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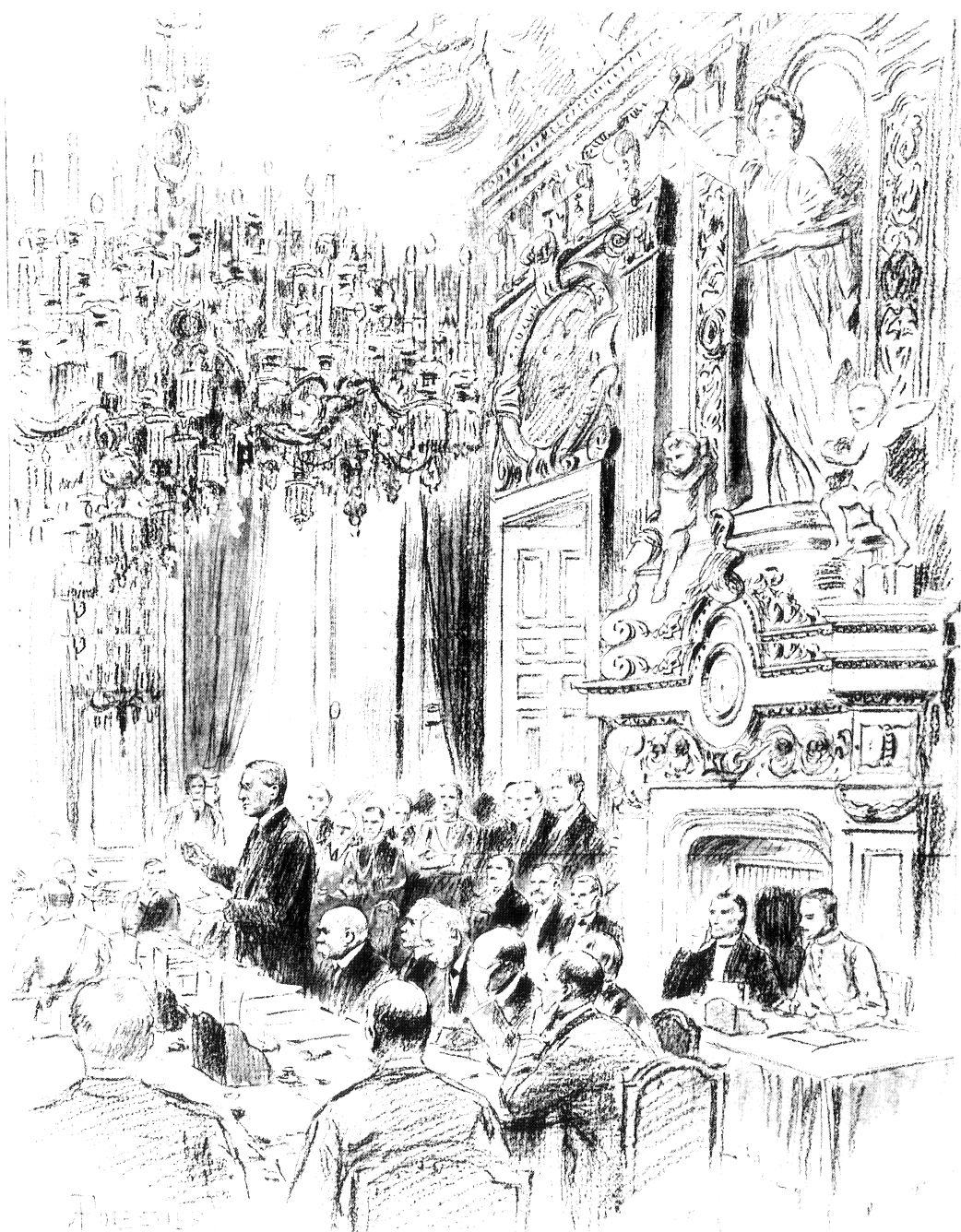
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HENRY
KISSINGER

DIPLMACY

SIMON & SCHUSTER PAPERBACKS
New York London Toronto Sydney



SIMON & SCHUSTER PAPERBACKS
ROCKEFELLER CENTER
1230 AVENUE OF THE AMERICAS
NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10020

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DESIGNED BY EVE METZ

PHOTO RESEARCH BY NATALIE GOLDSTEIN

MAPS BY ANITA KARL, JAMES KEMP/COMPASS PROJECTIONS
MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

23 25 27 29 30 28 26 24 22

THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS HAS CATALOGED THE HARDCOVER EDITION AS FOLLOWS:

KISSINGER, HENRY.

DIPLOMACY/HENRY KISSINGER.

P. CM.

INCLUDES BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES AND INDEX.

