking for what it did not need, and by offering what Great Britain did not want (sweeping commitments to defend the British Empire), Germany led Great Britain to suspect that it was in fact seeking world domination.

German impatience deepened the reserve of the British, who were beginning to entertain grave doubts about the judgment of their suitor. “I do not like to disregard the plain anxiety of my German friends,” wrote Salisbury. “But it is not wise to be guided too much by their advice now. Their Achitophel is gone. They are much pleasanter and easier to deal with; but one misses the extraordinary penetration of the old man [Bismarck].”¹³

While the German leadership impetuously pursued alliances, the German public was demanding an ever more assertive foreign policy. Only the Social Democrats held out for a time, though in the end they, too, succumbed to public opinion and supported Germany’s declaration of war in 1914. The leading German classes had no experience with European diplomacy, much less with the *Weltpolitik* on which they were so loudly insisting. The Junkers, who had led Prussia to the domination of Germany, would bear the weight of opprobrium after the two world wars, especially in the United States. In fact, they were the social stratum

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least guilty of overreaching in foreign affairs, being basically geared to Continental policy and having little interest in events outside Europe. Rather, it was the new industrial managerial and the growing professional classes that provided the nucleus of nationalist agitation without encountering in the political system the sort of parliamentary buffer which had evolved in Great Britain and France over several centuries. In the Western democracies, the strong nationalist currents were channeled through parliamentary institutions; in Germany, they had to find expression in extra-parliamentary pressure groups.

As autocratic as Germany was, its leaders were extremely sensitive to public opinion and heavily influenced by nationalistic pressure groups. These groups saw diplomacy and international relations almost as if they were sporting events, always pushing the government to a harder line, more territorial expansion, more colonies, a stronger army, or a larger navy. They treated the normal give-and-take of diplomacy, or the slightest hint of German diplomatic concession, as an egregious humiliation. Kurt Rietzler, the political secretary of the German Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, who was in office when war was declared, remarked aptly: "The threat of war in our time lies . . . in the internal politics of those countries in which a weak government is confronted by a strong nationalist movement."¹⁴

This emotional and political climate produced a major German diplomatic gaffe—the so-called Krüger Telegram—by which the Emperor undermined his option for a British alliance for at least the rest of the century. In 1895, a Colonel Jameson, supported by British colonial interests and most notably by Cecil Rhodes, led a raid into the independent Boer states of the South African Transvaal. The raid was a total failure and a great embarrassment to Salisbury's government, which claimed to have had no direct involvement in it. The German nationalist press gloated, urging an even more thorough humiliation of the British.

Friedrich von Holstein, a principal councilor and *éminence grise* in the Foreign Ministry, saw the disastrous raid as an opportunity to teach the British the advantages of a friendly Germany by showing them just how prickly an adversary it could be. For his own part, the Kaiser found the opportunity to swagger irresistible. Shortly after New Year's Day 1896, he dispatched a message to President Paul Krüger of the Transvaal congratulating him for repelling "the attacks from without." It was a direct slap at Great Britain and raised the specter of a German protectorate in the heart of what the British regarded as their own sphere of interest. In reality, the Krüger Telegram represented neither German colonial aspirations nor German foreign policy, for it was purely a public-relations ploy and

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it achieved that objective: "Nothing that the government has done for years," wrote the liberal *Allgemeine Zeitung* on January 5, "has given as complete satisfaction. . . . It is written from the soul of the German people."¹⁵

Germany's shortsightedness and insensitivity accelerated this trend. The Kaiser and his entourage convinced themselves that, since courting Great Britain had failed to produce an alliance, perhaps some demonstration of the cost of German displeasure would prove more persuasive. Unfortunately for Germany, that approach belied the historical record, which offered no example of a British susceptibility to being bullied.

What started out as a form of harassment to demonstrate the value of German friendship gradually turned into a genuine strategic challenge. No issue was as likely to turn Great Britain into an implacable adversary as a threat to its command of the seas. Yet this was precisely what Germany undertook, seemingly without realizing that it was embarking on an irrevocable challenge. Starting in the mid-1890s, domestic pressures to build up a large German navy began to mount, spearheaded by the "navalists," one of a growing number of pressure groups which consisted of a mix of industrialists and naval officers. Since they developed a vested interest in tensions with Great Britain to justify naval appropriations, they treated the Krüger Telegram as a godsend, as they did any other issue denoting the possibility of conflict with Great Britain in remote corners of the globe, ranging from the status of Samoa to the boundaries of the Sudan and the future of the Portuguese colonies.

Thus began a vicious cycle which culminated in confrontation. For the privilege of building a navy which, in the subsequent world war, had only one inconclusive encounter with the British fleet in the battle of Jutland, Germany managed to add Great Britain to its growing list of adversaries. For there was no question that England would resist once a Continental country already in possession of the strongest army in Europe began aiming for parity with Great Britain on the seas.

Yet the Kaiser seemed oblivious to the impact of his policies. British irritation with German bluster and the naval buildup did not, at first, change the reality that France was pressing Great Britain in Egypt, and that Russia was challenging it in Central Asia. What if Russia and France decided to cooperate, applying simultaneous pressure in Africa, Afghanistan, and China? What if the Germans joined them in an assault on the Empire in South Africa? British leaders began to doubt whether splendid isolation was still an appropriate foreign policy.

The most important and vocal spokesman of this group was the Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain. A dashing figure who was Salisbury's

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junior by a whole generation, Chamberlain seemed to embody the twentieth century in his call for some alliance—preferably German—while the older patrician adhered strictly to the isolationist impulse of the previous century. In a major speech in November 1899, Chamberlain called for a “Teutonic” alliance, consisting of Great Britain, Germany, and the United States.¹⁶ Chamberlain felt so strongly about it that he transmitted his scheme to Germany without Salisbury’s approval. But the German leaders continued to hold out for formal guarantees and remained oblivious to the reality that the terms were irrelevant and that what should have mattered to them most was British neutrality in a Continental war.

In October 1900, Salisbury’s poor health forced him to give up the office of Foreign Secretary, though he retained the post of Prime Minister. His successor at the Foreign Office was Lord Lansdowne, who agreed with Chamberlain that Great Britain could no longer enjoy safety through splendid isolation. Yet Lansdowne was unable to muster a consensus for a full-scale formal alliance with Germany, the Cabinet being unwilling to go further than an entente-style arrangement: “. . . an understanding with regard to the policy which they (the British and the German governments) might pursue in reference to particular questions or in particular parts of the world in which they are alike interested.”¹⁷ It was substantially the same formula which would lead to the Entente Cordiale with France a few years later and which proved quite sufficient to bring Great Britain into the World War on the side of France.

Once again, however, Germany rejected the attainable in favor of what was on the face of it unachievable. The new German Chancellor Bülow refused an entente-style arrangement with Great Britain because he was more worried about public opinion than he was about geopolitical vistas—especially given his priority of persuading the Parliament to vote a large increase in the German navy. He would curtail the naval program for nothing less than British adherence to a triple alliance consisting of Germany, Austria, and Italy. Salisbury rejected Bülow’s all-or-nothing gambit, and, for the third time in a decade, an Anglo-German agreement aborted.

The essential incompatibility between British and German perceptions of foreign policy could be seen in the way the two leaders explained their failure to agree. Bülow was all emotion as he accused Great Britain of provincialism, ignoring the fact that Great Britain had been conducting a global foreign policy for over a century before Germany was even unified:

English politicians know little about the Continent. From a continental point of view they know as much as we do about ideas in Peru or

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Siam. They are naive in their conscious egotism and in a certain blind confidence. They find it difficult to credit really bad intentions in others. They are very quiet, very phlegmatic and very optimistic. . . .¹⁸

Salisbury's reply took the form of a lesson in sophisticated strategic analysis for his restless and rather vague interlocutor. Citing a tactless comment by the German Ambassador to London, to the effect that Great Britain needed an alliance with Germany in order to escape dangerous isolation, he wrote:

The liability of having to defend the German and Austrian frontiers against Russia is heavier than that of *having to defend the British Isles* against France . . . Count Hatzfeldt [the German Ambassador] speaks of our "*isolation*" as constituting a serious danger for us. *Have we ever felt that danger practically?* If we had succumbed in the revolutionary war, our fall would not have been due to our isolation. We had many allies, but they would not have saved us if the French Emperor had been able to command the Channel. Except during his [Napoleon's] reign we have never even been in danger; and, therefore, it is impossible for us to judge whether the "*isolation*" under which we are supposed to suffer, does or does not contain in it any elements of peril. It would hardly be wise to incur novel and most onerous obligations, in order to guard against a *danger in whose existence we have no historical reason for believing*.¹⁹

Great Britain and Germany simply did not have enough parallel interests to justify the formal global alliance imperial Germany craved. The British feared that further additions to German strength would turn their would-be ally into the sort of dominant power they had historically resisted. At the same time, Germany did not relish assuming the role of a British auxiliary on behalf of issues traditionally considered peripheral to German interests, such as the threat to India, and Germany was too arrogant to understand the benefits of British neutrality.

Foreign Secretary Lansdowne's next move demonstrated that the German leaders' conviction that their country was indispensable to Great Britain was a case of inflated self-appraisal. In 1902, he stunned Europe by forging an alliance with Japan, the first time since Richelieu's dealings with the Ottoman Turks that any European country had gone for help outside the Concert of Europe. Great Britain and Japan agreed that if either of them became involved in a war with *one* other power over China or Korea, the other would observe neutrality. If, however, either signatory was attacked by *two* adversaries, the other signatory was obliged

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to assist its partner. Because the alliance would operate only if Japan were fighting two adversaries, Great Britain finally had discovered an ally which was willing, indeed eager, to contain Russia without, however, seeking to entangle it in extraneous arrangements—one, moreover, whose Far East location placed it in an area of greater strategic interest to Great Britain than the Russo-German frontier. And Japan was protected against France, which, without the alliance, might have sought to use the war to strengthen its claims on Russian support. From then on, Great Britain would lose interest in Germany as a strategic partner; indeed, in the course of time, it would come to regard Germany as a geopolitical threat.

As late as 1912, there was still a chance of settling Anglo-German difficulties. Lord Haldane, first Lord of the Admiralty, visited Berlin to discuss a relaxation of tensions. Haldane was instructed to seek an accommodation with Germany on the basis of a naval accord along with this pledge of British neutrality: "If either of the high contracting parties (i.e., Britain and Germany) becomes entangled in a war in which it cannot be said to be the aggressor, the other will at least observe towards the Power so entangled a benevolent neutrality."²⁰ The Kaiser, however, insisted that England pledge neutrality "should war be forced upon Germany,"²¹ which sounded to London like a demand that Great Britain stand on the sidelines if Germany decided to launch a pre-emptive war against Russia or France. When the British refused to accept the Kaiser's wording, he in turn rejected theirs; the German Navy Bill went forward, and Haldane returned to London empty-handed.

The Kaiser still had not grasped that Great Britain would not go beyond a tacit bargain, which was really all that Germany needed. "If England only intends to extend her hand to us under the condition that we must limit our fleet," he wrote, "that is an unbounded impudence which contains in it a bad insult to the German people and their Emperor. This offer must be rejected *a limine*. . . ."²² As convinced as ever that he could intimidate England into a formal alliance, the Kaiser boasted: "I have shown the English that, when they touch our armaments, they bite on granite. Perhaps by this I have increased their hatred but won their respect, which will induce them in due course to resume negotiations, it is to be hoped in a more modest tone and with a more fortunate result."²³

The Kaiser's impetuous and imperious quest for alliance merely succeeded in magnifying Great Britain's suspicions. The German naval program on top of German harassment of Great Britain during the Boer War of 1899–1902 led to a thorough reassessment of British foreign policy. For a century and a half, Great Britain had considered France as the principal threat to the European equilibrium, to be resisted with the

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assistance of some German state, usually with Austria, occasionally with Prussia. And it had viewed Russia as the gravest danger to its empire. But once it had the Japanese alliance in hand, Great Britain began to reconsider its historic priorities. In 1903, Great Britain initiated a systematic effort to settle outstanding colonial issues with France, culminating in the so-called Entente Cordiale of 1904—precisely the sort of arrangement for informal cooperation that Germany had consistently rejected. Almost immediately afterward, Great Britain began to explore a similar arrangement with Russia.

Because the Entente was formally a colonial agreement, it did not represent a technical break with the traditional British policy of “splendid isolation.” Yet its practical effect was that Great Britain abandoned the position of balancer and attached itself to one of the two opposing alliances. In July 1903, when the Entente was being negotiated, a French representative in London told Lansdowne as a *quid pro quo* that France would do its utmost to relieve Great Britain of Russian pressures elsewhere:

... that the most serious menace to the peace of Europe lay in Germany, that a good understanding between France and England was the only means of holding German designs in check, and that if such an understanding could be arrived at, England would find that France would be able to exercise a salutary influence over Russia and thereby relieve us from many of our troubles with that country.²⁴

Within a decade, Russia, previously tied to Germany by the Reinsurance Treaty, had become a military ally of France, while Great Britain, an on-again-off-again suitor of Germany, joined the French diplomatic camp. Germany had achieved the extraordinary feat of isolating itself and of bringing together three erstwhile enemies in a hostile coalition aimed against it.

A statesman aware of approaching danger has to make a basic decision. If he believes that the threat will mount with the passage of time, he must try to nip it in the bud. But if he concludes that the looming danger reflects a fortuitous, if accidental, combination of circumstances, he is usually better off waiting and letting time erode the peril. Two hundred years earlier, Richelieu had recognized the danger in the hostile encirclement of France—indeed, avoiding it was the core of his policy. But he understood as well the various components of that potential danger. He decided that premature action would drive the states surrounding France together. Thus he made time his ally and waited for the latent differences

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among France's adversaries to emerge. Then, and only after these had become entrenched, did he permit France to enter the fray.

The Kaiser and his advisers had neither the patience nor the acumen for such a policy—even though the countries by which Germany felt threatened were anything but natural allies. Germany's reaction to the looming encirclement was to accelerate the same diplomacy which had brought about the danger in the first place. It tried to split the young Entente Cordiale by finding some pretext to face down France, thereby demonstrating that British support was either illusory or ineffective.

Germany's opportunity to test the strength of the Entente presented itself in Morocco, where French designs were in violation of a treaty affirming Morocco's independence, and where Germany had substantial commercial interests. The Kaiser chose to make his point while on a cruise in March 1905. Landing at Tangier, he declared Germany's resolve to uphold the independence of Morocco. The German leaders were gambling, first, that the United States, Italy, and Austria would support their open-door policy, second, that in the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War, Russia would not be able to involve itself, and third, that Great Britain would be only too happy to be relieved of its obligation to France at an international conference.

All of these assumptions were proved wrong because fear of Germany overrode every other consideration. In the first challenge to the Entente Cordiale, Great Britain backed France to the hilt and would not go along with Germany's call for a conference until France had accepted it. Austria and Italy were reluctant to venture anywhere near the brink of war. Nevertheless, German leaders invested a huge amount of prestige in this growing dispute, on the reasoning that anything less than a diplomatic victory demonstrating the irrelevance of the Entente would be disastrous.

Throughout his reign, the Kaiser was better at starting crises than he was at concluding them. He found dramatic encounters exciting but lacked the nerve for prolonged confrontation. William II and his advisers were correct in their assessment that France was not prepared to go to war. But, as it turned out, neither were they. All they really achieved was the dismissal of French Foreign Minister Delcassé, a token victory because Delcassé soon returned in another position, retaining a major role in French politics. In terms of the substance of the dispute, the German leaders, lacking the courage of their boastful rhetoric, permitted themselves to be fobbed off with a conference scheduled in six months' time in the Spanish town of Algeciras. When a country threatens war and then backs down in favor of a conference to be held at some later date, it automatically diminishes the credibility of its threat. (This was also the

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way the Western democracies would defuse Khrushchev's Berlin ultimatum a half century later.)

The extent to which Germany had isolated itself became evident at the opening of the Algeciras Conference in January 1906. Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary of Great Britain's new Liberal government, warned the German Ambassador to London that, in the event of war, Great Britain would stand alongside France:

... in the event of an attack upon France by Germany arising out of our Morocco Agreement, public feeling in England would be so strong that no British government could remain neutral . . .²⁵

The German leaders' emotionalism and inability to define long-range objectives turned Algeciras into a diplomatic debacle for their country. The United States, Italy, Russia, and Great Britain all refused to take Germany's side. The results of this first Moroccan crisis were the exact opposite of what German leaders had sought to achieve. Instead of wrecking the Entente Cordiale, it led to Franco-British military cooperation and lent impetus to the Anglo-Russian Entente of 1907.

After Algeciras, Great Britain agreed to the military cooperation with a Continental power that it had avoided for so long. Consultations began between the leaders of the British and French navies. The Cabinet was not at ease with this new departure. Grey wrote to Paul Cambon, the French Ambassador to London, in an effort to hedge his bets:

We have agreed that consultation between experts is not, and ought not to be, regarded as an engagement that commits either Government to action in a contingency that has not arisen and may never arise. . . .²⁶

It was the traditional British escape clause that London not commit itself legally to specific circumstances in which it would be *obliged* to take military action. France accepted this sop to parliamentary control, convinced that military staff talks would wield their own reality, whatever the legal obligation. For a decade and a half, German leaders had refused to grant Great Britain this sort of leeway. The French had the political acumen to live with British ambiguity, and to rely on the conviction that a moral obligation was developing which, in a time of crisis, might well carry the day.

With the emergence of the Anglo-French-Russian bloc of 1907, only two forces remained in play in European diplomacy: the Triple Entente and the alliance between Germany and Austria. German encirclement

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became complete. Like the Anglo-French Entente, the British agreement with Russia began as a colonial accord. For some years, Great Britain and Russia had been slowly putting their colonial disputes to rest. Japan's victory over Russia in 1905 effectively ruined Russia's Far Eastern ambitions. By the summer of 1907, it became safe for Great Britain to offer Russia generous terms in Afghanistan and Persia, dividing Persia into three spheres of influence: the Russians were given the northern region; a central region was declared neutral; and Great Britain claimed control of the south. Afghanistan went to the British sphere. Anglo-Russian relations, which ten years earlier had been marred by disputes covering a third of the globe from Constantinople to Korea, were finally serene. The degree of British preoccupation with Germany was shown by the fact that, to secure Russian cooperation, Great Britain was prepared to abandon its determination to keep Russia out of the Dardanelles. As Foreign Secretary Grey remarked: "Good relations with Russia meant that our old policy of closing the Straits against her, and throwing our weight against her at any conference of the Powers must be abandoned."²⁷

Some historians²⁸ have claimed that the real Triple Entente was two colonial agreements gone awry, and that Great Britain had wanted to protect its empire, not to encircle Germany. There is a classic document, however, the so-called Crowe Memorandum, which leaves no reasonable doubt that Great Britain joined the Triple Entente in order to thwart what it feared was a German drive for world domination. On January 1, 1907, Sir Eyre Crowe, a prominent British Foreign Office analyst, explained why, in his view, an accommodation with Germany was impossible and entente with France was the only option. The Crowe Memorandum was at a level of analysis never reached by any document of post-Bismarck Germany. The conflict had become one between strategy and brute power—and unless there is a huge disproportion of strength, which was not the case, the strategist has the upper hand because he can plan his actions while his adversary is obliged to improvise. Admitting to major differences between Great Britain and both France and Russia, Crowe nevertheless assessed these as being subject to compromise because they reflected definable, and therefore limited, objectives. What made German foreign policy so menacing was the lack of any discernible rationale behind its ceaseless global challenges, which extended across regions as far-flung as South Africa, Morocco, and the Near East. In addition, the German drive for maritime power was "incompatible with the survival of the British Empire."

According to Crowe, Germany's unconstrained conduct guaranteed confrontation: "The union of the greatest military with the greatest naval

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power in one state would compel the world to combine for the riddance of such an incubus.”²⁹

True to the tenets of *Realpolitik*, Crowe argued that structure, not motive, determined stability: Germany’s intentions were essentially irrelevant; what mattered were its capabilities. He put forward two hypotheses:

Either Germany is definitely aiming at a general political hegemony and maritime ascendancy, threatening the independence of her neighbours and ultimately the existence of England; Or Germany, free from any such clear-cut ambition, and thinking for the present merely of using her legitimate position and influence as one of the leading Powers in the council of nations, is seeking to promote her foreign commerce, spread the benefits of German culture, extend the scope of her national energies, and create fresh German interests all over the world wherever and whenever a peaceful opportunity offers. . . .³⁰

Crowe insisted that these distinctions were irrelevant because, in the end, they would be overridden by the temptations inherent in Germany’s growing power:

. . . it is clear that the second scheme (of semi-independent evolution, not entirely unaided by statecraft) may at any stage merge into the first, or conscious-design scheme. Moreover, if ever the evolution scheme should come to be realized, the position thereby accruing to Germany would obviously constitute as formidable a menace to the rest of the world as would be presented by any deliberate conquest of a similar position by ‘malice aforethought’.³¹

Though the Crowe Memorandum did not actually go further than to oppose an understanding with Germany, its thrust was clear: if Germany did not abandon its quest for maritime supremacy and moderate its so-called *Weltpolitik*, Great Britain was certain to join Russia and France in opposing it. And it would do so with the implacable tenacity that had brought down French and Spanish pretensions in previous centuries.

Great Britain made it clear that it would not stand for any further accretion of German strength. In 1909, Foreign Secretary Grey made this point in response to a German offer to *slow down* (but not end) its naval buildup if Great Britain agreed to stay neutral in a German war against France and Russia. The proposed agreement, argued Grey,

. . . would serve to establish German hegemony in Europe and would not last long after it had served that purpose. It is in fact an invitation to

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help Germany to make a European combination which could be directed against us when it suited her to use it. . . . If we sacrifice the other Powers to Germany, we shall eventually be attacked.³²

After the creation of the Triple Entente, the cat-and-mouse game Germany and Great Britain had played in the 1890s grew deadly serious and turned into a struggle between a *status quo* power and a power demanding a change in the equilibrium. With diplomatic flexibility no longer possible, the only way to alter the balance of power was by adding more arms or by victory in war.

The two alliances were facing each other across a gulf of growing mutual distrust. Unlike the period of the Cold War, the two groupings did not fear war; they were in fact more concerned with preserving their cohesiveness than with avoiding a showdown. Confrontation became the standard method of diplomacy.

Nevertheless, there was still a chance to avoid catastrophe because there were actually few issues that justified war dividing the alliances. No other member of the Triple Entente would have gone to war to help France regain Alsace-Lorraine; Germany, even in its exalted frame of mind, was unlikely to support an Austrian war of aggression in the Balkans. A policy of restraint might have delayed the war and caused the unnatural alliances gradually to disintegrate—especially as the Triple Entente had been forged by fear of Germany in the first place.

By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the balance of power had degenerated into hostile coalitions whose rigidity was matched by the reckless disregard for consequence with which they had been assembled. Russia was tied to a Serbia teeming with nationalist, even terrorist, factions and which, having nothing to lose, had no concern for the risk of a general war. France had handed a blank check to a Russia eager to restore its self-respect after the Russo-Japanese War. Germany had done the same for an Austria desperate to protect its Slavic provinces against agitation from Serbia, which, in turn, was backed by Russia. The nations of Europe had permitted themselves to become captives of reckless Balkan clients. Far from restraining these nations of unbounded passion and limited sense of global responsibility, they allowed themselves to be dragged along by the paranoia that their restless partners might shift alliances if they were not given their way. For a few years, crises were still being surmounted although each new one brought the inevitable showdown closer. And Germany's reaction to the Triple Entente revealed a dogged determination to repeat the same mistake over and over again; every problem became transformed into a test of manhood to prove that Germany was decisive and powerful while its adversaries lacked resolu-

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tion and strength. Yet, with each new German challenge, the bonds of the Triple Entente grew tighter.

In 1908, an international crisis occurred over Bosnia-Herzegovina, worth retelling because it illustrates the tendency of history to repeat itself. Bosnia-Herzegovina had been the backwater of Europe, its fate having been left in an ambiguous status at the Congress of Berlin because no one really knew what to do with it. This no-man's-land between the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires, which contained Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Muslim religions, and Croatian, Serbian, and Muslim populations, had never been a state or even self-governing. It only seemed governable if none of these groups was asked to submit to the others. For thirty years, Bosnia-Herzegovina had been under Turkish suzerainty, Austrian administration, and local autonomy without experiencing a serious challenge to this multinational arrangement which left the issue of ultimate sovereignty unsettled. Austria had waited thirty years to initiate outright annexation because the passions of the polyglot mix were too complex even for the Austrians to sort out, despite their long experience of administering in the midst of chaos. When they finally did annex Bosnia-Herzegovina, they did so more to score a point against Serbia (and indirectly Russia) than to achieve any coherent political objective. As a result, Austria upset the delicate balance of offsetting hatreds.

Three generations later, in 1992, the same elemental passions erupted over comparable issues, confounding all but the zealots directly involved and those familiar with the region's volatile history. Once more, an abrupt change in government turned Bosnia-Herzegovina into a cauldron. As soon as Bosnia was declared an independent state, all the nationalities fell upon each other in a struggle for dominance, with the Serbs settling old scores in a particularly brutal manner.

Taking advantage of Russia's weakness in the wake of the Russo-Japanese War, Austria frivolously implemented a thirty-year-old secret codicil from the Congress of Berlin in which the powers had agreed to let Austria annex Bosnia-Herzegovina. Heretofore, Austria had been satisfied with *de facto* control because it wanted no more Slavic subjects. But in 1908, Austria reversed that decision, fearing its empire was about to dissolve under the impact of Serbian agitation and thinking that it needed some success to demonstrate its continued pre-eminence in the Balkans. In the intervening three decades, Russia had lost its dominant position in Bulgaria and the Three Emperors' League had lapsed. Not unreasonably, Russia was outraged that the all-but-forgotten agreement should now be invoked to permit Austria to acquire a territory which a Russian war had liberated.

