CHAPTER THREE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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 around Lyon and Savoy), also under Spanish control, in the east, and the Spanish Netherlands in the north. The few frontiers not under the rule of the Spanish Habsburgs were subject to the Austrian branch of the family.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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 the outskirts of Berlin. By the end of the century, it would be the principal agent in the partition of Poland.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

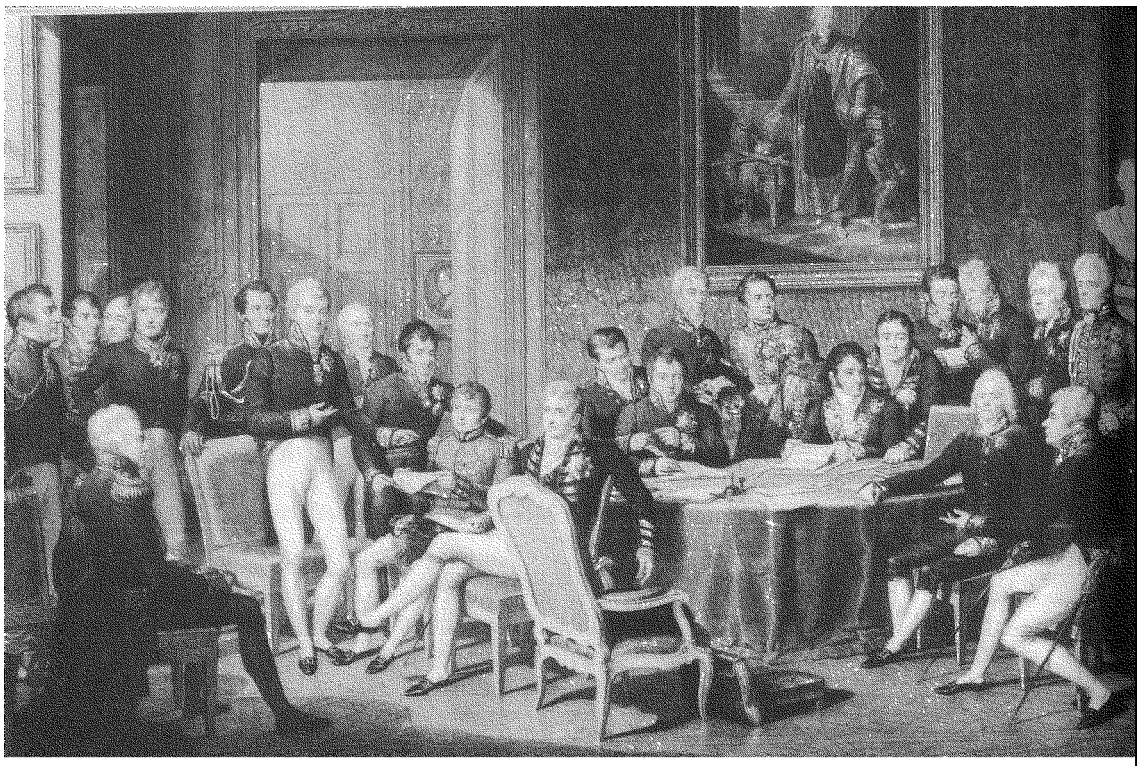
The emergence of the European balance of power in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries parallels certain aspects of the post–Cold War world. Then, as now, a collapsing world order spawned a multitude of states pursuing their national interests, unrestrained by any overriding principles. Then, as now,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

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

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

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

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



CHAPTER FOUR

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER FIVE

Two Revolutionaries: Napoleon III and Bismarck

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

> . . . Policy is the art of the possible, the science of the relative.[38]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER SIX

Realpolitik Turns on Itself

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

> The situation of Russia in Central Asia is similar to that of all civilized states that come into contact with half-savage nomadic tribes without a firm social organization. In such cases, the interests of border security and trade relations always require that the more civilized state have a certain authority over its neighbors. . . .
>
> The state therefore must make a choice: either to give up this continuous effort and doom its borders to constant unrest . . . or else to advance farther and farther into the heart of the savage lands . . . where the greatest difficulty lies in being able to stop.[5]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bismarck's goal was to give no other power—except irreconcilable France—any cause to join an alliance directed against Germany. Professing the unified Germany to be "satiated" and without further territorial ambitions, Bismarck sought to reassure Russia that Germany had no interest in the Balkans; the Balkans, he said, were not worth the bones of a single Pomeranian grenadier. Keeping Great Britain in mind, Bismarck mounted no challenge on the Continent that might trigger a British concern for the equilibrium, and he kept Germany out of the colonial race. "Here is Russia and here is France and here we are in the middle. That is my map of Africa," was Bismarck's reply to an advocate of German colonialism[12]—a piece of advice domestic politics would later force him to modify.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

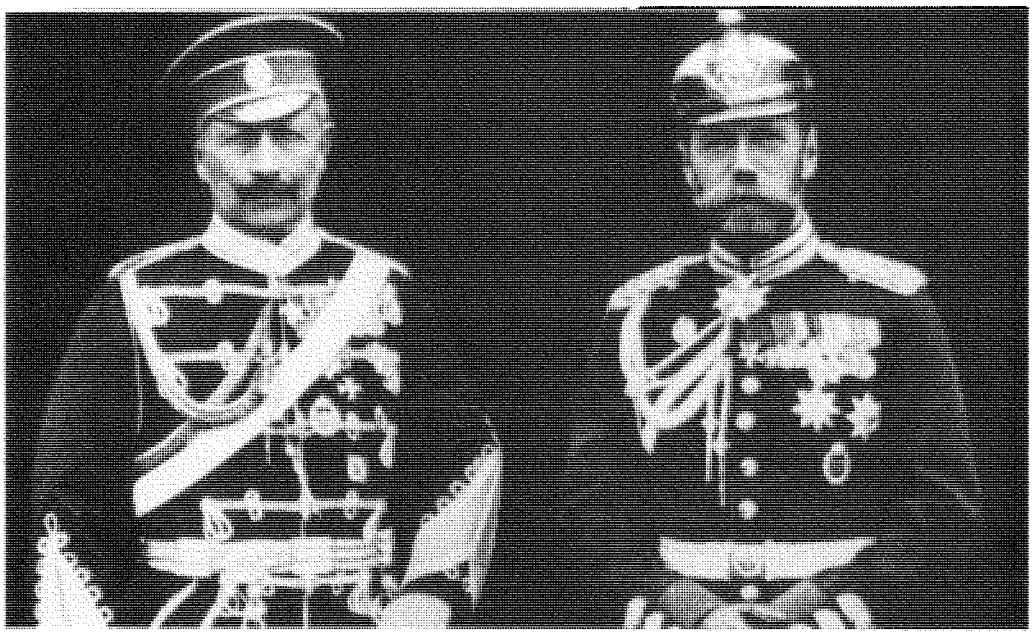
Yet Metternich had not had to create his legitimate order; it essentially already existed. In the contemporary world, democracy is far from universal, and where it is proclaimed it is not necessarily defined in commensurable terms. It is reasonable for the United States to try to buttress equilibrium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

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

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

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

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



CHAPTER SEVEN

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

By the end of the twentieth century's first decade, the Concert of Europe, which had maintained peace for a century, had for all practical purposes ceased to exist. The Great Powers had thrown themselves with blind frivolity into a bipolar struggle that led to petrification into two power blocs, anticipating the pattern of the Cold War fifty years later. There was one important difference, however. In the age of nuclear weapons, the avoidance of war would be a major, perhaps the principal, foreign policy goal. At the beginning of the twentieth century, wars could still be started with a touch of frivolity. Indeed, some European thinkers held that periodic bloodletting was cathartic, a naïve hypothesis that was brutally punctured by the First World War.

For decades, historians have been debating who must bear responsibility for the outbreak of the First World War. Yet no one country can be singled out for that mad dash to disaster. Each of the major powers contributed its quota of shortsightedness and irresponsibility, and did so

with an insouciance which would never again be possible once the disaster they had wrought entered the collective memory of Europe. They had forgotten Pascal's warning in *Pensées*—if they had ever known it—"We run heedlessly into the abyss after putting something in front of us to stop us seeing it."

There was surely enough blame to go around. The nations of Europe transformed the balance of power into an armaments race without understanding that modern technology and mass conscription had made general war the greatest threat to their security, and to European civilization as a whole. Though all the nations of Europe contributed to the disaster with their policies, it was Germany and Russia which undermined any sense of restraint by their very natures.

Throughout the process of German unification, there had been little concern about its impact on the balance of power. For 200 years, Germany had been the victim, not the instigator, of the wars of Europe. In the Thirty Years' War, the Germans had suffered casualties estimated as high as 30 percent of their entire population, and all the decisive battles of the dynastic wars of the eighteenth century and of the Napoleonic Wars were fought on German soil.

It was therefore nearly inevitable that a united Germany would aim to prevent the recurrence of these tragedies. But it was not inevitable that the new German state should have approached this challenge largely as a military problem, or that German diplomats after Bismarck should have conducted foreign policy with such bullying assertiveness. Whereas Frederick the Great's Prussia had been the weakest of the Great Powers, soon after unification, Germany became the strongest and as such proved disquieting to its neighbors. In order to participate in the Concert of Europe, it therefore needed to show special restraint in its foreign policy.[1] Unfortunately, after Bismarck's departure, moderation was the quality Germany lacked the most.

