

## 5 ‘From an umpire to a competitor’: Castlereagh, Canning and the issue of international intervention in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars

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There seems to be no little need that the whole doctrine of non-interference with foreign nations should be reconsidered ... with a view to establish some rule or criterion whereby the justifiableness of intervening in the affairs of other countries, and (what is sometimes fully as questionable) the justifiableness of refraining from intervention, may be brought to a definite and rational test.

John Stuart Mill, 1859<sup>1</sup>

In seeking to outline the historical genesis of a modern political concept, there is always the danger of anachronism and teleology. It is with that in mind that this chapter focuses on a period in British history when the *contra*-principle to humanitarian intervention – that is, the principle of non-intervention – was in the ascendant. The aim is to provide an insight into the twisted, accidental, but sequential origins of what was later understood as humanitarian intervention. The focus is on British foreign policy from the Battle of Waterloo in 1815 to the Battle of Navarino in 1827. Although this volume contains a number of chapters which pre-date the period of the Napoleonic Wars and it is misleading to assume that these debates started in 1815 – or even 1793 – the reality is that many theorists of intervention have traditionally taken, and still do take, this period as the starting point for their analysis. That was as true for John Stuart Mill, writing in the 1850s, as it is for Gary J. Bass in his 2008 work, *Freedom’s Battle: The Origins of Humanitarian Intervention*.<sup>2</sup>

Some twentieth-century theorists, such as the German thinker Carl Schmitt – a critic of intervention – have viewed humanitarian intervention as a modern incarnation of the ‘just war’ tradition, which could be

<sup>1</sup> J. S. Mill, ‘A Few Words on Non-intervention’, *Fraser’s Magazine for Town and Country*, 60:360 (Dec. 1859), 766–76.

<sup>2</sup> G. J. Bass, *Freedom’s Battle: The Origins of Humanitarian Intervention* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 37–151.

traced back to St Thomas Aquinas.<sup>3</sup> A more recent view is that humanitarian intervention derives from the theoretical application of abstract moral principles at the expense of traditional notions of state sovereignty and international law.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, this chapter argues that the genesis of the concept of humanitarian intervention was more complex than a revival of the ‘just war’ tradition or the application of moral universalism. It posits that there was a *realist* rationale at the core of nineteenth-century interventionism from the outset and that intervention on the European continent – in the form that it took in the 1820s and which has so clearly influenced later generations of theorists – came about, above all, because of *strategic* necessities rather than *humanitarian* imperatives. In this period, British foreign policy-makers, often reluctantly, moved outside what might be called the Westphalian paradigm. In doing so, they set new precedents in the conduct of foreign policy, entailing that their successors were less beholden to the strictures of the principle of non-intervention (or, at least, an absolute application of this principle), thus increasing the likelihood of humanitarian intervention in the future.

While the ‘justifiableness’ – in Mill’s phrase – of intervention was to become increasingly important, it was, initially at least, a secondary consideration. That is not to say that a ‘humanitarian imperative’ was not a prominent feature of contemporary debates. British foreign policy was set against the background of the Philhellene movement of the 1820s.<sup>5</sup> More broadly, Peter Mandler has described the emergence of a ‘liberal universalist’ mentality in early and mid-Victorian British thought, based partly on a civic tradition of constitutionalism.<sup>6</sup> The increasing use of the label ‘liberal’ was itself a product of heightened interest in the affairs of other European states in this period, taken from the Spanish *liberales*.<sup>7</sup> Much has also been said about the growing influence of evangelical religion in this period, embodied in figures such as

<sup>3</sup> C. Brown, ‘From Humanized War to Humanitarian Intervention: Carl Schmitt’s Critique of the Just War Tradition’, in *The International Political Thought of Carl Schmitt: Terror, Liberal War and the Crisis of the Global Order*, ed. L. Odysseos and F. Petit (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2007), 56–70.

<sup>4</sup> R. Howard, *What’s Wrong with Liberal Interventionism: The Dangers and Delusions of the Interventionist Doctrine* (London: Social Affairs Unit, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> D. Beales, *From Castlereagh to Gladstone, 1815–1885* (London: W. W. Norton and Co., 1969), 88.

<sup>6</sup> See P. Mandler, ‘“Race” and “Nation” in Mid-Victorian Thought’, in *History, Religion, and Culture: British Intellectual History, 1750–1950*, ed. S. Collini, R. Whatmore, and B. Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 223–44.

<sup>7</sup> F. Rosen, *Bentham, Byron and Greece: Constitutionalism, Nationalism and Early Liberal Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

Wilberforce and instrumental in the anti-slavery campaign.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, while these concerns were all part of the debate, they were not the foremost factor corroding Britain's commitment to non-interference in the internal affairs of other continental states. Rather than being *pushed* into intervention by a swell of domestic humanitarian sentiment – something which no government of the 1820s would have countenanced – Britain was actually *sucked* into intervention by the dictates of other foreign policy imperatives. The most important of these was a commitment to preserving 'the balance of power' in Europe. When foreign intervention did occur in a tangible military form, in the Battle of Navarino in 1827 – an episode which precipitated Greek independence and has often been interpreted as the first example of humanitarian intervention<sup>9</sup> – it was in fact 'accidental', to quote *The Times* editorial which appeared shortly after the episode.<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, Britain's increasing engagement with the Eastern Question – which culminated with Navarino – says more about the difficulties of avoiding such interventions – due to the necessities of *Realpolitik* – rather than the ideological, theoretical or moral considerations which fed into them.

If the origin of humanitarian intervention can be traced, it is arguably more discernible in the fusion of different strands of thinking, rather than in the search for a self-contained foreign policy tradition with a long historical lineage. In keeping with this, the first part of the chapter demonstrates how two otherwise separate concepts – interventionism and humanitarianism – were fused together in the unique context of the 1820s. Ultimately, however, the chapter also makes a bolder claim: that once Britain became drawn into active military intervention on the Continent, she was always likely to be drawn to the 'liberal' or 'humanitarian' side. In other words, the linkage between interventionism and humanitarianism was sequential; once it became clear that it was against the national interest to uphold a strict principle of non-intervention in every case, it was equally difficult for successive British governments to proceed without the consideration of humanitarian principles.