But outrage does not guarantee success, especially when its target is

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already in possession of the prize. For the first time, Germany placed itself squarely behind Austria, signaling that it was prepared to risk a European war if Russia challenged the annexation. Then, making matters even more tense, Germany demanded formal Russian and Serbian recognition of Austria's move. Russia had to swallow this humiliation because Great Britain and France were not yet ready to go to war over a Balkan issue, and because Russia was in no position to go to war all alone so soon after its defeat in the Russo-Japanese War.

Germany thus placed itself as an obstacle in Russia's path and in an area where it had never before asserted a vital interest—indeed, where Russia had heretofore been able to count on Germany to moderate Austria's ambitions. Germany demonstrated not only its recklessness but a severe lapse of historical memory. Only half a century before, Bismarck had accurately predicted that Russia would never forgive Austria for humiliating it in the Crimean War. Now, Germany was making the same mistake, compounding Russia's estrangement, which had started at the Congress of Berlin.

Humiliating a great country without weakening it is always a dangerous game. Though Germany thought it was teaching Russia the importance of German goodwill, Russia resolved never to be caught flat-footed again. The two great Continental powers thus began to play a game called "chicken" in American slang, in which two drivers hurtle their vehicles toward each other, each hoping that the other will veer off at the last moment while counting on his own more steady nerves. Unfortunately, this game was played on several different occasions in pre-World War I Europe. Each time a collision was avoided, the collective confidence in the game's ultimate safety was strengthened, causing everyone to forget that a single failure would produce irrevocable catastrophe.

As if Germany wanted to make perfectly sure that it had not neglected to bully any potential adversary or to give all of them sufficient reason to tighten their bonds to each other in self-defense, it next challenged France. In 1911, France, now effectively the civil administrator of Morocco, responded to local unrest by sending troops to the city of Fez, in clear violation of the Algeciras accord. To the wild applause of the nationalist German press, the Kaiser reacted by dispatching the gunboat *Panther* to the Moroccan port of Agadir. "Hurrah! A Deed!" wrote the *Rheinisch-Westfälische Zeitung* on July 2, 1911. "Action at last, a liberating deed which must dissolve the cloud of pessimism everywhere."³³ The *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* advised that the government push ahead with every energy, "even if out of such a policy, circumstances arise that we cannot foresee today."³⁴ In what passed for subtlety in the German press, the journal was basically urging Germany to risk war over Morocco.

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The grandiloquently named “*Panther Leap*” had the same ending as Germany’s previous efforts to break its self-inflicted encirclement. Once again, Germany and France seemed poised on the brink of a war, with Germany’s goals as ill-defined as ever. What sort of compensation was it seeking this time? A Moroccan port? Part of Morocco’s Atlantic coast? Colonial gains elsewhere? It wanted to intimidate France but could find no operational expression for that objective.

In keeping with their evolving relationship, Great Britain backed France more firmly than it had at Algeciras in 1906. The shift in British public opinion was demonstrated by the attitude of its then Chancellor of the Exchequer, David Lloyd George, who had a well-deserved reputation for pacifism and as an advocate of good relations with Germany. On this occasion, however, he delivered a major speech which warned that if

... a situation were to be forced upon us in which peace could only be preserved by the surrender of the great and beneficent position we had won by centuries of heroism and achievement... then I say emphatically that peace at that price would be a humiliation intolerable for a great country like ours to endure.³⁵

Even Austria turned a cold shoulder on its powerful ally, seeing no point in staking its survival on a North African adventure. Germany backed down, accepting a large but worthless tract of land in Central Africa, a transaction which elicited a groan from Germany’s nationalistic press. “We practically risked a world war for a few Congolese swamps,” wrote the *Berliner Tageblatt* on November 3, 1911.³⁶ Yet what ought to have been criticized was not the value of the new acquisitions but the wisdom of threatening a different country with war every few years without being able to define a meaningful objective, each time magnifying the fear which had brought the hostile coalitions into being in the first place.

If German tactics had by now become stereotyped, so had the Anglo-French response. In 1912, Great Britain, France, and Russia started military staff talks, the significance of which was only formally limited by the usual British disclaimer that they constituted no legally binding commitment. Even this constraint was belied to some extent by the Anglo-French Naval Treaty of 1912, according to which the French fleet was moved to the Mediterranean and Great Britain assumed responsibility for defending the French Atlantic coast. Two years later, this agreement would be invoked as a moral obligation for Great Britain to enter the First World War because, so it was claimed, France had left its Channel coast undefended in reliance on British support. (Twenty-eight years later, in 1940, a similar agreement between the United States and Great Britain

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would enable Great Britain to move its Pacific fleet to the Atlantic, implying a moral obligation on the part of the United States to protect Great Britain's nearby defenseless Asian possessions against Japanese attack.)

In 1913, German leaders culminated the alienation of Russia by another of their fitful and pointless maneuvers. This time, Germany agreed to reorganize the Turkish army and to send a German general to assume command over Constantinople. William II dramatized the challenge by sending off the training mission with a typically grandiloquent flourish, expressing his hope that "the German flags will soon fly over the fortifications of the Bosphorus."³⁷

Few events could have enraged Russia more than Germany's laying claim to the position in the Straits that Europe had denied to Russia for a century. Russia had with difficulty reconciled itself to the control of the Straits by a weak country like Ottoman Turkey, but it would never acquiesce to domination of the Dardanelles by another Great Power. The Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Sazonov, wrote to the Tsar in December 1913: "To abandon the Straits to a powerful state would be synonymous with subordinating the whole economic development of southern Russia to this state."³⁸ Nicholas II told the British Ambassador that "Germany was aiming at acquiring such a position at Constantinople as would enable it to shut in Russia altogether in the Black Sea. Should she attempt to carry out this policy, he would have to resist it with all his power, even if war should be the only alternative."³⁹

Though Germany devised a face-saving formula for removing the German commander from Constantinople (by promoting him to field marshal, which, according to German tradition, meant he could no longer command troops in the field), irreparable damage had been done. Russia understood that Germany's support to Austria over Bosnia-Herzegovina had not been an aberration. The Kaiser, regarding these developments as tests of his manhood, told his chancellor on February 25, 1914: "Russo-Prussian relations are dead once and for all! We have become enemies!"⁴⁰ Six months later, World War I broke out.

An international system had evolved whose rigidity and confrontational style paralleled that of the later Cold War. But in fact, the pre-World War I international order was far more volatile than the Cold War world. In the Nuclear Age, only the United States and the Soviet Union had the technical means to start a general war in which the risks were so cataclysmic that neither superpower dared to delegate such awesome power to an ally, however close. By contrast, prior to World War I, each member of the two main coalitions was in a position not only to start a war but to blackmail its allies into supporting it.

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For a while, the alliance system itself provided a certain restraint. France held Russia back in conflicts which primarily involved Austria; Germany played a similar role with Austria vis-à-vis Russia. In the Bosnian crisis of 1908, France made it clear that it would not go to war over a Balkan issue. During the Moroccan crisis of 1911, French President Calliaux was told firmly that any French attempt to resolve a colonial crisis by force would not receive Russian support. As late as the Balkan War of 1912, Germany warned Austria that there were limits to German backing, and Great Britain pressured Russia to moderate its acts on behalf of the volatile and unpredictable Balkan League, which was led by Serbia. At the London Conference of 1913, Great Britain helped to thwart Serbian annexation of Albania, which would have been intolerable to Austria.

The London Conference of 1913 would, however, be the last time that the pre-World War I international system could ease conflicts. Serbia was unhappy with Russia's lukewarm support, while Russia resented Great Britain's posture as an impartial arbiter and France's clear reluctance to go to war. Austria, on the verge of disintegrating under Russian and South Slav pressures, was upset that Germany was not backing it more vigorously. Serbia, Russia, and Austria all expected greater support from their allies; France, Great Britain, and Germany feared that they might lose their partners if they did not support them more forcefully in the next crisis.

Afterward, each Great Power was suddenly seized by panic that a conciliatory stance would make it appear weak and unreliable and cause its partners to leave it facing a hostile coalition all alone. Countries began to assume levels of risk unwarranted by their historic national interests or by any rational long-term strategic objective. Richelieu's dictum that means must correspond to ends was violated almost daily. Germany accepted the risk of world war in order to be seen as supportive of Vienna's South Slav policy, in which it had no national interest. Russia was willing to risk a fight to the death with Germany in order to be viewed as Serbia's steadfast ally. Germany and Russia had no major conflict with each other; their confrontation was by proxy.

In 1912, the new French President, Raymond Poincaré, informed the Russian Ambassador with respect to the Balkans that "if Russia goes to war, France will also, as we know that in this question Germany is behind Austria."⁴¹ The gleeful Russian Ambassador reported "a completely new French view" that "the territorial grabs by Austria affect the general European balance and therefore France's interests."⁴² That same year, the British Undersecretary in the Foreign Office, Sir Arthur Nicholson, wrote to the British Ambassador in St. Petersburg: "I do not know how much

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longer we shall be able to follow our present policy of dancing on a tight rope, and not be compelled to take some definite line or other. I am also haunted by the same fear as you—lest Russia should become tired of us and strike a bargain with Germany.”⁴³

Not to be outdone in recklessness, the Kaiser promised Austria in 1913 that, in the next crisis, Germany would follow it into war if necessary. On July 7, 1914, the German Chancellor explained the policy which, less than four weeks later, would lead to actual war: “If we urge them [the Austrians] ahead, then they will say we pushed them in; if we dissuade them, then it will become a matter of our leaving them in the lurch. Then they will turn to the Western Powers, whose arms are wide open, and we will lose our last ally, such as it is.”⁴⁴ The precise benefit Austria was to draw from an alliance with the Triple Entente was left undefined. Nor was it likely that Austria could join a grouping containing Russia, which sought to undermine Austria’s Balkan position. Historically, alliances had been formed to augment a nation’s strength in case of war; as World War I approached, the primary motive for war was to strengthen the alliances.

The leaders of all the major countries simply did not grasp the implications of the technology at their disposal, or of the coalitions they were feverishly constructing. They seemed oblivious to the huge casualties of the still relatively recent American Civil War, and expected a short, decisive conflict. It never occurred to them that the failure to make their alliances correspond to rational political objectives would lead to the destruction of civilization as they knew it. Each alliance had too much at stake to permit the traditional Concert of Europe diplomacy to work. Instead, the Great Powers managed to construct a diplomatic doomsday machine, though they were unaware of what they had done.



CHAPTER EIGHT

Into the Vortex: The Military Doomsday Machine

The astonishing aspect of the outbreak of the First World War is not that a crisis simpler than many already surmounted had finally triggered a global catastrophe, but that it took so long for it to happen. By 1914, the confrontation between Germany and Austria-Hungary on the one side, and the Triple Entente on the other, had turned deadly earnest. The statesmen of all the major countries had helped to construct the diplomatic doomsday mechanism that made each succeeding crisis progressively more difficult to solve. Their military chiefs had vastly compounded the peril by adding strategic plans which compressed the time available for decision-making. Since the military plans depended on speed and the diplomatic machinery was geared to its traditional leisurely pace, it became impossible to disentangle the crisis under intense time pressure. To make matters worse, the military planners had not adequately explained the implications of their handiwork to their political colleagues.

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Military planning had, in effect, become autonomous. The first step in this direction occurred during the negotiation for a Franco-Russian military alliance in 1892. Up to that time, alliance negotiations had been about the *casus belli*, or what specific actions by the adversary might oblige allies to go to war. Almost invariably, its definition hinged on who was perceived to have initiated the hostilities.

In May 1892, the Russian negotiator, Adjutant General Nikolai Obruchev, sent a letter to his Foreign Minister, Giers, explaining why the traditional method for defining the *casus belli* had been overtaken by modern technology. Obruchev argued that what mattered was who mobilized first, not who fired the first shot: "The undertaking of mobilization can no longer be considered as a peaceful act; on the contrary, it represents the most decisive act of war."¹

The side that procrastinated in mobilizing would lose the benefit of its alliances and enable its enemy to defeat each adversary in turn. The need for all the allies to mobilize simultaneously had become so urgent in the minds of European leaders that it turned into the keystone of solemn diplomatic engagements. The purpose of alliances was no longer to guarantee support *after* a war had started, but to guarantee that each ally would mobilize as soon as and, it was hoped, just before, any adversary did. When alliances so constructed confronted each other, threats based on mobilization became irreversible because stopping mobilization in midstream was more disastrous than not having started it at all. If one side stopped while the other proceeded, it would be at a growing disadvantage with every passing day. If both sides tried to stop simultaneously, it would be technically so difficult that almost certainly the mobilization would be completed before the diplomats could agree on how to arrest it.

This doomsday procedure effectively removed the *casus belli* from political control. Every crisis had a built-in escalator to war—the decision to mobilize—and every war was certain to become general.

Far from deploring the prospect of automatic escalation, Obruchev welcomed it enthusiastically. The last thing he wanted was a local conflict. For, if Germany were to stay out of a war between Russia and Austria, it would simply emerge afterward in a position to dictate the terms of the peace. In Obruchev's fantasy, this was what Bismarck had done at the Congress of Berlin:

Less than any other can our diplomacy count on an isolated conflict of Russia, for example, with Germany, or Austria, or Turkey alone. The Congress of Berlin was lesson enough for us in this connection, and it

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taught us whom we should regard as our most dangerous enemy—the one who fights with us directly or the one who waits for our weakening and then dictates the terms of peace? . . .²

According to Obruchev, it was in Russia's interest to make certain that every war would be general. The benefit to Russia of a well-constructed alliance with France would be to prevent the possibility of a localized war:

At the outset of every European war there is always a great temptation for the diplomats to localize the conflict and to limit its effects as far as possible. But in the present armed and agitated condition of continental Europe, Russia must regard any such localization of the war with particular skepticism, because this could unduly strengthen the possibilities not only for those of our enemies who are hesitating and have not come out into the open, but also for vacillating allies.³

In other words, a defensive war for limited objectives was *against* Russia's national interest. Any war had to be total, and the military planners could grant no other option to the political leaders:

Once we have been drawn into a war, we cannot conduct that war otherwise than with all our forces, and against both our neighbors. In the face of the readiness of entire armed peoples to go to war, no other sort of war can be envisaged than the most decisive sort—a war that would determine for long into the future the relative political positions of the European powers, and especially of Russia and Germany.⁴

However trivial the cause, war would be total; if its prelude involved only one neighbor, Russia should see to it that the other was drawn in. Almost grotesquely, the Russian general staff *preferred* to fight Germany and Austria-Hungary jointly than just one of them. A military convention carrying out Obruchev's ideas was signed on January 4, 1894. France and Russia agreed to mobilize together should *any* member of the Triple Alliance mobilize for *any* reason whatsoever. The doomsday machine was complete. Should Germany's ally, Italy, mobilize against France over Savoy, for instance, Russia would have to mobilize against Germany; if Austria mobilized against Serbia, France was now obliged to mobilize against Germany. Since it was virtually certain that at some point some nation would mobilize for some cause, it was only a matter of time before a general war broke out, for it required only *one* mobilization by a major power to start the doomsday machinery for all of them.

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At least Tsar Alexander III understood that the game now being played was for the highest stakes. When Giers asked him, "... what would we gain by helping the French destroy Germany?" he replied: "What we would gain would be that Germany, as such, would disappear. It would break up into a number of small, weak states, the way it used to be."⁵ German war aims were equally sweeping and nebulous. The much-invoked European equilibrium had turned into a battle to the death, though not one of the statesmen involved could have explained what cause justified such nihilism or what political aims would be served by the conflagration.

What Russian planners were putting forward as theory, the German general staff translated into operational planning at almost the exact moment that Obruchev was negotiating the Franco-Russian military alliance. And with German thoroughness, the imperial generals pushed the mobilization concept to its absolute extreme. The chief of the German staff, Alfred von Schlieffen, was as obsessed by mobilization schedules as his Russian and French counterparts. But whereas the Franco-Russian military leaders were concerned with defining the obligation to mobilize, Schlieffen focused on implementing the concept.

Refusing to leave anything to the vagaries of the political environment, Schlieffen tried to devise a foolproof plan for escaping Germany's dreaded encirclement. Just as Bismarck's successors had abandoned his complex diplomacy, so Schlieffen jettisoned the strategic concepts of Helmuth von Moltke, the military architect of Bismarck's three rapid victories between 1864 and 1870.

Moltke had devised a strategy that left open the option of a political solution to Bismarck's nightmare of hostile coalitions. In case of a two-front war, Moltke planned to split the German army more or less evenly between the East and the West, and to go on the defensive on both fronts. Since France's principal objective was to regain Alsace-Lorraine, it was certain to attack. If Germany defeated that offensive, France would be obliged to consider a compromise peace. Moltke specifically warned against extending military operations to Paris, having learned in the Franco-Prussian War how difficult it was to conclude a peace while besieging the enemy's capital.

Moltke proposed the same strategy for the Eastern front—namely, to defeat a Russian attack and to follow it by pushing the Russian army back to a strategically significant distance, and then to offer a compromise peace. Whichever forces first achieved victory would be available to aid the armies on the other front. In this manner, the scale of the war, the sacrifices, and the political solution would be kept in some sort of balance.⁶

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But just as Bismarck's successors had been uncomfortable with the ambiguities of his overlapping alliances, so Schlieffen rejected Moltke's plan because it left the military initiative to Germany's enemies. Nor did Schlieffen approve of Moltke's preference for political compromise over total victory. Determined to impose terms which were, in effect, unconditional surrender, Schlieffen elaborated a scheme for a quick and decisive victory on one front and then throwing all of Germany's forces against the other adversary, thereby achieving a clear-cut outcome on both fronts. Because a quick, knockout blow in the East was precluded by the slow pace of Russian mobilization, which was expected to take six weeks, and by Russia's vast territory, Schlieffen decided to destroy the French army first, before the Russian army was fully mobilized. To circumvent the heavy French fortifications at the German border, Schlieffen came up with the idea of violating Belgian neutrality by wheeling the German army through its territory. He would capture Paris and trap the French army from the rear in its fortresses along the border. In the meantime, Germany would stay on the defensive in the East.

The plan was as brilliant as it was reckless. A minimum knowledge of history would have revealed that Great Britain would surely go to war if Belgium was invaded—a fact which seems to have totally eluded the Kaiser and the German general staff. For twenty years after the Schlieffen Plan was devised in 1892, Germany's leaders had made innumerable proposals to Great Britain to gain its support—or at least neutrality—in a European war, all of which were rendered illusory by German military planning. There was no cause for which Great Britain had fought as consistently or implacably as the independence of the Low Countries. And Great Britain's conduct in the wars against Louis XIV and Napoleon testified to its tenacity. Once engaged, it would fight to the end, even if France were defeated. Nor did the Schlieffen Plan allow for the possibility of failure. If Germany did not destroy the French army—which was possible, since the French had interior lines and railways radiating from Paris whereas the German army had to march by foot in an arc through a devastated countryside—Germany would be forced into Moltke's strategy of defense on both fronts after it had destroyed the possibility of a political compromise peace by occupying Belgium. Where the principal goal of Bismarck's foreign policy had been to avoid a two-front war and of Moltke's military strategy to limit it, Schlieffen insisted on a two-front war conducted in an all-out fashion.

With German deployment focused against France while the most likely origin of the conflict would be in Eastern Europe, Bismarck's nightmare question, "what if there is a two-front war?" was transformed into Schlieffen's nightmare question, "what if there is not a two-front war?" If France

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were to declare neutrality in a Balkan war, Germany might face the danger of a French declaration of war *after* Russian mobilization was complete, as Obruchev had already explained from the other side of the European dividing line. If, on the other hand, Germany ignored France's offer of neutrality, Schlieffen's plan would put Germany in the uncomfortable position of attacking non-belligerent Belgium in order to get to non-belligerent France. Schlieffen therefore had to invent a reason to assault France should France stay on the sidelines. He created an impossible standard for what Germany would accept as French neutrality. Germany would regard France as neutral only if it agreed to cede one of its major fortresses to Germany—in other words, only if France put itself at Germany's mercy and abdicated its position as a Great Power.

The unholy mix of general political alliances and hair-trigger military strategies guaranteed a vast bloodletting. The balance of power had lost any semblance of the flexibility it had had during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Wherever war erupted (and it would almost certainly be in the Balkans), the Schlieffen Plan saw to it that the initial battles would be fought in the West between countries having next to no interest in the immediate crisis. Foreign policy had abdicated to military strategy, which now consisted of gambling on a single throw of the dice. A more mindless and technocratic approach to war would have been difficult to imagine.

Though the military leaders of both sides insisted on the most destructive kind of war, they were ominously silent about its political consequences in light of the military technology they were pursuing. What would Europe look like after a war on the scale they were planning? What changes could justify the carnage they were preparing? There was not a single specific Russian demand on Germany or a single German demand on Russia, which merited a local war, much less a general one.

The diplomats on both sides were silent, too, largely because they did not understand the political implications of their countries' time bomb, and because nationalistic politics in each country made them afraid to challenge their military establishments. This conspiracy of silence prevented the political leaders of all the major countries from requesting military plans which established some correspondence between military and political objectives.

Considering the catastrophe they were brewing, there was something almost eerie about the lightheartedness of European leaders as they embarked on their disastrous course. Surprisingly few warnings were ever uttered, an honorable exception being that of Peter Durnovo, a former Russian Interior Minister who became a member of the State Council.

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In February 1914—six months before the war—he wrote a prophetic memorandum for the Tsar:

The main burden of the war will undoubtedly fall on us, since England is hardly capable of taking a considerable part in a continental war, while France, poor in manpower, will probably adhere to strictly defensive tactics, in view of the enormous losses by which war will be attended under present conditions of military technique. The part of a battering-ram, making a breach in the very thick of the German defense, will be ours. . . .⁷

In Durnovo's judgment, these sacrifices would be wasted because Russia would not be able to make permanent territorial gains by fighting on the side of Great Britain, its traditional geopolitical opponent. Though Great Britain would concede gains to Russia in Central Europe, an additional slice of Poland would only magnify the already strong centrifugal tendencies within the Russian Empire. Adding to the Ukrainian population, said Durnovo, would spur demands for an independent Ukraine. Therefore, victory might have the ironic result of fostering enough ethnic turmoil to reduce the Tsar's empire to Little Russia.

Even if Russia realized its century-old goal of conquering the Dardanelles, Durnovo pointed out that such an achievement would prove strategically empty:

[It] would not give us an outlet to the open sea, however, since on the other side of them there lies a sea consisting almost wholly of territorial waters, a sea dotted with numerous islands where the British navy, for instance, would have no trouble whatever in closing to us every inlet and outlet, irrespective of the Straits.⁸

Why this simple geopolitical fact should have eluded three generations of Russians desiring the conquest of Constantinople—and of Englishmen determined to thwart them—remains a mystery.

Durnovo went on to argue that a war would bring even fewer economic benefits to Russia. By any calculation, it would cost far more than could possibly be recouped. A German victory would destroy the Russian economy while a Russian victory would drain the German economy, leaving nothing for reparations no matter which side won:

There can be no doubt that the war will necessitate expenditures which are beyond Russia's limited financial means. We shall have to obtain credit from allied and neutral countries, but this will not be granted

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gratuitously. As to what will happen if the war should end disastrously for us, I do not wish to discuss now. The financial and economic consequences of defeat can be neither calculated nor even foreseen, and will undoubtedly spell the total ruin of our entire national economy. But even victory promises us extremely unfavorable financial prospects; a totally ruined Germany will not be in a position to compensate us for the cost involved. Dictated in the interest of England, the peace treaty will not afford Germany opportunity for sufficient economic recuperation to cover our war expenditures, even at a distant time.⁹

Yet Durnovo's strongest reason for opposing the war was his prediction that war would inevitably lead to social revolution—first in the defeated country and then spreading from there to the victor:

It is our firm conviction, based upon a long and careful study of all contemporary subversive tendencies, that there must inevitably break out in the defeated country a social revolution which, by the very nature of things, will spread to the country of the victor.¹⁰

There is no evidence that the Tsar saw the memorandum that might have saved his dynasty. Nor is there any record of a comparable analysis in other European capitals. The closest anyone came to Durnovo's views were a few epigrammatic comments by Bethmann-Hollweg, the Chancellor who would lead Germany into the war. In 1913, already much too late, he had expressed, quite accurately, why German foreign policy proved so unsettling to the rest of Europe:

Challenge everybody, put yourself in everybody's path and actually weaken no one in this fashion. Reason: aimlessness, the need for little prestige successes and solicitude for every current of public opinion.¹¹

That same year, Bethmann-Hollweg laid down another maxim, which might have saved his country had it been put into practice twenty years earlier:

We must keep France in check through a cautious policy towards Russia and England. Naturally this does not please our chauvinists and is unpopular. But I see no alternative for Germany in the near future.¹²

By the time these lines were written, Europe was already headed into the vortex. The locale of the crisis that triggered the First World War was

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irrelevant to the European balance of power, and the *casus belli* as accidental as the preceding diplomacy had been reckless.

On June 28, 1914, Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Habsburg throne, paid for Austria's rashness in having annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908 with his life. Not even the manner of his assassination could escape the singular mix of the tragic and the absurd that marked Austria's disintegration. The young Serbian terrorist failed in his first attempt to assassinate Franz Ferdinand, wounding the driver of the Archduke's vehicle instead. After arriving at the governor's residence and chastising the Austrian administrators for their negligence, Franz Ferdinand, accompanied by his wife, decided to visit the victim at the hospital. The royal couple's new driver took a wrong turn and, in backing out of the street, came to a stop in front of the astonished would-be assassin, who had been drowning his frustrations in liquor at a sidewalk café. With his victims so providentially delivered to him by themselves, the assassin did not fail a second time.