The reason German statesmen were obsessed with naked power was that, in contrast to other nation-states, Germany did not possess any integrating philosophical framework. None of the ideals which had shaped the modern nation-state in the rest of Europe was present in Bismarck's construction—not Great Britain's emphasis on traditional liberties, the French Revolution's appeal to universal freedom, or even the benign universalist imperialism of Austria. Strictly speaking, Bismarck's Germany did not embody the aspirations of a nation-state at all, because he had deliberately excluded the Austrian Germans. Bismarck's Reich was an artifice, being foremost a greater Prussia whose principal purpose was to increase its own power.

The absence of intellectual roots was a principal cause of the aimlessness of German foreign policy. The memory of having served for so long as Europe's main battlefield had produced a deep-seated sense of insecurity in the German people. Though Bismarck's empire was now the strongest power on the Continent, German leaders always felt vaguely threatened, as was evidenced by their obsession with military preparedness compounded by bellicose rhetoric. German military planners always thought in terms of fighting off a combination of *all* of Germany's neighbors simultaneously. In readying themselves for that worst-case scenario, they helped to make it a reality. For a Germany strong enough to defeat a coalition of all its neighbors was obviously also more than capable of overwhelming any of them individually. At the sight of the military colossus on their borders, Germany's neighbors drew together for mutual protection, transforming the German quest for security into an agent of its own insecurity.

A wise and restrained policy might have postponed and perhaps even averted the looming peril. But Bismarck's successors, abandoning his restraint, relied more and more on sheer strength, as expressed in one of their favorite pronouncements—that Germany was to serve as the hammer and not the anvil of European diplomacy. It was as if Germany had expended so much energy on achieving nationhood that it had not had time to think through what purpose the new state should serve. Imperial Germany never managed to develop a concept of its own national interest. Swayed by the emotions of the moment and hampered by an extraordinary lack of sensitivity to foreign psyches, German leaders after Bismarck combined truculence with indecisiveness, hurling their country, first into isolation and then into war.

Bismarck had taken great pains to downplay assertions of German power, using his intricate system of alliances to restrain his many partners and to keep their latent incompatibilities from erupting into war. Bismarck's successors lacked the patience and the subtlety for such complexity. When Emperor William I died in 1888, his son, Frederick (whose liberalism had so worried Bismarck), governed for a mere ninety-eight days before succumbing to throat cancer. He was succeeded by his son, William II, whose histrionic demeanor gave observers the uneasy sense that the ruler of Europe's most powerful nation was both immature and erratic. Psychologists have ascribed William's restless bullying to an attempt to compensate for having been born with a deformed arm—a grave blow to a member of Prussia's royal family with its exalted military traditions. In 1890, the brash young Emperor dismissed Bismarck, refusing to govern in the shadow of so towering a figure. Henceforth, it was

the Kaiser's diplomacy which would become so central to the peace of Europe. Winston Churchill captured William's essence in sardonic style:

> Just strut around and pose and rattle the undrawn sword. All he wished was to feel like Napoleon, and be like him without having had to fight his battles. Surely less than this would not pass muster. If you are the summit of a volcano, the least you can do is smoke. So he smoked, a pillar of cloud by day and the gleam of fire by night, to all who gazed from afar; and slowly and surely these perturbed observers gathered and joined themselves together for mutual protection.
>
> . . . but underneath all this posing and its trappings, was a very ordinary, vain, but on the whole well-meaning man, hoping to pass himself off as a second Frederick the Great.[2]

What the Kaiser wanted most was international recognition of Germany's importance and, above all, of its power. He attempted to conduct what he and his entourage called *Weltpolitik,* or global policy, without ever defining that term or its relationship to the German national interest. Beyond the slogans lay an intellectual vacuum: truculent language masked an inner hollowness; vast slogans obscured timidity and the lack of any sense of direction. Boastfulness coupled with irresolution in action reflected the legacy of two centuries of German provincialism. Even if German policy had been wise and responsible, integrating the German colossus into the existing international framework would have been a daunting task. But the explosive mix of personalities and domestic institutions prevented any such course, leading instead to a mindless foreign policy which specialized in bringing down on Germany everything it had always feared.

In the twenty years after Bismarck's dismissal, Germany managed to foster an extraordinary reversal of alliances. In 1898, France and Great Britain had been on the verge of war over Egypt. Animosity between Great Britain and Russia had been a constant factor of international relations for most of the nineteenth century. At various times, Great Britain had been looking for allies against Russia, trying Germany before settling on Japan. No one would have thought that Great Britain, France, and Russia could possibly end up on the same side. Yet, ten years later, that was exactly what came to pass under the impact of insistent and threatening German diplomacy.

For all the complexity of his maneuvers, Bismarck had never attempted to go beyond the traditions of the balance of power. His successors, however, were clearly not comfortable with the balance of power, and

never seemed to understand that, the more they magnified their own strength, the more they would encourage the compensating coalitions and arms buildups inherent in the system of European equilibrium.

German leaders resented the reluctance of other countries to ally themselves with a nation that was already the strongest in Europe, and whose strength was generating fears of German hegemony. Bullying tactics seemed to Germany's leaders the best way to bring home to their neighbors the limits of their own strength and, presumably, the benefits of Germany's friendship. This taunting approach had quite the opposite effect. Trying to achieve absolute security for their country, German leaders after Bismarck threatened every other European nation with absolute insecurity, triggering countervailing coalitions nearly automatically. There are no diplomatic shortcuts to domination; the only route that leads to it is war, a lesson the provincial leaders of post-Bismarck Germany learned only when it was too late to avoid a global catastrophe.

Ironically, for the greater part of imperial Germany's history, Russia, not Germany, was considered the main threat to peace. First Palmerston and then Disraeli were convinced that Russia intended to penetrate into Egypt and India. By 1913, the corresponding fear among German leaders that they were about to be overrun by the Russian hordes had reached such a pitch that it contributed significantly to their decision to force the fateful showdown a year later.

In fact, there was little hard evidence to substantiate the fear that Russia might seek a European empire. The claims by German military intelligence of having proof that Russia was in fact preparing for such a war were as true as they were irrelevant. All the countries of both alliances, intoxicated with the new technology of railways and mobilization schedules, were constantly engaged in military preparations out of proportion to any of the issues being disputed. But, precisely because these fervid preparations could not be related to any definable objective, they were interpreted as portents of vast, if nebulous, ambitions. Characteristically, Prince von Bülow, German Chancellor from 1900 to 1909, espoused Frederick the Great's view that "of all Prussia's neighbors the Russian Empire is the most dangerous in its strength as well as in its position."[3]

Throughout, Europe found something decidedly eerie about the vastness and persistence of Russia. All the nations of Europe were seeking aggrandizement by means of threats and counterthreats. But Russia seemed impelled to expand by a rhythm all its own, containable only by the deployment of superior force, and usually by war. Throughout numerous crises, a reasonable settlement often seemed well within Russia's reach, much better in fact than what ultimately emerged. Yet Russia

always preferred the risk of defeat to compromise. This had been true in the Crimean War of 1854, the Balkan Wars of 1875–78, and prior to the Russo-Japanese War of 1904.

One explanation for these tendencies was that Russia belonged partly to Europe, partly to Asia. In the West, Russia was part of the Concert of Europe and participated in the elaborate rules of the balance of power. But even there, Russian leaders were generally impatient with appeals to the equilibrium and prone to resorting to war if their demands were not met—for example, in the prelude to the Crimean War of 1854, and the Balkan Wars, and again in 1885, when Russia nearly went to war with Bulgaria. In Central Asia, Russia was dealing with weak principalities to which the principle of the balance of power did not apply, and in Siberia —until it ran up against Japan—it was able to expand much as America had across a sparsely populated continent.

In European forums, Russia would listen to the arguments on behalf of the balance of power but did not always abide by its maxims. Whereas the nations of Europe had always maintained that the fate of Turkey and the Balkans had to be settled by the Concert of Europe, Russia, on the other hand, invariably sought to deal with this question unilaterally and by force—in the Treaty of Adrianople in 1829, the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi in 1833, the conflict with Turkey in 1853, and the Balkan Wars of 1875–78 and 1885. Russia expected Europe to look the other way and felt aggrieved when it did not. The same problem would recur after the Second World War, when the Western allies maintained that the fate of Eastern Europe concerned Europe as a whole, while Stalin insisted that Eastern Europe, and especially Poland, were within the Soviet sphere and that therefore their future should be settled without reference to the Western democracies. And, like his tsarist predecessors, Stalin proceeded unilaterally. Inevitably, however, some coalition of Western forces would arise to resist Russia's military thrusts and to undo Russia's impositions on its neighbors. In the post–World War II period, it would take a generation for the historic pattern to reassert itself.

Russia on the march rarely exhibited a sense of limits. Thwarted, it nursed its grievances and bided its time for revenge—against Great Britain through much of the nineteenth century, against Austria after the Crimean War, against Germany after the Congress of Berlin, and against the United States during the Cold War. It remains to be seen how the new post-Soviet Russia will react to the collapse of its historic empire and satellite orbit once it fully absorbs the shock of its disintegration.

In Asia, Russia's sense of mission was even less constrained by political or geographic obstacles. For all of the eighteenth century and most of the

nineteenth, Russia found itself alone in the Far East. It was the first European power to deal with Japan, and the first to conclude an agreement with China. This expansion, accomplished by relatively few settlers and military adventurers, produced no conflict with the European powers. Sporadic Russian clashes with China proved no more significant. In return for Russian assistance against warring tribes, China conceded large areas of territory to Russian administration in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, giving rise to a series of "unequal treaties" which every Chinese government since then, especially the communist one, has denounced.