<sup>8</sup> For a broader discussion of the influence of evangelicalism, see B. Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1785–1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, L. Oppenheim in *International Law: A Treatise*, vol. I: *Peace*, ed. H. Lauterpacht, 8th edn (London: Longman Green, 1995), cited in N. Onuf, 'Humanitarian Intervention: The Early Years' (paper presented at the Centre of Global Peace and Conflict Studies Symposium on the Norms and Ethics of Humanitarian Intervention, University of California, Irvine), 5 May 2000, available at [www.cgpac.uci.edu/research/working\\_papers/nicholas\\_onuf\\_humanitarian\\_intervention.pdf](http://www.cgpac.uci.edu/research/working_papers/nicholas_onuf_humanitarian_intervention.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> *The Times*, 21 Nov. 1827.

### The issue of intervention after the Treaty of Vienna

It would be a mistake to assume that, after 1815, the geopolitical landscape represented some sort of antediluvian world in the eyes of European statesmen. Nonetheless, the success of the Napoleonic army and the sheer reach of French conquests did have significant implications for traditional notions of state sovereignty and the restoration of the existing international order.<sup>11</sup> To a certain extent, the Treaty of Vienna of 1815 successfully papered over some of these cracks, at least momentarily.<sup>12</sup> After the defeat of Napoleon, the victorious allies – Britain, Austria, Prussia and Russia – proclaimed a desire to restore equilibrium in Europe and, with the exception of Britain, also expressed a specific preference for legitimist forms of government (stopping short of demanding the complete restoration of the pre-war status quo).<sup>13</sup> However, the corollary of this was that, in the eyes of the ‘Holy Alliance’ (Austria, Russia and Prussia), national sovereignty took second place to legitimacy. After 1815, Britain faced a European continent in which the main powers were more committed to intervening in the affairs of other states in a systematic way. Henry Kissinger has argued that the ‘operational significance’ of the Holy Alliance was that it introduced ‘an element of moral restraint in to the relationship of the Great Powers’.<sup>14</sup> Equally, it might be said that its long-term consequences were more destabilising, actually jeopardising the ‘balance of power’ – which Kissinger also saw as the essence of the Vienna compromise – and forcing Britain to rethink its attitude to the Continent.

Commentators reflecting on British foreign policy in this period – such as Kissinger, or the Marquess of Salisbury, writing in the late

<sup>11</sup> For a compelling case for the exceptional nature of the Napoleonic Wars, see C. Esdaile, *Napoleon’s Wars: An International History, 1803–1815* (London: Allen Lane, 2007). See also M. John, ‘The Napoleonic Legacy and Problems of Restoration in Central Europe: The German Confederation’, and B. Simms, ‘Napoleon and Germany: A Legacy in Foreign Policy’, in *Napoleon’s Legacy: Problems in Restoration Europe*, ed. D. Laven and L. Riall (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 83–96 and 97–114.

<sup>12</sup> A. Zamoyski, *Rites of Peace: The Fall of Napoleon and the Congress of Vienna* (London: HarperCollins, 2007); H. Nicolson, *The Congress of Vienna: A Study in Allied Unity: 1812–1822* (London: Constable & Co., 1946); C. K. Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Castlereagh, 1812–1815: Britain and the Reconstruction of Europe*, vol. I (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1931) and Webster, *British Diplomacy, 1813–1815: Select Documents Dealing with Reconstruction of Europe* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1921).

<sup>13</sup> P. M. Pilbeam, ‘The “Restoration” of Western Europe, 1814–15’, and B. Simms, ‘The Eastern Empires from the Challenge of Napoleon to the Restoration, c.1806–30’, in *Themes in Modern European History, 1780–1830*, ed. Pilbeam (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 107–24 and 85–106.

<sup>14</sup> H. Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 79–84.

nineteenth century – have placed great emphasis on the principle of ‘non-intervention’, which often appeared in diplomatic dispatches and parliamentary debates from the 1820s.<sup>15</sup> On the fundamental point that Lord Castlereagh (Foreign Secretary from 1812 until his death in 1822) adhered to a doctrine of non-intervention, there is no room for dispute. Where we must be careful, however, is in the concomitant assumption that, in pursuing such a policy, Castlereagh was resisting a significant bloc of pro-interventionist opinion, either from the Whig opposition or from his successor, George Canning. In reality, while there were deeply held divisions over the conduct of foreign policy, these were not fundamentally between interventionists and non-interventionists. The Whigs had a long history of willingness to intervene in Europe during the eighteenth century, largely through their commitment to Hanover. Likewise, William Pitt’s government had also shown itself willing to intervene in the internal affairs of other states in the 1790s, because of the exceptional nature of the war effort. Nonetheless, in the period under consideration, both Whigs and Tories were generally anti-interventionist; despite marked differences on what this meant in practice, it might be said that they represented different species of the same creed.<sup>16</sup>

Significantly, insofar as there were active interventionists on the European stage, they were not humanitarian or liberal. Linked to the Holy Alliance, and conducted in defence of hereditary monarchs, the very notion of intervention had negative connotations in British politics in this period, and was seen as the greatest impediment to the emergence of liberal constitutionalist movements.<sup>17</sup> When Castlereagh was attacked by radicals and Whigs it was because of his complicity in a great power system which intervened in the affairs of other states. ‘With a single stroke of his pen [at Vienna in 1815]’, declared a radical pamphleteer in 1818, he ‘laid the foundations of UNIVERSAL DESPOTISM’.<sup>18</sup> Or, as Lord John Russell claimed in his 1819 *Letter to the Right Honourable Lord Holland on Foreign Politics*, England had bound itself ‘to interfere in the internal concerns of every state of Europe’.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> R. Cecil (Lord Salisbury) on Castlereagh, *Essays by the Marquess of Salisbury*, vol. I: *Biographical* (London: John Murray, 1905), 3–70; Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace, 1812–1822* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1957).

<sup>16</sup> R. J. Vincent, *Nonintervention and International Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 70–2.

<sup>17</sup> Bass, *Freedom’s Battle*, 47–87.

<sup>18</sup> Anon., *Political Epitaphs, No. 1 Mr Canning . . . No. 2 Lord Castlereagh* (London, n.d. [1818?]).

<sup>19</sup> See also Lord John Russell, *A Letter to the Right Honourable Lord Holland on Foreign Politics* [1819], 4th edn (London, 1831).

