

change. The 1830s and 1840s clearly show growing tensions and friction between the powers. The cause usually given for this, as for the 1848 revolutions and the ultimate downfall of the Vienna system, is the growing ideological, political, and economic gap between absolutist and moderate liberal-constitutional governments and groups, and the way in which absolutist regimes, increasingly weak and threatened, tried to meet demands for political, social, and economic change and the rise of nationalism by repression rather than reform.

Basically this is true, but it over-simplifies the connection between the absolutist-constitutional split in domestic affairs and international relations. Historians often equate the Vienna system (the treaties, rules, and practices for conducting international politics) with the Metternich system (the absolutist prescriptions for the internal governance of states). Since Austria's chancellor Prince Metternich and his allies identified the two, using the Vienna treaties to legitimate their repressive internal and international practices, and since their liberal and radical opponents likewise tarred the two systems with the same brush, this is understandable. None the less, the two were not identical or inseparable, and the actual effects of the ideological contest from 1815 to 1848 show it. Overall, the Vienna system won (peace and the treaties were preserved), while the Metternich system ultimately lost (conservative attempts to hold back constitutionalism, liberal ideas, and economic and social change lost ground throughout the 1830s and 1840s in France, the Low Countries, Germany, northern Italy, and even parts of Austria). Moreover, the ideological rifts produced heated argument but not serious international rivalries or crises between governments. All the important rivalries in Europe both antedated the ideological divide and crossed its boundaries. The ideological dispute between absolutists proclaiming a right of intervention to suppress revolutions and liberals proclaiming a doctrine of non-intervention made little difference in practice. Regardless of doctrine, states intervened in foreign revolutions within their respective spheres of influence, or did not, according to their particular interests. The ideological contest, in other words, did not directly affect the Vienna system's capacity to manage immediate international problems, nor for the most part did it lead governments into dangerous or aggressive policies. The most reactionary great-power regime in 1815-48—Charles X's in France (1824-30)—also had the most dangerously ambitious foreign policy aims.

Yet absolutist policies did undermine the Vienna system and general peace both indirectly, adding to the pressures promoting revolution and discrediting and delegitimizing it by association with Metternichian repression, and directly, by deliberately stunting the Vienna system's capacity to grow and adapt itself to new conditions. From 1819 on Metternich and his allies took the 1815 arrangements for the German Confederation, Italy, and Poland, originally capable of change and development, and reduced them to mere instruments for preserving the status quo, leaving the system still useful for crisis management but not problem-solving. On the other side, the Utopian schemes and reckless actions of nationalist and revolutionary ideologues threatened peace even more directly, while moderate reformers, especially in Britain, gave good advice without ever intending to back it with action or to take responsibility for the consequences. Britain's Lord Palmerston, for example, was often right on the kinds of measures needed to avoid revolution in Germany and Italy; Metternich right about the dangers of urging others to apply them without considering how to manage the results.

Thus its very success in preventing war and managing crises helped prepare the ground for the assault against the Vienna system.

The system undermined and overthrown, 1848-1861

Unlike some revolutions, those that swept western and central Europe from France to the Romanian Principalities in 1848 arose primarily from internal political, social, and economic discontents and movements, not international conflicts. International politics, however, played a certain role in their origins and a bigger one in their course and outcome.

One important factor was nationalism, manifesting itself in two forms, both seeking liberation but from different bonds or restraints and for different ends. The first, voiced by peoples or leaders asserting a particular identity and chafing under foreign rule, called for national 'rights' ranging from local autonomy and privileges through home rule to total independence. This kind of nationalist protest was

widespread—Danes and Germans in Schleswig-Holstein, Italians in Austrian-ruled Lombardy-Venetia, Hungarians within Austria, Czechs in Bohemia-Moravia, Croats in Hungary, Poles under all three partitioning powers, Romanians under Turkish and Hungarian authority, Irish in the United Kingdom. Another kind of nationalism, voiced mainly by a rising commercial and professional middle class led or joined by free intellectuals and liberal nobles, demanded liberation from the obstacles placed in the path of the nation's political freedom, social, economic, and cultural development, and power by small, weak, or unprogressive governments. This was present in France, but strongest in Germany and Italy.