Characteristically, Russia's appetite for Asian territory seemed to grow with each new acquisition. In 1903, Serge Witte, the Russian Finance Minister and a confidant of the Tsar, wrote to Nicholas II: "Given our enormous frontier with China and our exceptionally favorable situation, the absorption by Russia of a considerable part of the Chinese Empire is only a question of time."[4] As with the Ottoman Empire, Russia's leaders took the position that the Far East was Russia's own business and that the rest of the world had no right to intervene. Russia's advances on all fronts sometimes occurred simultaneously; more often they shifted back and forth, depending on where expansion seemed least risky.

Imperial Russia's policymaking apparatus reflected the empire's dual nature. Russia's Foreign Office was a department of the Chancery, staffed by independent officials whose orientation was essentially toward the West.[5] Frequently Baltic Germans, these officials considered Russia a European state with policies which should be implemented in the context of the Concert of Europe. The Chancery's role, however, was contested by the Asiatic Department, which was equally independent and responsible for Russian policy toward the Ottoman Empire, the Balkans, and the Far East—in other words, for every front where Russia was actually advancing.

Unlike the Chancery, the Asiatic Department did not consider itself a part of the Concert of Europe. Viewing the European nations as obstacles to its designs, the Asiatic Department treated the European nations as irrelevant and, whenever possible, sought to fulfill Russian goals through unilateral treaties or by wars initiated without any reference to Europe. Since Europe insisted that issues concerning the Balkans and the Ottoman Empire be settled in concert, frequent conflicts were inevitable, while Russia's outrage mounted at being thus thwarted by powers it considered interlopers.

Partly defensive, partly offensive, Russian expansion was always ambiguous, and this ambiguity generated Western debates over Russia's true intentions that lasted through the Soviet period. One reason for the pe-

rennial difficulty in understanding Russia's purposes was that the Russian government, even in the communist period, always had more in common with an eighteenth-century autocratic court than with a twentieth-century superpower. Neither imperial nor communist Russia ever produced a great foreign minister. Like Nesselrode, Gorchakov, Giers, Lamsdorff, and even Gromyko, its foreign ministers were all accomplished and able but lacked the authority to design long-range policy. They were little more than servants of a volatile and easily distracted autocrat, for whose favor they had to compete amidst many overriding domestic concerns. Imperial Russia had no Bismarck, no Salisbury, no Roosevelt—in short, no hands-on minister with executive powers over all aspects of foreign affairs.

Even when the ruling tsar was a dominant personality, the autocratic system of Russian policymaking inhibited the evolution of a coherent foreign policy. Once the tsars found a foreign minister with whom they felt comfortable, they tended to retain him into his dotage, as was the case with Nesselrode, Gorchakov, and Giers. Among them, these three foreign ministers served for most of the nineteenth century. Even in their extreme old age, they proved invaluable to foreign statesmen, who considered them the only personalities worth seeing in St. Petersburg because they were the only officials with access to the tsar. Protocol prohibited virtually anybody else from seeking an audience with the tsar.

To complicate decision-making further, the tsar's executive power frequently clashed with his aristocratic notions of princely life-style. For example, immediately after the signing of the Reinsurance Treaty, a key period in Russia's foreign affairs, Alexander III left St. Petersburg for four consecutive months, from July through October 1887, to go yachting, observe maneuvers, and visit his in-laws in Denmark. With the only real decision-maker thus out of reach, Russia's foreign policy floundered. Not only were the tsar's policies often driven by the emotions of the moment, they were greatly influenced by the nationalist agitation fanned by the military. Military adventurers, like General Kaufmann in Central Asia, paid hardly any attention to the foreign ministers. Gorchakov was probably telling the truth about how little he knew of Central Asia in his conversations with the British ambassadors described in the previous chapter.

By the time of Nicholas II, who ruled from 1894 to 1917, Russia was forced to pay the price for its arbitrary institutions. Nicholas first took Russia into a disastrous war with Japan and then permitted his country to become captive to an alliance system which made war with Germany virtually inevitable. While Russia's energies had been geared to expansion and consumed by attendant foreign conflicts, its social and political structure had grown brittle. Defeat in the war with Japan in 1905 should

have served as a warning that the time for domestic consolidation—as advocated by the great reformer, Peter Stolypin—was drawing short. What Russia needed was a respite; what it received was another foreign enterprise. Thwarted in Asia, Russia reverted to its dream of Pan-Slavism and a push toward Constantinople, which, this time, ran out of control.

The irony was that, after a certain point, expansionism no longer enhanced Russia's power but brought about its decline. In 1849, Russia was widely considered the strongest nation in Europe. Seventy years later, its dynasty collapsed and it temporarily disappeared from the ranks of the Great Powers. Between 1848 and 1914, Russia was involved in over half a dozen wars (other than colonial wars), far more than any other major power. In each of these conflicts, except for the intervention in Hungary in 1849, the financial and political costs to Russia far exceeded the possible gains. Though each of these conflicts took its toll, Russia continued to identify Great Power status with territorial expansion; it hungered for more land, which it neither needed nor was able to digest. Tsar Nicholas II's close adviser, Serge Witte, promised him that "from the shores of the Pacific and the heights of the Himalayas Russia would dominate not only the affairs of Asia but those of Europe as well."[6] Economic, social, and political development would have been far more advantageous to Great Power status in the Industrial Age than a satellite in Bulgaria or a protectorate in Korea.

A few Russian leaders, such as Gorchakov, were wise enough to realize that, for Russia, "the extension of territory was the extension of weakness,"[7] but their views were never able to moderate the Russian mania for new conquests. In the end, the communist empire collapsed for essentially the same reasons that the tsars' had. The Soviet Union would have been much better off had it stayed within its borders after the Second World War and established relations with what came to be known as the satellite orbit comparable to those it maintained with Finland.

When two colossi—a powerful, impetuous Germany and a huge, relentless Russia—rub up against each other at the center of the Continent, conflict is probable, no matter that Germany had nothing to gain from a war with Russia and that Russia had everything to lose in a war with Germany. The peace of Europe therefore depended on the one country that had played the role of balancer so skillfully and with such moderation throughout the nineteenth century.

In 1890, the term "splendid isolation" still accurately described British foreign policy. British subjects proudly referred to their country as the "balance wheel" of Europe—the weight of which prevented any one of the various coalitions among the Continental powers from becoming

dominant. Entanglement in these alliances was traditionally nearly as repugnant to British statesmen as it was to American isolationists. Yet only twenty-five years later, Englishmen would be dying by the hundreds of thousands on the muddy fields of Flanders as they fought at the side of a French ally against a German foe.

A remarkable change occurred in British foreign policy between 1890 and 1914. It was no small irony that the man who led Great Britain through the first part of this transition represented everything traditional about Great Britain and British foreign policy. For the Marquis of Salisbury was the ultimate insider. He was the scion of the ancient Cecil family, whose ancestors had served as top ministers to British monarchs since the time of Queen Elizabeth I. King Edward VII, who reigned from 1901 to 1910 and came from an upstart family compared with the Cecils, was known to complain occasionally at the condescending tone Salisbury used toward him.

Salisbury's rise in politics was as effortless as it was foreordained. After an education at Christ Church, Oxford, the young Salisbury toured Europe, perfected his French, and met heads of state. By the age of forty-eight, after serving as viceroy of India, he became Disraeli's Foreign Minister and played a major role at the Congress of Berlin, where he did most of the detailed day-to-day negotiating. After Disraeli's death, he took over the leadership of the Tory Party and, apart from Gladstone's last government of 1892–94, was the dominant figure in British politics during the last fifteen years of the nineteenth century.

In some respects, Salisbury's position was not unlike that of President George Bush, though he served longer in his nation's highest office. Both men bestrode a world which was receding by the time they came to power, though that fact was not obvious to either of them. Both left an impact by knowing how to operate what they had inherited. Bush's view of the world was shaped by the Cold War, in which he had risen to prominence and over whose end he was obliged to preside while at the pinnacle of his career; Salisbury's formative experiences had been in the Palmerston era of unparalleled British power overseas and of intractable Anglo-Russian rivalry, both of which were clearly coming to an end during his leadership.

Salisbury's government had to grapple with the decline in Great Britain's relative standing. Its vast economic power was now matched by Germany's; Russia and France had expanded their imperial efforts and were challenging the British Empire nearly everywhere. Though Great Britain was still pre-eminent, the dominance it had enjoyed in the middle of the nineteenth century was slipping. Just as Bush adjusted skillfully to

what he had not foreseen, by the 1890s Great Britain's leaders recognized the need to relate traditional policy to unexpected realities.

Overweight and rumpled in his physical appearance, Lord Salisbury more adequately embodied Great Britain's contentment with the *status quo* than he did its transformation. As the author of the phrase "splendid isolation," Salisbury, on the face of it, promised to carry on the traditional British policies of holding a firm line overseas against other imperial powers, and of involving Great Britain in Continental alliances only when it was required as a last resort to prevent an aggressor from overturning the balance. For Salisbury, Great Britain's insular position meant that its ideal policy was to be active on the high seas and to remain unentangled in the customary Continental alliances. "We are fish," he bluntly asserted on one occasion.