In fact, Castlereagh's cooperation with these powers was more limited than is often assumed. He held aloof from the Holy Alliance, famously calling it 'a piece of sublime mysticism and nonsense'.<sup>20</sup> It is true that he did acquiesce in (rather than actively support) Austria's suppression of the Neapolitan revolt of 1821, which he had been appraised of by Count Metternich and which he refused to condemn in parliament. Nonetheless, Castlereagh became increasingly alarmed by the 'abstractions and sweeping generalities' associated with the Holy Alliance.<sup>21</sup> In contrast to the Holy Alliance, Britain was bound to protect the territorial settlement agreed to at Vienna for twenty years, but she had never agreed to collectively interfere in, or act as the guarantor of, any system of government within an independent state. Even in the case of France, Castlereagh was insistent that the allies 'could not justly claim any right of interference' unless they considered 'their own safety compromised'. 'The only safe Principles is that of the Law of Nations', he ventured, 'nothing would be more immoral or prejudicial to the Character of Government generally, than the Idea that their force was collectively to be prostituted to the support of established Power without any Consideration of the extent to which it was abused'.<sup>22</sup>

The most definitive expression of the principle of non-intervention was Castlereagh's State Paper of 5 May 1820, a response to another Russian dispatch which mooted allied intervention to put down a liberal rising in Spain. Castlereagh emphasised that his insistence on non-intervention was 'not absolute'; Britain would be found in her place 'when actual danger menaces the System of Europe'. However, he was also clear that 'this Country cannot, and will not, act upon the abstract and speculative principles of Precaution'. It was apparent that many European states were 'now employed in the difficult task of casting anew their Gov[ernmen]ts upon the Representative Principle' and 'the notion of revising, limiting or regulating the course of such Experiments, either by foreign Council or by foreign foe, would be as dangerous to avow as it w[ould] be impossible to execute'. The Congress system was never 'intended as an Union for the Government of the World, or for the Superintendence of the Internal Affairs of other States'. There were other practical problems with such a policy too; collective intervention had an 'air of dictation and menace', entailing that the 'grounds of the

<sup>20</sup> W. Hinde, *Castlereagh* (London: Collins, 1981), 233.

<sup>21</sup> A. Hassal, *Viscount Castlereagh* (London: Sir I. Pitman and Sons, 1908), 212.

<sup>22</sup> 'Memorandum on the Treaties of 1814 and 1815, Aix-la-Chapelle, October 1818', in H. Temperley and L. M. Penson, *Foundations of British Foreign Policy from Pitt (1792) to Salisbury (1902)* [1938] (London: Frank Cass, 1966), 39–46.

intervention thus become unpopular, the intention of the parties is misunderstood, the publick Mind is agitated and perverted, and the General Political Situation of the Government is thereby essentially embarrassed'.<sup>23</sup>

### The anti-intervention consensus

Castlereagh's position was based on a definition of national freedom as independence from other nations: 'the sense in which the word [freedom] is mostly used by the ancients' and which had been most famously articulated in Emmerich de Vattel's 1758 treatise on *The Law of Nations*.<sup>24</sup> Yet, this was not a particularly controversial mantra in the context of British political debate. Despite their differences of opinion, both the Whig opposition and George Canning – Castlereagh's successor as Foreign Secretary from 1822 to 1827 – did not deviate substantially from this premise. In his study of the Whigs in opposition in this period, Austin Mitchell argued that their basic foreign policy stance was as the 'advocates of change'. 'Palmerstonian before Palmerston', they 'urged the twin principles of national independence and self-determination'. But if this was a party that advocated change on the European continent, they also limited the scope for such change through their explicit commitment to a policy of non-intervention. Notably, Mitchell insisted that 'all other whig principles were subordinate to this encouragement of liberal regimes' and that non-intervention 'was never advanced in absolute terms'.<sup>25</sup> But it is hard to see how this caveat distinguished them in any concrete way from the position held by Castlereagh.

At various points during the eighteenth century, Whigs had been more willing than Tories to interfere in continental affairs, both for strategic reasons and in order to protect the Protestants against oppression.<sup>26</sup> However, one consequence – perhaps unintended – of Whig opposition to Pitt's entry into war against France in 1793 was a shift to an anti-interventionist stance – a position which hardened in opposition to Castlereagh from 1815. In 1831, one Tory writer characterised the

<sup>23</sup> Temperley and Penson, *Foundations of British Foreign Policy*, 48–63.

<sup>24</sup> T. P. Courtenay (a junior member of the government under Castlereagh), 'Foreign Policy of England: Lord Castlereagh', *The Foreign Quarterly Review* 8 (July 1831), 33–60.

<sup>25</sup> A. Mitchell, *The Whigs in Opposition, 1815–1830* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 17–18.

<sup>26</sup> See B. Simms, *Three Victories and a Defeat: The Rise and Fall of the First British Empire, 1714–1783* (London: Allen Lane, 2007).

Whig position of the previous forty years as follows: ‘Mr Pitt was for despotism and the Bourbons; Mr Fox for freedom and the people. Mr Pitt would interfere in the form of foreign government; Mr Fox would leave each nation to choose its own government . . . Interference, the principle of the Tories; non-interference, the watch-word of the Whigs.’ If anything, as this writer observed, this was an inaccurate portrayal of Pitt’s position – the latter had justified the intervention on the grounds of France’s threat to the navigation laws of Scheldt and her breaking of existing European treaties. Instead, it was the former Whig Edmund Burke who had been the foremost exponent of the restoration of the Bourbons as a war aim, something which Pitt regarded as ‘at variance with his political creed’. What is more, despite their support for Pitt, ‘the disciples of Burke and Windham impute to . . . [Pitt] as a fault the disregard of that advice’.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the mainstream Whig position from 1815 represented a disjuncture with past traditions. Significantly, as early as 1817, Lord Grey wrote to Lord Holland to express concern about the self-imposed limits of this commitment to non-intervention.<sup>28</sup> As noted below, some Whigs began to shift back to a more flexible position in making a case for intervention in Portugal in 1826, in order to protect the constitutional government there against foreign interference. In practice, however, although the Whigs showed occasional glimpses of awareness about the potential contradictions in their position, they never satisfactorily resolved this internal tension and, for most of the 1820s, their foreign policy still pivoted around anti-interventionism.

The classic statement of the anti-interventionist Whig position was made by the jurist Sir James Mackintosh in response to Austria’s intervention to suppress the Naples revolt of 1821. His key objection to such instances of intervention was that, once they began, they would be limitless. Moreover, even when humanitarian concerns were at stake, he was unprepared to countenance an exception. Referring to Austrian allegations of cruelty by the Neapolitan rebels (which he rejected), Mackintosh speculated about how dangerously open-ended such a justification could be:

Suppose the emperor of Russia had committed acts of flagrant injustice and cruelty towards some of his subjects in Asia; were we called on to express our opinions and to remonstrate on behalf of the Calmucs and Tongulsses? If such interference were justified, there would be no end to them. Suppose some foreign government had complained of our conduct towards the Catholics in Ireland,

<sup>27</sup> Courtenay, ‘Foreign Policy of England’. <sup>28</sup> Mitchell, *Whigs in Opposition*, 17–18.



and remonstrated on the ground that we had provoked a rebellion, and then suppressed it, in order to effect a union with Great Britain, should we have endured such meddling with our conduct towards any of our intermediaries.