In meaning different things by national liberation and unification, the two varieties targeted and threatened different foes. The former threatened multinational empires, Austria in particular; the latter particularly targeted small princely states. The former pointed toward decentralization and federation, the latter toward amalgamation. Thus, while they might cooperate at times, the likelihood, borne out by events, was that they would ultimately clash head on. Both kinds, moreover, aroused various divergent counter-revolutionary passions and programmes—anti-Polish patriotism in Prussia and Russia, particularist loyalty in Bavaria and other German states, municipal loyalties in Italy, military, bureaucratic, and religious *Habsburgtraue* in Austria, German resistance to Czechs in Bohemia-Moravia or Danes in Schleswig, Croat and Slovak resistance to Hungarian domination, and the like. Hence the inevitable result of nationalist unity movements was increased disunity and conflict.

Nationalist movements affected international politics most directly, however, not by creating or deepening conflicts within countries or between peoples, but by providing the opportunity and means for ambitious leaders and governments to pursue expansionist aims, often old statist and dynastic ones, under new revolutionary slogans. Such 'nationalist' programmes and the responses of governments attacked or threatened by them mainly account for the international crises and conflicts of 1848-9. The Italian revolutions directly challenged both Austrian hegemony and the 1815 system, but only when Sardinia-Piedmont took the lead and attacked Austria was there an interstate war that threatened to pull in France and become general, and, when Austria crushed Sardinia-Piedmont in 1848 and 1849, the international crisis ended. The German and Danish national

causes clashed in Schleswig-Holstein, but an international crisis arose only when Prussia temporarily supported the German cause with its army, and, when Britain and Russia forced Prussia to back down, the acute crisis was over. The German National Parliament at Frankfurt developed a dangerous Great German foreign policy in seeking to unite Germany, but the great international danger lay in the Austro-Prussian rivalry over who would run it. The Hungarian independence movement was a more formidable challenge to Austria than any other because early on the Hungarian movement gained legal recognition of its rights from Vienna, albeit later rescinded. It could then declare independence and fight to retain all the historic lands and peoples of the crown of St Stephen as a government in command of the Hungarian half of the regular Austrian army. Finally, it was Tsar Nicholas I's determination to keep revolution from his own lands and maintain Russian hegemony in eastern Europe that ultimately doomed the Romanian risings and the Hungarian revolution, and helped prevent war in 1849-50 between Austria and Prussia over mastery in Germany.

In other words, power politics prevailed over national movements in the international arena. More surprisingly, international peace and order temporarily won out over revolution, ambition, and war. In 1850, after numerous crises, conflicts, and threats of major war, all the pre-1848 treaties, international institutions, and borders remained intact. The events of 1848-9, unlike those of 1814-15, brought about a true restoration of the old order. What made it possible and largely accounts for both the defeat of revolutions and the preservation of peace is that all the great powers resisted the temptation to expand abroad, using their armies instead to restore their internal authority. The survival and effective use of key structural elements of the Vienna order for crisis management, notably the dual hegemonic cooperation of Britain and Russia and the application of Concert methods and principles, helps to explain this outcome.

Yet the surface restoration concealed profound changes in the international system. Crucial questions (German, Italian, and Hungarian, all part of a still larger Austrian one) had been opened up and deepened, old rivalries revived in acute form (Austro-Sardinian and Austro-French in Italy, Austro-Prussian in Germany, and Austro-Russian in the Balkans, despite their cooperation in Hungary). Liberal or democratic revolution from below was discredited, but

conservative revolution from above by governments and armed force was encouraged. An insecure and adventurous republic emerged in France, with a Bonapartist conspirator, Napoleon's nephew Louis Napoleon, its President. Worst of all, the revolutions had radicalized many conservatives, formerly cautious, internationalist, and legalistic, who now saw how conservative regimes could neutralize liberalism and win over the masses by coopting nationalist goals.