In the end, Salisbury was obliged to recognize that Great Britain's overextended empire was straining under the pressures of Russia in the Far and Near East, and of France in Africa. Even Germany was entering the colonial race. Though France, Germany, and Russia were frequently in conflict with one another on the Continent, they always clashed with Great Britain overseas. For Great Britain possessed not only India, Canada, and a large portion of Africa, but insisted on dominating vast territories which, for strategic reasons, it wanted to keep from falling into the hands of another power even though it did not seek to control them directly. Salisbury called this claim a "sort of ear-mark upon territory, which, in case of a break-up, England did not want any other power to have."[8] These areas included the Persian Gulf, China, Turkey, and Morocco. During the 1890s, Great Britain felt beleaguered by endless clashes with Russia in Afghanistan, around the Straits, and in Northern China, and with France in Egypt and Morocco.

With the Mediterranean Agreements of 1887, Great Britain became indirectly associated with the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy in the hope that Italy and Austria might strengthen its hand in dealing with France in North Africa, and with Russia in the Balkans. Yet the Mediterranean Agreements proved to be only a stopgap.

The new German empire, deprived of its master strategist, did not know what to do with its opportunity. Geopolitical realities were gradually drawing Great Britain out of its splendid isolation, though there was enough handwringing about it by traditionalists. The first move toward greater involvement with the Continent was on behalf of warmer relations with imperial Germany. Convinced that Russia and Great Britain desperately needed Germany, German policymakers thought they could drive a hard bargain with both of them simultaneously without specifying the

nature of the bargain they were seeking or ever imagining that they might be pushing Russia and Great Britain closer together. When rebuffed in these all-or-nothing overtures, German leaders would withdraw into sulkiness, which quickly changed to truculence. This approach was in sharp contrast to that of France, which settled for slow, step-by-step progress, waiting twenty years for Russia and another decade and a half for Great Britain to propose an agreement. For all the noise post-Bismarck Germany made, its foreign policy was overwhelmingly amateurish, shortsighted, and even timid when faced with the confrontations it had itself generated.

William II's first diplomatic move along what turned into a fated course came in 1890, shortly after he had dismissed Bismarck, when he rejected the Tsar's offer to renew the Reinsurance Treaty for another three-year term. By rejecting Russia's overture at the very beginning of his rule, the Kaiser and his advisers pulled the perhaps most important thread out of the fabric of Bismarck's system of overlapping alliances. Three considerations motivated them: first, they wanted to make their policy as "simple and transparent" as possible (the new Chancellor, Caprivi, confessed on one occasion that he simply did not possess Bismarck's ability to keep eight balls in the air at once); second, they wanted to reassure Austria that their alliance with it was their top priority; finally, they considered the Reinsurance Treaty an obstacle to their preferred course of forging an alliance with Great Britain.

Each of these considerations demonstrated the lack of geopolitical understanding by which the Germany of William II progressively isolated itself. Complexity was inherent in Germany's location *and* history; no "simple" policy could take account of its many aspects. It had been precisely the ambiguity of a simultaneous treaty with Russia and an alliance with Austria that had enabled Bismarck to act as a balancer between Austrian fears and Russian ambitions for twenty years without having to break with either or to escalate the endemic Balkan crises. Ending the Reinsurance Treaty brought about exactly the opposite situation: limiting Germany's options promoted Austrian adventurism. Nikolai de Giers, the Russian Foreign Minister, understood this immediately, noting: "Through the dissolution of our treaty [the Reinsurance Treaty], Vienna has been liberated from the wise and well-meaning, but also stern control of Prince Bismarck."[9]

Abandoning the Reinsurance Treaty not only caused Germany to lose leverage vis-à-vis Austria, it above all increased Russia's anxieties. Germany's reliance on Austria was interpreted in St. Petersburg as a new predisposition to support Austria in the Balkans. Once Germany had

positioned itself as an obstacle to Russian aims in a region that had never before represented a vital German interest, Russia was certain to search for a counterweight, which France was only too eager to supply.

Russia's temptations to move in France's direction were strengthened by a German colonial agreement with Great Britain, which swiftly followed the Kaiser's refusal to renew the Reinsurance Treaty. Great Britain acquired from Germany the sources of the Nile and tracts of land in East Africa, including the island of Zanzibar. As a *quid pro quo,* Germany received a relatively inconsequential strip of land linking South-West Africa to the Zambezi River, the so-called Caprivi Strip, and the island of Helgoland in the North Sea, which was presumed to have some strategic value in safeguarding the German coast from naval attack.

It was not a bad bargain for either side, though it turned into the first of a series of misunderstandings. London undertook the agreement as a means of settling African colonial issues; Germany saw it as a prelude to an Anglo-German alliance; and Russia, going even further, interpreted it as England's first step into the Triple Alliance. Thus Baron Staal, the Russian Ambassador to Berlin, anxiously reported the pact between his country's historic friend, Germany, and its traditional foe, Great Britain, in these terms:

> When one is united by numerous interests and positive engagements on one point of the globe, one is almost certain to proceed in concert in all the great questions that may arise in the international field. . . . Virtually the entente with Germany has been accomplished. It cannot help but react upon the relations of England with the other powers of the Triple Alliance.[10]

Bismarck's nightmare of coalitions was now in train, for the end of the Reinsurance Treaty had paved the way for a Franco-Russian alliance.

Germany had calculated that France and Russia would never form an alliance, because Russia had no interest in fighting for Alsace-Lorraine, and France had no interest in fighting for the Balkan Slavs. It turned out to be one of the many egregious misconceptions of imperial Germany's post-Bismarck leadership. Once Germany was irrevocably committed to Austria's side, France and Russia in fact needed each other, however divergent their goals, because neither could achieve its own strategic objectives without first defeating, or at least weakening, Germany. France needed to do so because Germany would never relinquish Alsace-Lorraine without war, while Russia knew it would not be able to inherit the Slavic parts of the Austrian Empire without defeating Austria—which

Germany had made clear it would resist by its refusal to renew the Reinsurance Treaty. And Russia had no chance against Germany without the assistance of France.

Within a year of Germany's refusal to renew the Reinsurance Treaty, France and Russia had signed their Entente Cordiale, which provided mutual diplomatic support. Giers, the venerable Russian Foreign Minister, warned that the agreement would not solve the fundamental problem that Great Britain, not Germany, was Russia's principal adversary. Desperate to escape the isolation to which Bismarck had consigned it, France agreed to add a clause to the Franco-Russian agreement obliging France to give Russia diplomatic support in any colonial conflict with Great Britain.

To French leaders, this anti-British clause seemed a small entrance fee to establish what was bound to turn into an anti-German coalition. Thereafter, French efforts would be directed at extending the Franco-Russian agreement into a military alliance. Though Russian nationalists favored such a military pact to speed the dismemberment of the Austrian Empire, Russian traditionalists were uneasy. Giers' eventual successor as Foreign Minister, Count Vladimir Lamsdorff, wrote in his diary in early February 1892:

> They (the French) are also preparing to besiege us with proposals for an agreement about joint military actions in case of an attack by a third party. . . . But why overdo a good thing? We need peace and quiet in view of the miseries of the famine, of the unsatisfactory state of our finances, of the uncompleted state of our armaments program, of the desperate state of our transportation system, and finally of the renewed activity in the camp of the nihilists.[11]

In the end, French leaders overcame Lamsdorff's doubts, or else he was overruled by the Tsar. In 1894, a military convention was signed in which France agreed to aid Russia if Russia was attacked by Germany, or by Austria in combination with Germany. Russia would support France in case of an attack by Germany, or by Germany in combination with Italy. Whereas the Franco-Russian Agreement of 1891 had been a diplomatic instrument and could plausibly have been argued to be aimed at Great Britain as well as at Germany, the sole adversary foreseen by this military convention was Germany. What George Kennan would later call "the fateful alliance" (the entente between France and Russia of 1891, followed by the military convention of 1894) marked a watershed in Europe's rush toward war.

It was the beginning of the end for the operation of the balance of

power. The balance of power works best if at least one of the following conditions pertains: First, each nation must feel itself free to align with any other state, depending on the circumstances of the moment. Through much of the eighteenth century, the equilibrium was adjusted by constantly shifting alignments; it was also the case in the Bismarck period until 1890. Second, when there are fixed alliances but a balancer sees to it that none of the existing coalitions becomes predominant—the situation after the Franco-Russian treaty, when Great Britain continued to act as balancer and was in fact being wooed by both sides. Third, when there are rigid alliances and no balancer exists, but the cohesion of the alliances is relatively low so that, on any given issue, there are either compromises or changes in alignment.

When none of these conditions prevails, diplomacy turns rigid. A zero sum game develops in which any gain of one side is conceived as a loss for the other. Armaments races and mounting tensions become inevitable. This was the situation during the Cold War, and in Europe tacitly after Great Britain joined the Franco-Russian alliance, thereby forming the Triple Entente starting in 1908.

Unlike during the Cold War, the international order after 1891 did not turn rigid after a single challenge. It took fifteen years before each of the three elements of flexibility was destroyed in sequence. After the formation of the Triple Entente, the balance of power ceased to function. Tests of strength became the rule and not the exception. Diplomacy as the art of compromise ended. It was only a question of time before some crisis would drive events out of control.

But in 1891, as France and Russia lined up against it, Germany still hoped that it could bring about the offsetting alliance with Great Britain for which William II yearned but which his impetuousness made impossible. The colonial agreement of 1890 did not lead to the alliance the Russian Ambassador had feared. Its failure to materialize was partly due to British domestic politics. When the aged Gladstone returned to office in 1892 for the last time, he bruised the Kaiser's tender ego by rejecting any association with autocratic Germany or Austria.