Pursued to its full logic, the Holy Alliance position was, ‘in effect a proposition for encamping a whole horde of Cossacks or croats in Hyde-park’.<sup>29</sup>

In responding to Mackintosh, Castlereagh identified a contradiction between the lofty moral tones assumed by the Whigs in foreign policy debates and their apparent squeamishness about intervention on the Continent. Following an attack on his policy of refusing to censure Austria for its suppression of the rebellion, he complained that, ‘when reduction of every kind, and especially of our army, had been called for again and again, it was too much . . . to be told that the British government ought to dictate moral lessons to Europe’. If we did speak, he stated, ‘we ought to speak with effect’:

He should deem it most pusillanimous conduct on our part, if, after interfering on a question of this nature, we limited our interference to the mere delivery of a scroll of paper, and did not follow it up with some more effectual measures. Were we to turn itinerant preachers of morality to the other nations of Europe, and to follow up the doctrines which we preached by nothing else but what was contained in our state papers?

When Napoleon had put down rebellions in Venice and Genoa, ‘not a voice was raised in behalf of these republics by the gentlemen opposite [the Whigs]’, who were more interested in negotiating a settlement with Napoleon, ‘the grand subverter of the independence of states’.<sup>30</sup>

It would also be a mistake to see George Canning’s appointment as Foreign Secretary in 1822 as the signature moment in the departure of a new, more ‘interventionist’ policy.<sup>31</sup> In fact, it is possible to argue that Canning was even more of a staunch anti-interventionist than Castlereagh. Over the issue of Austria’s intervention in Naples in 1821, he had essentially backed his predecessor’s position, reiterating the need for neutrality in ‘deed’ as well as ‘word’. It was Canning who stated that intervention to uphold constitutionalist movements in other states was out of keeping with the aims of a country which mediated between ‘Jacobinism’ and ‘Ultraism’.<sup>32</sup> The most obvious distinction was that Canning made a clearer break from the Concert of Europe.

<sup>29</sup> 21 Feb. 1821, *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol. IV, 838–58.

<sup>30</sup> 21 Feb. 1821, *ibid.*, 864–79.

<sup>31</sup> H. W. V Temperley, *The Foreign Policy of Canning, 1822–1827*, 2nd edn (London: Frank Cass, 1966).

<sup>32</sup> Vincent, *Nonintervention and International Order*, 84–5.

In emphasising Britain's opposition to French royalist intervention against the Spanish *liberales*, Canning effectively broke up the congress of Verona which had convened in October 1823. He also refused to attend a congress called by the tsar in December 1824, on the issue of the war between the Ottoman Empire and the Greeks. If anything, it was his staunch anti-interventionism that allowed him to sidestep Whig critiques more effectively. As Temperley has explained, Canning's 'English' foreign policy was often contrasted to Castlereagh's 'Europeanism'.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, in demonstrating more disdain for the notion of 'legitimacy' adhered to by the Holy Alliance, he won some supporters in the liberal press, without making a substantial new departure in policy.<sup>34</sup>

In reality, Castlereagh had already been extricating himself from the Concert of Europe by the time of his suicide in 1822.<sup>35</sup> Speaking to parliament in 1823, Canning insisted that he had no intention of 'separating himself in any degree from those who had preceded him in it'. As the foundation-stone of his own position, he referred to Castlereagh's State Paper of 1820, 'laying down the principle of non-interference, with all the qualifications properly belonging to it'. Canning also made the ingenious point that the respective positions of Castlereagh and the Whigs were, in effect, two sides of the same coin. After acknowledging his debt to Castlereagh, he informed the Commons that he claimed to see no contradiction in also adhering to the guiding principles laid down by Mackintosh in 1821: 'respect for the faith of treaties – respect for the independence of nations – respect for that established line of policy known by the name of "the balance of power" in Europe – and last and not least, respect for the honour and interests of this country'.<sup>36</sup>

Canning was highlighting the fact that there was, in this period, a non-interventionist consensus, bound closely to the notion of the balance of power. However, just as he was articulating his own policy, doubts about the long-term sustainability of the non-intervention principle began to emerge. Before the Verona conference of October 1822, Canning (following Castlereagh's brief) had insisted that England would not tolerate a breach of the sovereignty of Spain by France, in defence of the royalist cause; once again, a policy of 'strict neutrality' was to form the crux of British policy. In the Commons, he tackled the argument that 'the invasion of Spain by a French force ought to be considered by

<sup>33</sup> Temperley, *The Foreign Policy of Canning*.

<sup>34</sup> See A. Briggs, *The Age of Improvement, 1783–1867* (London: Longmans, 1959), 218–19.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> 14 Apr. 1823, *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol. VIII, 872–904. See also Temperley and Penson, *Foundations of British Foreign Policy*, 47–9.

England as an act of war against herself'. He was prepared to admit that a French invasion would be 'absolutely unjust' and he sympathised with those who 'seeing a strong and powerful nation eager to crush and overwhelm [with] its vengeance a less numerous but not less gallant people, were anxious to join the weaker against the stronger party'. Equally, however, in opposing such an action, he emphasised that, for military action to take place, 'the cause of it should not merely be sufficient, but urgent'. Moreover – here was the realist core – war had to be 'absolutely consistent with the interest and welfare of the country which first declared it'.<sup>37</sup>

When France did march on Spain, with the professed aim of restoring the legitimist government, Canning maintained British neutrality, despite requests for assistance from both the French government and the Spanish rebels. It was clear that vague warnings that Britain was opposed to the interference in principle had not been enough to prevent French action. But the French invasion created a number of other concerns, relating more directly to British interests in the New World, as well as Europe. Consequently, Canning now issued a stern warning to France against the permanent occupation of Spain, the appropriation of Spain's colonial possessions in the New World or the violation of territorial integrity of Portugal, Britain's traditional ally (with whom she had a defensive treaty). In doing so, he successfully acquired from Polignac, the French ambassador in London, a guarantee that France would not invade Cuba on behalf of legitimist Spain.<sup>38</sup> This 'hands off' warning to the European powers who might have designs on the New World was underpinned by an implicit threat that 'the junction of any foreign Power in an enterprise of Spain against the Colonies, would be viewed by them as constituting an entirely new question: and one upon which they must take such decision as the *interest* of Great Britain might require [my italics]'.<sup>39</sup>

Britain was effectively evoking the spectre of intervention in defence of the principle of non-intervention.<sup>40</sup> Although the logic was somewhat lopsided, the implications were increasingly difficult to ignore. A similar dilemma was soon caused by the progress of the Portuguese constitutionalists. Initially, Canning rejected appeals to intervene in Portugal on their behalf and rebuked Sir Edward Thornton, the British minister at

<sup>37</sup> *Hansard, ibid.*      <sup>38</sup> Vincent, *Nonintervention and International Order*, 86–9.