What started out as a near-accident turned into a conflagration with the inevitability of a Greek tragedy. Because the Archduke's wife was not of royal blood, none of the kings of Europe attended the funeral. Had the crowned heads of state congregated and had an opportunity to exchange views, they might have proven more reluctant to go to war a few weeks later over what had been, after all, a terrorist plot.

In all likelihood, not even a royal summit could have prevented Austria from lighting the fuse which the Kaiser now rashly handed it. Remembering his promise of the previous year to back Austria in the next crisis, he invited the Austrian Ambassador to lunch on July 5 and urged speedy action against Serbia. On July 6, Bethmann-Hollweg confirmed the Kaiser's pledge: "Austria must judge what is to be done to clear up her relations with Serbia; but whatever Austria's decision, she could count with certainty upon it, that Germany will stand behind her as an ally."¹³

Austria at last had the blank check it had sought for so long, and a real grievance to which it might be applied. Insensitive as ever to the full implications of his bravado, William II vanished on a cruise to the Norwegian fjords (this in the days before radio). Exactly what he had in mind is not clear, but he obviously did not anticipate a European war. The Kaiser and his chancellor apparently calculated that Russia was not yet ready for war and would stand by while Serbia was humiliated, as it had done in 1908. In any event, they believed they were in a better position for a showdown with Russia than they would be a few years later.

Maintaining their unbroken record of misjudging the psychology of potential adversaries, the German leaders were now as convinced of the vastness of their opportunity as when they had tried to force Great Britain

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into an alliance by building a large navy, or to isolate France by threatening war over Morocco. Operating from the assumption that Austria's success might break their ever-tighter encirclement by disillusioning Russia with the Triple Entente, they ignored France, which they deemed irreconcilable, and evaded mediation by Great Britain lest it spoil their triumph. They had persuaded themselves that if, against all expectations, war did break out, Great Britain would either remain neutral or intervene too late. Yet Serge Sazonov, Russia's Foreign Minister at the outbreak of the war, described why Russia would not back off this time:

Ever since the Crimean War, we could entertain no illusions on the subject of Austria's feelings toward us. On the day she initiated her predatory policy in the Balkans, hoping thereby to prop up the tottering structure of her dominion, her relations with us became more and more unfriendly. We were able, however, to reconcile ourselves to this inconvenience, until it became clear that her Balkan policy had the sympathy of Germany, and received encouragement from Berlin.¹⁴

Russia felt it had to resist what it interpreted as a German maneuver to destroy its position among the Slavs by humiliating Serbia, its most reliable ally in the area. "It was clear," wrote Sazonov, "that we had to do not with the rash decision of a short-sighted Minister, undertaken at his own risk and on his own responsibility, but with a carefully prepared plan, elaborated with the aid of the German Government, without whose consent and promise of support Austria-Hungary would never have ventured upon its execution."¹⁵

Another Russian diplomat later wrote nostalgically of the difference between the Germany of Bismarck and the Germany of the Kaiser:

The Great War was the inevitable consequence of the encouragement given by Germany to Austria-Hungary in her policy of penetration into the Balkans, which was combined with the grandiose Pan-German idea of a Germanized "Middle-Europe." In Bismarck's day this never would have happened. What did happen was the result of Germany's novel ambition to grapple with a task more stupendous than that of Bismarck—without a Bismarck.^{16*}

* The Russian memoirs must be taken with a grain of salt because they were trying to shift the total responsibility for the war onto Germany's shoulders. Sazonov in particular must bear part of the blame because he clearly belonged to the war party pushing for full mobilization—even though his overall analysis has much merit.

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The Russian diplomats were paying the Germans too great an honor, for the Kaiser and his advisers had no more of a long-range plan in 1914 than they had had during any previous crisis. The crisis over the Archduke's assassination ran out of control because no leader was prepared to back down and every country was concerned above all with living up to formal treaty obligations rather than to an overall concept of long-range common interest. What Europe lacked was some all-encompassing value system to bind the powers together, such as had existed in the Metternich system or the cold-blooded diplomatic flexibility of Bismarck's *Realpolitik*. World War I started not because countries broke their treaties, but because they fulfilled them to the letter.

Of the many curious aspects of the prelude to the First World War, one of the strangest was that nothing happened at first. Austria, true to its operating style, procrastinated, in part because Vienna needed time to overcome the reluctance of Hungarian Prime Minister Stephen Tisza to risk the Empire. When he finally yielded, Vienna issued a forty-eight-hour ultimatum to Serbia on July 23, deliberately putting forward such onerous conditions that they were sure to be rejected. Yet the delay had cost Austria the benefits of the widespread initial feelings of indignation in Europe over the Archduke's assassination.

In Metternich's Europe, with its shared commitment to legitimacy, there can be little doubt that Russia would have sanctioned Austrian retribution against Serbia for the assassination of a prince in direct line of succession to the Austrian throne. But by 1914, legitimacy was no longer a common bond. Russia's sympathy for its ally, Serbia, outweighed its outrage at the assassination of Franz Ferdinand.

For the entire month following the assassination, Austrian diplomacy had been dilatory. Then came the mad rush to cataclysm in the space of less than a week. The Austrian ultimatum drove events out of the control of the political leaders. For once the ultimatum had been issued, any major country was in a position to trigger the irreversible race to mobilization. Ironically, the mobilization juggernaut was set off by the one country for which mobilization schedules were essentially irrelevant. For, alone among all the major powers, Austria's military plans were still old-fashioned in that they did not depend on speed. It mattered little to Austrian war plans which week the war started, as long as its armies were able to fight Serbia sooner or later. Austria had delivered its ultimatum to Serbia in order to forestall mediation, not to speed military operations. Nor did Austrian mobilization threaten any other major power, since it would take a month to be completed.

Thus, the mobilization schedules which made war inevitable were set

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in motion by the country whose army did not actually start fighting until *after* the major battles in the West were already over. On the other hand and whatever the state of Austria's readiness, if Russia wanted to threaten Austria, it would have to mobilize some troops, an act which would trigger the irreversible in Germany (though none of the political leaders seemed to have grasped this danger). The paradox of July 1914 was that the countries which had political reasons to go to war were not tied to rigid mobilization schedules while nations with rigid schedules, such as Germany and Russia, had no political reason to go to war.

Great Britain, the country in the best position to arrest this chain of events, hesitated. It had next to no interest in the Balkan crisis, though it did have a major interest in preserving the Triple Entente. Dreading war, it feared a German triumph even more. Had Great Britain declared unambiguously its intentions and made Germany understand that it would enter a general war, the Kaiser might well have turned away from confrontation. That is how Sazonov saw it later:

I cannot refrain from expressing the opinion that if in 1914 Sir Edward Grey had, as I insistently requested him, made a timely and equally unambiguous announcement of the solidarity of Great Britain with France and Russia, he might have saved humanity from that terrible cataclysm, the consequences of which endangered the very existence of European civilization.¹⁷

The British leaders were reluctant to risk the Triple Entente by indicating any hesitation to support their allies and, somewhat contradictorily, did not want to threaten Germany so as to keep open the option of mediating at the right moment. As a result, Great Britain fell between two stools. It had no legal obligation to go to war on the side of France and Russia, as Grey assured the House of Commons on June 11, 1914, a little more than two weeks before the Archduke's assassination:

... if war arose between European Powers, there were no unpublished agreements which would restrict or hamper the freedom of the Government or Parliament to decide whether or not Great Britain should participate in a war. . . .¹⁸

Legally, this was certainly true. But there was an intangible moral dimension involved as well. The French navy was in the Mediterranean because of France's naval agreement with Great Britain; as a result, the coast of northern France would be wide open to the German navy if Great Britain

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stayed out of the war. As the crisis developed, Bethmann-Hollweg pledged not to employ the German navy against France if Great Britain promised to remain neutral. But Grey refused this bargain, for the same reason that he had rejected the German offer in 1909 to slow down its naval buildup in return for British neutrality in a European war—he suspected that after France was defeated, Great Britain would be at Germany's mercy.

You must inform the German Chancellor that his proposal that we should bind ourselves to neutrality on such terms cannot for a moment be entertained.

... For us to make this bargain with Germany at the expense of France would be a disgrace from which the good name of this country would never recover.

The Chancellor also in effect asks us to bargain away whatever obligation or interest we have as regards the neutrality of Belgium. We could not entertain that bargain either.¹⁹

Grey's dilemma was that his country had become snared between the pressures of public opinion and the traditions of its foreign policy. On the one hand, the lack of public support for going to war over a Balkan issue would have suggested mediation. On the other hand, if France were defeated or lost confidence in the British alliance, Germany would be in the dominant position the British had always resisted. Therefore, it is highly probable that, in the end, Great Britain would have gone to war to prevent a French military collapse even if Germany had not invaded Belgium, although it could have taken some time for the British people's support for the war to crystallize. During that period, Great Britain might have tried to mediate. However, Germany's decision to challenge one of the most established principles of English foreign policy—that the Low Countries must not fall into the hands of a major power—served to resolve British doubts and guaranteed that the war would not end with a compromise.

Grey reasoned that, by not taking sides in the early stages of the crisis, Great Britain would retain its claim to the impartiality which might permit it to broker a solution. And past experience supported this strategy. The outcome of heightened international tensions for twenty years had invariably been a conference. However, in no previous crisis had there been any mobilization. As all the Great Powers were getting ready to mobilize, the margin of time available for traditional diplomatic methods vanished. Thus, in the crucial ninety-six hours during which mobilization schedules

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destroyed the opportunity for political maneuvering, the British Cabinet in effect assumed the role of bystander.

Austria's ultimatum backed Russia against the wall at a moment when it already believed it had been sorely misused. Bulgaria, whose liberation from Turkish rule had been brought about by Russia through several wars, was leaning toward Germany. Austria, having annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina, seemed to be seeking to turn Serbia, Russia's last significant Balkan ally, into a protectorate. Finally, with Germany establishing itself in Constantinople, Russia could only wonder whether the age of Pan-Slavism might not end in the Teutonic domination of everything it had coveted for a century.

Even so, Tsar Nicholas II was not eager for a showdown with Germany. At a ministerial meeting on July 24, he reviewed Russia's options. The Finance Minister, Peter Bark, reported the Tsar as saying: "War would be disastrous for the world, and once it had broken out it would be difficult to stop." In addition, Bark noted, "The German Emperor had frequently assured him of his sincere desire to safeguard the peace of Europe." And he reminded the ministers of "the German Emperor's loyal attitude during the Russo-Japanese War and during the internal troubles that Russia had experienced afterwards."²⁰

The rebuttal came from Aleksandr Krivoshein, the powerful Minister of Agriculture. Demonstrating Russia's endemic refusal to forget a slight, he argued that, despite the Kaiser's kind letters to his cousin, Tsar Nicholas, the German had bullied Russia during the Bosnian crisis of 1908. Therefore, "public and parliamentary opinion would fail to understand why, at the critical moment involving Russia's vital interest, the Imperial Government was reluctant to act boldly. . . . Our exaggeratedly prudent attitudes had unfortunately not succeeded in placating the Central European Powers."²¹

Krivoshein's argument was supported by a dispatch from the Russian Ambassador in Sofia to the effect that, if Russia backed down, "our prestige in the Slav world and in the Balkans would perish never to return."²² Heads of government are notoriously vulnerable to arguments that question their courage. In the end, the Tsar suppressed his premonitions of disaster and opted for backing Serbia even at the risk of war, though he stopped short of ordering mobilization.

When Serbia responded to Austria's ultimatum on July 25 in an unexpectedly conciliatory fashion—accepting all Austrian demands except one—the Kaiser, just back from his cruise, thought that the crisis was over. But he did not count on Austria's determination to exploit the backing he had proffered so incautiously. Above all, he had forgotten—if

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indeed he had ever known it—that, with the Great Powers so close to the brink of war, mobilization schedules were likely to outrun diplomacy.

On July 28, Austria declared war against Serbia, even though it would not be ready for military action until August 12. On the same day, the Tsar ordered partial mobilization against Austria and discovered to his surprise that the only plan the general staff had readied was for general mobilization against both Germany and Austria, despite the fact that for the past fifty years Austria had stood in the way of Russia's Balkan ambitions, and that a localized Austro-Russian war had been a staple of military-staff schools during that entire period. Russia's Foreign Minister, unaware that he was living in a fool's paradise, sought to reassure Berlin on July 28: "The military measures taken by us in consequence of the Austria declaration of war . . . not a single one of them was directed against Germany."²³

The Russian military leaders, without exception disciples of Obruchev's theories, were appalled by the Tsar's restraint. They wanted general mobilization and thus war with Germany, which had taken no military steps so far. One of the leading generals told Sazonov that "war had become inevitable and that we were in danger of losing it before we had time to unsheath our sword."²⁴

If the Tsar had been too hesitant for his generals, he was far too decisive for Germany. All German war plans were based on knocking France out of a war within six weeks, and then turning against a presumably still not fully mobilized Russia. Any Russian mobilization—even a partial one—would cut into this timetable and lower the odds of Germany's already risky gamble. Accordingly, on July 29, Germany demanded that Russia stop its mobilization or Germany would follow suit. And everyone knew that German mobilization was tantamount to war.

The Tsar was too weak to yield. Stopping partial mobilization would have unraveled the entire Russian military planning, and the resistance of his generals convinced him that the die was cast. On July 30, Nicholas ordered full mobilization. On July 31, Germany once more demanded an end to Russian mobilization. When that request was ignored, Germany declared war on Russia. This occurred without a single serious political exchange between St. Petersburg and Berlin about the substance of the crisis, and in the absence of any tangible dispute between Germany and Russia.

Germany now faced the problem that its war plans required an immediate attack on France, which had been quiescent throughout the crisis except to encourage Russia not to compromise by pledging France's unconditional support. Understanding at last where twenty years of histri-

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onics had landed him, the Kaiser tried to divert Germany's mobilization away from France and toward Russia. His attempt to rein in the military was as much in vain as the Tsar's previous, similar effort to limit the scope of Russian mobilization. The German general staff was no more willing than its Russian counterpart to scrap twenty years of planning; indeed, no more than the Russian staff did it have an alternate plan. Though both the Tsar and the Emperor had wanted to pull back from the brink, neither knew how to do it—the Tsar because he was prevented from carrying out partial mobilization, the Kaiser because he was kept from mobilizing only against Russia. Both were thwarted by the military machinery which they had helped to construct and which, once set in motion, proved irreversible.

On August 1, Germany inquired of France whether it intended to remain neutral. Had France replied in the affirmative, Germany would have demanded the fortresses of Verdun and Toulon as tokens of good faith. Instead, France replied rather enigmatically that it would act in accordance with its national interest. Germany, of course, had no specific issue with which to justify war with France, which had been a bystander in the Balkan crisis. Again, the mobilization schedules were the driving force. Thus, Germany trumped up some French border violations and, on August 3, declared war. The same day, German troops, carrying out the Schlieffen Plan, invaded Belgium. On the next day, August 4, to the surprise of no one except the German leaders, Great Britain declared war on Germany.

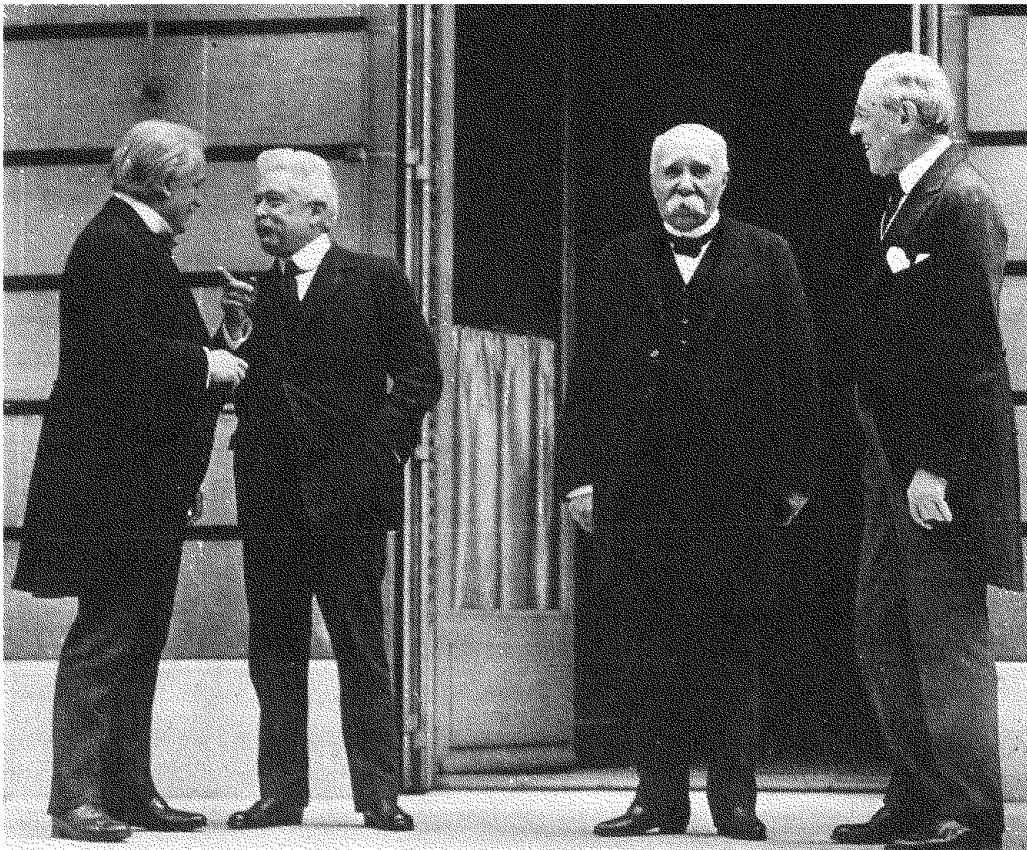
The Great Powers had succeeded in turning a secondary Balkan crisis into a world war. A dispute over Bosnia and Serbia had led to the invasion of Belgium, at the other end of Europe, which had in turn made Great Britain's entry into the war inevitable. Ironically, by the time the decisive battles were being fought on the Western front, Austrian troops had still not taken the offensive against Serbia.

Germany learned too late that there can be no certainty in war and that its obsessive quest for a quick and decisive victory had landed it in a draining war of attrition. In implementing the Schlieffen Plan, Germany dashed all its hopes for British neutrality without succeeding in destroying the French army, which had been the purpose of taking the risks in the first place. Ironically, Germany lost the offensive battle in the West and won the defensive battle in the East, much as the elder Moltke had foreseen. In the end, Germany was obliged to adopt Moltke's defensive strategy in the West as well after having committed itself to a policy which excluded the compromise political peace on which Moltke's strategy had been based.

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The Concert of Europe failed miserably because the political leadership had abdicated. As a result, the sort of European Congress which throughout most of the nineteenth century had provided a cooling-off period or led to an actual solution, was not even attempted. European leaders had provided for every contingency except the time needed for diplomatic conciliation. And they had forgotten Bismarck's dictum: "Woe to the leader whose arguments at the end of a war are not as plausible as they were at the beginning."

By the time events had run their course, 20 million lay dead; the Austro-Hungarian Empire had disappeared; three of the four dynasties which entered the war—the German, the Austrian, and the Russian—were overthrown. Only the British royal house remained standing. Afterward, it was hard to recall exactly what had triggered the conflagration. All that anyone knew was that, from the ashes produced by monumental folly, a new European system had to be constructed, though its nature was difficult to discern amidst the passion and the exhaustion deposited by the carnage.



CHAPTER NINE

The New Face of Diplomacy: Wilson and the Treaty of Versailles

On November 11, 1918, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George announced that an armistice between Germany and the Allied Powers had been signed with these words: "I hope that we may say that thus, this fateful morning, come to an end all wars."¹ In reality, Europe was a mere two decades away from an even more cataclysmic war.

Since nothing about the First World War had gone as planned, it was inevitable that the quest for peace would prove as futile as the expectations with which nations had launched themselves into the catastrophe. Every participant had anticipated a brief war and had left the determination of its peace terms to the sort of diplomatic congress which had ended European conflicts for the past century. But as the casualties mounted to horrendous proportions, they obliterated the political disputes of the

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prelude to the conflict—the competition for influence in the Balkans, the possession of Alsace-Lorraine, and the naval race. The nations of Europe came to blame their suffering on the inherent evil of their adversaries, and convinced themselves that compromise could bring no real peace; the enemy had to be totally defeated or the war fought to utter exhaustion.

Had European leaders continued the practices of the prewar international order, a compromise peace would have been made in the spring of 1915. Offensives by each side had run their bloody course, and stalemate prevailed on all fronts. But just as mobilization schedules had run away with diplomacy in the week prior to the outbreak of the war, so now the scale of the sacrifices stood in the way of a sensible compromise. Instead, the leaders of Europe kept raising their terms, thereby not only compounding the incompetence and the irresponsibility with which they had slid into war, but destroying the world order in which their nations had coexisted for nearly a century.

By the winter of 1914–15, military strategy and foreign policy had lost touch with each other. None of the belligerents dared to explore a compromise peace. France would not settle without regaining Alsace-Lorraine; Germany would not consider a peace in which it would be asked to give up the territory it had conquered. Once plunged into war, the leaders of Europe became so obsessed with fratricide, so maddened by the progressive destruction of an entire generation of their young men, that victory turned into its own reward, regardless of the ruins on which that triumph would have to be erected. Murderous offensives confirmed the military stalemate and produced casualties unimaginable before the advent of modern technology. Efforts to enlist new allies deepened the political deadlock. For each new ally—Italy and Romania on the Allied side, Bulgaria on the side of the Central Powers—demanded its share of the anticipated booty, thereby destroying whatever flexibility might have remained to diplomacy.

Peace terms gradually took on a nihilistic character. The aristocratic, somewhat conspiratorial style of nineteenth-century diplomacy proved irrelevant in the age of mass mobilization. The Allied side specialized in couching the war in moral slogans such as “the war to end all wars” or “making the world safe for Democracy”—especially after America entered the war. The first of these goals was understandable, if not highly promising, for nations that had been fighting each other in various combinations for a thousand years. Its practical interpretation was the complete disarmament of Germany. The second proposition—spreading democracy—required the overthrow of German and Austrian domestic institutions. Both Allied slogans therefore implied a fight to the finish.

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Great Britain, which in the Napoleonic Wars had produced a blueprint for European equilibrium via the Pitt Plan, supported the pressures for an all-out victory. In December 1914, a German feeler offering to withdraw from Belgium in exchange for the Belgian Congo was rejected by British Foreign Secretary Grey with the argument that the Allies must be given “security against any future attack from Germany.”²

Grey’s comment marked a transformation in the British attitude. Until shortly before the outbreak of the war, Great Britain had identified its security with the balance of power, which it protected by supporting the weaker side against the stronger. By 1914, Great Britain felt less and less comfortable in this role. Sensing that Germany had become stronger than all the rest of the Continent combined, Great Britain felt it could no longer play its traditional role of trying to remain above the fray in Europe. Because it perceived Germany as a hegemonic threat in Europe, a return to the *status quo ante* would do nothing to alleviate the fundamental problem. Thus, Great Britain, too, would no longer accept compromise and insisted on its own “guarantees,” which amounted to the permanent weakening of Germany, especially a sharp reduction of the German High Sea Fleet—something Germany would never accept unless it were totally defeated.

The German terms were both more precise and more geopolitical. Yet with their characteristic lack of a sense of proportion, the German leaders, too, asked for what amounted to unconditional surrender. In the West, they demanded the annexation of the coal fields of northern France and military control over Belgium, including the port of Antwerp, which guaranteed Great Britain’s implacable hostility. In the East, Germany only stated formal terms with respect to Poland, where, on November 5, 1916, it promised to create “an independent State with a hereditary and constitutional monarchy”³—dashing any prospect for a compromise peace with Russia. (Germany’s hope had been that the promise of Polish independence would produce enough Polish volunteers for five divisions; as it turned out, only 3,000 recruits showed up.)⁴ After defeating Russia, Germany imposed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on March 3, 1918, by which it annexed a third of European Russia and established a protectorate over the Ukraine. In finally defining what it meant by *Weltpolitik*, Germany was opting for the domination of Europe at the very least.

The First World War began as a typical cabinet war, with notes being passed from embassy to embassy, and telegrams being distributed among sovereign monarchs at all the decisive steps on the road to actual combat. But once war had been declared, and as the streets of European capitals filled with cheering throngs, the conflict ceased being a conflict of chan-

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celleries and turned into a struggle of the masses. After the first two years of the war, each side was stating terms incompatible with any notion of equilibrium.

What proved beyond everyone's imagination was that both sides would win and lose at the same time: that Germany would defeat Russia and seriously weaken both France and England; but that, in the end, the Western Allies, with America's indispensable assistance, would emerge as the victors. The aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars had been a century of peace based on equilibrium and sustained by common values. The aftermath of World War I was social upheaval, ideological conflict, and another world war.

The enthusiasm that marked the beginning of the war evaporated once the peoples of Europe came to understand that their governments' ability to produce the carnage was not matched by a commensurate ability to achieve either victory or peace. In the resulting maelstrom, the Eastern Courts, whose unity had sustained the peace of Europe in the days of the Holy Alliance, were overthrown. The Austro-Hungarian Empire disappeared altogether. The Russian Empire was taken over by the Bolsheviks and for two decades receded into the periphery of Europe. Germany was successively racked by defeat, revolution, inflation, economic depression, and dictatorship. France and Great Britain did not benefit from the weakened state of their adversaries. They had sacrificed the best of their young men for a peace which left the enemy geopolitically stronger than it had been before the war.

Before the full dimension of this largely self-inflicted debacle could become evident, a new player appeared on the scene to end once and for all what had up to this time been called the Concert of Europe. Amidst the rubble and the disillusionment of three years of carnage, America stepped into the international arena with a confidence, a power, and an idealism that were unimaginable to its more jaded European allies.