Yet the fundamental reason for the failure of the several attempts to arrange an Anglo-German alliance was the German leadership's persistent incomprehension of traditional British foreign policy as well as of the real requirements of its own security. For a century and a half, Great Britain had refused to commit itself to an open-ended military alliance. It would make only two kinds of engagements: limited military agreements to deal with definable, clearly specified dangers; or entente-type arrangements to cooperate diplomatically on those issues in which interests with

another country ran parallel. In a sense, the British definition of entente was, of course, a tautology: Great Britain would cooperate when it chose to cooperate. But an entente also had the effect of creating moral and psychological ties and a presumption—if not a legal obligation—of joint action in crises. And it would have kept Great Britain apart from France and Russia, or at least complicated their rapprochement.

Germany refused such informal procedures. William II insisted on what he called a Continental-type alliance. "If England wants allies or aid," he said in 1895, "she must abandon her non-committal policy and provide continental type guarantees or treaties."[12] But what could the Kaiser have meant by a Continental-type guarantee? After nearly a century of splendid isolation, Great Britain was clearly not ready to undertake the permanent Continental commitment it had so consistently avoided for 150 years, especially on behalf of Germany, which was fast becoming the strongest country on the Continent.

What made this German pressure for a formal guarantee so self-defeating was that Germany did not really need it, because it was strong enough to defeat any prospective Continental adversary or combination of them, so long as Great Britain did not take their side. What Germany should have asked of Great Britain was not an alliance, but benevolent neutrality in a Continental war—and for that an entente-type arrangement would have been sufficient. By asking for what it did not need, and by offering what Great Britain did not want (sweeping commitments to defend the British Empire), Germany led Great Britain to suspect that it was in fact seeking world domination.

German impatience deepened the reserve of the British, who were beginning to entertain grave doubts about the judgment of their suitor. "I do not like to disregard the plain anxiety of my German friends," wrote Salisbury. "But it is not wise to be guided too much by their advice now. Their Achitophel is gone. They are much pleasanter and easier to deal with; but one misses the extraordinary penetration of the old man [Bismarck]."[13]

While the German leadership impetuously pursued alliances, the German public was demanding an ever more assertive foreign policy. Only the Social Democrats held out for a time, though in the end they, too, succumbed to public opinion and supported Germany's declaration of war in 1914. The leading German classes had no experience with European diplomacy, much less with the *Weltpolitik* on which they were so loudly insisting. The Junkers, who had led Prussia to the domination of Germany, would bear the weight of opprobrium after the two world wars, especially in the United States. In fact, they were the social stratum

least guilty of overreaching in foreign affairs, being basically geared to Continental policy and having little interest in events outside Europe. Rather, it was the new industrial managerial and the growing professional classes that provided the nucleus of nationalist agitation without encountering in the political system the sort of parliamentary buffer which had evolved in Great Britain and France over several centuries. In the Western democracies, the strong nationalist currents were channeled through parliamentary institutions; in Germany, they had to find expression in extra-parliamentary pressure groups.

As autocratic as Germany was, its leaders were extremely sensitive to public opinion and heavily influenced by nationalistic pressure groups. These groups saw diplomacy and international relations almost as if they were sporting events, always pushing the government to a harder line, more territorial expansion, more colonies, a stronger army, or a larger navy. They treated the normal give-and-take of diplomacy, or the slightest hint of German diplomatic concession, as an egregious humiliation. Kurt Rietzler, the political secretary of the German Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, who was in office when war was declared, remarked aptly: "The threat of war in our time lies . . . in the internal politics of those countries in which a weak government is confronted by a strong nationalist movement."[14]

This emotional and political climate produced a major German diplomatic gaffe—the so-called Krüger Telegram—by which the Emperor undermined his option for a British alliance for at least the rest of the century. In 1895, a Colonel Jameson, supported by British colonial interests and most notably by Cecil Rhodes, led a raid into the independent Boer states of the South African Transvaal. The raid was a total failure and a great embarrassment to Salisbury's government, which claimed to have had no direct involvement in it. The German nationalist press gloated, urging an even more thorough humiliation of the British.

Friedrich von Holstein, a principal councilor and *éminence grise* in the Foreign Ministry, saw the disastrous raid as an opportunity to teach the British the advantages of a friendly Germany by showing them just how prickly an adversary it could be. For his own part, the Kaiser found the opportunity to swagger irresistible. Shortly after New Year's Day 1896, he dispatched a message to President Paul Krüger of the Transvaal congratulating him for repelling "the attacks from without." It was a direct slap at Great Britain and raised the specter of a German protectorate in the heart of what the British regarded as their own sphere of interest. In reality, the Krüger Telegram represented neither German colonial aspirations nor German foreign policy, for it was purely a public-relations ploy and

it achieved that objective: "Nothing that the government has done for years," wrote the liberal *Allgemeine Zeitung* on January 5, "has given as complete satisfaction. . . . It is written from the soul of the German people."[15]

Germany's shortsightedness and insensitivity accelerated this trend. The Kaiser and his entourage convinced themselves that, since courting Great Britain had failed to produce an alliance, perhaps some demonstration of the cost of German displeasure would prove more persuasive. Unfortunately for Germany, that approach belied the historical record, which offered no example of a British susceptibility to being bullied.

What started out as a form of harassment to demonstrate the value of German friendship gradually turned into a genuine strategic challenge. No issue was as likely to turn Great Britain into an implacable adversary as a threat to its command of the seas. Yet this was precisely what Germany undertook, seemingly without realizing that it was embarking on an irrevocable challenge. Starting in the mid-1890s, domestic pressures to build up a large German navy began to mount, spearheaded by the "navalists," one of a growing number of pressure groups which consisted of a mix of industrialists and naval officers. Since they developed a vested interest in tensions with Great Britain to justify naval appropriations, they treated the Krüger Telegram as a godsend, as they did any other issue denoting the possibility of conflict with Great Britain in remote corners of the globe, ranging from the status of Samoa to the boundaries of the Sudan and the future of the Portuguese colonies.

Thus began a vicious cycle which culminated in confrontation. For the privilege of building a navy which, in the subsequent world war, had only one inconclusive encounter with the British fleet in the battle of Jutland, Germany managed to add Great Britain to its growing list of adversaries. For there was no question that England would resist once a Continental country already in possession of the strongest army in Europe began aiming for parity with Great Britain on the seas.

Yet the Kaiser seemed oblivious to the impact of his policies. British irritation with German bluster and the naval buildup did not, at first, change the reality that France was pressing Great Britain in Egypt, and that Russia was challenging it in Central Asia. What if Russia and France decided to cooperate, applying simultaneous pressure in Africa, Afghanistan, and China? What if the Germans joined them in an assault on the Empire in South Africa? British leaders began to doubt whether splendid isolation was still an appropriate foreign policy.

The most important and vocal spokesman of this group was the Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain. A dashing figure who was Salisbury's

junior by a whole generation, Chamberlain seemed to embody the twentieth century in his call for some alliance—preferably German—while the older patrician adhered strictly to the isolationist impulse of the previous century. In a major speech in November 1899, Chamberlain called for a "Teutonic" alliance, consisting of Great Britain, Germany, and the United States.[16] Chamberlain felt so strongly about it that he transmitted his scheme to Germany without Salisbury's approval. But the German leaders continued to hold out for formal guarantees and remained oblivious to the reality that the terms were irrelevant and that what should have mattered to them most was British neutrality in a Continental war.

In October 1900, Salisbury's poor health forced him to give up the office of Foreign Secretary, though he retained the post of Prime Minister. His successor at the Foreign Office was Lord Lansdowne, who agreed with Chamberlain that Great Britain could no longer enjoy safety through splendid isolation. Yet Lansdowne was unable to muster a consensus for a full-scale formal alliance with Germany, the Cabinet being unwilling to go further than an entente-style arrangement: "... an understanding with regard to the policy which they (the British and the German governments) might pursue in reference to particular questions or in particular parts of the world in which they are alike interested."[17] It was substantially the same formula which would lead to the Entente Cordiale with France a few years later and which proved quite sufficient to bring Great Britain into the World War on the side of France.

Once again, however, Germany rejected the attainable in favor of what was on the face of it unachievable. The new German Chancellor Bülow refused an entente-style arrangement with Great Britain because he was more worried about public opinion than he was about geopolitical vistas —especially given his priority of persuading the Parliament to vote a large increase in the German navy. He would curtail the naval program for nothing less than British adherence to a triple alliance consisting of Germany, Austria, and Italy. Salisbury rejected Bülow's all-or-nothing gambit, and, for the third time in a decade, an Anglo-German agreement aborted.

The essential incompatibility between British and German perceptions of foreign policy could be seen in the way the two leaders explained their failure to agree. Bülow was all emotion as he accused Great Britain of provincialism, ignoring the fact that Great Britain had been conducting a global foreign policy for over a century before Germany was even unified:

> English politicians know little about the Continent. From a continental point of view they know as much as we do about ideas in Peru or

> Siam. They are naive in their conscious egotism and in a certain blind confidence. They find it difficult to credit really bad intentions in others. They are very quiet, very phlegmatic and very optimistic. . . .[18]

Salisbury's reply took the form of a lesson in sophisticated strategic analysis for his restless and rather vague interlocutor. Citing a tactless comment by the German Ambassador to London, to the effect that Great Britain needed an alliance with Germany in order to escape dangerous isolation, he wrote:

> The liability of having to defend the German and Austrian frontiers against Russia is heavier than that of *having to defend the British Isles* against France . . . Count Hatzfeldt [the German Ambassador] speaks of our *"isolation"* as constituting a serious danger for us. *Have we ever felt that danger practically?* If we had succumbed in the revolutionary war, our fall would not have been due to our isolation. We had many allies, but they would not have saved us if the French Emperor had been able to command the Channel. Except during his [Napoleon's] reign we have never even been in danger; and, therefore, it is impossible for us to judge whether the "isolation" under which we are supposed to suffer, does or does not contain in it any elements of peril. It would hardly be wise to incur novel and most onerous obligations, in order to guard against a *danger in whose existence we have no historical reason for believing.*[19]

Great Britain and Germany simply did not have enough parallel interests to justify the formal global alliance imperial Germany craved. The British feared that further additions to German strength would turn their would-be ally into the sort of dominant power they had historically resisted. At the same time, Germany did not relish assuming the role of a British auxiliary on behalf of issues traditionally considered peripheral to German interests, such as the threat to India, and Germany was too arrogant to understand the benefits of British neutrality.