<sup>39</sup> 'The Polignac Memorandum, October 1823', in Temperley and Penson, *Foundations of British Foreign Policy*, 70–6.

<sup>40</sup> W. A. Phillips, 'Great Britain and the Continental Alliance, 1816–1822', in *The Cambridge History of British Foreign Policy, 1783–1919*, vol. II: 1815–1886, ed. A. W. Ward and G. P. Gooch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923), 67.

Lisbon, who had publicly advocated the liberal cause.<sup>41</sup> Ultimately, however, he was prepared to send British forces into Portugal in 1826, when absolutists – supporting the king’s anti-constitutionalist younger brother Miguel – attacked Portugal with Spanish arms and equipment. Canning carefully justified this more substantive intervention on the traditional grounds that Britain was preserving the independence of an ally, with whom she had a defensive treaty. In these instances, it appeared that the principle of non-intervention was morphing into threats of counter-attack and *de facto* interventionism by Britain. Crucially, however, the humanitarian imperative was not explicitly evoked as a justification for action, despite widespread sympathy for the constitutionalist movements in the Iberian Peninsula. The tensions over Spain and Portugal during the mid- to late 1820s have often been viewed as ‘an outgrowth of the fundamental clash and division in Europe between the constitutional West and the autocratic East’. In reality, as Paul Schroeder has pointed out, ‘the two liberal-constitutional powers actively involved in the peninsula, Britain and France, were both playing a normal, non-ideological game almost entirely with and against each other’. Moreover, despite the supposed conflict of principles, the reality is that the Holy Alliance powers, who believed in the principle of intervention, did not intervene, and the Western powers, in particular Britain, intervened under the principle of non-intervention.<sup>42</sup> The balance of power remained central to all these actions; it was telling that British troops did not leave Portugal until French troops left Spain.<sup>43</sup>

### **The Russian threat and the realist case for intervention**

At this stage, it might be said that I seem to have been arguing against the existence of humanitarian interventionism as a serious foreign policy consideration in this period. Certainly, it was not a principle which was operationally recognisable or had any staunch advocates among those likely to exert a formative influence on the shaping of policy; there may well have been proto-interventionists – as Gary Bass has described, in the case of the London Greek Committee – but they did not exert a formative influence on the making of policy.<sup>44</sup> In fact, the dominant mantras of this period prompted Henry Kissinger to compare British

<sup>41</sup> Temperley, *The Foreign Policy of Canning*, 202–3.

<sup>42</sup> P. W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763–1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 720.

<sup>43</sup> Vincent, *Nonintervention and International Order*, 86–9.

<sup>44</sup> Bass, *Freedom’s Battle*, 51–151.

foreign policy with later American isolationism, as ‘Britain felt impervious to all but cataclysmic upheavals’.<sup>45</sup> There was also a clear selfish, strategic rationale behind the policy of non-intervention. Britain increasingly trained its sights on extending its empire overseas and had no territorial designs on the European continent. It is worth repeating Canning’s definitive mantra: ‘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.’ This was also the ‘guiding principle’ of Lord Palmerston who declared that ‘changes in the 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’.<sup>46</sup> ‘There is a country in Europe, equal to the greatest in extent of dominion, far exceeding any other in wealth, and in the power that wealth bestows, the declared principle of whose foreign policy is, to let other nations alone’, wrote Mill.<sup>47</sup> The ‘seductive policy of total abstention in continental affairs, an isolationism which would interpret the non-intervention principle absolutely’, was always under the surface of debate.<sup>48</sup>

But that still leaves us with an important question unanswered: how did the idea of humanitarian intervention subsequently become ingrained onto the diplomatic agenda, to the extent that John Stuart Mill could seek to define it as a coherent principle in 1859, citing the experiences of the 1820s? The short answer is that there was a growing realisation that the successful operation of the non-intervention principle did not always coalesce with British interests. From the time of Castlereagh’s tenure at the Foreign Office, a shared commitment with other powers to maintain the peace of Europe entailed that the spectre of intervention would raise its head at intervals. In accepting a role of mediation on the Continent after Vienna, the prospect of becoming embroiled in such interference had increased. To this it might be said that both Canning and the Whigs advocated the extrication of Britain from these alliances. Yet, although they could step away from the Holy Alliance, they could not wish away its existence. Second, and most importantly, non-intervention was not a purely abstract position, independent of any other considerations; it was nearly always invoked in the same breath as another cornerstone of British foreign policy: the balance of power. Castlereagh’s strategic objection to great power intervention was that it might jeopardise the equilibrium established at Vienna, which

<sup>45</sup> Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 96.      <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Mill, ‘A Few Words on Non-intervention’.

<sup>48</sup> Vincent, *Nonintervention and International Order*, 70–2.

ensured that no one power was dominant on the Continent.<sup>49</sup> Under Castlereagh, Britain had acted as a moderating check on the interventionist ambitions of other powers, such as Russia; consequently, once she had broken with the Congress system under Canning, the likelihood of intervention by the other European powers actually increased rather than diminished.

This problem – the growing spectre of great power intervention by other European states – had become increasingly obvious in the cases of Spain and Portugal. Canning’s actions in both instances might be seen as a reluctant recognition of that reality. As Vincent has pointed out, Britain’s generally *laissez-faire* attitude to forms of government in other states ‘did not mean that she would refrain from intervention if pressing imperatives like the maintenance of the balance of power required it; what it did mean was that she could admit intervention only as an exception to the general of international conduct’.<sup>50</sup> In other words, Britain was being sucked back into European intervention, primarily on the basis of the old Pittite imperative: the balance of power. As Derek Beales has written, Castlereagh’s objections derived from the fear ‘that a Power which moved to suppress a revolution or a constitution in other states might have expansionist intentions’.<sup>51</sup> Thus, he was able to countenance Metternich’s autocratic interference in the Italian and German states, chiefly because he did not regard Austria as a country which aspired to European hegemony.