America's entry into the war made total victory technically possible, but it was for goals which bore little relation to the world order Europe had known for some three centuries and for which it had presumably entered the war. America disdained the concept of the balance of power and considered the practice of *Realpolitik* immoral. America's criteria for international order were democracy, collective security, and self-determination—none of which had undergirded any previous European settlement.

To Americans, the dissonance between their philosophy and European thought underlined the merit of their beliefs. Proclaiming a radical departure from the precepts and experiences of the Old World, Wilson's idea of world order derived from Americans' faith in the essentially peaceful

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nature of man and an underlying harmony of the world. It followed that democratic nations were, by definition, peaceful; people granted self-determination would no longer have reason to go to war or to oppress others. Once all the peoples of the world had tasted of the blessings of peace and democracy, they would surely rise as one to defend their gains.

European leaders had no categories of thought to encompass such views. Neither their domestic institutions nor their international order had been based on political theories postulating man's essential goodness. Rather, they had been designed to place man's demonstrated selfishness in the service of a higher good. European diplomacy was predicated not on the peace-loving nature of states but on their propensity for war, which needed to be either discouraged or balanced. Alliances were formed in the pursuit of specific, definable objectives, not in the defense of peace in the abstract.

Wilson's doctrines of self-determination and collective security put European diplomats on thoroughly unfamiliar terrain. The assumption behind all European settlements had been that borders could be adjusted to promote the balance of power, the requirements of which took precedence over the preferences of the affected populations. This was how Pitt had envisaged the "great masses" to contain France at the end of the Napoleonic Wars.

Throughout the nineteenth century, for example, Great Britain and Austria resisted the breakup of the Ottoman Empire because they were convinced that the smaller nations emerging from it would undermine international order. To their way of thinking, the smaller nations' inexperience would magnify endemic ethnic rivalries, while their relative weakness would tempt Great Power encroachment. In the British and Austrian view, the smaller states had to subordinate their national ambitions to the broader interests of peace. In the name of equilibrium, France had been prevented from annexing the French-speaking Walloon part of Belgium, and Germany was discouraged from uniting with Austria (though Bismarck had his own reasons for not seeking a union with Austria).

Wilson entirely rejected this approach, as the United States has done ever since. In America's view, it was not self-determination which caused wars but the lack of it; not the absence of a balance of power that produced instability but the pursuit of it. Wilson proposed to found peace on the principle of collective security. In his view and that of all his disciples, the security of the world called for, not the defense of the national interest, but of peace as a legal concept. The determination of whether a breach of peace had indeed been committed required an international institution, which Wilson defined as the League of Nations.

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Oddly enough, the idea for such an organization first surfaced in London, heretofore the bastion of balance-of-power diplomacy. And the motive for it was not an attempt to invent a new world order but England's search for a good reason why America should enter a war of the old order. In September 1915, in a revolutionary departure from British practice, Foreign Secretary Grey wrote to Wilson's confidant, Colonel House, with a proposal which he believed the idealistic American President would not be able to refuse.

To what extent, asked Grey, might the President be interested in a League of Nations committed to enforcing disarmament and to the pacific settlement of disputes?

Would the President propose that there should be a League of Nations binding themselves to side against any Power which broke a treaty . . . or which refused, in case of dispute, to adopt some other method of settlement than that of war?⁵

It was unlikely that Great Britain, which for 200 years had steered clear of open-ended alliances, had suddenly developed a taste for open-ended commitments on a global scale. Yet Great Britain's determination to prevail against the immediate threat of Germany was so great that its Foreign Secretary could bring himself to put forward a doctrine of collective security, the most open-ended commitment imaginable. Every member of his proposed world organization would have an obligation to resist aggression anywhere and from whatever quarter, and to penalize nations which rejected the pacific settlement of disputes.

Grey knew his man. From the days of his youth, Wilson had believed that American federal institutions should serve as a model for an eventual "parliament of man"; early in his presidency, he was already exploring a Pan-American pact for the Western Hemisphere. Grey could not have been surprised—though surely he was gratified—to receive a prompt reply falling in with what was, in retrospect, his rather transparent hint.

The exchange was perhaps the earliest demonstration of the "special relationship" between America and Great Britain that would enable Great Britain to maintain a unique influence in Washington long after the decline of its power in the wake of the Second World War. A common language and cultural heritage combined with great tactfulness to enable British leaders to inject their ideas into the American decision-making process in such a manner that they imperceptibly seemed to be a part of Washington's own. Thus, when, in May 1916, Wilson advanced for the first time his scheme for a world organization, he was no doubt convinced

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that it had been his own idea. And in a way it had been, since Grey had proposed it in full awareness of Wilson's likely convictions.

Regardless of its immediate parentage, the League of Nations was a quintessentially American concept. What Wilson envisaged was a "universal association of the nations to maintain the inviolate security of the highway of the seas for the common and unhindered use of all the nations of the world, and to prevent any war begun either contrary to treaty covenants or without warning and full submission of the causes to the opinion of the world—a virtual guarantee of territorial integrity and political independence."⁶

Initially, however, Wilson refrained from offering American participation in this "universal association." Finally in January 1917, he took the leap and advocated American membership, using, amazingly enough, the Monroe Doctrine as a model:

I am proposing, as it were, that the nations should with one accord adopt the doctrine of President Monroe as the doctrine of the world: that no nation should seek to extend its polity over any other nation or people, . . . that all nations henceforth avoid entangling alliances which would draw them into competitions of power. . . .⁷

Mexico was probably astonished to learn that the president of the country which had seized a third of its territory in the nineteenth century and had sent its troops into Mexico the preceding year was now presenting the Monroe Doctrine as a guarantee for the territorial integrity of sister nations and as a classic example of international cooperation.

Wilson's idealism stopped short of the belief that his views would prevail in Europe on their inherent merits. He showed himself quite prepared to supplement argument with pressure. Shortly after America entered the war in April 1917, he wrote to Colonel House: "When the war is over we can force them to our way of thinking, because by that time they will, among other things, be financially in our hands."⁸ For the time being, several of the Allies lingered over their responses to Wilson's idea. Though they could not quite bring themselves to approve views so contrary to their traditions, they also needed America far too much to voice their reservations.

In late October 1917, Wilson dispatched House to ask the Europeans to formulate war aims which would reflect his proclaimed aim for a peace without annexations or indemnities safeguarded by a world authority. For several months, Wilson refrained from putting forward his own views because, as he explained to House, France and Italy might object if

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America expressed doubts about the justice of their territorial aspirations.⁹

Finally, on January 8, 1918, Wilson proceeded on his own. With extraordinary eloquence and elevation, he put forward America's war aims before a joint session of Congress, presenting them in the form of Fourteen Points which were divided into two parts. He described eight points as being obligatory in the sense that they "must" be fulfilled. These included open diplomacy, freedom of the seas, general disarmament, the removal of trade barriers, impartial settlement of colonial claims, the restoration of Belgium, the evacuation of Russian territory, and, as the crown jewel, the establishment of a League of Nations.

Wilson introduced the remaining six points, which were more specific, with the statement that they "should" rather than "must" be achieved, presumably because, in his view, they were not absolutely indispensable. Surprisingly, the restoration of Alsace-Lorraine to France was included in the non-obligatory category, even though a determination to regain that region had sustained French policy for half a century and through unprecedented sacrifices in the war. Other "desirable" goals were described as autonomy for the minorities of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires, readjustment of Italy's frontiers, evacuation of the Balkans, internationalization of the Dardanelles, and the creation of an independent Poland with access to the sea. Did Wilson mean to imply that these six conditions were subject to compromise? Poland's access to the sea and the modification of Italy's frontiers would surely be difficult to reconcile with the principle of self-determination and were, for this reason, the first flaws in the moral symmetry of Wilson's design.

Wilson concluded his presentation with an appeal to Germany in the name of the spirit of conciliation with which America would approach the building of a new international order—an attitude precluding historical war aims:

We grudge her no achievement or distinction of learning or of pacific enterprise such as have made her record very bright and very enviable. We do not wish to injure her or to block in any way her legitimate influence or power. We do not wish to fight her either with arms or with hostile arrangements of trade if she is willing to associate herself with us and the other peace-loving nations of the world in covenants of justice and law and fair dealing. We wish her only to accept a place of equality among the peoples of the world. . . .¹⁰

Never before had such revolutionary goals been put forward with so few guidelines as to how to implement them. The world Wilson envisaged

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would be based on principle, not power; on law, not interest—for both victor and vanquished; in other words, a complete reversal of the historical experience and method of operation of the Great Powers. Symbolic of this was the way Wilson described his and America's role in the war. America had joined what, due to Wilson's aversion to the word "ally," he preferred to call "one side" of one of the most ferocious wars in history, and Wilson was acting as if he were the principal mediator. For what Wilson seemed to be saying was that the war had been fought not to achieve certain specific conditions but to engender a particular attitude on the part of Germany. Hence the war had been about conversion, not geopolitics.

In an address at London's Guildhall on December 28, 1918, after the Armistice, Wilson explicitly condemned the balance of power as unstable and based on "jealous watchfulness and an antagonism of interests":

They [the Allied soldiers] fought to do away with an old order and to establish a new one, and the center and characteristic of the old order was that unstable thing which we used to call the "balance of power"—a thing in which the balance was determined by the sword which was thrown in the one side or the other; a balance which was determined by the unstable equilibrium of the competitive interests. . . . The men who have fought in this war have been the men from free nations who were determined that that sort of thing should end now and forever.¹¹

Wilson was surely right about the European nations' having made a mess of things. However, it was not so much the balance of power as Europe's abdication of it that had caused the debacle of World War I. The leaders of pre-World War I Europe had neglected the historic balance of power and abandoned the periodic adjustments which had avoided final showdowns. They had substituted a bipolar world much less flexible than even the Cold War world of the future, in that it lacked the cataclysmic inhibitions of the Nuclear Age. While paying lip service to equilibrium, the leaders of Europe had catered to the most nationalistic elements of their public opinion. Neither their political nor their military arrangements allowed for any flexibility; there was no safety valve between the *status quo* and conflagration. This had led to crises that could not be settled and to endless public posturing that, in the end, permitted no retreat.

Wilson accurately identified some of the principal challenges of the twentieth century—most especially how to put power into the service of peace. But his solutions too often compounded the problems he identified. For he ascribed competition among states primarily to the absence

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of self-determination and to economic motives. Yet history shows many other, more frequent, causes of competition, prominent among which are national aggrandizement and the exaltation of the ruler or the ruling group. Disdainful of such impulses, Wilson was convinced that the spread of democracy would arrest them and self-determination would deprive them of their focal points.

Wilson's remedy of collective security presupposed that the nations of the world would unite against aggression, injustice, and, presumably, excessive selfishness. In an appearance before the Senate early in 1917, Wilson asserted that the establishment of equal rights among states would provide the precondition for maintaining peace through collective security regardless of the power each nation represented.

Right must be based upon the common strength, not upon the individual strength, of the nations upon whose concert peace will depend. Equality of territory or of resources there of course cannot be; nor any other sort of equality not gained in the ordinary peaceful and legitimate development of the peoples themselves. But no one asks or expects anything more than an equality of rights. Mankind is looking now for freedom of life, not for equipoises of power.¹²

Wilson was proposing a world order in which resistance to aggression would be based on moral rather than geopolitical judgments. Nations would ask themselves whether an act was unjust rather than whether it was threatening. Though America's allies had little faith in this new dispensation, they felt too weak to challenge it. America's allies knew or thought they knew how to calculate equilibrium based on power; they had no confidence that they, or anyone else, knew how to assess equilibrium on the basis of moral precepts.

Before America's entry into the war, the European democracies never dared to express openly their doubts about Wilson's ideas and indeed made every attempt to enlist Wilson by humoring him. By the time America did join the Allies, they were desperate. The combined forces of Great Britain, France, and Russia had not been sufficient to overcome Germany and, in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, they feared that America's entry into the war might do no more than offset Russia's collapse. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Russia showed what fate Germany had in mind for the losers. Fear of German victory kept Great Britain and France from debating war aims with their idealistic American partner.

After the Armistice, the Allies found themselves in a better position to express their reservations. Nor would it have been the first time that a

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European alliance was strained or broken in the aftermath of victory (for example, the Congress of Vienna went through a phase in which the victors threatened each other with war). Yet the victors of the First World War were too drained by their sacrifices and still too dependent on the American giant to risk a testy dialogue with it, or its withdrawal from the peace settlement.

This was especially true of France, which now found itself in a truly tragic position. For two centuries it had struggled to achieve the mastery of Europe, but, in the war's aftermath, it no longer had confidence in its ability to protect even its own frontiers against a defeated enemy. French leaders felt instinctively that containing Germany was beyond the capacity of their ravaged society. War had exhausted France and the peace seemed to induce premonitions of further catastrophe. France, which had fought for its existence, now struggled for its identity. France dared not stand alone, yet its most powerful ally was proposing to found the peace on principles that turned security into a judicial process.

Victory brought home to France the stark realization that *revanche* had cost it too dearly, and that it had been living off capital for nearly a century. France alone knew just how weak it had become in comparison with Germany, though nobody else, especially not America, was prepared to believe it. Thus, on the eve of victory began a Franco-American dialogue which accelerated the process of French demoralization. Like Israel in the modern period, France masked its vulnerability with prickliness, and incipient panic with intransigence. And, like Israel in the modern period, it stood in constant danger of isolation.

Though France's allies insisted that its fears were exaggerated, French leaders knew better. In 1880, the French had represented 15.7 percent of Europe's population. By 1900, that figure had declined to 9.7 percent. In 1920, France had a population of 41 million and Germany a population of 65 million, causing the French statesman Briand to answer critics of his conciliatory policy toward Germany with the argument that he was conducting the foreign policy of France's birthrate.

France's relative economic decline was even more dramatic. In 1850, France had been the largest industrial nation on the Continent. By 1880, German production of steel, coal, and iron exceeded that of France. In 1913, France produced 41 million tons of coal compared with Germany's 279 million tons; by the late 1930s, the disparity was to widen to 47 million tons produced by France against Germany's total of 351 million tons.¹³

The residual strength of the defeated enemy marked the essential difference between the post-Vienna and post-Versailles international orders,

and the reason for it was the disunity of the victors after Versailles. A coalition of powers defeated Napoleon and a coalition of powers was needed to surmount imperial Germany. Even after losing, both of the vanquished—France in 1815 and Germany in 1918—remained strong enough to overcome any one of the coalition members singly and perhaps even a combination of two of them. The difference was that, in 1815, the peacemakers at the Congress of Vienna stayed united and formed the Quadruple Alliance—an overwhelming coalition of four powers that would crush any revisionist dreams. In the post-Versailles period, the victors did not remain allied, America and the Soviet Union withdrew altogether, and Great Britain was highly ambivalent as far as France was concerned.

It was not until the post-Versailles period that France came to the searing realization that its defeat by Germany in 1871 had not been an aberration. The only way France could have maintained equilibrium with Germany by itself would have been to break Germany up into its component states, perhaps by re-establishing the German Confederation of the nineteenth century. Indeed, France fitfully pursued this objective by encouraging separatism in the Rhineland and by occupying the Saar coal mines.

Two obstacles, however, stood in the way of the partitioning of Germany. For one, Bismarck had built too well. The Germany he created retained its sense of unity through defeats in two world wars, through the French occupation of the Ruhr area in 1923, and the Soviet imposition of a satellite state in Eastern Germany for a generation after the Second World War. When the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, French President Mitterrand briefly toyed with the idea of cooperating with Gorbachev to obstruct German unification. But Gorbachev was too preoccupied with domestic problems to undertake such an adventure, and France was not strong enough to attempt it alone. A similar French weakness prevented the partitioning of Germany in 1918. Even if France had been up to the task, its allies, especially America, would not have tolerated so crass a violation of the principle of self-determination. But neither was Wilson prepared to insist on a peace of reconciliation. In the end, he went along with several punitive provisions contradicting the equal treatment promised in the Fourteen Points.

The attempt to reconcile American idealism with France's nightmares turned out to be beyond human ingenuity. Wilson traded modification of the Fourteen Points for the establishment of the League of Nations, to which he looked to remedy any legitimate grievances left over from the peace treaty. France settled for far fewer punitive measures than it

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thought commensurate with its sacrifices in the hope of evoking a long-term American commitment to French security. Ultimately, no country achieved its objective: Germany was not reconciled, France was not made secure, and the United States withdrew from the settlement.

Wilson was the star of the Peace Conference, which convened in Paris between January and June 1919. In the days when travel to Europe took a week by ship, many of Wilson's advisers had warned that an American president could not afford to be away from Washington for months on end. In fact, in Wilson's absence his strength in the Congress did deteriorate, proving especially costly when the peace treaty came up for ratification. Wilson's absence from Washington aside, it is almost always a mistake for heads of state to undertake the details of a negotiation. They are then obliged to master specifics normally handled by their foreign offices and are deflected onto subjects more appropriate to their subordinates, while being kept from issues only heads of state can resolve. Since no one without a well-developed ego reaches the highest office, compromise is difficult and deadlocks are dangerous. With the domestic positions of the interlocutors so often dependent on at least the semblance of success, negotiations more often concentrate on obscuring differences than they do on dealing with the essence of a problem.

This proved to be Wilson's fate at Paris. With every passing month, he was drawn more deeply into haggling over details which had never concerned him before. The longer he stayed, the more the sense of urgency to bring matters to a conclusion overrode the desire to create an entirely new international order. The final outcome was made inevitable by the procedure used to negotiate the peace treaty. Because a disproportionate amount of time was spent adjusting territorial questions, the League of Nations emerged as a sort of *deus ex machina*, to straighten out later the ever-widening gap between Wilson's moral claims and the actual terms of the settlement.

The mercurial Welshman David Lloyd George, who represented Great Britain, had told his public shortly before the Peace Conference that he would "squeeze Germany until the pips squeak." But, confronted by a volatile Germany and a fretful France, he focused on maneuvering between Clemenceau and Wilson. In the end, he went along with the punitive provisions, invoking the League as the mechanism by which any inequities would later be corrected.

Arguing on behalf of France's point of view was the battle-scarred and aged Georges Clemenceau. Nicknamed "the Tiger," he was a veteran of decades of domestic battles, from the overthrow of Napoleon III to the vindication of Captain Dreyfus. Yet, at the Paris Conference, he set himself

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a task that was beyond even his ferocious capacities. Striving for a peace which would somehow undo Bismarck's work and reassert Richelieu-style primacy on the Continent, he exceeded the tolerance of the international system and, indeed, the capacities of his own society. The clock simply could not be turned back 150 years. No other nation either shared or fully grasped France's objectives. Frustration would prove to be Clemenceau's lot, and progressive demoralization France's future.

Vittorio Orlando, the Italian Prime Minister, represented the last of the "Big Four." Though he cut a fine figure, he was frequently overshadowed by his energetic Foreign Minister, Sidney Sonnino. The Italian negotiators, it turned out, had come to Paris to collect their booty rather than to design a new world order. The Allies had induced Italy into the war by promising it the South Tirol and the Dalmatian coast in the Treaty of London of 1915. Since the South Tirol was predominantly Austro-German and the Dalmatian coast Slavic, Italy's claims were in direct conflict with the principle of self-determination. Yet Orlando and Sonnino deadlocked the Conference until, in utter exasperation, South Tirol (though not Dalmatia) was turned over to Italy. This "compromise" demonstrated that the Fourteen Points were not etched in stone, and opened the floodgates to various other adjustments which, collectively, ran counter to the prevailing principle of self-determination without either improving the old balance of power or creating a new one.

Unlike the Congress of Vienna, the Paris Peace Conference did not include the defeated powers. As a result, the months of negotiation cast the Germans beneath a pall of uncertainty, which encouraged illusions. They recited Wilson's Fourteen Points as if by heart and, though their own peace program would have been brutal, deluded themselves into believing that the Allies' final settlement would be relatively mild. Therefore, when the peacemakers revealed their handiwork in June 1919, the Germans were shocked and embarked on two decades of systematically undermining it.

Lenin's Russia, which was also not invited, attacked the entire enterprise on the ground that it was a capitalist orgy organized by countries whose ultimate goal was to intervene in the civil war in Russia. Thus it happened that the peace concluding the war to end all wars did not include the two strongest nations of Europe—Germany and Russia—which, between them, contained well over half of Europe's population and by far the largest military potential. That fact alone would have doomed the Versailles settlement.

Nor did its procedures encourage a comprehensive approach. The Big Four—Wilson, Clemenceau, Lloyd George, and Orlando—were the

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dominant figures, but they could not control the proceedings in the same way that the ministers of the Great Powers had dominated the Congress of Vienna a hundred years earlier. The negotiators at Vienna had concentrated above all on establishing a new balance of power, for which the Pitt Plan had served as a general blueprint. The leaders at Paris were constantly being diverted by an unending series of sideshows.

Twenty-seven states were invited. Envisioned as a forum for all the peoples of the world, the Conference, in the end, turned into a free-for-all. The Supreme Council—composed of the heads of government of Great Britain, France, Italy, and the United States—was the highest-ranking of the innumerable commissions and sections making up the Conference. In addition, there was the Council of Five, composed of the Supreme Council plus the head of government of Japan; and a Council of Ten, which was the Council of Five and their foreign ministers. Delegates from the smaller countries were free to address the more elite groups about their various concerns. It underlined the democratic nature of the Conference, but was also very time-consuming.

Since no agenda had been agreed upon prior to the Conference, delegates arrived not knowing in what particular order the issues would be addressed. Thus, the Paris Conference ended up having fifty-eight different committees. Most of them dealt with territorial questions. A separate committee for each country was established. Additionally, there were committees dealing with war guilt and war criminals, with reparations, ports, waterways and railways, with labor, and, finally, with the League of Nations. All together, the Conference's committee members sat through 1,646 meetings.

Endless discussions about peripheral subjects obscured the central fact that, for the peace to be stable, the settlement had to have some overarching concept—especially a long-term view about the future role of Germany. In theory, the American principles of collective security and self-determination were to play that role. In practice, the real issue at the Conference, and one which would prove irresolvable, was the differences between the American concept of international order and that of the Europeans, particularly the French. Wilson rejected the idea that international conflicts had structural causes. Deeming harmony to be natural, Wilson strove for institutions which would sweep away the illusion of clashing interests and permit the underlying sense of world community to assert itself.

France, the theater of many a European war and itself a participant in many more, was not to be persuaded that clashing national interests were illusory, or that there existed some nebulous, underlying harmony

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heretofore hidden from mankind. Two German occupations in the course of fifty years had made France obsessively fearful of another round of conquest. It would aspire to tangible guarantees of its security and leave the moral improvement of mankind to others. But tangible guarantees implied either a weakening of Germany or an assurance that, in the event of another war, other countries, especially the United States and Great Britain, would be on the side of France.

Since dismembering Germany was opposed by America, and collective security was too nebulous for France, the only remaining solution to France's problem was an American and British pledge to defend it. And that, precisely, was what both Anglo-Saxon countries were extremely reluctant to give. With no such assurance forthcoming, France was reduced to pleading for expedients. Geography protected America, and the surrender of the German fleet had dispersed British concerns about control of the seas. France alone among the victors was being asked to rest its security on world opinion. André Tardieu, a principal French negotiator, argued that:

For France, as for Great Britain and the United States, it is necessary to create a zone of safety. . . . This zone the naval Powers create by their fleets, and by the elimination of the German fleet. This zone France, unprotected by the ocean, unable to eliminate the millions of Germans trained to war, must create by the Rhine, by an inter-allied occupation of that river.¹⁴

Yet France's demand to separate the Rhineland from Germany ran up against the American conviction that "such a peace would then be made as would be contrary to everything we have stood for."¹⁵ The American delegation argued that separating the Rhineland from Germany and stationing Allied troops there would engender a permanent German grievance. Philip Kerr, a British delegate, told Tardieu that Great Britain considered an independent Rhenish state "a source of complication and of weakness. . . . If local conflicts occur, whither will they lead? If war results from these conflicts, neither England nor her Dominions will have that deep feeling of solidarity with France which animated them in the last war."¹⁶

French leaders were far less worried about later German grievances than about Germany's ultimate power. Tardieu held his ground:

You say that England does not like English troops to be used away from home. It is a question of fact. England has always had troops in India

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and Egypt. Why? Because she knows that her frontier is not at Dover. . . . *To ask us to give up occupation, is like asking England and the United States to sink their fleet of battleships.*¹⁷

If France was denied a buffer, it would need some other assurance, preferably an alliance with Great Britain and the United States. If need be, France was prepared to accept an interpretation of the concept of collective security to achieve the same result as a traditional alliance.

Wilson was so eager to establish the League of Nations that he occasionally put forward theories encouraging French hopes. On several occasions, Wilson described the League as an international tribunal to adjudicate disputes, alter boundaries, and infuse international relations with much-needed elasticity. One of Wilson's advisers, Dr. Isaiah Bowman, summed up Wilson's ideas in a memorandum drafted aboard the ship transporting them to the Peace Conference in December 1918. The League would provide for:

*. . . territorial integrity plus later alteration of terms and alteration of boundaries if it could be shown that injustice had been done or that conditions had changed. And such alteration would be the easier to make in time as passion subsided and matters could be viewed in the light of justice rather than in the light of a peace conference at the close of a protracted war. . . . [The] opposite of such a course was to maintain the idea of the Great Powers and of balance of power, and such an idea had always produced only "aggression and selfishness and war."*¹⁸

After the plenary session of February 14, 1919, at which Wilson unveiled the League Covenant, he spoke in nearly identical terms to his wife: "This is our first real step forward, for I now realize, more than ever before, that once established, the League can arbitrate and correct mistakes which are inevitable in the treaty we are trying to make at this time."¹⁹

As Wilson envisaged it, the League of Nations would have the dual mandate of enforcing the peace and rectifying its inequities. Nevertheless, Wilson was gripped by a profound ambivalence. It would have been impossible to find a single historical example of European borders being changed by appeals to justice or purely legal processes; in almost every instance, they had been altered—or defended—in the name of the national interest. Yet Wilson was well aware that the American people were not even remotely ready for a military commitment in defense of the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles. In essence, Wilson's ideas translated into institutions tantamount to world government, which the American people were even less prepared to accept than a global police force.