1. DIPLOMACY. 2. UNITED STATES—FOREIGN RELATIONS ADMINISTRATION.

I. TITLE.

JX1662.K57 1994

327.73—DC20

93-44001

ISBN-13: 978-0-671-65991-2

ISBN-10: 0-671-65991-X

ISBN-13: 978-0-671-51099-2 (PBK)

ISBN-10: 0-671-51099-1 (PBK)

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

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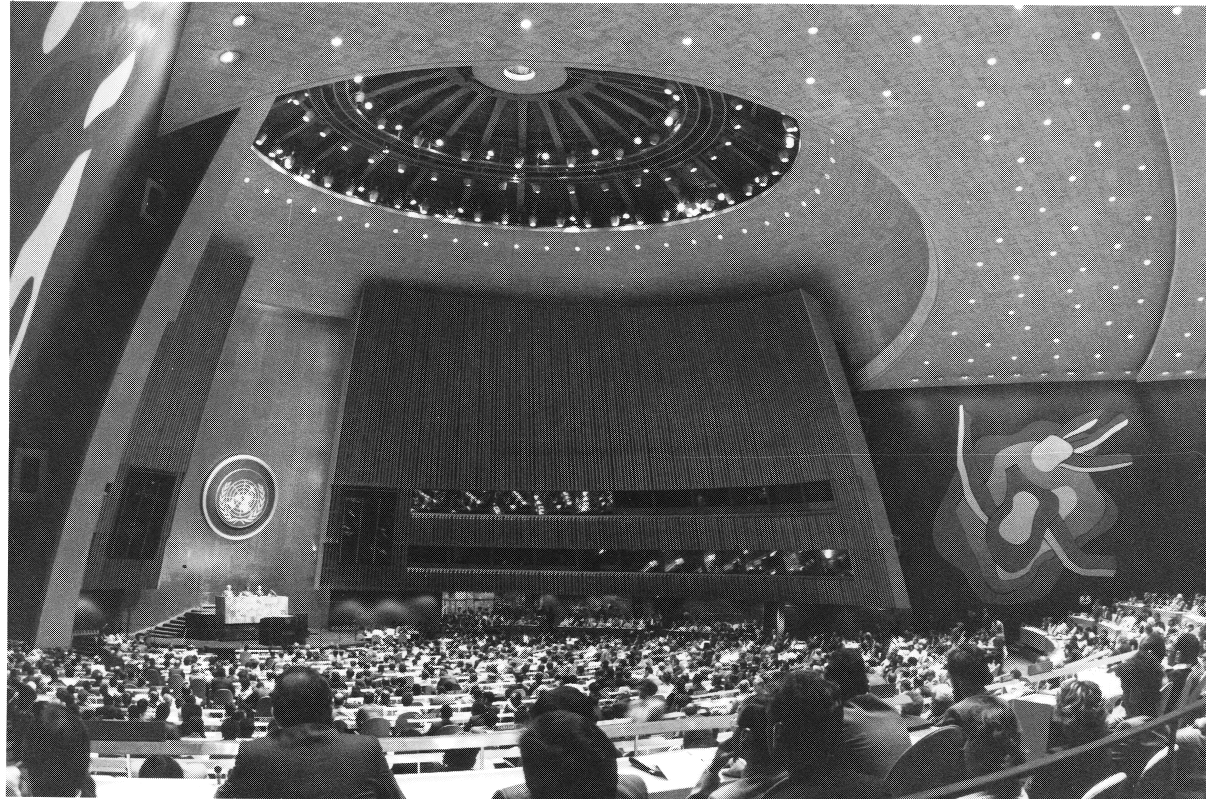
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CHAPTER ONE

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

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 bellicose, 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

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

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

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-

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

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 leader 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-

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 "permanent" 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

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:

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—whose principal members were 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

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

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,

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

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

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,

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 Americans were represented in Morocco by their ambassador to Italy, 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, which was ultimately concluded at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, 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.

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

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.

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

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-

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 sinking of the *Lusitania* and above all its renewal of unrestricted submarine warfare 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

THE HINGE: THEODORE ROOSEVELT OR WOODROW WILSON

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

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

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

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,

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 England were peripheral states with respect to it. Had the Holy Roman Emperor ever succeeded in establishing central control over all the territories technically

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

For most of the medieval period, however, the Holy Roman Emperor never achieved that degree of central control. One reason was the lack of adequate transportation and communication systems, making it difficult to tie together such extensive territories. But the most important reason was that the Holy Roman Empire had separated control of the church from control of the government. Unlike a 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, England, and Spain did not accept the authority of the Holy Roman Empire, though they remained part of the Universal Church.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Richelieu would never have permitted himself to miss the opportunity which presented itself to Ferdinand in 1629, the eleventh year of the war. The Protestant princes were ready to accept Habsburg political 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-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



CHAPTER FOUR

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

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

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

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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. Ironical as it may seem, Metternich presaged Wilson, in the sense that he believed that a shared concept of justice was a prerequisite for international order, however diametrically opposed his idea of justice was to what Wilson sought to institutionalize in the twentieth century.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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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,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE CONCERT OF EUROPE: GREAT BRITAIN, AUSTRIA, AND RUSSIA

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