By contrast, the prospect of Russian expansionism was the one variable which neither Castlereagh – as a key participant in the Congress system – nor much less Canning – as its critic – could control. In practical terms, the fear of Russian troops swamping Europe – rather than French resurgence – was the fundamental threat to British foreign policy interests.<sup>52</sup> One reason why England was slow to tackle the problem of Barbary pirates – and aimed to keep it off the table at the Congress of 1818 – was the risk of allowing the Russian fleet a free rein in the Mediterranean.<sup>53</sup> Concerted interventionism, wrote Castlereagh, would give Russian troops ‘an almost irresistible claim to march through the territories of all the Confederate States to the most distant points of Europe to fulfil her guarantee [to maintain legitimist governments]’.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>49</sup> ‘State Paper of 5 May 1820’, in Temperley and Penson, *Foundations of British Foreign Policy*, 48–63.

<sup>50</sup> Vincent, *Nonintervention and International Order*, 71.

<sup>51</sup> Beales, *From Castlereagh to Gladstone*, 91.

<sup>52</sup> Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 95. <sup>53</sup> Hassal, *Viscount Castlereagh*, 212.

<sup>54</sup> Castlereagh to Lord Liverpool, 19 Oct. 1818, cited in Phillips, ‘Great Britain and the Continental Alliance’, 9.

The rationale in acting in congress was, to use Castlereagh's own phrase, to keep the tsar 'grouped' and less likely to behave in a renegade manner.<sup>55</sup>

The difficulty in reining in the tsar's ambitions first became apparent over the issue of the Greek revolt against the crumbling Ottoman Empire. From the Foreign Office perspective, the righteousness (or otherwise) of the cause took second place to fears about Russian ambitions in the region, as the self-styled advocates of the Christian Greeks. For this reason, Castlereagh was unprepared 'to embark on a scheme for new modelling the position of the Greek population at the hazard of all the destructive confusion and disunion which such an attempt would lead to'.<sup>56</sup> As one Irish advocate of the Greeks explained, 'the insurgents had perceived their ultimate dependency on the Courts of Europe' and had 'sought to conciliate their goodwill' at the Congress of Verona.<sup>57</sup> But Castlereagh's fear was that collective intervention would allow Russia to assume a predominant role in a region vital for British commercial and shipping interests. Shortly before his death, he successfully convinced the tsar not to act, suggesting that encouraging a revolt was a betrayal of the founding principles of the Holy Alliance (which was certainly Metternich's position). After Castlereagh's death, Britain lost something of its restraining influence on Russia. Moreover, by 1824, the Greeks had come close to achieving a *de facto* position of autonomy in the region, allowing Canning to grant them the status of belligerents in international law. It seemed that the conflict might be heading towards a conclusion without outside interference, until the Ottoman Sultan enlisted extra-European support in the form of Ali, the Pacha of Egypt. The latter's armies arrived in February 1825, adding a new intensity to the war and accentuating the impression that this was a struggle between Christians and Muslims. From this point, the issue was thrust back onto the diplomatic agenda; British public opinion was roused as the news began to emerge of Ottoman–Egyptian attempts to 'depopulate' some areas of its Greek population.<sup>58</sup>

In a protocol agreed in April 1826, both Britain and Russia had agreed a self-denying ordinance not to seek territorial advantage in the region. For his own part, Canning was still eager to avoid a joint commitment to upholding Greek independence, which would see Britain sucked into military intervention. Nonetheless, however undesirable this scenario was, it was the second worst option facing him. Much more dangerous was the

<sup>55</sup> Phillips, 'Great Britain and the Continental Alliance', 43. <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 43–4.

<sup>57</sup> James Emerson, *The History of Greece* (London, 1830), vol. I, cxvii–cxxxiii.

<sup>58</sup> Bass, *Freedom's Battle*, 123–8.

prospect of Russia taking the matter into her own hands. Thus, Britain took the strategic decision to enter into more substantive negotiations with Russia (and France), leading to the Treaty of London on 6 July 1827. During the course of negotiations, as the Russians pushed for a secret clause which recommended the use of force, as Temperley has described, it was ‘pretty clear now that unless he [Canning] consented to use force, Russia would go forward alone’. The conclusion reached was that ‘if force was to be used, England must act with, and restrain, Russia’.<sup>59</sup> The basis of the treaty – accepted by the Greeks and rejected by the Turks – was to make Greece a tributary province, under sovereignty of the sultan, with permission to choose its own governors. It was accompanied by an offer to mediate in the dispute if an armistice was declared. Russian, French and English forces in the Mediterranean were immediately strengthened.

From this point, it was soon to become clear, Britain’s Greek policy was devolved to its naval commanders. When supplies for Ibrahim Pacha’s army arrived in the Greek port of Navarino, British forces prevented their movement to other ports in order to enforce the treaty.<sup>60</sup> However, the Turkish–Egyptian fleet broke the terms of an armistice signed on 25 September 1825 and reports soon reached the French and British navies that the Turks had resorted to what some called ‘inhuman butchery’ in the Morea. On 18 October 1827, the commanders of the three allied fleets, following instructions to enforce the treaty, entered the harbour of Navarino to remonstrate with the Turks and Egyptians.<sup>61</sup> The allied brief was to ensure the treaty and act as an arbiter, rather than to engage any of the combatants in warfare. The Commander-in-Chief of the British fleet, Edward Codrington, described how the allies sailed into Navarino on 20 October ‘in order to induce Ibrahim Pacha to discontinue the brutal war of extermination which has been carrying on’. On the one hand, Codrington might be seen as an early exponent of humanitarian intervention; on hearing evidence of Ottoman atrocities in the region, he had commented that war might be ‘a more humane way of settling affairs here than any other’. But much more important was the lack of precision in his brief. ‘Neither I nor the French Admiral can make out’, he had written, ‘how we are by force to prevent the Turks, if obstinate, from pursuing any line of conduct which we are instructed to oppose, without committing hostility’.<sup>62</sup> When Turkish and Egyptian

<sup>59</sup> Temperley, *The Foreign Policy of Canning*, 390–409.      <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Emerson, *History of Greece*, vol. I, cxvii–cxxiii.