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Wilson sought to sidestep this problem by invoking world public opinion rather than world government or military force as the ultimate sanction against aggression. This is how he described it to the Peace Conference in February 1919:

...throughout this instrument [the League of Nations] we are depending primarily and chiefly upon one great force, and that is the moral force of the public opinion of the world. . . .²⁰

And what public opinion could not resolve, economic pressure would surely accomplish. According to the Bowman Memorandum:

In cases involving discipline there was the alternative to war, namely, the boycott; trade, including postal and cable facilities, could be denied a state that had been guilty of wrongdoing.²¹

No European state had ever seen such mechanisms at work or could bring itself to believe in their feasibility. In any case, it was too much to expect from France, which had expended so much blood and treasure in order just barely to survive, only to find itself faced with a vacuum in Eastern Europe and a Germany whose actual strength was much greater than its own.

For France, therefore, the League of Nations had only one purpose, and that was to activate military assistance against Germany should that be needed. An ancient and by this time depleted country, France could not bring itself to trust in the basic premise of collective security, that all nations would assess threats in the same way or that, if they did, they would reach identical conclusions about how to resist. If collective security failed, America—and perhaps Great Britain—could always defend themselves, as a last resort, on their own. But for France, there was no last resort; its judgment had to prove right the first time. If the basic assumption of collective security turned out to be wrong, France, unlike America, could not fight another traditional war; it would cease to exist. France was therefore not seeking a general assurance, but a guarantee applicable to its specific circumstances. This the American delegation resolutely refused to give.

Though Wilson's reluctance to commit America to more than a declaration of principles was understandable in light of his domestic pressures, it magnified France's forebodings. The United States had never hesitated to use force to back up the Monroe Doctrine, which Wilson constantly invoked as a model for his new international order. Yet America turned

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coy when the issue of German threats to the European balance of power arose. Did this not signify that the European equilibrium was a lesser security interest for the United States than conditions in the Western Hemisphere? To remove this distinction, the French representative on the relevant committee, Léon Bourgeois, kept pressing for an international army or any other mechanism that would endow the League of Nations with automatic enforcement machinery in case Germany abrogated the Versailles settlement—the only cause of war that interested France.

For a fleeting moment, Wilson seemed to endorse the concept by referring to the proposed Covenant as a guarantee of the “land titles of the world.”²² But Wilson’s entourage was horrified. Its members knew that the Senate would never ratify a standing international army or a permanent military commitment. One of Wilson’s advisers even argued that a provision stipulating the use of force to resist aggression would be unconstitutional:

A substantial objection to such a provision is that it would be void if contained in a treaty of the United States, as Congress under the Constitution had the power to declare war. A war automatically arising upon a condition subsequent, pursuant to a treaty provision, is not a war declared by Congress.²³

Taken literally, this meant that no alliance with the United States could ever have binding force.

Wilson quickly tacked back to the undiluted doctrine of collective security. In rejecting the French proposal, he described standby enforcement machinery as unnecessary because the League itself would serve to inspire overwhelming confidence around the world. He maintained that “the only method . . . lies in our having confidence in the good faith of the nations who belong to the League. . . . When danger comes, we too will come, but you must trust us.”²⁴

Trust is not a commodity in abundant supply among diplomats. When the survival of nations is at stake, statesmen look for more tangible guarantees—especially if a country is as precariously situated as France. The persuasiveness of the American argument resided in the absence of an alternative; however ambiguous the League obligations, they were still better than nothing. Lord Cecil, one of the British delegates, was saying just that when he scolded Léon Bourgeois for his threats not to join the League unless the Covenant was endowed with enforcement machinery. “America,” Cecil told Bourgeois, “had nothing to gain from the League

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of Nations; . . . she could let European affairs go and take care of her own; the offer that was made by America for support was practically a present to France. . . .”²⁵

Though beset by many doubts and premonitions, France finally yielded to the painful logic of the Briton’s argument, and acceded to the tautology contained in Article 10 of the League of Nations Charter: “The Council shall advise upon the means by which this obligation [i.e., the preservation of territorial integrity] shall be fulfilled.”²⁶ That is, in case of an emergency, the League of Nations would agree to that on which it could agree. This was, of course, what the nations of the world would have typically done even if there had been no Covenant; and this was precisely the circumstance which traditional alliances sought to remedy by invoking the formal obligation of mutual assistance for specifically defined circumstances.

A French memorandum bluntly stressed the inadequacy of the proposed League security arrangements:

Suppose that instead of a defensive military understanding—very limited indeed—which was given effect between Great Britain and France in 1914, there had been no other bond between the two countries than the general agreements contained in the Covenant of the League, the British intervention would have been less prompt and Germany’s victory thereby assured. So we believe that, under present conditions, the aid provided for by the Covenant of the League would arrive too late.²⁷

Once it had become clear that America was refusing to incorporate any concrete security provisions into the Covenant, France resumed its pressure for dismembering Germany. It proposed the establishment of an independent Rhenish republic as a demilitarized buffer zone, and sought to create an incentive for such a state by exempting it from reparations. When the United States and Great Britain balked, France suggested that, at a minimum, the Rhineland be separated from Germany until the League’s institutions had had a chance to develop and its enforcement machinery could be tested.

In an effort to placate France, Wilson and the British leaders offered as a substitute for the dismemberment of Germany a treaty guaranteeing the new settlement. America and Great Britain would agree to go to war if Germany violated the settlement. It was very similar to the agreement that the allies at the Congress of Vienna had created to reinsure themselves against France. But there was one important difference: after the Napoleonic Wars, the allies had genuinely believed in a French threat and

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sought to provide security against it; after World War I, Great Britain and the United States did not really believe in a German threat; they offered their guarantee without being either convinced that it was necessary or particularly determined to implement it.

The principal French negotiator was jubilant, describing the British guarantee as “unprecedented.” Great Britain had occasionally entered into temporary agreements, he maintained, but had never previously submitted to a permanent obligation: “She has at times lent her aid; she has never bound herself in advance to give it.”²⁸ Tardieu considered America’s proposed commitment an equally momentous departure from its historic pattern of isolationism.²⁹

In their eagerness for formal guarantees, French leaders overlooked the crucial fact that the “unprecedented” Anglo-Saxon decisions were primarily a tactic to induce France to abandon its demand that Germany be dismembered. In foreign policy, the term “unprecedented” is always somewhat suspect, because the actual range of innovation is so circumscribed by history, domestic institutions, and geography.

Had Tardieu been privy to the American delegation’s reaction, he would have understood how tenuous the guarantee really was. Wilson’s advisers were unanimous in opposing their chief. Had not the new diplomacy been explicitly created to do away with this type of national commitment? Had America fought the war only to end up in a traditional alliance? House wrote in his diary:

I thought I ought to call the President’s attention to the perils of such a treaty. Among other things, it would be looked upon as a direct blow at the League of Nations. The League is supposed to do just what this treaty proposed, and if it were necessary for the nations to make such treaties, then why the League of Nations?³⁰

It was a fair question. For, if the League performed as advertised, the guarantee was unnecessary; and if the guarantee was necessary, the League was not living up to its design and all postwar concepts would be in doubt. The isolationists in the United States Senate had misgivings of their own. They were not so much worried that the guarantee conflicted with the League as that the devious Europeans were luring America into the web of their corrupt ancient entanglements. The guarantee did not last long. The Senate’s refusal to ratify the Treaty of Versailles rendered it moot; and Great Britain jumped at the pretext to release itself from its commitment as well. France’s abandonment of its claims turned out to be permanent, and the guarantee ephemeral.

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Out of all these crosscurrents finally emerged the Treaty of Versailles, named after the Hall of Mirrors of Versailles Palace in which it was signed. The location seemed to invite unnecessary humiliation. Fifty years earlier, Bismarck had tactlessly proclaimed the unified Germany there; now, the victors inflicted an insult of their own. Nor was their handiwork likely to calm the international environment. Too punitive for conciliation, too lenient to keep Germany from recovering, the treaty of Versailles condemned the exhausted democracies to constant vigilance and to the need for permanent enforcement against an irreconcilable and revisionist Germany.

The Fourteen Points notwithstanding, the Treaty was punitive in territorial, economic, and military areas. Germany had to surrender 13 percent of its prewar territory. Economically important Upper Silesia was handed over to a newly created Poland, which also received an outlet to the Baltic Sea and the area around Posen, thereby creating the "Polish Corridor" separating East Prussia from the rest of Germany. The tiny territory of Eupen-et-Malmédy was given to Belgium, and Alsace-Lorraine was returned to France.

Germany lost its colonies, the legal status of which occasioned a dispute between Wilson on the one side and France, Great Britain, and Japan on the other, all three of which wanted to annex their share of the spoils. Wilson insisted that such a direct transfer would violate the principle of self-determination. The Allies finally arrived at the so-called Mandate Principle, which was as ingenious as it was hypocritical. German colonies as well as former Ottoman territories in the Middle East were assigned to the various victors with a "mandate" under League supervision, to facilitate their independence. What that meant was never specifically defined, nor in the end did the mandates lead to independence any more rapidly than in other colonial areas.

The Treaty's military restrictions reduced the German army to 100,000 volunteers and its navy to six cruisers and a few smaller vessels. Germany was forbidden to possess offensive weapons such as submarines, aircraft, tanks, or heavy artillery, and its general staff was dissolved. To supervise German disarmament, an Allied Military Control Commission was created and given, as it turned out, extremely vague and ineffective authority.

Despite Lloyd George's electioneering promise to "squeeze" Germany, the Allies began to realize that an economically prostrate Germany might produce a world economic crisis affecting their own societies. But the victorious populations showed little interest in the warnings of theoretical economists. The British and the French demanded that Germany indemnify their civilian populations for all damages. Against his better judgment,

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Wilson finally agreed to a provision that made Germany pay for the pensions of war victims and some compensation for their families. Such a provision was unheard of; no previous European peace treaty had ever contained such a clause. No figure was set for these claims; it was to be determined at some later date, generating a source of endless controversy.

Other economic penalties included immediate payment of \$5 billion in cash or in kind. France was to receive large quantities of coal as compensation for Germany's destruction of its mines during the occupation of eastern France. To make up for ships sunk by German submarines, Great Britain was awarded much of the German merchant fleet. Germany's foreign assets, totaling about \$7 billion, were seized, along with many German patents (thanks to the Versailles Treaty, Bayer Aspirin is an American, not a German product). Germany's major rivers were internationalized, and its ability to raise tariffs was restricted.

These terms mortgaged the new international order instead of helping to create it. When the victors assembled in Paris, they proclaimed a new era in history. So eager were they to avoid what they considered the mistakes of the Congress of Vienna that the British delegation commissioned the renowned historian Sir Charles Webster to write a treatise on the subject.³¹ Yet what they finally produced was a fragile compromise between American utopianism and European paranoia—too conditional to fulfill the dreams of the former, too tentative to alleviate the fears of the latter. An international order that can be preserved only by force is precarious, all the more so when the countries which must bear the principal burden for enforcement—in this case Great Britain and France—were at odds.

It soon became apparent that, as a practical matter, the principle of self-determination could not be applied in the clear-cut sort of way envisaged by the Fourteen Points, especially among the successor states of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Czechoslovakia ended up with 3 million Germans, 1 million Hungarians, and half a million Poles out of a population of some 15 million; nearly a third of the total population was neither Czech nor Slovak. And Slovakia was not an enthusiastic part of a Czech-dominated state, as it would demonstrate by seceding in 1939 and again in 1992.

The new Yugoslavia fulfilled the aspirations of South Slavic intellectuals. But to create that state, it was necessary to cross the fault line of European history, which divided the Western and the Eastern Roman empires, the Catholic and the Orthodox religions, the Latin and the Cyrillic scripts—a fault line running roughly between Croatia and Serbia,

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which had never in their complex histories belonged to the same political unit. The bill for this came due after 1941, in a murderous civil war which started all over again in 1991.

Romania acquired millions of Hungarians, Poland millions of Germans and the guardianship of a corridor separating East Prussia from the rest of Germany. At the end of this process, which was conducted in the name of self-determination, nearly as many people lived under foreign rule as during the days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, except that now they were distributed across many more, much weaker, nation-states which, to undermine stability even further, were in conflict with each other.

When it was too late, Lloyd George understood the dilemma into which the victorious Allies had maneuvered themselves. In a memorandum to Wilson dated March 25, 1919, he wrote:

I can not conceive any greater cause of future war than that the German people, who have certainly proved themselves one of the most vigorous and powerful races in the world should be surrounded by a number of small states, many of them consisting of people who have never previously set up a stable government for themselves, but each of them containing large masses of Germans clamouring for reunion with their native land.³²

But by then, the conference had already progressed too far toward its closing date in June. Nor was any alternative principle for organizing the world order available, now that the balance of power had been discarded.

Later on, many German leaders were to claim that their country had been tricked into the Armistice by Wilson's Fourteen Points, which were then systematically violated. Such propositions were so much self-pitying nonsense. Germany had ignored the Fourteen Points as long as it thought that it had a chance of winning the war, and had, soon after the proclamation of the Fourteen Points, imposed a Carthaginian peace on Russia at Brest-Litovsk, violating every one of Wilson's principles. The only reason Germany finally ended the war had to do with pure power calculations—with the American army involved, its final defeat was only a question of time. When it asked for an armistice, Germany was exhausted, its defenses were breaking, and Allied armies were about to drive into German territory. Wilson's principles in fact spared Germany much more severe retribution.

With better reason, historians have argued that it was the refusal of the United States to join the League that doomed the Treaty of Versailles. America's failure to ratify the Treaty or the guarantee of French borders

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connected with it certainly contributed to France's demoralization. But, given the isolationist mood of the country, American membership in the League or ratification of the guarantee would not have made a significant difference. Either way, the United States would not have used force to resist aggression, or else it would have defined aggression in terms which did not apply to Eastern Europe—much as Great Britain was to do in the 1930s.

The debacle of the Treaty of Versailles was structural. The century of peace produced by the Congress of Vienna had been buttressed by three pillars, each of which was indispensable: a peace of conciliation with France; a balance of power; and a shared sense of legitimacy. The relatively conciliatory peace with France would not in itself have prevented French revisionism. But France knew that the Quadruple and Holy Alliances could always assemble superior power, making French expansionism far too risky. At the same time, periodic European congresses gave France an opportunity to participate in the Concert of Europe as an equal. Above all, the major countries had shared common values so that existing grievances did not coalesce into an attempt to overthrow the international order.

The Treaty of Versailles fulfilled none of these conditions. Its terms were too onerous for conciliation but not severe enough for permanent subjugation. In truth, it was not easy to strike a balance between satisfying and subjugating Germany. Having considered the prewar world order too confining, Germany was not likely to be satisfied with *any* terms available after defeat.

France had three strategic choices: it could try to form an anti-German coalition; it could seek to partition Germany; or it could try to conciliate Germany. All attempts to form alliances failed because Great Britain and America refused, and Russia was no longer part of the equilibrium. Partitioning Germany was resisted by the same countries which rejected an alliance but on whose support in an emergency France nevertheless had to rely. And it was both too late and too early for the conciliation of Germany—too late because conciliation was incompatible with the Treaty of Versailles, too early because French public opinion was not yet ready for it.

Paradoxically, France's vulnerability and Germany's strategic advantage were both magnified by the Treaty of Versailles despite its punitive provisions. Before the war, Germany had faced strong neighbors in both the East and the West. It could not expand in either direction without encountering a major state—France, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, or Russia. But after the Treaty of Versailles, there was no longer a counterweight to

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Germany in the East. With France weakened, the Austro-Hungarian Empire dissolved, and Russia out of the picture for some time, there was simply no way of reconstructing the old balance of power, especially since the Anglo-Saxon powers refused to guarantee the Versailles settlement.

As early as 1916, Lord Balfour, then British Foreign Secretary, foresaw at least a part of the danger that lay ahead for Europe when he warned that an independent Poland might leave France defenseless in another war: if "Poland was made an independent kingdom, becoming a buffer state between Russia and Germany, France would be at the mercy of Germany in the next war, for this reason, that Russia could not come to her aid without violating the neutrality of Poland"³³—exactly the dilemma in 1939. To contain Germany, France needed an ally in the East that could force Germany to fight a two-front war. Russia was the only country strong enough to fulfill that role. But with Poland separating Germany and Russia, Russia could only pressure Germany by violating Poland. And Poland was too weak to play Russia's role. What the Treaty of Versailles did was to give an incentive to Germany and Russia to partition Poland, precisely what they did twenty years later.

Lacking a Great Power in the East with which to ally itself, France sought to strengthen the new states to create the illusion of a two-front challenge to Germany. It backed the new East European states in their effort to extract more territory from Germany or from what was left of Hungary. Obviously, the new states had an incentive to encourage the French delusion that they might come to serve as a counterweight to Germany. Yet these infant states could not possibly assume the role that, up to this time, Austria and Russia had played. They were too weak and racked by internal conflicts and mutual rivalries. And to their east loomed a reconstituted Russia, seething over its own territorial losses. Once it recovered its strength, Russia would prove as great a threat to the independence of the small states as Germany.

Thus the stability of the Continent came to rest on France. It had taken the combined forces of America, Great Britain, France, and Russia to subdue Germany. Of these countries, America was again isolationist, and Russia was severed from Europe by a revolutionary drama and by the so-called *cordon sanitaire* of small Eastern European states standing in the way of direct Russian assistance to France. To preserve the peace, France would have had to play policeman all over Europe. Not only had it lost the stomach and the strength for so interventionist a policy but, had it attempted one, it would have found itself alone, abandoned by both America and Great Britain.

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The most dangerous weakness of the Versailles settlement, however, was psychological. The world order created by the Congress of Vienna had been cemented by the principle of conservative unity that had meshed with the requirements of the balance of power; in effect, the powers that were most needed to maintain the settlement also considered it just. The Versailles settlement was stillborn because the values it extolled clashed with the incentives needed to enforce it: the majority of the states required to defend the agreement considered it unjust in one way or another.

The paradox of the First World War was that it had been fought to curb German power and looming predominance, and that it had aroused public opinion to a pitch which prevented the establishment of a conciliatory peace. Yet, in the end, Wilsonian principles inhibited a peace which curbed Germany's power and there was no shared sense of justice. The price for conducting foreign policy on the basis of abstract principles is the impossibility of distinguishing among individual cases. Since the leaders at Versailles were not willing to reduce German power by either the implicit rights of victory or the calculations of the balance of power, they were obliged to justify German disarmament as the first installment of a general plan of disarmament, and reparations as an expiation of guilt for the war itself.

In justifying German disarmament in this way, the Allies undermined the psychological readiness that was required to sustain their agreement. From the first, Germany could, and did, claim that it was being discriminated against, and demanded that it either be permitted to rearm or that other nations disarm to its level. In the process, the disarmament provisions of the Treaty of Versailles ended up demoralizing the victors. At every disarmament conference, Germany would seize the moral high ground, in which it was usually supported by Great Britain. But if France did grant Germany equality in rearmament, the possibility of safeguarding the independence of the nations of Eastern Europe would vanish. The disarmament clauses were therefore bound to lead to either the disarmament of France or the rearmament of Germany. In neither case would France be strong enough to defend Eastern Europe or, in the long run, even itself.

Similarly, the prohibition against the union of Austria and Germany violated the principle of self-determination, as did the presence of a large German minority in Czechoslovakia and, to a lesser extent, of a German minority in Poland. German irredentism was thus supported by the organizing principle of the Treaty of Versailles, compounding the guilty conscience of the democracies.

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The gravest psychological blight on the Treaty was Article 231, the so-called War Guilt clause. It stated that Germany was solely responsible for the outbreak of World War I, and delivered a severe moral censure. Most of the punitive measures against Germany in the Treaty—economic, military, and political—were based on the assertion that the whole conflagration had been entirely Germany's fault.

Eighteenth-century peacemakers would have regarded "war guilt clauses" as absurd. For them, wars were amoral inevitabilities caused by clashing interests. In the treaties that concluded eighteenth-century wars, the losers paid a price without its being justified on moral grounds. But for Wilson and the peacemakers at Versailles, the cause of the war of 1914–18 had to be ascribed to some evil which had to be punished.

When the hatreds had diminished, however, astute observers began to see that responsibility for the outbreak of the war was far more complicated. To be sure, Germany bore a heavy responsibility, but was it fair to single out Germany for punitive measures? Was Article 231 really proper? Once this question began being asked, especially in Great Britain in the 1920s, the will to enforce the punitive measures against Germany contained in the Treaty began to waver. The peacemakers, assailed by their own consciences, wondered if what they had wrought was fair, and this fostered a lack of resolve in maintaining the Treaty. Germany, of course, was irresponsible on this issue. In German public discourse, Article 231 became known as the "War Guilt Lie." The physical difficulty of establishing a balance of power was matched by the psychological difficulty of creating a moral equilibrium.

Thus, the framers of the Versailles settlement achieved the precise opposite of what they had set out to do. They had tried to weaken Germany physically but instead strengthened it geopolitically. From a long-term point of view, Germany was in a far better position to dominate Europe after Versailles than it had been before the war. As soon as Germany threw off the shackles of disarmament, which was just a matter of time, it was bound to emerge more powerful than ever. Harold Nicolson summed it up: "We came to Paris confident that the new order was about to be established; we left it convinced that the new order had merely fouled the old."³⁴



CHAPTER TEN

The Dilemmas of the Victors

The policing of the Versailles agreement was based on two general concepts which canceled each other out. The first failed because it was too sweeping, the second, because it was too grudging. The concept of collective security was so general as to prove inapplicable to circumstances most likely to disturb the peace; the informal Franco-English cooperation which replaced it was far too tenuous and ambivalent to resist major German challenges. And before five years had elapsed, the two powers vanquished in the war came together at Rapallo. The growing cooperation between Germany and the Soviet Union was a crucial blow to the Versailles system, something the democracies were too demoralized to grasp immediately.

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At the end of the First World War, the age-old debate about the relative roles of morality and interest in international affairs seemed to have been resolved in favor of the dominance of law and ethics. Under the shock of the cataclysm, many hoped for a better world as free as possible from the kind of *Realpolitik* which, in their view, had decimated the youth of a generation. America emerged as the catalyst of this process even as it was withdrawing into isolationism. Wilson's legacy was that Europe embarked on the Wilsonian course of trying to preserve stability via collective security rather than the traditional European approach of alliances and the balance of power, despite the absence of America.

In subsequent American usage, alliances in which America participated (such as NATO) were generally described as instruments of collective security. This is not, however, how the term was originally conceived, for in their essence, the concepts of collective security and of alliances are diametrically opposed. Traditional alliances were directed against specific threats and defined precise obligations for specific groups of countries linked by shared national interests or mutual security concerns. Collective security defines no particular threat, guarantees no individual nation, and discriminates against none. It is theoretically designed to resist *any* threat to the peace, by whoever might pose it and against whomever it might be directed. Alliances always presume a specific potential adversary; collective security defends international law in the abstract, which it seeks to sustain in much the same way that a judicial system upholds a domestic criminal code. It no more assumes a particular culprit than does domestic law. In an alliance, the *casus belli* is an attack on the interests or the security of its members. The *casus belli* of collective security is the violation of the principle of "peaceful" settlement of disputes in which all peoples of the world are assumed to have a common interest. Therefore, force has to be assembled on a case-by-case basis from a shifting group of nations with a mutual interest in "peacekeeping."

The purpose of an alliance is to produce an obligation more predictable and precise than an analysis of national interest. Collective security works in the exact opposite way. It leaves the application of its principles to the interpretation of particular circumstances when they arise, unintentionally putting a large premium on the mood of the moment and, hence, on national self-will.

Collective security contributes to security only if all nations—or at least all nations relevant to collective defense—share nearly identical views about the nature of the challenge and are prepared to use force or apply sanctions on the "merits" of the case, regardless of the specific national interest they may have in the issues at hand. Only if these conditions are

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fulfilled can a world organization devise sanctions or act as an arbiter of international affairs. This was how Wilson had perceived the role of collective security as the end of the war approached in September 1918:

National purposes have fallen more and more into the background and the common purpose of enlightened mankind has taken their place. The counsels of plain men have become on all hands more simple and straightforward and more unified than the counsels of sophisticated men of affairs, who still retain the impression that they are playing a game of power and playing for high stakes.¹

The fundamental difference between the Wilsonian and the European interpretations of the causes of international conflict is reflected in these words. European-style diplomacy presumes that national interests have a tendency to clash, and views diplomacy as the means for reconciling them; Wilson, on the other hand, considered international discord the result of "clouded thinking," not an expression of a genuine clash of interests. In the practice of *Realpolitik*, statesmen shoulder the task of relating particular interests to general ones through a balance of incentives and penalties. In the Wilsonian view, statesmen are required to apply universal principles to specific cases. Moreover, statesmen are generally treated as the causes of conflict, because they are believed to distort man's natural bent toward harmony with abstruse and selfish calculations.

The conduct of most statesmen at Versailles belied Wilsonian expectations. Without exception, they stressed their national interests, leaving the defense of the common purposes to Wilson, whose country in fact had no national interest (in the European sense) in the territorial issues of the settlement. It is in the nature of prophets to redouble their efforts, not to abandon them, in the face of a recalcitrant reality. The obstacles Wilson encountered at Versailles raised no doubt in his mind about the feasibility of his new dispensation. On the contrary, they fortified his faith in its necessity. And he was confident that the League and the weight of world opinion would correct the many provisions of the Treaty that departed from his principles.