This long-term perspective makes the breakdown of the Concert in the next Eastern crisis, resulting, in the first major war since 1815, appear inevitable. Yet the actual origins of the Crimean War suggest blunder and accident instead. The original confrontation between France and Russia took a long time to develop (1851-3), the issue in dispute seems superficial (nominally control of certain Holy Places in Jerusalem, really prestige and influence at Constantinople), and that issue was settled in Russia's favour before the crisis grew serious. The descent from initial crisis into actual war took almost a year (May 1853-March 1854) and went through many stages—a Turkish rejection of a Russian ultimatum, a Russian break in relations and occupation of the Romanian principalities, British and French fleet movements in support of the Turks, a Turkish declaration of war, Russian destruction of the Turkish navy, an Anglo-French offensive occupation of the Black Sea, and finally war between Russia and the western powers. At every stage European Concert solutions, usually orchestrated by Austria, were proposed and seemed capable of solving the crisis, only to be spoiled by some new development. Yet the war did not really result from bad luck or accident; beneath a contingent process lay profound causes. Three were important without being central. France, where Louis Napoleon now ruled as Emperor Napoleon III, deliberately exploited the crisis and risked war to gain prestige, destroy the Austro-Russian alliance, acquire an alliance with Britain, and thereby enjoy security and leadership in Europe. The Turks, once confident of Western support, decided on war to relieve the constant Russian pressure on them. In Britain, domestic politics within a weak divided government under pressure from a Russophile press, Parliament, and public opinion led to confusion and unclear decisions and actions at crucial moments. But the two central factors derived from basic policy decisions in Russia and Britain, and each rested on miscalculation. The crisis arose because Russia attempted to bully the Turkish government into formally

acknowledging Russian pre-eminence at Constantinople, assuming that there would be no strong European reaction. The Ottoman-Russian conflict evolved into a major war because the British government decided at various junctures after July 1853 not to allow Russia an honourable retreat under cover of the Concert, which it knew Russia was seeking, but instead to inflict a humiliating political defeat on Russia and to weaken its position in Europe and the Middle East. This policy, which risked war from the outset and finally steered towards it, rested on two assumptions: that restraining Russia by grouping it in the Concert might preserve peace now, but would not eliminate the long-range Russian threat to the Ottoman and British empires (which was true), and that British naval and financial strength added to continental land forces (Turkish, French, and perhaps also Austrian and German) could do so fairly easily and quickly, possibly even throwing Russia back in Europe and Asia.

This proved incorrect. The war, fought principally on the Crimean peninsula because Britain and France could not get at Russia effectively elsewhere, revealed the military weaknesses and inefficiency of all the contestants, especially Russia and Britain. The losses, though fairly heavy especially for Russia, stemmed from weather, disease, and logistical problems more than battle. When the allies after a year-long siege finally captured the fortress of Sevastopol, France and Austria combined to force Russia to accept peace terms and to drag Britain to the peace table. The settlement reached at the Congress of Paris in the spring of 1856 reflected the limited allied victory. Russia surrendered its special treaty rights *vis-à-vis* the Ottoman Empire (a foregone conclusion) and had to cede a small piece of southern Bessarabia to Turkey and accept the neutralization of the Black Sea, twin blows to its prestige, sovereignty, and security.

Yet, except for France, which gained military laurels and international prestige, no principal profited from the war. Russia, suffering the effects of its backwardness, partly withdrew from European affairs to concentrate on internal reform. Britain, disappointed by its war effort and distracted by troubles in Persia and India, also partially retreated from Europe. The war, far from reducing the Russian threat to the British Empire, served to convince Russians hitherto divided on the subject that Britain was a worldwide enemy and turned them towards more expansion in the Caucasus, central Asia, and the Far East. The Ottoman Empire, though it gained a brief respite from

Russian pressure and a chance for modernization, acquired no durable western support. The allies disdained it during the war and abandoned it soon after, with Russia joining France in encouraging Balkan independence movements.