<sup>62</sup> Temperley, *The Foreign Policy of Canning*, 404–6. See also *Memoir of the Life of Admiral Sir Edward Codrington* (London, 1873), by his daughter Lady Jane Bouchier.



forces took fright at the sight of the approaching allies and opened fire, Codrington responded with his own fire, leading to a massive battle in which the Turkish and Egyptian fleets in the bay were almost entirely routed.<sup>63</sup>

There was clearly a humanitarian component to this act. Nonetheless, for all the horror at Ottoman atrocities, the only scenario in which the allied commanders were allowed to use force was in the event that they were attacked directly. Commenting on this surprise engagement – which had actually taken place after Canning’s death on 8 August 1827 – *The Times* described the existence of ‘humane and Christian feeling’ as a contributory factor but also emphasised that the allied onslaught was, first and foremost, an act of ‘self-defence’. Ibrahim Pacha had behaved ‘grossly towards the Allies, and cruelly towards the Greeks’, breaking the conditions of his armistice. Not only had the object of the treaty of 6 July been finally obtained, it also noted, ‘the policy of Russia [had been] developed, explained, defined, and limited’.<sup>64</sup> However, within just a few days, *The Times* – which had been sympathetic to the intervention – also acknowledged the growing controversy about ‘the rectitude of those principles on which the battle was fought by the Allies’. The battle itself was ‘accidental’, claimed the newspaper, and the British presence in the region was justified by the ‘Law of Nations’ and the Treaty of London. Notably, however, the humanitarian rationale loomed increasingly large in retrospective justifications of the action: ‘Could ... the Turkish Government, *after* the conclusion and communication of ... [the] treaty, *expect* that it would be any longer permitted to direct the massacre of the Greeks?’<sup>65</sup> Moreover, the suggestion that ‘public opinion has declared itself *against* the battle of Navarino as an act of violence and aggression’ was quickly rejected: on the contrary ‘it is universally regarded as an event as unavoidable as it was professionally glorious’.<sup>66</sup>

At the level of officialdom, bitter disputes were reported between the members of the government ‘as to the causes, the conduct, or the consequences of that battle’, and of the propriety of honouring Codrington, who was accused of gunboat diplomacy.<sup>67</sup> Writing three-quarters of a century later, Lord Salisbury bemoaned the Battle of Navarino as an unfortunate consequence of ‘the practice of foreign intervention in domestic squabbles’, and another example from the history of the last seventy years, ‘strewn with the wrecks of national prosperity which these well-meant interventions have caused’. In the King’s Speech of

<sup>63</sup> *The Times*, 12 Nov. 1827.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *The Times*, 14 Nov. 1827.

<sup>66</sup> *The Times*, 21 Nov. 1827.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

29 January 1828, it was dismissed as an ‘untoward event’.<sup>68</sup> The legacy of the event is discussed further below. Ultimately, however, there is no escaping the fact that Britain’s willingness to countenance intervention in Greece ‘reflected the primacy of interest over doctrine’.<sup>69</sup> It was emphatically not the case, as one scholar has put it, that ‘Humanitarian and religious concerns combined to inflame the liberal world and override the resistance to intervention so typical of the British government.’<sup>70</sup> Indeed, as one radical critic of Greek policy correctly identified in 1836, it was not ‘the practice of intervention’ but the ‘balance of power’ which had led to British involvement in the region in the first place. ‘Not a war has broken out, but, either, in its origin or progress, it has had reference to this maxim’, it was claimed. This, the radical complained, was what was always behind the sight of ‘English statesmen of all parties and ages. . . rushing eagerly to participate in the dangers, and share the burdens, of commotions a thousand miles removed from its shores’.<sup>71</sup>

### **The humanitarian context of intervention**

Thus far, this chapter has illustrated the realist rationale which undermined the principle of non-intervention. With that having been established, it makes one further claim. When Britain was sucked into intervention, the ‘humanitarian imperative’ – the moral dimension to British political debate – increasingly came into play as an irreducible consideration. Even when it was accidental, military intervention of this kind, as the editorial commentary of *The Times* on the Battle of Navarino described above demonstrated, was much easier to defend when it had a moral justification.

Even Castlereagh had clearly recognised that British foreign policy could not proceed without a sufficient degree of public support. In his 1820 State Paper, he had stated that ‘if embarked in a War, which the Voice of the Country does not support, the Efforts of the strongest Administration which ever served the Crown would be unequal to the prosecution of the Conquest’.<sup>72</sup> As he told his half-brother Lord Stewart in the same year, it was impossible to act militarily without ‘the

<sup>68</sup> Cecil, *Essays by the Marquess of Salisbury*, vol. I, 24–5.

<sup>69</sup> Vincent, *Nonintervention and International Order*, 90.

<sup>70</sup> Onuf, ‘Humanitarian Intervention’.

<sup>71</sup> C. I. Johnstone, ‘England, Turkey, Russia: The Balance of Power, and the Non-Intervention Principle’, *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 3:28 (Apr. 1836), 240–6.

<sup>72</sup> ‘State Paper of 5 May 1820’, in Temperley and Penson, *Foundations of British Foreign Policy*, 48–63.

national sentiment' being behind the government: 'This is our compass, and by this we must steer; and our Allies on the Continent may be assured that they will deceive themselves if they suppose that we could for six months act with them unless the mind of the nation was in the cause'.<sup>73</sup>

By March 1823, Canning – who liked to shape public opinion rather than being driven by it<sup>74</sup> – had forewarned that there was a growing ideological dichotomy in continental politics; it was impossible 'to contemplate the struggles now going on in different parts of the world without anticipating struggles between the contending principles'. While insisting that it was not necessarily England's duty to be a party to these struggles, he was aware of the difficulties of remaining aloof. The 'perfect equilibrium' (balance of power and non-intervention) which Britain desired was not easy to maintain: 'the course we had to pursue was on a path which lay across a roaring stream; attempts might be made to bear us down on the one side or the other'. For Canning, the best approach was 'to preserve in an undeviating path, to preserve our resources entire until the period should arrive, if ever, when we might exercise our only legitimate right to interfere, from being called upon to quell the raging floods that threaten to distract the balance of Europe'.<sup>75</sup> Later the same year, in a famous speech in Plymouth, he pointed towards the warships in the town and compared them to England herself: 'apparently passive and motionless, she silently concentrates the power to be put forth on an adequate occasion'.<sup>76</sup>

By 1826 – as the European Concert had fractured over Spain, Portugal and then Greece – Canning had opened himself to the possibility that this 'adequate occasion' might be on the not-too-distant horizon, stating that he did not 'dread war in a good cause (and in no other may it be to the lot of this country ever to engage!)'. Reiterating that the next war in Europe would be a 'war not so much of armies, as of opinions', he prophesied that – if, for whatever reason, Britain was sucked into conflict – 'she will see under her banners, arrayed for the contest all the discontented and restless spirits of the age, all those – who whether justly or unjustly – are dissatisfied with the present state of their countries'. A year before the intervention in Greece, Canning was also prepared to admit: 'The consciousness of such a situation excites all my fears, for it

<sup>73</sup> Castlereagh to Lord Stewart, 24 Feb. 1820, quoted in Phillips, 'Great Britain and the Continental Alliance', 48.