Indeed, the power of Wilson's ideals was demonstrated by their impact on Great Britain, the motherland of the balance-of-power policy. The official British commentary on the League Covenant declared that "the ultimate and most effective sanction must be the public opinion of the civilised world."² Or, as Lord Cecil argued before the House of Commons, "what we rely upon is public opinion . . . and if we are wrong about it, then the whole thing is wrong."³

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It seems improbable that the scions of the policy of Pitt, Canning, Palmerston, and Disraeli would have come to such conclusions on their own. At first they went along with Wilson's policy in order to ensure American support in the war. As time went on, Wilsonian principles succeeded in capturing British public opinion. By the 1920s and 1930s, Great Britain's defense of collective security was no longer tactical. Wilsonianism had made a genuine convert.

In the end, collective security fell prey to the weakness of its central premise—that all nations have the same interest in resisting a particular act of aggression and are prepared to run identical risks in opposing it. Experience has shown these assumptions to be false. No act of aggression involving a major power has ever been defeated by applying the principle of collective security. Either the world community has refused to assess the act as one which constituted aggression, or it has disagreed over the appropriate sanctions. And when sanctions were applied, they inevitably reflected the lowest common denominator, often proving so ineffectual that they did more harm than good.

At the time of the Japanese conquest of Manchuria in 1932, the League had no machinery for sanctions. It remedied this defect, but faced with Italian aggression against Abyssinia, it voted for sanctions while stopping short of imposing a cutoff of oil with the slogan "All sanctions short of war." When Austria was forcibly united with Germany and Czechoslovakia's freedom was extinguished, there was no League reaction at all. The last act of the League of Nations, which no longer contained Germany, Japan, or Italy, was to expel the Soviet Union after it attacked Finland in 1939. It had no effect on Soviet actions.

During the Cold War, the United Nations proved equally ineffective in every case involving Great Power aggression, due to either the communist veto in the Security Council or the reluctance on the part of smaller countries to run risks on behalf of issues they felt did not concern them. The United Nations was ineffective or at the sidelines during the Berlin crises and during the Soviet interventions in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Afghanistan. It was irrelevant in the Cuban Missile Crisis until the two superpowers agreed to settle. America was able to invoke the authority of the United Nations against North Korean aggression in 1950 only because the Soviet representative was boycotting the Security Council and the General Assembly was still dominated by countries eager to enlist America against the threat of Soviet aggression in Europe. The United Nations did provide a convenient meeting place for diplomats and a useful forum for the exchange of ideas. It also performed important technical functions. But it failed to fulfill the underlying premise of collec-

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tive security—the prevention of war and collective resistance to aggression.

This has been true of the United Nations even in the post–Cold War period. In the Gulf War of 1991, it did indeed ratify American actions, but resistance to Iraqi aggression was hardly an application of the doctrine of collective security. Not waiting for an international consensus, the United States had unilaterally dispatched a large expeditionary force. Other nations could gain influence over America's actions only by joining what was in effect an American enterprise; they could not avoid the risks of conflict by vetoing it. Additionally, domestic upheavals in the Soviet Union and China gave the permanent members of the UN Security Council an incentive to maintain America's goodwill. In the Gulf War, collective security was invoked as a justification of American leadership, not as a substitute for it.

Of course, these lessons had not yet been learned in the innocent days when the concept of collective security was first being introduced into diplomacy. The post-Versailles statesmen had half-convinced themselves that armaments were the cause of tensions, not the result of them, and half-believed that if goodwill replaced the suspiciousness of traditional diplomacy, international conflict might be eradicated. Despite having been emotionally drained by the war, the European leaders should have realized that a general doctrine of collective security could never work, even if it overcame all the other hurdles it faced, as long as it excluded three of the most powerful nations of the world: the United States, Germany, and the Soviet Union. For the United States had refused to join the League, Germany was barred from it, and the Soviet Union, which was treated as a pariah, disdained it.

The country suffering most grievously under the postwar order was “victorious” France. French leaders knew that the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles would not keep Germany permanently weak. After the last European war—the Crimean War of 1854–56—the victors, Great Britain and France, had managed to maintain the military provisions for less than twenty years. In the wake of the Napoleonic Wars, France became a full-fledged member of the European Concert after only three years. After Versailles, France's decline vis-à-vis Germany grew progressively more evident, even as it seemed to dominate Europe militarily. France's victorious Commander-in-Chief, Marshal Ferdinand Foch, was right when he said about the Treaty of Versailles: “This is not peace; it is an Armistice for twenty years.”⁴

By 1924, the staff of the British ground forces had reached the same conclusion when it predicted that Germany would again be going to war

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with Great Britain over issues that would be “simply a repetition of the conditions which brought us into the late war.”⁵ The restraints imposed by the Treaty of Versailles, it argued, would delay German rearmament by at most nine months once Germany felt strong enough politically to throw off the shackles of Versailles—which the general staff presciently assessed as being probable within ten years. Concurring with the analysis of the French, the British general staff also predicted that France would be helpless unless, in the meantime, it made a military alliance with “first-class powers.”

Yet the only first-class power available was Great Britain, whose political leaders did not accept the views of their military advisers. Instead, their policy was based on the mistaken belief that France was already too powerful and that the last thing it needed was a British alliance. Great Britain’s leaders considered demoralized France to be the potentially dominant power and in need of being balanced, while revisionist Germany was perceived as the aggrieved party in need of conciliation. Both assumptions—that France was militarily dominant and that Germany had been harshly treated—were correct in the short term; but as premises of British policy, they were disastrous in the long term. Statesmen stand or fall on their perceptions of trends. And British postwar leaders failed to perceive the long-range dangers before them.

France desperately wanted a military alliance with Great Britain, to replace the guarantee that had lapsed when the United States Senate refused to ratify the Versailles Treaty. Never having made a military alliance with the country they considered to be the strongest in Europe, British leaders now perceived France as rekindling its historic threat to dominate the Continent. In 1924, the Central Department of the British Foreign Office described the French occupation of the Rhineland as a “jumping-off point for an incursion into Central Europe,”⁶ a judgment totally at variance with French psychology of the period. Even more inane, the Foreign Office memorandum treated the occupation of the Rhineland as an encirclement of Belgium, creating “a direct menace to the Scheldt and Zuider Zee, and therefore an indirect menace to this country.”⁷ Not to be outdone in generating anti-French suspicions, the Admiralty weighed in with an argument straight from the wars of the Spanish Succession or the Napoleonic Wars: that the Rhineland dominated Dutch and Belgian ports whose control would severely impair the British Royal Navy’s planning in the event of war with France.⁸

There was no hope whatsoever of maintaining a balance of power in Europe so long as Great Britain considered the primary threat to be a country whose nearly panicky foreign policy was geared to fending off

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another German assault. Indeed, in a kind of historic reflex, many in Great Britain began to look to Germany to balance France. For example, the British Ambassador in Berlin, Viscount d'Abernon, reported that it was in England's interest to maintain Germany as a counterweight to France. "As long as Germany is a coherent whole, there is more or less a balance of power in Europe," he wrote in 1923. If Germany disintegrated, France would be "in undisputed military and political control, based upon her army and her military alliances."⁹ This was true enough but hardly the likely scenario that British diplomacy would confront in the decades ahead.

Great Britain was right to argue, as it always had, that, after victory, the reconstruction of international order required the return of the erstwhile enemy to the community of nations. But appeasing Germany's grievances would not restore stability as long as the balance of power continued to shift inexorably in Germany's direction. France and Great Britain, whose unity was essential to maintaining the last shred of the European balance of power, were glaring at each other in frustration and incomprehension, while the real threats to the equilibrium—Germany and the Soviet Union—stood at the sidelines in sullen resentment. Great Britain vastly exaggerated France's strength; France vastly overestimated its ability to use the Treaty of Versailles to compensate for its growing inferiority vis-à-vis Germany. Great Britain's fear of possible French hegemony on the Continent was absurd; France's belief that it could conduct foreign policy on the basis of keeping Germany prostrate was delusion tinged by despair.

Perhaps the most important reason for Great Britain's rejection of a French alliance was that its leaders did not in their hearts consider the Versailles Treaty just, least of all the settlement of Eastern Europe, and feared that an alliance with France, which had pacts with the Eastern European countries, might draw them into a conflict over the wrong issues and in defense of the wrong countries. Lloyd George expressed the conventional wisdom of that time:

The British people . . . would not be ready to be involved in quarrels which might arise regarding Poland or Danzig or Upper Silesia. . . . The British people felt that the populations of that quarter of Europe were unstable and excitable; they might start fighting at any time and the rights and wrongs of the dispute might be very hard to disentangle.¹⁰

Holding attitudes such as these, British leaders used discussions about the possibility of a French alliance primarily as a tactical device to ease French pressures on Germany, not as a serious contribution to international security.

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France thus continued its hopeless quest of keeping Germany weak; Great Britain sought to devise security arrangements to calm French fears without incurring a British commitment. It was a circle never to be squared, for Great Britain could not bring itself to extend to France the one assurance that might have brought about a calmer and more conciliatory French foreign policy toward Germany—a full military alliance.

Realizing in 1922 that the British Parliament would never countenance a formal military commitment, French Prime Minister Briand reverted to the precedent of the Entente Cordiale of 1904—Anglo-French diplomatic cooperation without military provisions. But in 1904, Great Britain had felt threatened by Germany's naval program and by its constant bullying. By the 1920s, it feared Germany less than France, whose conduct it mistakenly attributed to arrogance rather than to panic. Though Great Britain grudgingly acceded to Briand's proposal, its real motive in doing so was reflected in a cynical Cabinet note which defended the French alliance as a means of strengthening Great Britain's relations with Germany:

Germany is to us the most important country in Europe not only on account of our trade with her, but also because she is the key to the situation in Russia. By helping Germany we might under existing conditions expose ourselves to the charge of deserting France; but if France was our ally no such charge could be made.¹¹

Whether it was because French President Alexandre Millerand sensed the British evasion or simply found the arrangement too amorphous, he rejected Briand's scheme, which led to the Prime Minister's resignation.

Frustrated in its attempt to elicit a traditional British alliance, France next attempted to achieve the same result through the League of Nations by elaborating a precise definition of aggression. This would then be turned into a precise obligation within the framework of the League of Nations—thereby transforming the League into a global alliance. In September 1923, at French and British urging, the League Council devised a universal treaty of mutual assistance. In the event of conflict, the Council would be empowered to designate which country was the aggressor and which the victim. Every League member would then be obliged to assist the victim, by force if necessary, on the continent on which that signatory was situated (this clarification was added to avoid incurring a League obligation to help in colonial conflicts). Since obligations of the doctrine of collective security are meant to derive from general causes rather than from national interests, the treaty stipulated that, to be eligible for assistance, the victim must have previously signed a disarmament

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agreement approved by the League, and have been reducing its armed forces according to an agreed schedule.

Since the victim is usually the weaker side, the League's Treaty of Mutual Assistance was in fact providing incentives for aggression by asking the more vulnerable side to compound its difficulties. There was something absurd about the proposition that the international order would henceforth be defended on behalf of excellent disarmers rather than of vital national interests. Moreover, since reduction schedules of a general disarmament treaty would take years to negotiate, the universal Treaty of Mutual Assistance was creating a vast vacuum. With the League obligation to resist being placed into a distant and nebulous future, France and any other threatened country would have to face their perils alone.

Despite its escape clauses, the Treaty failed to command support. The United States and the Soviet Union refused to consider it. Germany's opinion was never solicited. Once it became clear that the draft treaty would have obliged Great Britain, with colonies on every continent, to assist any victim of aggression anywhere, Labour Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald also felt obliged to report that Great Britain could not accept the Treaty, even though it had helped to draft it.

By now, France's quest for security had turned obsessive. Far from accepting the futility of its effort, it refused to abandon its search for criteria compatible with collective security, especially since the British government under Ramsay MacDonald so strongly supported collective security and disarmament—the so-called progressive causes represented by the League. Finally, MacDonald and the new French Prime Minister, Edouard Herriot, came up with a variation of the previous proposal. The Geneva Protocol of 1924 required League arbitration for all international conflicts and established three criteria for a universal obligation to assist victims of aggression: the aggressor's refusal to permit the Council to settle the dispute by conciliation; the aggressor's failure to submit the issue to judicial settlement or arbitration; and, of course, the victim's membership in a scheme for general disarmament. Each signatory was obliged to assist the victim by all available means against the aggressor so defined.¹²

The Geneva Protocol, however, failed as well for the same reason as the Treaty of Mutual Assistance and all the other schemes for collective security in the 1920s had failed. It went too far for Great Britain and not nearly far enough for France. Great Britain had proposed it in order to draw France into disarmament, not to generate an additional defense obligation. France had pursued the Protocol primarily as an obligation of

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mutual assistance—having only a secondary interest, if that, in disarmament. To underscore the futility of this exercise, the United States announced that it would not honor the Geneva Protocol or tolerate any interference with U.S. trade under its provisions. When the chairman of the British Imperial Defense Staff warned that the Protocol would dangerously overextend British forces, the Cabinet withdrew it in early 1925.

It was a preposterous state of affairs. Resisting aggression had been made dependent on the prior disarmament of the victim. Geopolitical considerations and the strategic importance of the region, reasons for which nations had been going to war for centuries, were being deprived of legitimacy. According to this approach, Great Britain would defend Belgium because it had disarmed, not because it was strategically vital. After months of negotiations, the democracies were advancing neither disarmament nor security. The tendency of collective security to transform aggression into an abstract, legal problem and its refusal to consider any specific threat or commitment had a demoralizing rather than a reassuring effect.

Despite the passionate lip service it paid to the concept, Great Britain clearly considered the obligations of collective security less binding than those of traditional alliances. For the Cabinet proved to be quite fertile in inventing various formulae for collective security while it adamantly rejected a formal alliance with France until the very eve of the war, a decade and a half later. Surely it would not have made such a distinction unless it viewed the obligations of collective security as less likely to have to be implemented or easier to evade than those of alliances.

The wisest course for the Allies would have been to relieve Germany voluntarily of the most onerous provisions of Versailles and to forge a firm Franco-British alliance. This is what Winston Churchill had in mind when he advocated an alliance with France “if (and only if) she entirely alters her treatment of Germany and loyally accepts a British policy of help and friendship towards Germany.”¹³ Such a policy was never pursued with any consistency, however. French leaders were too afraid of both Germany and their own public opinion, which was deeply hostile to Germany, and British leaders were too suspicious of French designs.

The disarmament provisions of the Treaty of Versailles widened the Anglo-French split. Ironically, they eased Germany’s road toward military parity, which, given the weakness of Eastern Europe, would spell geopolitical superiority in the long run. For one thing, the Allies had compounded discrimination with incompetence by neglecting to set up any

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verification machinery for the disarmament provisions. In a letter to Colonel House in 1919, André Tardieu, a principal French negotiator at Versailles, predicted that the failure to set up verification machinery would cripple the disarmament clauses of the Treaty:

... a weak instrument is being drawn up, dangerous and absurd. . . . Will the League say to Germany, 'Prove that my information is false,' or even, 'We wish to verify.' But then it is claiming a right of supervision, and Germany will reply: 'By what right?'

That is what Germany will reply and she will be justified in so replying, if she is not forced by the Treaty to recognize the right of verification.¹⁴

In the innocent days before the study of arms control had become an academic subject, no one thought it odd to be asking Germany to verify its own disarmament. To be sure, an Inter-Allied Military Control Commission had been set up. But it had no independent right of inspection; it could only ask the German government for information about German violations—not exactly a foolproof procedure. The Commission was disbanded in 1926, leaving the verification of German compliance to Allied intelligence services. No wonder the disarmament provisions were being grossly violated long before Hitler refused to carry them out.

On the political level, German leaders skillfully insisted on the general disarmament promised in the Versailles Treaty, of which their own disarmament was to have been the first stage. With the passage of time, they managed to obtain British support for this proposition, and used it as well to justify the failure to fulfill other provisions of the Treaty. To put pressure on France, Great Britain announced dramatic reductions of its own ground forces (on which it had never relied for security), though not of its navy (on which, of course, it did). France's security, on the other hand, depended totally on its standing army's being significantly larger than Germany's because the industrial potential of Germany and its population were so superior. The pressure to alter this balance—through either German rearmament or French disarmament—had the practical consequence of reversing the results of the war. By the time Hitler came to power, it was already quite apparent that the disarmament provisions of the Treaty would soon be in tatters, making Germany's geopolitical advantage apparent.

Reparations were another element of the disunity between France and Great Britain. Until the Versailles Treaty, it had been axiomatic that the vanquished paid reparations. After the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, Ger-

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many did not feel compelled to invoke any principle other than its victory for the indemnity it imposed on France; nor did it do so in 1918 with respect to the staggering reparations bill it presented to Russia in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

Yet, in the new world order of Versailles, the Allies had come to believe that reparations required a moral justification. They found it in Article 231, or the War Guilt Clause, described in the previous chapter. The clause was furiously attacked in Germany, and eliminated the already low incentive there to cooperate with the peace settlement.

One of the astonishing aspects of the Versailles Treaty was that its drafters included so invidious and precise a clause on war guilt without specifying the total amount to be paid in reparations. The determination of the reparations figure had been left to future expert commissions because the amount which the Allies had led their publics to expect was so exorbitant, it could never have survived Wilson's scrutiny or the analysis of serious financial experts.

In this manner, reparations, like disarmament, became a weapon of the German revisionists; experts increasingly doubted not only the morality but the feasibility of the claims. John Maynard Keynes' *Treatise on the Economic Consequences of the Peace* was a prime example.¹⁵ Finally, the bargaining position of the victor always diminishes with time. Whatever is not exacted during the shock of defeat becomes increasingly difficult to attain later—a lesson America had to learn with respect to Iraq at the end of the 1991 Gulf War.

It was not until 1921—two years after the signing of the Versailles Treaty—that a figure for reparations was finally established. It was absurdly high: 132 billion Goldmarks (some \$40 billion, which amounts to approximately \$323 billion in present value), a sum which would have necessitated German payments for the rest of the century. Predictably, Germany claimed insolvency; even if the international financial system could have accommodated such a vast transfer of resources, no democratic German government could have survived agreeing to it.

In the summer of 1921, Germany paid the first installment of the reparations bill, transferring 1 billion Marks (\$250 million). But it did so by printing paper Marks and selling them for foreign currency on the open market—in other words, by inflating its currency to the point where no significant transfer of resources was taking place. At the end of 1922, Germany proposed a four-year moratorium on reparations.

The demoralization of the Versailles international order and of France, its leading European pillar, was now far advanced. No enforcement machinery existed for reparations, and no verification machinery for disar-

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advocated the policy of “no war, no peace.”¹⁹ Yet the weaker side has the option of playing for time only against an adversary that considers negotiations as operating according to their own internal logic—an illusion to which the United States has been especially subject. The Germans had no such views. When Trotsky returned with instructions proclaiming a policy of neither peace nor war and announced unilaterally that the war was over, the Germans resumed military operations. Faced with total defeat, Lenin and his colleagues accepted Hoffmann’s terms and signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, accepting coexistence with imperial Germany.

The principle of coexistence would be invoked time and again over the next sixty years by the Soviets, with the reactions of the protagonists remaining constant: the democracies would each time hail the Soviet proclamation of peaceful coexistence as a sign of conversion to a permanent policy of peace. Yet, for their part, communists always justified periods of peaceful coexistence on the ground that the relation of forces was not conducive to confrontation. The obvious corollary was that, as that relationship changed, so would the Bolsheviks’ devotion to peaceful coexistence. According to Lenin, it was reality which dictated coexistence with the capitalist foe:

By concluding a separate peace, we are freeing ourselves in the largest measure possible *at the present moment* from both warring imperialist groups; by utilizing their mutual enmity we utilize the war, which makes a bargain between them against us difficult.²⁰

The high point of that policy was, of course, the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939. Potential inconsistencies were easily rationalized. “We are convinced,” said a communist statement, “that the most consistent socialist policy can be reconciled with the sternest realism and most level-headed practicality.”²¹

In 1920, Soviet policy took the final step in acknowledging the need for a more traditional policy toward the West when Foreign Minister Georgi Chicherin said:

There may be differences of opinion as to the duration of the capitalist system, but at present the capitalist system exists, so that a *modus vivendi* must be found. . . .²²

Despite the revolutionary rhetoric, in the end national interest emerged as a dominant Soviet goal, becoming elevated into a socialist verity just as it had stood for so long at the core of the policies of the capitalist

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states. Survival was now the immediate goal and coexistence the tactic.

Yet the socialist state soon confronted another military threat when, in April 1920, it was attacked by Poland. Polish forces reached the neighborhood of Kiev before they were defeated. When the Red Army, in a counterthrust, approached Warsaw, the Western Allies intervened, demanding an end to the offensive and peace. British Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon proposed a dividing line between Poland and Russia which the Soviets were prepared to accept. Poland, however, refused, so the final settlement was made along the prewar military lines, far to the east of what Curzon had proposed.

Poland thus managed to sharpen the antagonism of its two historic enemies: Germany, from which it had acquired Upper Silesia and the Polish corridor; and the Soviet Union, from which it had seized the territory east of what became known as the Curzon Line. When the smoke cleared, the Soviet Union found itself free at last of wars and revolution, yet having paid for it with the loss of most of the tsars' conquests in the Baltic, Finland, Poland, Bessarabia, and along the Turkish frontier. By 1923, Moscow had reclaimed control of Ukraine and Georgia, which had seceded from the Russian Empire during the turmoil—an event not forgotten by many contemporary Russian leaders.

To restore domestic control, the Soviet Union had to make a pragmatic compromise between revolutionary crusades and *Realpolitik*, between the proclamation of world revolution and the practice of peaceful coexistence. Though it opted to defer world revolution, the Soviet Union was far from a supporter of the existing order. It saw in peace an opportunity to pit the capitalists against each other. Its particular target was Germany, which had always played a major role in Soviet thought and in Russian sentiment. In December 1920, Lenin described the Soviet strategy:

Our existence depends, first, on the existence of a radical split in the camp of the imperialist powers and, secondly, on the fact that the victory of the Entente and the Versailles peace have thrown the vast majority of the German nation into a position where they cannot live. . . . The German bourgeois government madly hates the Bolsheviks, but the interests of the international situation are pushing it towards peace with Soviet Russia against its own will.²³

Germany was coming to the same conclusion. During the Russo-Polish war, General Hans von Seeckt, the architect of the postwar German army, had written:

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The present Polish state is a creation of the Entente. It is to replace the pressure formerly exercised by Russia on the eastern frontier of Germany. The fight of Soviet Russia with Poland hits not only the latter, but above all the Entente—France and Britain. If Poland collapses the whole edifice of the Versailles Treaty totters. From this it follows clearly that Germany has no interest in rendering any help to Poland in her struggle with Russia.²⁴

Von Seeckt's view confirmed the fears aired by Lord Balfour a few years earlier (and quoted in the last chapter)—that Poland gave Russia and Germany a common enemy and obviated their balancing one another, as they had done throughout the nineteenth century. In the Versailles system, Germany faced not a Triple Entente but a multitude of states in various stages of disagreement with each other, all of them opposed as well by a Soviet Union with territorial grievances very similar to Germany's. It was only a matter of time before the two outcasts pooled their resentments.

The occasion arose in 1922 at Rapallo, an Italian seaside town near Genoa, and the site of Lloyd George's international conference. Ironically, it was made possible by the constant haggling over reparations that had been going on since the Treaty of Versailles, and that had intensified after the presentation of the Allied reparations bill and Germany's claim that it was unable to pay.

A major obstacle to the conference's success was that Lloyd George had neither the power nor the wisdom with which Secretary of State George Marshall would later steer his own reconstruction program to fruition. At the last moment, France refused to permit the subject of reparations to be included in the agenda, fearing, quite correctly, that France would be pressed to reduce the total amount. It seemed that France prized above all its unfulfillable, albeit internationally recognized, claim to some attainable compromise. Germany was looking for a moratorium on reparations. The Soviets were suspicious that the Allies might try to end the impasse by linking tsarist debts to German reparations, whereby the Soviet Union would be asked to acknowledge the tsars' debts and to reimburse itself from German reparations. Article 116 of the Treaty of Versailles had left open precisely this possibility.

The Soviet government had no more intention of acknowledging tsarist debts than it did of recognizing British and French financial claims. Nor was it anxious to add Germany to its already extensive list of adversaries by joining the reparations merry-go-round. In order to prevent the Genoa Conference from resolving this issue to the Soviets' disadvantage, Moscow proposed in advance of the conference that the two pariahs establish

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diplomatic relations and mutually renounce all claims against each other. Not wanting to be the first European country to establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and thereby possibly jeopardize its chances of obtaining relief from the reparations bill, Germany evaded the proposition. The proposal remained on the table until events at Genoa forced a change of attitude.

Soviet Foreign Minister Georgi Chicherin, an aristocrat by birth who became a passionate believer in the Bolshevik cause, relished the opportunity provided by Genoa to put revolutionary convictions into the service of *Realpolitik*. He proclaimed “peaceful coexistence” in terms which placed practical cooperation above the requirements of ideology:

... the Russian delegation recognize that in the present period of history, which permits the parallel existence of the old social order and of the new order now being born, economic collaboration between the States representing these two systems of property is imperatively necessary for the general economic reconstruction.²⁵

At the same time, Chicherin coupled the appeal for cooperation with proposals well designed to compound the confusion of the democracies. He spelled out an agenda so sweeping that it could neither be implemented nor ignored by democratic governments—a tactic that would remain a constant of Soviet diplomacy. This agenda included the abolition of weapons of mass destruction, a world economic conference, and international control of all waterways. The purpose was to mobilize Western public opinion and to give Moscow a reputation for peaceful internationalism which would make it difficult for the democracies to organize the anticommunist crusade which was the Kremlin’s nightmare.