Foreign Secretary Lansdowne's next move demonstrated that the German leaders' conviction that their country was indispensable to Great Britain was a case of inflated self-appraisal. In 1902, he stunned Europe by forging an alliance with Japan, the first time since Richelieu's dealings with the Ottoman Turks that any European country had gone for help outside the Concert of Europe. Great Britain and Japan agreed that if either of them became involved in a war with *one* other power over China or Korea, the other would observe neutrality. If, however, either signatory was attacked by *two* adversaries, the other signatory was obliged

to assist its partner. Because the alliance would operate only if Japan were fighting two adversaries, Great Britain finally had discovered an ally which was willing, indeed eager, to contain Russia without, however, seeking to entangle it in extraneous arrangements—one, moreover, whose Far East location placed it in an area of greater strategic interest to Great Britain than the Russo-German frontier. And Japan was protected against France, which, without the alliance, might have sought to use the war to strengthen its claims on Russian support. From then on, Great Britain would lose interest in Germany as a strategic partner; indeed, in the course of time, it would come to regard Germany as a geopolitical threat.

As late as 1912, there was still a chance of settling Anglo-German difficulties. Lord Haldane, first Lord of the Admiralty, visited Berlin to discuss a relaxation of tensions. Haldane was instructed to seek an accommodation with Germany on the basis of a naval accord along with this pledge of British neutrality: "If either of the high contracting parties (i.e., Britain and Germany) becomes entangled in a war in which it cannot be said to be the aggressor, the other will at least observe towards the Power so entangled a benevolent neutrality."[20] The Kaiser, however, insisted that England pledge neutrality "should war be forced upon Germany,"[21] which sounded to London like a demand that Great Britain stand on the sidelines if Germany decided to launch a pre-emptive war against Russia or France. When the British refused to accept the Kaiser's wording, he in turn rejected theirs; the German Navy Bill went forward, and Haldane returned to London empty-handed.

The Kaiser still had not grasped that Great Britain would not go beyond a tacit bargain, which was really all that Germany needed. "If England only intends to extend her hand to us under the condition that we must limit our fleet," he wrote, "that is an unbounded impudence which contains in it a bad insult to the German people and their Emperor. This offer must be rejected *a limine*. . . ."[22] As convinced as ever that he could intimidate England into a formal alliance, the Kaiser boasted: "I have shown the English that, when they touch our armaments, they bite on granite. Perhaps by this I have increased their hatred but won their respect, which will induce them in due course to resume negotiations, it is to be hoped in a more modest tone and with a more fortunate result."[23]

The Kaiser's impetuous and imperious quest for alliance merely succeeded in magnifying Great Britain's suspicions. The German naval program on top of German harassment of Great Britain during the Boer War of 1899–1902 led to a thorough reassessment of British foreign policy. For a century and a half, Great Britain had considered France as the principal threat to the European equilibrium, to be resisted with the

assistance of some German state, usually with Austria, occasionally with Prussia. And it had viewed Russia as the gravest danger to its empire. But once it had the Japanese alliance in hand, Great Britain began to reconsider its historic priorities. In 1903, Great Britain initiated a systematic effort to settle outstanding colonial issues with France, culminating in the so-called Entente Cordiale of 1904—precisely the sort of arrangement for informal cooperation that Germany had consistently rejected. Almost immediately afterward, Great Britain began to explore a similar arrangement with Russia.

Because the Entente was formally a colonial agreement, it did not represent a technical break with the traditional British policy of "splendid isolation." Yet its practical effect was that Great Britain abandoned the position of balancer and attached itself to one of the two opposing alliances. In July 1903, when the Entente was being negotiated, a French representative in London told Lansdowne as a *quid pro quo* that France would do its utmost to relieve Great Britain of Russian pressures elsewhere:

> . . . that the most serious menace to the peace of Europe lay in Germany, that a good understanding between France and England was the only means of holding German designs in check, and that if such an understanding could be arrived at, England would find that France would be able to exercise a salutary influence over Russia and thereby relieve us from many of our troubles with that country.[24]

Within a decade, Russia, previously tied to Germany by the Reinsurance Treaty, had become a military ally of France, while Great Britain, an on-again-off-again suitor of Germany, joined the French diplomatic camp. Germany had achieved the extraordinary feat of isolating itself and of bringing together three erstwhile enemies in a hostile coalition aimed against it.

A statesman aware of approaching danger has to make a basic decision. If he believes that the threat will mount with the passage of time, he must try to nip it in the bud. But if he concludes that the looming danger reflects a fortuitous, if accidental, combination of circumstances, he is usually better off waiting and letting time erode the peril. Two hundred years earlier, Richelieu had recognized the danger in the hostile encirclement of France—indeed, avoiding it was the core of his policy. But he understood as well the various components of that potential danger. He decided that premature action would drive the states surrounding France together. Thus he made time his ally and waited for the latent differences

among France's adversaries to emerge. Then, and only after these had become entrenched, did he permit France to enter the fray.

The Kaiser and his advisers had neither the patience nor the acumen for such a policy—even though the countries by which Germany felt threatened were anything but natural allies. Germany's reaction to the looming encirclement was to accelerate the same diplomacy which had brought about the danger in the first place. It tried to split the young Entente Cordiale by finding some pretext to face down France, thereby demonstrating that British support was either illusory or ineffective.

Germany's opportunity to test the strength of the Entente presented itself in Morocco, where French designs were in violation of a treaty affirming Morocco's independence, and where Germany had substantial commercial interests. The Kaiser chose to make his point while on a cruise in March 1905. Landing at Tangier, he declared Germany's resolve to uphold the independence of Morocco. The German leaders were gambling, first, that the United States, Italy, and Austria would support their open-door policy, second, that in the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War, Russia would not be able to involve itself, and third, that Great Britain would be only too happy to be relieved of its obligation to France at an international conference.

All of these assumptions were proved wrong because fear of Germany overrode every other consideration. In the first challenge to the Entente Cordiale, Great Britain backed France to the hilt and would not go along with Germany's call for a conference until France had accepted it. Austria and Italy were reluctant to venture anywhere near the brink of war. Nevertheless, German leaders invested a huge amount of prestige in this growing dispute, on the reasoning that anything less than a diplomatic victory demonstrating the irrelevance of the Entente would be disastrous.

Throughout his reign, the Kaiser was better at starting crises than he was at concluding them. He found dramatic encounters exciting but lacked the nerve for prolonged confrontation. William II and his advisers were correct in their assessment that France was not prepared to go to war. But, as it turned out, neither were they. All they really achieved was the dismissal of French Foreign Minister Delcassé, a token victory because Delcassé soon returned in another position, retaining a major role in French politics. In terms of the substance of the dispute, the German leaders, lacking the courage of their boastful rhetoric, permitted themselves to be fobbed off with a conference scheduled in six months' time in the Spanish town of Algeciras. When a country threatens war and then backs down in favor of a conference to be held at some later date, it automatically diminishes the credibility of its threat. (This was also the

way the Western democracies would defuse Khrushchev's Berlin ultimatum a half century later.)

The extent to which Germany had isolated itself became evident at the opening of the Algeciras Conference in January 1906. Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary of Great Britain's new Liberal government, warned the German Ambassador to London that, in the event of war, Great Britain would stand alongside France:

> . . . in the event of an attack upon France by Germany arising out of our Morocco Agreement, public feeling in England would be so strong that no British government could remain neutral . . .[25]

The German leaders' emotionalism and inability to define long-range objectives turned Algeciras into a diplomatic debacle for their country. The United States, Italy, Russia, and Great Britain all refused to take Germany's side. The results of this first Moroccan crisis were the exact opposite of what German leaders had sought to achieve. Instead of wrecking the Entente Cordiale, it led to Franco-British military cooperation and lent impetus to the Anglo-Russian Entente of 1907.

After Algeciras, Great Britain agreed to the military cooperation with a Continental power that it had avoided for so long. Consultations began between the leaders of the British and French navies. The Cabinet was not at ease with this new departure. Grey wrote to Paul Cambon, the French Ambassador to London, in an effort to hedge his bets:

> We have agreed that consultation between experts is not, and ought not to be, regarded as an engagement that commits either Government to action in a contingency that has not arisen and may never arise. . . .[26]

It was the traditional British escape clause that London not commit itself legally to specific circumstances in which it would be *obliged* to take military action. France accepted this sop to parliamentary control, convinced that military staff talks would wield their own reality, whatever the legal obligation. For a decade and a half, German leaders had refused to grant Great Britain this sort of leeway. The French had the political acumen to live with British ambiguity, and to rely on the conviction that a moral obligation was developing which, in a time of crisis, might well carry the day.