The main impact of the war however, making it a turning point in international politics, was systemic and especially affected central Europe. Austria and the European Concert lost; Prussia and Sardinia-Piedmont won. The war itself, which Austria had tried desperately to prevent, undermined the Concert and threatened Austria, an empire peculiarly dependent on international sanctions and support. The results of Austrian policy during the war proved even worse. Pressed by the western powers to join the war and by Russia, Prussia, and the German Confederation to stay out, Austria had followed a non-belligerent but pro-western course that succeeded in limiting the war and preventing Russia from winning it (two-thirds of Russia's army had to be kept on its western front) but not in ending it on Austrian terms. After a peace conference at Vienna in March–May 1855 failed, Austria helped France force Russia to accept defeat and humiliating terms. In the end it made Russia an enemy by its betrayal, angered Prussia and the German states by dragging them along in its risky pro-western policy, antagonized the western powers by refusing to fight, and convinced everyone that it was selfish, irresolute, and greedy. Yet its aim was to revive the Concert through a permanent conservative alliance with the western powers, serving to restrain Russia, defend the Ottoman Empire, and gain British and French support for the status quo (that is, Austrian leadership) against revolution and challenges from Prussia and Sardinia in Germany and Italy. Russia, Prussia, and other states were supposed to accept this for the general peace and stability it would bring.

It was a pipe dream, of course. The Habsburg Monarchy, neo-absolutist, financially shaky, full of unrest in Hungary and Lombardy-Venetia and unsolved problems elsewhere, had neither the power nor the credibility for such a position of leadership. The programme itself simply ignored liberal and national pressures and the need for change, subordinated everything to Austria's need for external tranquillity, and overlooked how unsuitable Britain and France were to be reliable partners for Austria. But the failure of this attempt to reconstruct the European Concert in mid-century on a conservative, Austrian-centred basis points to something even more significant: the

absence of any liberal, western attempt to do so. The great missed opportunity for establishing a liberal international order in Europe did not come in 1848–9—the actual liberal-revolutionary foreign policy programme of those years (French, German, Prussian, Italian, Austrian, and Hungarian) were all dangerously power-political and expansionist—but in 1853–6. The western powers' defeat of autocratic Russia afforded them a chance, if they chose, to lead Europe on a liberal path in regard to trade, nationalities problems, constitutional reform, and other policies that many had advocated for decades. But neither government had clear ideas for this task or interest in it. The British concentrated on trade, empire, domestic politics, and maintaining the continental balance of power now mainly against France. Napoleon III's ideas about reconstructing Europe were vague, impractical, and bound up with his dynastic ambitions and he proved inept in executing them. The liberal moment thus passed, leaving the field to the practitioners of *Realpolitik*.

A further blow to Austria came with the unification and *de facto* independence of the Romanian principalities that Romanian nationalists achieved in 1858–9 against Austrian and Turkish opposition through shrewd manoeuvres encouraged by France and Russia and grudgingly accepted by Britain. This cost the Ottoman Sultan little, for his rights had long been nominal and an independent Romania would ultimately prove a better buffer against Russia. For Austria, however, it worsened the Hungarian problem (Transylvania had a Romanian majority) and the general threat of nationalism.

Italy, however, posed a greater strategic and power-political threat. Austria's defeat of Sardinia-Piedmont in 1849 had only hardened their rivalry. Its new king Victor Emmanuel II and leading statesman Count Cavour continued the cold war against Austria and prepared for a hot one, using the Italian national cause mainly for their particular ends—military and dynastic glory and territorial expansion, the expulsion of Austria from Italy and if possible its destruction, and victory for conservative-liberal constitutional forces led by Piedmont over democratic-republican revolutionary forces in the Italian Risorgimento. Cavour's effort in 1856 to start a war against Austria with British and French support had failed, but by 1859 he had gone far to make Sardinia a leader in fiscal, commercial, and constitutional progress in Italy, to organize and co-opt the bourgeois nationalist movement, to win sympathy abroad especially in Britain, and to

blacken Austria's reputation, exploiting the revolutionary discontent in Lombardy-Venetia, Austria's repressive measures against it, and its military treaties with other Italian states to paint it as the aggressor. Having goaded Austria into breaking relations, Cavour reached a secret agreement with Napoleon III in mid-1858 to provoke a joint war with Austria to expel it from Italy, expand Sardinia, and reconstruct Italy on federal lines under French influence. This was backed by a defensive alliance in early 1859. Cavour knew that he risked replacing Austrian hegemony with French, but was confident he could manage Napoleon III.