Chicherin found himself an outsider at Genoa, though no more so than the members of the German delegation. The Western Allies remained oblivious to the temptations they were creating for both Germany and the Soviet Union by pretending that these two most powerful countries on the Continent could simply be ignored. Three requests by the German Chancellor and his Foreign Minister for a meeting with Lloyd George were rebuffed. Simultaneously, France proposed holding private consultations with Great Britain and the Soviet Union from which Germany would be excluded. The purpose of these meetings was to resurrect the shopworn scheme of trading tsarist debts for German reparations—a proposal which even less suspicious diplomats than the Soviets would have construed as a trap to undermine the prospect of improved German-Soviet relations.

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By the end of the first week of the conference, both Germany and the Soviet Union were worried that they would be pitted against each other. When one of Chicherin's aides telephoned the German delegation at the conspiratorial hour of one-fifteen in the morning on April 16, 1922, proposing a meeting later that day at Rapallo, the Germans jumped at the invitation. They were anxious to end their isolation as much as the Soviets wanted to avoid the dubious privilege of becoming German creditors. The two foreign ministers lost little time drafting an agreement in which Germany and the Soviet Union established full diplomatic relations, renounced claims against each other, and granted each other Most Favored Nation status. Lloyd George, upon receiving belated intelligence of the meeting, frantically tried to reach the German delegation to invite them to the interview he had repeatedly rejected. The message reached Rathenau, the German negotiator, as he was about to leave for the signing of the Soviet-German agreement. He hesitated, then muttered: "*Le vin est tiré; il faut le boire*" (The wine is drawn; it must be drunk).²⁶

Within a year, Germany and the Soviet Union were negotiating secret agreements for military and economic cooperation. Though Rapallo later came to be a symbol of the dangers of Soviet-German rapprochement, it was in fact one of those fateful accidents which seem inevitable only in retrospect: accidental in the sense that neither side planned for it to happen when it did; inevitable because the stage for it had been set by the Western Allies' ostracism of the two largest Continental countries, by their creation of a belt of weak states between them hostile to each, and by their dismemberment of both Germany and the Soviet Union. All of this created the maximum incentive for Germany and the Soviet Union to overcome their ideological hostility and to cooperate in undermining Versailles.

Rapallo by itself did not have that consequence; it symbolized, however, a common overriding interest which continued to draw together Soviet and German leaders for the remainder of the interwar period. George Kennan has ascribed this agreement in part to Soviet persistence, in part to Western disunity and complacency.²⁷ Clearly, the Western democracies were shortsighted and fatuous. But once they had made the error of drafting the Treaty of Versailles, only extremely forbidding choices were left to them. In the long run, Soviet-German cooperation could have been forestalled only by a British and French deal with one or the other of them. But the minimum price of such a deal with Germany would have been the rectification of the Polish border and, almost certainly, the abolition of the Polish Corridor. In such a Europe, France could only have avoided German domination by a firm alliance with Great

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Britain, which, of course, the British refused to consider. Similarly, the practical implication of any deal with the Soviet Union would have been the restoration of the Curzon Line, which Poland would have rejected and France would not consider. The democracies were not prepared to pay either price, or even to admit to the dilemma of how to defend the Versailles settlement without allowing either Germany or the Soviet Union a significant role.

This being the case, there was always the possibility that the two Continental giants might opt to partition Eastern Europe between themselves rather than join a coalition directed against the other. Thus it remained to Hitler and Stalin, unfettered by the past and driven by their lusts for power, to blow away the house of cards assembled by the well-meaning, peace-loving, and essentially timid statesmen of the interwar period.



CHAPTER ELEVEN

Stresemann and the Re-emergence of the Vanquished

All the principles of balance-of-power diplomacy as they had been practiced in Europe since William III would have commanded that Great Britain and France form an anti-German alliance to rein in the revisionist impulses of their restless neighbor. Ultimately, Great Britain and France were each weaker than Germany—even a defeated Germany—and could hope to counterbalance it only in coalition. But that coalition was never formed. Great Britain abandoned the single-minded pursuit of equilibrium that had distinguished its policy for three centuries. It oscillated between a superficial application of the balance of power, which it aimed at France, and a growing devotion to the new principle of collective security, which it recoiled from enforcing. France pursued a foreign pol-

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icy of desperation, alternating between using the Treaty of Versailles to delay German recovery and making halfhearted attempts to reconcile its ominous neighbor. Thus it happened that the statesman destined to do the most to shape the diplomatic landscape of the 1920s—Gustav Stresemann—came not from one of the victorious powers, but from defeated Germany.

But before the emergence of Stresemann, there was to be one more doomed effort by France to assure its security by its own efforts. At the end of 1922, with reparations elusive, disarmament controversial, meaningful British security guarantees unavailable, and German-Soviet rapprochement taking place, France found itself at the end of its emotional tether. Raymond Poincaré, its wartime President, took over as Prime Minister and decided in favor of unilateral enforcement of the Versailles reparations clause. In January 1923, French and Belgian troops occupied the Ruhr, Germany's industrial heartland, without consulting the other Allies.

Lloyd George would remark many years later: "If there had been no Rapallo, there would have been no Ruhr."¹ But it is also true that, had Great Britain been prepared to undertake a security guarantee, France would not have embarked on so desperate a step as occupying Germany's industrial heartland. And if France had been more ready to compromise on reparations (and on the disarmament issue), Great Britain might have been more forthcoming about forging an alliance—though how meaningful this alliance would have been, given the near-pacifist state of British public opinion, is another matter.

Ironically, France's sole unilateral military initiative demonstrated that it had in fact lost the capacity to act alone. France took control of the industries of the Ruhr region in order to exploit its steel and coal as a substitute for the reparations payments refused by the Germans. The German government ordered passive resistance and paid the coal and steel workers not to work. Though the policy bankrupted the German government—and sparked hyperinflation—it also prevented France from achieving its objective, thereby turning the occupation of the Ruhr into a massive French failure.

France was now thoroughly isolated. The United States expressed its displeasure by withdrawing its own army of occupation from the Rhineland. Great Britain glowered. Germany saw in this split between the Allies an opportunity for rapprochement with Great Britain. The heady atmosphere of national resistance to the French occupation even led some German leaders to resurrect the old project of an Anglo-German alliance—another instance of Germany's ingrained tendency to overestimate its options. The British Ambassador to Berlin, Lord d'Abernon, re-

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ported a conversation in which a leading German statesman resurrected some of the arguments of imperial Germany for a British alliance, declaring that “the position of 1914 is today reversed. It is quite clear that, as in 1914 England had fought Germany to withstand a military domination of Europe, so in the course of a few years she might fight France on the same grounds. The question is whether England would carry on that fight alone or whether she would have allies.”²

No responsible British leader thought of going so far as allying his country with Germany. Nevertheless, on August 11, 1923, Foreign Secretary Curzon and Foreign Office official Sir Eyre Crowe (author of the Crowe Memorandum of 1907) demanded that France reconsider its course in the Ruhr at the risk of losing Great Britain’s support in a future crisis with Germany. Poincaré was not impressed. He did not consider British support a favor to France but, rather, a requirement of the British national interest: “. . . in case a situation like in 1914 develops . . . England, in its own interest, will have to take the same measure as she took back then.”³

Poincaré turned out to be right about what Great Britain’s ultimate choice would be when faced with a situation similar to that of 1914. But he miscalculated as to the amount of time it would take Great Britain to realize it was indeed facing a similar crisis and that, in the interim, the rickety Versailles system would be in a shambles.

The occupation of the Ruhr ended in the fall of 1923. France did not succeed in generating a significant separatist movement in the Ruhr or even in the Rhineland, which, according to the terms of the Versailles Treaty, the German army was not permitted to enter and therefore could not go into to quell a separatist movement. The coal mined during the occupation barely paid for the costs of administering the territory. In the meantime, Germany was beset by insurrections developing in Saxony (from the political left) and in Bavaria (from the right). Inflation raged, threatening the ability of the German government to carry out any of its obligations. France’s insistence on full reparations had become unfulfillable as a result of French actions.

France and Great Britain had managed to checkmate each other: France, by insisting on weakening Germany by unilateral action and thereby forfeiting British support; Great Britain, by insisting on conciliation without considering its impact on the balance of power, thereby forfeiting French security. Even a disarmed Germany proved strong enough to thwart unilateral French actions—an augury of what lay ahead once Germany threw off the shackles of Versailles.

In the 1920s, whenever the democracies came to a dead end, they would invoke the League of Nations rather than face geopolitical realities.

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Even the British general staff fell into this trap. The very memorandum quoted in the previous chapter that had identified Germany as the principal threat and deemed France incapable of offering effective resistance, fell in with the prevailing orthodoxies: in its conclusions, the general staff had no better idea than “strengthening” the League (whatever that meant) and making “alliances *ad hoc* in such situations as . . . Germany running amok.”⁴

That recommendation was a nearly guaranteed prescription for failure. The League was too divided and, by the time Germany ran amok, it would be too late to organize alliances. Now, all Germany needed to ensure for itself an even more commanding long-term position than it had enjoyed before the war was a statesman sufficiently farsighted and patient to erode the discriminatory provisions of the Treaty of Versailles.

Such a leader emerged in 1923, when Gustav Stresemann became Foreign Minister and then Chancellor. His method for renewing Germany’s strength was the so-called policy of “fulfillment,” which amounted to a total reversal of previous German policy and the abandonment of the diplomatic guerrilla war his predecessors had waged against the provisions of the Versailles Treaty. “Fulfillment” relied on taking advantage of the obvious discomfort of Great Britain and France with the distance between their principles and the terms of Versailles. In return for a German effort to meet an eased reparations schedule, Stresemann strove to be released from the most onerous political and military provisions of Versailles by the Allies themselves.

A nation defeated in war and partially occupied by foreign troops has basically two choices. It can challenge the victor in the hope of making enforcement of the peace too painful; or it can cooperate with the victor while regaining strength for a later confrontation. Both strategies contain risks. After a military defeat, resistance invites a test of strength at the moment of maximum weakness; collaboration risks demoralization, because policies which appeal to the victor also tend to confuse the public opinion of the vanquished.

Before Stresemann, Germany had pursued the policy of resistance. Confrontational tactics had enabled it to prevail in the Ruhr crisis, but Germany’s grievances were hardly allayed by the French withdrawal from the Ruhr. Strangely enough, the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France was not controversial. But the redrawing of Germany’s borders, giving Poland large tracts of German territory, faced passionate nationalistic opposition. Finally, there were widespread pressures to throw off the restrictions on German military strength. And there was nearly unanimous consensus in Germany that the Allied reparations demands were outrageous.

Unlike the nationalists, Stresemann understood that no matter how

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unpopular the Versailles Treaty—indeed, regardless of how much he hated it himself—he needed British and, to some extent, French help to throw off its most onerous provisions. The Rapallo understanding had been a useful tactic to unnerve the Western democracies. But because the Soviet Union was too impoverished to aid German economic recovery and too isolated to lend support in most diplomatic confrontations, its real impact would be felt only after Germany became strong enough to challenge the Versailles settlement openly. Above all, regaining economic strength required foreign loans, something Germany would find difficult in an atmosphere of confrontation. Thus, Stresemann's policy of fulfillment reflected above all his realistic assessment of the requirements of German political and economic recovery: "Germany's basic military weakness," he wrote, "spells out the limits, the nature, and the methods of Germany's foreign policy."⁵

Though the fulfillment policy was grounded in realism, that commodity was in no more abundant supply in postwar Germany (especially in conservative circles) than it had been in the days when the conservatives' policies had so heavily contributed to the outbreak of World War I. Ending the war while German forces still stood on Allied soil had enabled those responsible for Germany's participation in the war to escape the consequences of their folly, and to saddle their more moderate successors with the blame. Lloyd George had foreseen this result when, on October 26, 1918, he commented to the War Cabinet about Germany's first peace overtures:

The Prime Minister said that industrial France had been devastated and Germany had escaped. At the first moment when we were in a position to put the lash on Germany's back she said "I give up." The question arose whether we ought not to continue lashing her as she had lashed France.⁶

His colleagues, however, thought Great Britain too exhausted to pursue such a course. Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain replied wearily that "vengeance was too expensive these days."⁷

As Lloyd George had predicted, the new Weimar Republic was from the outset besieged by nationalist agitators, even though it had been granted peace terms far more generous than what the military high command could have obtained. Germany's new democratic leaders received no credit for preserving their country's substance under the most difficult of circumstances. In politics, however, there are few rewards for mitigating damage because it is rarely possible to prove that worse consequences would in fact have occurred.

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Just as, two generations later, it took a conservative American president to engineer America's opening to China, only a leader with the impeccable conservative credentials of Stresemann could have even thought of basing German foreign policy on cooperating, however ambivalently, with the hated Versailles settlement. The son of a beer distributor, Stresemann was born in Berlin in 1878 and had built his political career by espousing the views of the conservative, pro-business bourgeois National Liberal Party. He became its leader in 1917. A man of great conviviality, he loved literature and history, and his conversations were frequently sprinkled with allusions to German classics. Nevertheless, his early views on foreign policy reflected the conventional conservative wisdom. For example, he was convinced that Germany had been lured into the war by a jealous Great Britain eager to preserve its own primacy.

As late as 1917, Stresemann had advocated vast conquests in both the East and the West, as well as the annexation of French and British colonial possessions in Asia and Africa. He had also supported unrestricted submarine warfare, the calamitous decision which brought America into the war. That the man who had called the Treaty of Versailles "the greatest swindle in history"⁸ should initiate a policy of fulfillment seems a strange turn of events only to those who believe that *Realpolitik* cannot teach the benefits of moderation.

Stresemann was the first postwar German leader—and the only democratic leader—who exploited the geopolitical advantages which the Versailles settlement conferred on Germany. He grasped the essentially brittle nature of the Franco-English relationship, and used it to widen the wedge between the two wartime allies. He cleverly exploited the British fear of a German collapse vis-à-vis both France and the Soviet Union. An official British analyst described Germany as a crucial bulwark against the spread of Bolshevism, using arguments which would show that "fulfillment" was making progress. The German government was "supported by [a] majority of National Assembly, is genuinely democratic, intends to carry out [the] Treaty of Peace to [the] best of its ability, and is deserving [of] frank support from Allies." If British support failed, Germany "will inevitably gravitate toward Bolshevism now and ultimately perhaps to absolute monarchism again."⁹

Great Britain's arguments in favor of assistance to Germany bear a certain resemblance to American propositions regarding aid to Russia in the Yeltsin period. In neither case was there an assessment of the consequences of the "success" of the policy being advocated. If fulfillment succeeded, Germany would become progressively stronger and be

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in a position to threaten the equilibrium of Europe. Similarly, if a post-Cold War international aid program to Russia achieves its objective, growing Russian strength will produce geopolitical consequences all around the vast periphery of the former Russian Empire.

In both cases, the advocates of conciliation had positive, even farsighted, goals. The Western democracies were wise to go along with Stresemann's fulfillment policy. But they erred in not tightening the bonds among themselves. The policy of fulfillment was bound to bring closer the day described by General von Seeckt: "We must regain our power, and as soon as we do, we will naturally take back everything we lost."¹⁰ America was farsighted in offering aid to post-Cold War Russia; but once Russia recovers economically, its pressure on neighboring countries is certain to mount. This may be a price worth paying, but it would be a mistake not to recognize that there is a price.

In the early stages of his fulfillment policy, Stresemann's ultimate aims were irrelevant. Whether he was seeking permanent conciliation or an overthrow of the existing order—or, as was most likely, keeping both options open—he first had to free Germany from the controversy over reparations. With the exception of France, the Allies were equally eager to put the issue behind them and to begin receiving some reparations at last. As for France, it hoped to escape from the self-inflicted trap of having occupied the Ruhr.

Stresemann skillfully proposed international arbitration for a new schedule of reparations, expecting an international forum to prove less exacting than France alone was likely to be. In November 1923, France accepted the appointment of an American banker, Charles G. Dawes, as "impartial arbiter" to reduce France's reparation claim—a galling symbol of the disintegration of the wartime alliance. The Dawes Committee's recommendations establishing a reduced schedule of payments for five years were accepted in April 1924.

Over the next five years, Germany paid out about \$1 billion in reparations and received loans of about \$2 billion, much of it from the United States. In effect, America was paying Germany's reparations, while Germany used the surplus from American loans to modernize its industry. France had insisted on reparations in order to keep Germany weak. Forced to choose between a weak Germany and a Germany capable of paying reparations, France had opted for the latter, but then had to stand by as reparations helped to rebuild Germany's economic and, ultimately, its military power.

By the end of 1923, Stresemann was in a position to claim some success:

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All our measures of a political and diplomatic nature, through deliberate co-operation by the two Anglo-Saxon Powers, the estrangement of Italy from her neighbour [France], and the vacillation of Belgium, have combined to create a situation for France that the country will not in the long run be able to sustain.¹¹

Stresemann's assessment was accurate. The fulfillment policy produced an insoluble quandary for both France and the entire European order. French security required a certain amount of discrimination against Germany in the military field; otherwise, Germany's superior potential in manpower and resources would prevail. But without equality—the right to build armaments like any other European country—Germany would never accept the Versailles system, and fulfillment would come to a halt.

Fulfillment placed British diplomats in a difficult position as well. If Great Britain did not grant Germany military equality as a *quid pro quo* for Germany's meeting its reparations payments, Germany could well revert to its earlier intransigence. But military equality for Germany would imperil France. Great Britain might have made an alliance with France to counterbalance Germany, but it did not wish to become entangled in France's alliances in Eastern Europe or to find itself at war with Germany over some piece of Polish or Czech territory. "For the Polish Corridor," said Austen Chamberlain in 1925, paraphrasing Bismarck's remark about the Balkans, "no British government ever will or ever can risk the bones of a British grenadier."¹² His prediction, like Bismarck's, was disproved by events: Great Britain did go to war—just as Germany had earlier in the century—and for the very cause it had so consistently disdained.

To avoid this dilemma, Austen Chamberlain in 1925 developed an idea for a limited alliance among Great Britain, France, and Belgium which would guarantee only their borders with Germany—in essence a military alliance to resist German aggression in the West. By this time, however, Stresemann's fulfillment policy had made such headway that he held a near-veto over Allied initiatives. To forestall Germany's being identified as the potential aggressor, he declared that a pact without Germany was a pact against Germany.

Half-convinced that Germany's fear of encirclement had contributed to its bellicose prewar policy, Chamberlain retreated to a curious hybrid agreement in which he sought to blend a traditional alliance with the new principle of collective security. In keeping with the alliance concept originally proposed, the new pact—signed at Locarno, Switzerland—guaranteed the borders between France, Belgium, and Germany against

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aggression. True to the principle of collective security, the draft presumed neither aggressor nor victim but promised resistance against aggression from whatever quarter in *either* direction. The *casus belli* was no longer an aggressive act by a specific country but the violation of a legal norm by *any* country.

By the mid-1920s, Stresemann, the Minister of defeated Germany, was in the driver's seat much more than Briand and Chamberlain, the representatives of the victors. In return for renouncing revisionism in the West, Stresemann drew from Briand and Chamberlain an implicit recognition that the Versailles Treaty required revision in the East. Germany accepted its *Western* frontier with France and Belgium, and the permanent demilitarization of the Rhineland; Great Britain and Italy guaranteed this arrangement, pledging assistance to repel invasions across the frontiers or into the demilitarized Rhineland from whatever direction. At the same time, Stresemann refused to accept Germany's border with Poland, which the other signatories also refused to guarantee. Germany concluded arbitration agreements with its Eastern neighbors, pledging peaceful settlement of all disputes. Yet Great Britain refused to extend its guarantee even to that pledge. Finally, Germany agreed to enter the League of Nations, thereby assuming a general obligation to settle all disputes by peaceful means, which, in theory, included the unrecognized borders in the East.

The Locarno Pact was greeted with exuberant relief as the dawning of a new world order. The three foreign ministers—Aristide Briand of France, Austen Chamberlain of Great Britain, and Gustav Stresemann of Germany—received the Nobel Peace Prize. But amidst all the jubilation, no one noticed that the statesmen had sidestepped the real issues; Locarno had not so much pacified Europe as it had defined the next battlefield.

The reassurance felt by the democracies at Germany's formal recognition of its Western frontier showed the extent of the demoralization and the confusion that had been caused by the *mélange* of old and new views on international affairs. For in that recognition was implicit that the Treaty of Versailles, which had ended a victorious war, had been unable to command compliance with the victors' peace terms, and that Germany had acquired the option of observing only those provisions which it chose to reaffirm. In this sense, Stresemann's unwillingness to recognize Germany's Eastern frontiers was ominous; while Great Britain's refusal to guarantee even the arbitration treaties gave international sanction to two classes of frontier in Europe—those accepted by Germany and guaranteed by the other powers, and those neither accepted by Germany nor guaranteed by the other powers.

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To confuse matters further, three tiers of commitments now prevailed in Europe. The first consisted of traditional alliances backed by the conventional machinery of staff talks and political consultations. No longer in vogue, these were confined to French arrangements with the weak new states in Eastern Europe—alliances which Great Britain refused to join. In the event of German aggression in Eastern Europe, France would face a choice between undesirable alternatives: abandoning Poland and Czechoslovakia, or fighting alone, which had been its recurring nightmare since 1870 and was not something it was very likely to undertake. The second tier consisted of special guarantees such as Locarno, obviously deemed less binding than formal alliances, which explains why they never encountered obstacles in the House of Commons. Finally, there was the League of Nations' own commitment to collective security, which was in practice devalued by Locarno. For, if collective security was in fact reliable, Locarno was unnecessary; and if Locarno was necessary, the League of Nations was, by definition, inadequate to assure the security of even its principal founding members.

Because neither the Locarno-type guarantee nor the general concept of collective security identified a potential aggressor, both rendered advance military planning impossible. Even if concerted military action had been possible—and there is no example of it during the League period—the bureaucratic machinery guaranteed endless delays for fact-finding and various other League conciliation procedures.

All of these unprecedented diplomatic stipulations compounded the uneasiness of the countries which considered themselves most threatened. Italy ended up guaranteeing frontiers along the Rhine, which it had never in its history identified with national security. Italy's primary interest in Locarno had been to gain recognition as a Great Power. Having achieved that goal, it saw no reason to run any actual risks—as it would amply demonstrate when the Rhine frontier was challenged ten years later. For Great Britain, Locarno signified the first agreement in which a major power simultaneously guaranteed an erstwhile ally *and* a recently defeated enemy while pretending to be impartial between them.

Locarno represented not so much reconciliation between France and Germany as endorsement of the military outcome of the recent war. Germany had been defeated in the West but had overcome Russia in the East. Locarno in effect confirmed both results and laid the basis for Germany's ultimate assault on the Eastern settlement.

Locarno, hailed in 1925 as turning the corner toward permanent peace, in fact marked the beginning of the end of the Versailles international order. From then on, the distinction between victor and vanquished be-

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came more and more murky—a situation which could have been beneficial had the victor gained from it a heightened sense of security or the defeated become reconciled to living with a modified settlement. Neither occurred. France's frustration and sense of impotence grew with every passing year. So did nationalist agitation in Germany. The wartime Allies had all abdicated their responsibilities—America shirked its role in designing the peace, Great Britain renounced its historic role as balancer, and France relinquished its responsibility as guardian of the Versailles settlement. Only Stresemann, leader of a defeated Germany, had a long-range policy, and he inexorably moved his country to the center of the international stage.

The sole remaining hope for a peaceful new world order was that the emotional lift of the agreement itself and the expectations it produced, as summed up in the slogan "the spirit of Locarno," might overcome its structural failings. Contrary to Wilson's teachings, it was not the broad masses which promoted this new atmosphere but the foreign ministers—Chamberlain, Briand, and Stresemann—of the countries whose suspicions and rivalries had produced the war and prevented the consolidation of the peace.

Since there was no geopolitical basis for the Versailles order, the statesmen were driven to invoking their personal relationships as a means of maintaining it—a step none of their predecessors had ever taken. The aristocrats who had conducted foreign policy in the nineteenth century belonged to a world in which intangibles were understood in the same way. Most of them were comfortable with each other. Nevertheless, they did not believe that their personal relations could influence their assessments of their countries' national interests. Agreements were never justified by the "atmosphere" they generated, and concessions were never made to sustain individual leaders in office. Nor did leaders address each other by their first names as a way of underlining their good relations with each other for the sake of their publics' opinions.

That style of diplomacy changed after World War I. Since then, the trend toward personalizing relations has accelerated. When Briand welcomed Germany to the League, he stressed Stresemann's human qualities, and Stresemann responded in kind. Similarly, Austen Chamberlain's alleged personal predilection for France caused Stresemann to accelerate his policy of fulfillment and to recognize Germany's Western border when Chamberlain replaced the more pro-German Lord Curzon as foreign secretary in 1924.

Austen Chamberlain was the scion of a distinguished family. The son of the brilliant and mercurial Joseph Chamberlain, advocate of an alliance

with Germany early in the century, he was the half-brother of Neville Chamberlain, who was to make the Munich settlement. Like his father, Austen wielded massive power in Great Britain's coalition governments. But, also like his father, he never reached the highest office; indeed, he was the only leader of the Conservative Party in the twentieth century who did not become prime minister. As one quip had it, Austen "always played the game, and always lost it." Harold Macmillan said of Austen Chamberlain: "He spoke well, but never in the grand style. He was clear, but not incisive. . . . He was respected, but never feared."¹³

Chamberlain's major diplomatic accomplishment was his role in forging the Locarno Pact. Because Chamberlain was known to be a Francophile, having once remarked that he "loved France like a woman," Stresemann feared an incipient Franco-English alliance. It was this fear that moved Stresemann to originate the process that led to Locarno.