With the emergence of the Anglo-French-Russian bloc of 1907, only two forces remained in play in European diplomacy: the Triple Entente and the alliance between Germany and Austria. German encirclement

became complete. Like the Anglo-French Entente, the British agreement with Russia began as a colonial accord. For some years, Great Britain and Russia had been slowly putting their colonial disputes to rest. Japan's victory over Russia in 1905 effectively ruined Russia's Far Eastern ambitions. By the summer of 1907, it became safe for Great Britain to offer Russia generous terms in Afghanistan and Persia, dividing Persia into three spheres of influence: the Russians were given the northern region; a central region was declared neutral; and Great Britain claimed control of the south. Afghanistan went to the British sphere. Anglo-Russian relations, which ten years earlier had been marred by disputes covering a third of the globe from Constantinople to Korea, were finally serene. The degree of British preoccupation with Germany was shown by the fact that, to secure Russian cooperation, Great Britain was prepared to abandon its determination to keep Russia out of the Dardanelles. As Foreign Secretary Grey remarked: "Good relations with Russia meant that our old policy of closing the Straits against her, and throwing our weight against her at any conference of the Powers must be abandoned."[27]

Some historians[28] have claimed that the real Triple Entente was two colonial agreements gone awry, and that Great Britain had wanted to protect its empire, not to encircle Germany. There is a classic document, however, the so-called Crowe Memorandum, which leaves no reasonable doubt that Great Britain joined the Triple Entente in order to thwart what it feared was a German drive for world domination. On January 1, 1907, Sir Eyre Crowe, a prominent British Foreign Office analyst, explained why, in his view, an accommodation with Germany was impossible and entente with France was the only option. The Crowe Memorandum was at a level of analysis never reached by any document of post-Bismarck Germany. The conflict had become one between strategy and brute power—and unless there is a huge disproportion of strength, which was not the case, the strategist has the upper hand because he can plan his actions while his adversary is obliged to improvise. Admitting to major differences between Great Britain and both France and Russia, Crowe nevertheless assessed these as being subject to compromise because they reflected definable, and therefore limited, objectives. What made German foreign policy so menacing was the lack of any discernible rationale behind its ceaseless global challenges, which extended across regions as far-flung as South Africa, Morocco, and the Near East. In addition, the German drive for maritime power was "incompatible with the survival of the British Empire."

According to Crowe, Germany's unconstrained conduct guaranteed confrontation: "The union of the greatest military with the greatest naval

power in one state would compel the world to combine for the riddance of such an incubus."[29]

True to the tenets of *Realpolitik,* Crowe argued that structure, not motive, determined stability: Germany's intentions were essentially irrelevant; what mattered were its capabilities. He put forward two hypotheses:

> Either Germany is definitely aiming at a general political hegemony and maritime ascendancy, threatening the independence of her neighbours and ultimately the existence of England; Or Germany, free from any such clear-cut ambition, and thinking for the present merely of using her legitimate position and influence as one of the leading Powers in the council of nations, is seeking to promote her foreign commerce, spread the benefits of German culture, extend the scope of her national energies, and create fresh German interests all over the world wherever and whenever a peaceful opportunity offers. . . .[30]

Crowe insisted that these distinctions were irrelevant because, in the end, they would be overridden by the temptations inherent in Germany's growing power:

> . . . it is clear that the second scheme (of semi-independent evolution, not entirely unaided by statecraft) may at any stage merge into the first, or conscious-design scheme. Moreover, if ever the evolution scheme should come to be realized, the position thereby accruing to Germany would obviously constitute as formidable a menace to the rest of the world as would be presented by any deliberate conquest of a similar position by 'malice aforethought'.[31]

Though the Crowe Memorandum did not actually go further than to oppose an understanding with Germany, its thrust was clear: if Germany did not abandon its quest for maritime supremacy and moderate its so-called *Weltpolitik,* Great Britain was certain to join Russia and France in opposing it. And it would do so with the implacable tenacity that had brought down French and Spanish pretensions in previous centuries.

Great Britain made it clear that it would not stand for any further accretion of German strength. In 1909, Foreign Secretary Grey made this point in response to a German offer to *slow down* (but not end) its naval buildup if Great Britain agreed to stay neutral in a German war against France and Russia. The proposed agreement, argued Grey,

> . . . would serve to establish German hegemony in Europe and would not last long after it had served that purpose. It is in fact an invitation to

> help Germany to make a European combination which could be directed against us when it suited her to use it. . . . If we sacrifice the other Powers to Germany, we shall eventually be attacked.[32]

After the creation of the Triple Entente, the cat-and-mouse game Germany and Great Britain had played in the 1890s grew deadly serious and turned into a struggle between a *status quo* power and a power demanding a change in the equilibrium. With diplomatic flexibility no longer possible, the only way to alter the balance of power was by adding more arms or by victory in war.

The two alliances were facing each other across a gulf of growing mutual distrust. Unlike the period of the Cold War, the two groupings did not fear war; they were in fact more concerned with preserving their cohesiveness than with avoiding a showdown. Confrontation became the standard method of diplomacy.

Nevertheless, there was still a chance to avoid catastrophe because there were actually few issues that justified war dividing the alliances. No other member of the Triple Entente would have gone to war to help France regain Alsace-Lorraine; Germany, even in its exalted frame of mind, was unlikely to support an Austrian war of aggression in the Balkans. A policy of restraint might have delayed the war and caused the unnatural alliances gradually to disintegrate—especially as the Triple Entente had been forged by fear of Germany in the first place.

By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the balance of power had degenerated into hostile coalitions whose rigidity was matched by the reckless disregard for consequence with which they had been assembled. Russia was tied to a Serbia teeming with nationalist, even terrorist, factions and which, having nothing to lose, had no concern for the risk of a general war. France had handed a blank check to a Russia eager to restore its self-respect after the Russo-Japanese War. Germany had done the same for an Austria desperate to protect its Slavic provinces against agitation from Serbia, which, in turn, was backed by Russia. The nations of Europe had permitted themselves to become captives of reckless Balkan clients. Far from restraining these nations of unbounded passion and limited sense of global responsibility, they allowed themselves to be dragged along by the paranoia that their restless partners might shift alliances if they were not given their way. For a few years, crises were still being surmounted although each new one brought the inevitable showdown closer. And Germany's reaction to the Triple Entente revealed a dogged determination to repeat the same mistake over and over again; every problem became transformed into a test of manhood to prove that Germany was decisive and powerful while its adversaries lacked resolu-

tion and strength. Yet, with each new German challenge, the bonds of the Triple Entente grew tighter.

In 1908, an international crisis occurred over Bosnia-Herzegovina, worth retelling because it illustrates the tendency of history to repeat itself. Bosnia-Herzegovina had been the backwater of Europe, its fate having been left in an ambiguous status at the Congress of Berlin because no one really knew what to do with it. This no-man's-land between the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires, which contained Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Muslim religions, and Croatian, Serbian, and Muslim populations, had never been a state or even self-governing. It only seemed governable if none of these groups was asked to submit to the others. For thirty years, Bosnia-Herzegovina had been under Turkish suzerainty, Austrian administration, and local autonomy without experiencing a serious challenge to this multinational arrangement which left the issue of ultimate sovereignty unsettled. Austria had waited thirty years to initiate outright annexation because the passions of the polyglot mix were too complex even for the Austrians to sort out, despite their long experience of administering in the midst of chaos. When they finally did annex Bosnia-Herzegovina, they did so more to score a point against Serbia (and indirectly Russia) than to achieve any coherent political objective. As a result, Austria upset the delicate balance of offsetting hatreds.

Three generations later, in 1992, the same elemental passions erupted over comparable issues, confounding all but the zealots directly involved and those familiar with the region's volatile history. Once more, an abrupt change in government turned Bosnia-Herzegovina into a cauldron. As soon as Bosnia was declared an independent state, all the nationalities fell upon each other in a struggle for dominance, with the Serbs settling old scores in a particularly brutal manner.

Taking advantage of Russia's weakness in the wake of the Russo-Japanese War, Austria frivolously implemented a thirty-year-old secret codicil from the Congress of Berlin in which the powers had agreed to let Austria annex Bosnia-Herzegovina. Heretofore, Austria had been satisfied with *de facto* control because it wanted no more Slavic subjects. But in 1908, Austria reversed that decision, fearing its empire was about to dissolve under the impact of Serbian agitation and thinking that it needed some success to demonstrate its continued pre-eminence in the Balkans. In the intervening three decades, Russia had lost its dominant position in Bulgaria and the Three Emperors' League had lapsed. Not unreasonably, Russia was outraged that the all-but-forgotten agreement should now be invoked to permit Austria to acquire a territory which a Russian war had liberated.

But outrage does not guarantee success, especially when its target is

already in possession of the prize. For the first time, Germany placed itself squarely behind Austria, signaling that it was prepared to risk a European war if Russia challenged the annexation. Then, making matters even more tense, Germany demanded formal Russian and Serbian recognition of Austria's move. Russia had to swallow this humiliation because Great Britain and France were not yet ready to go to war over a Balkan issue, and because Russia was in no position to go to war all alone so soon after its defeat in the Russo-Japanese War.

Germany thus placed itself as an obstacle in Russia's path and in an area where it had never before asserted a vital interest—indeed, where Russia had heretofore been able to count on Germany to moderate Austria's ambitions. Germany demonstrated not only its recklessness but a severe lapse of historical memory. Only half a century before, Bismarck had accurately predicted that Russia would never forgive Austria for humiliating it in the Crimean War. Now, Germany was making the same mistake, compounding Russia's estrangement, which had started at the Congress of Berlin.