Yet, despite growing unrest in Lombardy and mobilization of Austrian and Sardinian forces on their frontier, war proved elusive so long as Austria stood on the defence of its legal rights, and the whole conspiracy was threatened when Britain and Prussia, opposed to war and worried about France, offered jointly to mediate the Italian crisis. France countered by getting Russia to propose a general congress, intended to isolate Austria and provoke a *casus belli*. The Austrians, sensing this, initially did not flatly reject a congress but insisted that Sardinia demobilize first as a precondition. Fearing isolation, Napoleon III decided in mid-April to agree and pressed Sardinia to accept this humiliation. Cavour, near despair, contemplated resigning and exposing the plot when suddenly he was rescued by an Austrian ultimatum demanding immediate Sardinian demobilization. He evaded it, Austria declared war, France honoured its alliance commitment, Britain and Prussia condemned Austria as the aggressor and withdrew into neutrality, and Cavour had his war.

Austria's blunder is explained, though not justified, by its belief that it had to end Sardinia's provocations and the military, fiscal, and political pressures of cold war and mobilization once for all, and that this was the last best opportunity. Along with this went a fatal miscalculation born of a kind of moral hubris—the conviction that Austria's cause, the defence of its legal rights against revolutionary attacks, was so obviously right and necessary for European order that Europe would in the end support it against its enemies.

Nemesis followed hubris. After the French army had defeated the Austrian in two bloody battles in Lombardy (the Piedmontese did little fighting), Emperor Franz Joseph accepted Napoleon III's offer of a truce in mid-July. Napoleon III's decision to end the war before Austria was expelled from Italy as promised was prudent. The war

had proved costly and unpopular at home, the Austrian army was still in the field, Britain was growing suspicious, Sardinia was unreliable, and, worst of all, Prussia and the German Confederation threatened to intervene. His methods, however, which included deceiving Franz Joseph, worsened his existing reputation for unreliability; diplomats' tricks are one thing, sovereigns' another. Though Cavour resigned in protest over the truce, he remained in control behind the scenes and succeeded in subverting its terms so that in the final peace Sardinia-Piedmont acquired Tuscany, Parma, Modena, and the Papal Marches along with conquered Lombardy. These gains, sanctioned by plebiscites, almost tripled it in size and population. The cost was the cession to France (again dignified by plebiscites) of two smaller Piedmontese territories as compensation, Savoy and Nice. The sacrifice was painful to Italian and Savoyard patriots, but a bargain for Cavour and no boon for Napoleon. The Italian venture, as his domestic enemies pointed out, had at great cost created a new potential rival for France, while the acquisition of Nice and Savoy alienated Britain and deepened European suspicions of his ambitions.

The events of 1859–60 obviously did not create a final settlement for Italy. Austria still held Venetia, the Pope and the Bourbons still ruled at Rome and Naples, and both Napoleon III and the Austrians secretly hoped to alter the outcome in different ways. Yet it could have lasted a good while. Austria was friendless, exhausted, and racked with internal problems; Napoleon III was unready for another adventure, and Sardinia had plenty of new territory to absorb and organize. Cavour, moreover, had little interest in the south or Italian nationalism *per se*. It required a different kind of Italian adventurer-patriot, Giuseppe Garibaldi, the greatest of all nineteenth-century freedom fighters, to launch the next act in Italian unification, one that Cavour would take over, exploit, and finish.