In retrospect, the weakness of the policy of creating two classes of frontiers in Europe has become obvious. But Chamberlain viewed it as a crucial extension of Great Britain's strategic commitments, which went to the limit of what the British public would support. Until the beginning of the eighteenth century, Great Britain's security frontier had been at the Channel. Throughout the nineteenth century, the security frontier had been at the borders of the Low Countries. Austen Chamberlain tried to extend it to the Rhine, where, in the end, it was not supported when Germany challenged it in 1936. A guarantee to Poland was beyond the ken of British statesmen in 1925.

Aristide Briand was a classic political leader of the Third Republic. Starting his career as a left-wing firebrand, he became a fixture in French Cabinets—occasionally as prime minister but more frequently as foreign minister (he served in fourteen governments in that capacity). He recognized early on that France's relative position vis-à-vis Germany was declining and concluded that reconciliation with Germany represented France's best hope for long-term security. Relying on his convivial personality, he hoped to relieve Germany of the most onerous provisions of the Treaty of Versailles.

Briand's policy could not be popular in a country devastated by German armies. Nor is it at all easy to determine to what extent Briand's was an attempt to end a century-old enmity or whether it represented a reluctant *Realpolitik*. In times of crisis, Frenchmen preferred the tough and austere Poincaré, who insisted on rigid enforcement of Versailles. When crises became too painful to sustain—as after the occupation of the Ruhr—Briand would re-emerge. The trouble with this constant alternation was that France lost the capacity to pursue the policies of either of these

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two antipodal figures to their logical conclusions: France was no longer strong enough to carry out Poincaré's policy, yet French public opinion gave Briand too little to offer to Germany to achieve permanent reconciliation.

Whatever his ultimate motives, Briand understood that, if France did not pursue conciliation, it would be extorted from it by Anglo-Saxon pressure and by Germany's growing strength. Stresemann, though an ardent opponent of the Treaty of Versailles, believed that a relaxation of tensions with France would speed revision of the disarmament clauses and lay the basis for a revision of Germany's eastern borders.

On September 27, 1926, Briand and Stresemann met in the quaint village of Thoiry, in the French Jura Mountains near Geneva. Germany had just been admitted to the League of Nations and welcomed by a warm, eloquent, and personal speech from Briand. In this heady atmosphere, the two statesmen worked out a package deal designed to settle the war once and for all. France would return the Saar without the plebiscite called for by the Treaty of Versailles. French troops would evacuate the Rhineland within a year, and the Inter-Allied Military Control Commission (IMCC) would be withdrawn from Germany. In return, Germany would pay 300 million Marks for the Saar mines, speed up reparations payments to France, and fulfill the Dawes Plan. Briand was in effect offering to trade the most invidious provisions of Versailles for help with French economic recovery. The agreement demonstrated the unequal bargaining position of the two sides. Germany's gains were permanent and irrevocable; France's benefits were one-time, transitory, financial contributions, some of which repeated what Germany had previously promised.

The agreement ran into problems in both capitals. German nationalists violently opposed any form of cooperation with Versailles, however advantageous the specific terms, and Briand was accused of throwing away the Rhineland buffer. There were further difficulties with the bond issue for financing additional German expenditures. On November 11, Briand abruptly broke off the talks, declaring that "the prompt fulfillment of the Thoiry idea had been crushed by technical obstacles."¹⁴

This was the last attempt at a general settlement between France and Germany in the interwar period. Nor is it clear whether it would have made all that much difference had it been implemented. For the basic question posed by Locarno diplomacy remained—whether conciliation would cause Germany to accept the Versailles international order or accelerate Germany's capacity to threaten it.

After Locarno, that question became increasingly moot. Great Britain

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was convinced that conciliation was the only practical course. America believed it was a moral imperative as well. Strategic or geopolitical analysis having become unfashionable, the nations talked about justice even while they strenuously disagreed about its definition. A spate of treaties affirming general principles and appeals to the League followed—partly from conviction, partly from exhaustion, and partly from the desire to avoid painful geopolitical realities.

The post-Locarno period witnessed France's step-by-step retreat from the Versailles settlement—against its better judgment—under constant British (and American) pressures to go even further. After Locarno, capital—mostly American—poured into Germany, accelerating the modernization of its industry. The Inter-Allied Military Control Commission, which had been created to supervise German disarmament, was abolished in 1927, and its functions were turned over to the League of Nations, which had no means of verifying compliance.

Germany's secret rearmament accelerated. As early as 1920, the then minister of industry, Walther Rathenau, had consoled the German military with the argument that the provisions of Versailles leading to the dismantling of heavy German armaments would affect primarily weapons which would in any event soon become obsolete. And nothing, he argued, could prevent research on modern weapons or the creation of the industrial capacity to build them quickly. Attending army maneuvers in 1926, shortly after Locarno was ratified and at the moment that Briand and Stresemann were meeting at Thoiry, Field Marshal von Hindenburg, the Commander of the German army for the last three years of the war and the recently elected President of Germany, said: "I have seen today that the German army's traditional standard of spirit and skill has been preserved."¹⁵ If that was so, France's security would be in jeopardy as soon as the restrictions on the size of the German army were lifted.

As the disarmament issue moved to the forefront of international diplomacy, this threat loomed ever closer. Demanding political equality, Germany was carefully creating the psychological framework for insisting on military parity later. France refused to disarm unless it obtained additional security guarantees; Great Britain, the only country in a position to extend them, refused to guarantee the Eastern settlement and would go no further than Locarno with respect to the Western settlement, thereby underlining the fact that Locarno was less of a commitment than an alliance.

To avoid, or at least to delay, the day of formal German equality, France began to play the game of developing criteria for the reduction of arms as favored by League of Nations disarmament experts. It submitted an analytical paper to the League Preparatory Commission relating actual

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power to potential power, trained reserves to demographic trends, and weapons-in-being to the rate of technological change. But none of the finely spun theories could get around the key issue, which was that, at equal levels of armaments, however low, French security was in jeopardy because of Germany's superior mobilization potential. The more France seemed to accept the premises of the Preparatory Commission, the more pressure it generated against itself. In the end, all the various French maneuvers served primarily to magnify the Anglo-Saxons' conviction that France was the real obstacle to disarmament and therefore to peace.

The poignancy of the French dilemma was that, after Locarno, France was no longer in a position to pursue its convictions and had to settle for mitigating its fears. French policy grew increasingly reactive and defensive. Symbolic of this state of mind was that France began to construct the Maginot Line within two years of Locarno—at a time when Germany was still disarmed and the independence of the new states of Eastern Europe depended on France's ability to come to their aid. In the event of German aggression, Eastern Europe could only be saved if France adopted an offensive strategy centered on its using the demilitarized Rhineland as a hostage. Yet the Maginot Line indicated that France intended to stay on the defensive inside its own borders, thereby liberating Germany to work its will in the East. French political and military strategies were no longer in step.

Confused leaders have a tendency to substitute public relations maneuvers for a sense of direction. Driven by the desire to be perceived as doing something, Briand used the occasion of the tenth anniversary of America's entry into the war to submit in June 1927 a draft treaty to Washington according to which the two governments would renounce war in their relations with each other and agree to settle all their disputes by peaceful means. The American Secretary of State, Frank B. Kellogg, did not quite know how to respond to a document which renounced what no one feared and offered what everyone took for granted. The approach of the election year of 1928 helped to clear Kellogg's mind; "peace" was popular, and Briand's draft had the advantage of not involving any practical consequence.

In early 1928, Secretary Kellogg ended his silence and accepted the draft treaty. But he went Briand one better, proposing that the renunciation of war include as many other nations as possible. The offer proved as irresistible as it was meaningless. On August 27, 1928, the Pact of Paris (popularly known as the Kellogg-Briand Pact), renouncing war as an instrument of national policy, was signed with great fanfare by fifteen nations. It was quickly ratified by practically all the countries of the world,

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including Germany, Japan, and Italy, the nations whose aggressions would blight the next decade.

No sooner was the Pact signed than second thoughts began to seize the world's statesmen. France qualified its original proposal by inserting a clause legalizing wars of self-defense and wars to honor obligations arising out of the League Covenant, the Locarno guarantees, and all of France's alliances. This brought matters back to their starting point, for the exceptions encompassed every conceivable practical case. Next, Great Britain insisted on freedom of action in order to defend its empire. America's reservations were the most sweeping of all; it invoked the Monroe Doctrine, the right of self-defense, and the stipulation that each nation be its own judge of the requirements of self-defense. Retaining every possible loophole, the United States rejected participation in any enforcement action as well.

In testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee a few months later, Kellogg presented the extraordinary theory that the United States had no obligation under the Pact to help victims of aggression, since such aggression would already have proved that the Pact had been abrogated. "Supposing some other nation does break this treaty; why should we interest ourselves in it?" asked Senator Walsh from Montana. "There is not a bit of reason," replied the Secretary of State.¹⁶

Kellogg had reduced the treaty to the tautology that the Pact of Paris would preserve the peace as long as the peace was being preserved. War was banned in all circumstances except those which were foreseeable. No wonder that D. W. Brogan had this to say about the Kellogg-Briand Pact: "The United States, which had abolished the evils of drink by the Eighteenth Amendment, invited the world to abolish war by taking the pledge. The world, not quite daring to believe or doubt, obeyed."¹⁷

In the event, Briand's original idea was transformed by his erstwhile allies into a new means of putting pressure on France. Henceforth it was widely argued that, with war outlawed, France had an obligation to accelerate its own disarmament. To symbolize the era of goodwill, the Allies ended the occupation of the Rhineland in 1928, five years ahead of schedule.

Concurrently, Austen Chamberlain let it be known that, as far as Great Britain was concerned, the Polish border with Germany could, and indeed should, be modified, if only the Germans were civilized about it:

If she [Germany] comes into the League and plays her part there in a friendly and conciliatory spirit I myself believe that within a reasonable number of years she will find herself in a position where her economic

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and commercial support is so necessary and her political friendship so desirable to Poland that, without having recourse to the League machinery, she will be able to make a friendly arrangement on her own account directly with the Poles. . . . If the German public and press could be restrained from talking so much about the eastern frontiers, they might get more quickly to a solution.¹⁸

Stresemann skillfully used Germany's entry into the League both to increase his options toward the Soviet Union and to intensify German pressure on France for parity in armaments. For example, Stresemann asked for and was granted an exemption permitting German participation in the enforcement provisions of the League Charter (Article 16) on the ground that a disarmed Germany was in no position to face the risks of sanctions. Next, in Bismarckian fashion, Stresemann notified Moscow that his request for the exemption had been due to Germany's reluctance to join any anti-Soviet coalition.

Moscow took the hint. Within a year of Locarno, in April 1926, a treaty of neutrality between the Soviet Union and Germany was signed in Berlin. Each party agreed to remain neutral if the other was attacked; each agreed not to join any political combination or economic boycott aimed at the other—presumably regardless of the issue. In effect, this meant that the two countries excluded themselves from the application of collective security against each other. And Germany had already exempted itself from sanctions against anyone else. Berlin and Moscow were united in hostility to Poland, as German Chancellor Wirth told his Ambassador to Moscow, Ulrich von Brockdorff-Rantzau: "One thing I tell you frankly; Poland must be eliminated. . . . I do not conclude any treaty which might strengthen Poland."¹⁹

Nevertheless, French leaders, especially Briand, concluded that the fulfillment policy remained France's only realistic option. If France's worst fears came to pass and Germany resumed a bellicose policy, the hope of eventually gaining British support and maintaining America's goodwill would surely be jeopardized if France could be blamed for having wrecked conciliation.

Gradually, Europe's center of gravity shifted to Berlin. Amazingly, at least in retrospect, Stresemann's domestic position was disintegrating all this time. The prevailing nationalist attitude could be seen in the reaction to the so-called Young Plan, which the Allies had proposed when the five-year term for the Dawes Plan ran out in 1929. The Young Plan reduced German reparations even further and established a terminal, albeit distant, date for them. In 1924, the Dawes Plan had been adopted with the

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support of German conservatives; in 1929, the Young Plan, which offered considerably better terms, came under violent attack from German conservatives who were backed by the surging Nazi Party and by the communists. It was finally approved in the Reichstag by just twenty votes.

For a few years, the purported spirit of Locarno had signified the aspiration toward goodwill among the former adversaries of the First World War. But in German, the word "spirit" is also a synonym for "ghost," and by the end of the decade it was becoming fashionable in nationalistic circles to joke about the "ghost" of Locarno. This cynical attitude toward the centerpiece of the Versailles international order existed even in the halcyon days of German economic recovery, before the Depression had radicalized German politics beyond repair.

Stresemann died on October 3, 1929. He proved irreplaceable because Germany had no other leader of comparable talent or subtlety and, above all, because the rehabilitation of Germany and the pacification of Europe had in such large part been due to the confidence the Western powers had placed in his personality. For quite a long time, the prevailing view was that Stresemann had embodied all the qualities of the "good European." In this sense, he was treated as a precursor of the great Konrad Adenauer, who recognized that France and Germany in fact shared a common destiny across the gulf of their historic rivalries.

Yet, when Stresemann's papers became available, they seemed to contradict the benign estimation of him. They revealed a calculating practitioner of *Realpolitik* who pursued the traditional German national interest with ruthless persistence. For Stresemann, these interests were straightforward: to restore Germany to its pre-1914 stature, to dispose of the financial burdens of reparations, to attain military parity with France and Great Britain, to revise Germany's Eastern border, and to achieve the union (*Anschluss*) of Austria and Germany. Edgar Stern-Rubarth, a Stresemann aide, described his chief's objectives as follows:

Stresemann's ultimate hope, as he once confessed to me, was: To free the Rhineland, to recover Eupen-Malmédy, and the Saar, to perfect Austria's *Anschluss*, and to have, under mandate or otherwise an African colony where essential tropical raw materials could be secured and an outlet created for the surplus energy of the younger generation.²⁰

Stresemann was therefore clearly not a "good European" in the post-World War II sense of the phrase, a criterion which did not yet exist, however. Most Western statesmen shared Stresemann's view that Versailles required revision, especially in the East, and that Locarno was but

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a stage in this process. For France, of course, it was unbearably painful to have to deal with a resurgent Germany after a war in which it had expended its very substance. Yet this was also an accurate reflection of the new distribution of power. Stresemann understood that, even within the limits of Versailles, Germany was potentially the strongest nation in Europe. He drew from this assessment the *Realpolitik* conclusion that he had before him an opportunity to rebuild Germany to at least its pre-1914 level and probably beyond.

Unlike his nationalist critics, however—and quite contrary to the Nazis—Stresemann relied on patience, compromise, and the blessing of European consensus to achieve his goals. Mental agility allowed him to trade paper concessions—especially on the sensitive and symbolic issue of reparations—for an end to the military occupation of Germany and for the prospect of long-term changes which could not fail to place his country in an increasingly pivotal position. Unlike the German nationalists, however, he saw no need for a violent revision of Versailles.

Stresemann's opportunity to pursue his policy was inherent in Germany's resources and potential. The war had not crippled Germany's power, and Versailles had enhanced its geopolitical position. Not even a vastly more catastrophic defeat in World War II would succeed in eliminating Germany's influence in Europe. Rather than seeing Stresemann as a precursor of the Nazi assault on Western values, it would be more accurate to view Nazi excesses as an interruption of Stresemann's gradual and almost certainly peaceful progression to achieving a decisive role for his country in Europe.

Over time, tactic for Stresemann might well have turned into strategy, and expedient into conviction. In our own period, the original motive for President Sadat's rapprochement with Israel was almost certainly to undermine the West's image of Arab bellicosity and to place Israel on the psychological defensive. Like Stresemann, Sadat tried to drive a wedge between his adversary and its friends. By fulfilling reasonable Israeli demands, he hoped to weaken its ultimate refusal to return Arab, and especially Egyptian, land. But as time went on, Sadat actually turned into the apostle of peace and the healer of international rifts, which at first may well have been a pose. In time, the pursuit of peace and conciliation ceased to be for Sadat tools of the national interest and turned into values in and of themselves. Was Stresemann heading along a similar path? His premature death has left us with that possibility as one of history's unsolved riddles.

At the time of Stresemann's death, the reparations issue was on the way to being resolved, and Germany's western border had been settled.

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Germany remained revisionist with respect to its eastern borders and to the disarmament provisions of the Versailles Treaty. The attempt to pressure Germany by occupying its territory had failed, and the modified collective security approach of Locarno had not stilled German claims for parity. The statesmen of Europe now took refuge in an all-out commitment to disarmament as their best hope for peace.

The notion that Germany was entitled to parity had by now become fixed in the British mind. As early as in his first term in office, in 1924, Labour Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald had proclaimed disarmament as his top priority. In his second term, starting in 1929, he stopped construction of a naval base in Singapore and the building of new cruisers and submarines. In 1932, his government announced a moratorium on airplane construction. MacDonald's principal adviser on the subject, Philip Noel-Baker, declared that only disarmament could prevent another war.

The basic inconsistency between parity for Germany and security for France remained unresolved, however, perhaps because it was irresolvable. In 1932, a year before Hitler came to power, French Prime Minister Edouard Herriot predicted: "I have no illusions. I am convinced that Germany wishes to rearm. . . . We are at a turning point in history. Until now Germany has practised a policy of submission. . . . [N]ow she is beginning a positive policy. Tomorrow it will be a policy of territorial demands."²¹ The most remarkable aspect of this statement was its passive, resigned tone. Herriot said nothing about the French army, which was still the largest in Europe; about the Rhineland, demilitarized under Locarno; about a still-disarmed Germany; or about French responsibility for the security of Eastern Europe. Unwilling to fight for its convictions, France now simply awaited its fate.

Great Britain saw matters on the Continent from a quite different perspective. Wanting to conciliate Germany, it relentlessly pressed France to accede to German parity in armaments. Disarmament experts are notoriously ingenious in coming up with schemes which meet the formal aspect of security issues without addressing the substance. Thus, the British experts devised a proposal granting Germany parity but without allowing conscription, thereby theoretically putting a premium on France's larger pool of trained reserves (as if Germany, having come this far, could not find a means to evade this last, relatively minor, restriction).

In that same fateful year before Hitler's rise to power, the democratic German government felt confident enough to walk out of the Disarmament Conference in protest against what it called French discrimination. It was wooed back with the promise of "[e]quality of rights in a system

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which would provide security for all nations,"²² a weaseling phrase implying the theoretical right to parity with "security" provisions which made it too difficult to achieve. The public mood had gone beyond such subtleties. *The New Statesman*, an organ of the British Labour Party, greeted the formula as "the unqualified recognition of the principle of the equality of states." At the other end of the British political spectrum, the *Times* spoke approvingly of "the timely redress of inequality."²³

The formula of "equality [within] a system [of] security" was, however, a contradiction in terms. France was no longer strong enough to defend itself against Germany, and Great Britain continued to refuse the military alliance with France that could have established a crude approximation of geopolitical equality (though, based on the experience of the war, even that was questionable). While insisting on defining equality in the purely formalistic terms of ending the discriminatory treatment of Germany, England remained silent about the impact of such equality on the European equilibrium. In 1932, an exasperated Prime Minister MacDonald told French Foreign Minister Paul-Boncour: "French demands always created the difficulty that they required of Great Britain that she should assume further obligations, and this at the moment could not be contemplated."²⁴ This demoralizing impasse continued until Hitler walked out of disarmament negotiations in October 1933.

After a decade in which diplomacy had focused on Europe, it was—unexpectedly—Japan which demonstrated the hollowness of collective security and of the League itself, ushering in a decade of mounting violence in the 1930s.

In 1931, Japanese forces occupied Manchuria, which legally was a part of China, although the authority of the Chinese central government had not operated there for many years. Intervention on such a scale had not been attempted since the founding of the League. But the League had no enforcement machinery for even the economic sanctions contemplated in its article 16. In its hesitations, the League exemplified the basic dilemma of collective security: no country was prepared to fight a war against Japan (or was in a position to do so without American participation, since the Japanese navy dominated Asian waters). Even if the machinery for economic sanctions had existed, no country was willing to curtail trade with Japan in the midst of the Depression; on the other hand, no country was willing to accept the occupation of Manchuria. None of the League members knew how to overcome these self-inflicted contradictions.

Finally, a mechanism was devised for doing nothing at all. It took the form of a fact-finding mission—the standard device for diplomats signal-

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ing that inaction is the desired outcome. Such commissions take time to assemble, to undertake studies, and to reach a consensus—by which point, with luck, the problem might even have gone away. Japan felt so confident of this pattern that it took the lead in recommending such a study. What came to be known as the Lytton Commission reported that Japan had justified grievances but had erred by not first exhausting all peaceful means of redress. This mildest of rebukes for occupying a territory larger than itself proved too much for Japan, which responded by withdrawing from the League of Nations. It was the first step toward the unraveling of the entire institution.

In Europe, the whole incident was treated as a kind of aberration peculiar to distant continents. Disarmament talks continued as if there were no Manchurian crisis, turning the debate over security versus parity into a largely ceremonial act. Then, on January 30, 1933, Hitler came to power in Germany and demonstrated that the Versailles system had indeed been a house of cards.



CHAPTER TWELVE

The End of Illusion: Hitler and the Destruction of Versailles

Hitler's advent to power marked one of the greatest calamities in the history of the world. But for him, the collapse of the house of cards which represented the Versailles international order might have proceeded in a peaceful, or at least noncatastrophic, fashion. That Germany would emerge from that process as the strongest nation on the Continent was inevitable; the orgy of killing and devastation that it unleashed was the work of one demonic personality.

Hitler attained eminence through his oratory. Unlike other revolution-

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ary leaders, he was a solitary political adventurer representing no major school of political thought. His philosophy, as expressed in *Mein Kampf*, ranged from the banal to the fantastic and consisted of a popularized repackaging of right-wing, radical, conventional wisdom. Standing alone, it could never have launched an intellectual current that culminated in revolution, as had Marx's *Das Kapital* or the works of the philosophers of the eighteenth century.

Demagogic skill catapulted Hitler to the leadership of Germany and remained his stock in trade throughout his career. With the instincts of an outcast and an unerring eye for psychological weaknesses, he shunted his adversaries from disadvantage to disadvantage, until they were thoroughly demoralized and ready to acquiesce to his domination. Internationally, he ruthlessly exploited the democracies' guilty conscience about the Treaty of Versailles.

As the head of government, Hitler operated by instinct rather than analysis. Fancying himself an artist, he resisted sedentary habits and was constantly and restlessly on the move. He disliked Berlin and found solace in his Bavarian retreat, to which he would repair for months at a time, though he quickly grew bored even there. Since he disdained orderly work procedures and his ministers found it difficult to gain access to him, policymaking occurred in fits and starts. Anything consistent with his flashes of frenetic activity thrived; anything requiring sustained effort tended to languish.

The essence of demagoguery resides in the ability to distill emotion and frustration into a single moment. Gratifying that moment and achieving a mesmeric, nearly sensual relationship with his entourage and the public at large became Hitler's specialties. Abroad, Hitler was most successful when the world perceived him as pursuing normal, limited objectives. All his great foreign policy triumphs occurred in the first five years of his rule, 1933–38, and were based on his victims' assumption that his aim was to reconcile the Versailles system with its purported principles.

Once Hitler abandoned the pretense of rectifying injustice, his credibility vanished. Embarking on naked conquest for its own sake made him lose his touch. There were still occasional flashes of intuition, as in his design of the campaign against France in 1940 and in his refusal to permit a retreat in front of Moscow in 1941, which would almost certainly have caused a collapse of the German army. However, Hitler's seminal experience seems to have been Germany's defeat in World War I. He never ceased to recount how he first learned of it while bedridden in a military hospital, partially blinded by mustard gas. Ascribing Germany's collapse

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to treachery, a Jewish conspiracy, and lack of will, he would for the rest of his life insist that Germany could be defeated only by itself, not by foreigners. This line of thinking transmuted the defeat of 1918 into treason, while the failure on the part of Germany's leaders to fight to the end became a staple of Hitler's obsessive rhetoric and mind-numbing monologues.

Hitler always seemed strangely unfulfilled by his victories; in the end, he only seemed able to realize his image of himself by overcoming imminent collapse through sheer willpower. Psychologists may find therein one explanation for his conducting the war in a manner that seemed to lack a strategic or political rationale until Germany's resources had been squandered and Hitler could finally, and still unyieldingly, fulfill himself by defying the world in a bomb shelter in the encircled capital of his almost completely occupied country.

Demagogic skill and egomania were two sides of the same coin. Hitler was incapable of normal conversation, and either engaged in long monologues or lapsed into bored silences when some interlocutor managed to seize the floor—and at times even dozed off.¹ Hitler was wont to ascribe his, in truth, nearly miraculous rise from Vienna's netherworld to unchallenged rule over Germany to personal qualities unrivaled by any contemporary. Thus, a recital of his rise to power entered the deadening liturgy of Hitler's "table talks" as transcribed by his disciples.²

Hitler's egomania had deadlier consequences as well; he had convinced himself—and, what is more significant, his entourage—that, because his faculties were so unique, all his goals had to be accomplished in his own lifetime. Since, on the basis of his family history, he had estimated that his life would be relatively short, he was never able to permit any of his successes to mature, and pushed forward according to a timetable established by his assessment of his physical powers. History offers no other example of a major war being started on the basis of medical conjecture.

When all was said and done, Hitler's startling early successes amounted to an accelerated harvesting of opportunities which had been created by the policies of the predecessors he despised, especially Stresemann. Like the Peace of Westphalia, the Treaty of Versailles left a powerful country confronting a group of much smaller and unprotected states on its eastern border. The difference, however, was that while this had been intentional at Westphalia, quite the opposite was true of Versailles. Versailles and Locarno had smoothed Germany's road into Eastern Europe, where a patient German leadership would in time have achieved a preponderant