Humiliating a great country without weakening it is always a dangerous game. Though Germany thought it was teaching Russia the importance of German goodwill, Russia resolved never to be caught flat-footed again. The two great Continental powers thus began to play a game called "chicken" in American slang, in which two drivers hurtle their vehicles toward each other, each hoping that the other will veer off at the last moment while counting on his own more steady nerves. Unfortunately, this game was played on several different occasions in pre–World War I Europe. Each time a collision was avoided, the collective confidence in the game's ultimate safety was strengthened, causing everyone to forget that a single failure would produce irrevocable catastrophe.

As if Germany wanted to make perfectly sure that it had not neglected to bully any potential adversary or to give all of them sufficient reason to tighten their bonds to each other in self-defense, it next challenged France. In 1911, France, now effectively the civil administrator of Morocco, responded to local unrest by sending troops to the city of Fez, in clear violation of the Algeciras accord. To the wild applause of the nationalist German press, the Kaiser reacted by dispatching the gunboat *Panther* to the Moroccan port of Agadir. "Hurrah! A Deed!" wrote the *Rheinisch-Westfalische Zeitung* on July 2, 1911. "Action at last, a liberating deed which must dissolve the cloud of pessimism everywhere."[33] The *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* advised that the government push ahead with every energy, "even if out of such a policy, circumstances arise that we cannot foresee today."[34] In what passed for subtlety in the German press, the journal was basically urging Germany to risk war over Morocco.

The grandiloquently named *"Panther* Leap" had the same ending as Germany's previous efforts to break its self-inflicted encirclement. Once again, Germany and France seemed poised on the brink of a war, with Germany's goals as ill-defined as ever. What sort of compensation was it seeking this time? A Moroccan port? Part of Morocco's Atlantic coast? Colonial gains elsewhere? It wanted to intimidate France but could find no operational expression for that objective.

In keeping with their evolving relationship, Great Britain backed France more firmly than it had at Algeciras in 1906. The shift in British public opinion was demonstrated by the attitude of its then Chancellor of the Exchequer, David Lloyd George, who had a well-deserved reputation for pacifism and as an advocate of good relations with Germany. On this occasion, however, he delivered a major speech which warned that if

> . . . a situation were to be forced upon us in which peace could only be preserved by the surrender of the great and beneficent position we had won by centuries of heroism and achievement . . . then I say emphatically that peace at that price would be a humiliation intolerable for a great country like ours to endure.[35]

Even Austria turned a cold shoulder on its powerful ally, seeing no point in staking its survival on a North African adventure. Germany backed down, accepting a large but worthless tract of land in Central Africa, a transaction which elicited a groan from Germany's nationalistic press. "We practically risked a world war for a few Congolese swamps," wrote the *Berliner Tageblatt* on November 3, 1911.[36] Yet what ought to have been criticized was not the value of the new acquisitions but the wisdom of threatening a different country with war every few years without being able to define a meaningful objective, each time magnifying the fear which had brought the hostile coalitions into being in the first place.

If German tactics had by now become stereotyped, so had the Anglo-French response. In 1912, Great Britain, France, and Russia started military staff talks, the significance of which was only formally limited by the usual British disclaimer that they constituted no legally binding commitment. Even this constraint was belied to some extent by the Anglo-French Naval Treaty of 1912, according to which the French fleet was moved to the Mediterranean and Great Britain assumed responsibility for defending the French Atlantic coast. Two years later, this agreement would be invoked as a moral obligation for Great Britain to enter the First World War because, so it was claimed, France had left its Channel coast undefended in reliance on British support. (Twenty-eight years later, in 1940, a similar agreement between the United States and Great Britain

would enable Great Britain to move its Pacific fleet to the Atlantic, implying a moral obligation on the part of the United States to protect Great Britain's nearby defenseless Asian possessions against Japanese attack.)

In 1913, German leaders culminated the alienation of Russia by another of their fitful and pointless maneuvers. This time, Germany agreed to reorganize the Turkish army and to send a German general to assume command over Constantinople. William II dramatized the challenge by sending off the training mission with a typically grandiloquent flourish, expressing his hope that "the German flags will soon fly over the fortifications of the Bosphorus."[37]

Few events could have enraged Russia more than Germany's laying claim to the position in the Straits that Europe had denied to Russia for a century. Russia had with difficulty reconciled itself to the control of the Straits by a weak country like Ottoman Turkey, but it would never acquiesce to domination of the Dardanelles by another Great Power. The Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Sazonov, wrote to the Tsar in December 1913: "To abandon the Straits to a powerful state would be synonymous with subordinating the whole economic development of southern Russia to this state."[38] Nicholas II told the British Ambassador that "Germany was aiming at acquiring such a position at Constantinople as would enable it to shut in Russia altogether in the Black Sea. Should she attempt to carry out this policy, he would have to resist it with all his power, even if war should be the only alternative."[39]

Though Germany devised a face-saving formula for removing the German commander from Constantinople (by promoting him to field marshal, which, according to German tradition, meant he could no longer command troops in the field), irreparable damage had been done. Russia understood that Germany's support to Austria over Bosnia-Herzegovina had not been an aberration. The Kaiser, regarding these developments as tests of his manhood, told his chancellor on February 25, 1914: "Russo-Prussian relations are dead once and for all! We have become enemies!"[40] Six months later, World War I broke out.

An international system had evolved whose rigidity and confrontational style paralleled that of the later Cold War. But in fact, the pre–World War I international order was far more volatile than the Cold War world. In the Nuclear Age, only the United States and the Soviet Union had the technical means to start a general war in which the risks were so cataclysmic that neither superpower dared to delegate such awesome power to an ally, however close. By contrast, prior to World War I, each member of the two main coalitions was in a position not only to start a war but to blackmail its allies into supporting it.

For a while, the alliance system itself provided a certain restraint. France held Russia back in conflicts which primarily involved Austria; Germany played a similar role with Austria vis-à-vis Russia. In the Bosnian crisis of 1908, France made it clear that it would not go to war over a Balkan issue. During the Moroccan crisis of 1911, French President Calliaux was told firmly that any French attempt to resolve a colonial crisis by force would not receive Russian support. As late as the Balkan War of 1912, Germany warned Austria that there were limits to German backing, and Great Britain pressured Russia to moderate its acts on behalf of the volatile and unpredictable Balkan League, which was led by Serbia. At the London Conference of 1913, Great Britain helped to thwart Serbian annexation of Albania, which would have been intolerable to Austria.

The London Conference of 1913 would, however, be the last time that the pre–World War I international system could ease conflicts. Serbia was unhappy with Russia's lukewarm support, while Russia resented Great Britain's posture as an impartial arbiter and France's clear reluctance to go to war. Austria, on the verge of disintegrating under Russian and South Slav pressures, was upset that Germany was not backing it more vigorously. Serbia, Russia, and Austria all expected greater support from their allies; France, Great Britain, and Germany feared that they might lose their partners if they did not support them more forcefully in the next crisis.

Afterward, each Great Power was suddenly seized by panic that a conciliatory stance would make it appear weak and unreliable and cause its partners to leave it facing a hostile coalition all alone. Countries began to assume levels of risk unwarranted by their historic national interests or by any rational long-term strategic objective. Richelieu's dictum that means must correspond to ends was violated almost daily. Germany accepted the risk of world war in order to be seen as supportive of Vienna's South Slav policy, in which it had no national interest. Russia was willing to risk a fight to the death with Germany in order to be viewed as Serbia's steadfast ally. Germany and Russia had no major conflict with each other; their confrontation was by proxy.

In 1912, the new French President, Raymond Poincaré, informed the Russian Ambassador with respect to the Balkans that "if Russia goes to war, France will also, as we know that in this question Germany is behind Austria."[41] The gleeful Russian Ambassador reported "a completely new French view" that "the territorial grabs by Austria affect the general European balance and therefore France's interests."[42] That same year, the British Undersecretary in the Foreign Office, Sir Arthur Nicholson, wrote to the British Ambassador in St. Petersburg: "I do not know how much

longer we shall be able to follow our present policy of dancing on a tight rope, and not be compelled to take some definite line or other. I am also haunted by the same fear as you—lest Russia should become tired of us and strike a bargain with Germany."[43]

Not to be outdone in recklessness, the Kaiser promised Austria in 1913 that, in the next crisis, Germany would follow it into war if necessary. On July 7, 1914, the German Chancellor explained the policy which, less than four weeks later, would lead to actual war: "If we urge them [the Austrians] ahead, then they will say we pushed them in; if we dissuade them, then it will become a matter of our leaving them in the lurch. Then they will turn to the Western Powers, whose arms are wide open, and we will lose our last ally, such as it is."[44] The precise benefit Austria was to draw from an alliance with the Triple Entente was left undefined. Nor was it likely that Austria could join a grouping containing Russia, which sought to undermine Austria's Balkan position. Historically, alliances had been formed to augment a nation's strength in case of war; as World War I approached, the primary motive for war was to strengthen the alliances.

The leaders of all the major countries simply did not grasp the implications of the technology at their disposal, or of the coalitions they were feverishly constructing. They seemed oblivious to the huge casualties of the still relatively recent American Civil War, and expected a short, decisive conflict. It never occurred to them that the failure to make their alliances correspond to rational political objectives would lead to the destruction of civilization as they knew it. Each alliance had too much at stake to permit the traditional Concert of Europe diplomacy to work. Instead, the Great Powers managed to construct a diplomatic doomsday machine, though they were unaware of what they had done.