<sup>74</sup> S. J. Lee, *George Canning and Liberal Toryism, 1801–1827* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2008).

<sup>75</sup> Canning speaking on 5 March 1820, quoted in Phillips, 'Great Britain and the Continental Alliance', 53–4.

<sup>76</sup> Quoted in Phillips, 'Great Britain and the Continental Alliance', 64.

shows that there exists a power to be wielded by Great Britain, more tremendous than was perhaps ever yet brought into action in the history of making'. The best prospect, he believed, was 'to content ourselves with letting the professors of violent and exaggerated doctrines on both sides feel that it is not their interest to convert an umpire into their competitor'.<sup>77</sup> The stage was set. Britain was non-interventionist and she wished to remain so. But if some other consideration – such as a threat to her interests, or the balance of power – brought her into conflict, it was almost inevitable that she would intervene on the side of those who wished to overthrow autocracy.

I have argued that Britain was sucked into the Eastern Question as an 'umpire', not primarily because of its sympathy to the Greek cause but because the ambitions of Russia made her effectively – as Canning put it – a 'competitor' in the region. However, this should not detract from the long-term significance of the episode. With a slightly different emphasis, Gary Bass has suggested the 'litany of slaughter' committed by the Ottomans 'forced Britain out of its ostensible neutrality, and then to the brink of a humanitarian war'. This argument is perhaps clearly overstated; the pace and timing of Britain's engagement was dictated by Russian actions rather than news of Ottoman atrocities, but the fruition of the humanitarian agenda was an outcome of British policy. Indeed, Bass himself acknowledges that 'Russia, which had imperialistic as well as humanitarian motives, also pushed Britain closer to intervention'. What he does convincingly demonstrate, however, is how accounts of Ottoman atrocities kept the Greek issue on the political agenda in Britain.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, while unlikely, Canning had hinted that public outrage at Ottoman atrocities in the Morea might ultimately push him towards military action in Greece.<sup>79</sup> And even Castlereagh admitted that it was 'impossible not to feel the appeal' of the Greek cause.<sup>80</sup>

The fact remains that humanitarian ends were served – perhaps more effectively than strategic ones – and they became irrevocably tied to how British actions in Greece were understood: humanitarianism *de facto*, if not by design. This was the fusion of humanitarianism and intervention which was described at the outset of this chapter. 'It is too late in the day', John Stuart Mill later commented, 'after these precedents, to tell us that nations may not forcibly interfere with one another for the sole

<sup>77</sup> Canning, 'Extract from Speech of 12 December 1826', in Temperley and Penson, *Foundations of British Foreign Policy*, 66–7.

<sup>78</sup> Bass, *Freedom's Battle*, 49.

<sup>79</sup> Temperley, *The Foreign Policy of Canning*, 391–2.      <sup>80</sup> Bass, *Freedom's Battle*, 63.

purpose of stopping mischief and benefitting humanity'.<sup>81</sup> Writing in 1859, he argued that intervention was therefore justified in cases of 'protracted civil war, in which the contending parties are so equally balanced that there is no probability of a speedy issue; or, if the victorious side cannot hope to keep down the vanquished but by severities repugnant to humanity and injurious to the permanent welfare of the country'. He believed it was now 'an admitted doctrine' that the interference of a powerful neighbour, 'with the acquiescence of the rest', was permitted in such instances. 'Intervention of this description has been repeatedly practised during the present generation', he wrote, 'with such general approval that its legitimacy may be considered to have passed into a maxim of what is called international law'.<sup>82</sup>

This was not a case of Mill rewriting history to justify an abstract or philosophical position; he was completely aware that the selfish interests of Britain were always likely to be the primary concern in considering the 'justifiableness' of intervention. Even in the case of Britain's pro-active role in forcing the abolition of slavery on other states, he noted that 'The fox who had lost his tail had an intelligible interest in persuading his neighbours to rid themselves of theirs.'<sup>83</sup> But his most important insight – the same which dawned upon the makers of British foreign policy in the 1820s – was one which had strategic as well as moral implications. 'The doctrine of non-intervention, to be a legitimate principle of morality, must be accepted by all governments.' In other words, the 'despots must consent to be bound by it as well as the free States ... Unless they do, the profession of it by free countries comes but to this miserable issue, that the wrong side may help the wrong, but the right must not help the right.' Thus, for Mill, intervention 'to enforce non-intervention is always rightful, always moral, if not always prudent'.<sup>84</sup> There were indeed many people who believed British intervention in Portugal and Greece in the 1820s was both rightful and moral; nonetheless, it remains the case that intervention in both these cases had occurred because it was also deemed to be strategically prudent.

Critics of humanitarian intervention have often bemoaned the erosion of traditional Westphalian concepts of international order over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, due to the corrosive

<sup>81</sup> J. S. Mill in his 1849 essay 'Vindication of the French Revolution of February 1848, in Reply to Lord Brougham and Others', cited in Onuf, 'Humanitarian Intervention'.

<sup>82</sup> Mill, 'A Few Words on Non-intervention'. For a recent discussion of this article, see M. Walzer, 'Mill's "A Few Words on Non-Intervention": A Commentary', in *J. S. Mill's Political Thought: A Bicentennial Reassessment*, ed. N. Urbinati and A. Zakras (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 347–56.

<sup>83</sup> Mill, 'A Few Words on Non-intervention'. <sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

effect of philosophical abstractions. This chapter has argued that the post-War commitment to non-intervention was not simply undermined by humanitarian moralism, but because it was not always the most effective way of protecting the national interest. The realisation which occurred in the course of the 1820s – and which the experience of the Napoleonic Wars had already hinted at – was that the ideal of the Westphalian world in which all participants subscribed faithfully to the ‘Law of Nations’, however desirable, was itself an abstraction.