In May 1860 Garibaldi led an expedition of 1,000 ill-armed volunteers from the north to Sicily to support a Sicilian insurrection against Neapolitan rule. He succeeded in driving the demoralized Neapolitan army out of Sicily and much of the Neapolitan mainland, and was checked only in late summer north of Naples. His real aim, however, was to go to Rome, overthrow the papacy, and found a democratic united Italy over which Victor Emmanuel could reign. The opportunity this presented to Cavour, who had tried secretly to stop Garibaldi while pretending to support him, was outweighed by

its challenge and dangers. He, his monarch, and his allies abhorred the notion of a democratic Italy formed by popular action, but overthrowing the Pope would alienate France, outrage Catholic Europe, bring Austria back into the field with conservative support, and destroy everything that had been achieved.

Cavour's response was bold and Machiavellian. Gaining Napoleon's tacit permission, he tried first to foment an insurrection in the Papal State to justify an intervention there. When this failed, he sent the army in anyway, dispersing the papal forces and seizing most of the Pope's territory. It then invaded Naples (another neutral friendly state), and defeated the Neapolitan army, though the final mop-up took months. Garibaldi and his forces were dismissed with thanks but no reward, the Pope was confined to Rome and its environs (the Patrimony of St Peter), and Naples, Sicily, and most papal territory were absorbed through plebiscite into a new Kingdom of Italy proclaimed in January 1861.

With all its flaws, this outcome was better than any practical alternative, and achieved with surprisingly little violence and bloodshed in the interstate wars (the internal pacification of the south was another matter). Yet, from an international standpoint, these events did less to reorganize Europe on a new national basis than to advance the destruction of the old European order without establishing a new one. Three reasons prompt this conclusion. First, Italy was incomplete (Venice and Rome), would still have irredentist ambitions even after acquiring these, and, as a weak, ambitious would-be great power, would remain an incalculable, destabilizing factor in European politics. Secondly, France was now isolated and Napoleon III discredited as a leader and manager of the system, while old rivalries had been aggravated rather than healed (Austro-Italian, Austro-French, Anglo-French, Austro-Prussian). Finally, Cavour's actions in uniting Italy, however justified by danger and necessity, were so unscrupulous as to undermine any stable code of international conduct and system of mutual restraint unless convincingly renounced for the future—something neither Cavour, who died in mid-1861, nor his successors would or could do.

The creation of Prussia-Germany, 1862–1871

As everyone knows, the Second German Reich was not unified from below but created from above by Prussia through wars that ousted Austria from Germany, destroyed the German Confederation, and incorporated its non-Austrian territories into a Prussian-dominated empire. This outcome was not foreordained; other settlements of the German question were possible. Yet paradoxically, without this contingent outcome resulting in this particular Prussian-dominated Germany, it is hard to envision any stable European system emerging to replace the one finally buried in these last of the mid-century wars.

The fact that the architect of German unification, Count Bismarck, was named Prussia's Minister-President in 1862 in the course of a constitutional crisis pitting the king, the army, and the ministry against the liberal majority in Prussia's lower house demonstrates the intimate connection between foreign and domestic politics in the process. Other internal political, social, economic, and cultural factors in Prussia and Germany were involved in unification. Bismarck's motives in seeking and using power, however, were primarily international, not domestic or personal. For years he had advocated expanding Prussia's territory and power to fit its great power needs and role, absorbing or subordinating smaller states and ousting Austria from at least north Germany and possibly the south as well.

This revolutionary programme was almost certain to require war, as Bismarck recognized. Yet one cannot simply say, 'Bismarck started three wars to unify Germany'. He always tried other means first and as long as possible; technically Prussia was not the aggressor in any of them. Moreover, his main aim was always to strengthen Prussia and never to unify Germany entirely. Above all, he conducted policy, not as a puppeteer or visionary following his star, but as one player among many in Europe who pursued his overall goal step by step with limited means, seizing opportunities and avoiding traps as he went. The reason for organizing the story around him is not that he controlled events, but that he showed extraordinary skill and success in exploiting them.