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Metternich's Theory of European Order: A Political Agenda for "Perpetual Peace"

James R. Sofka

This article examines the foreign policy of Prince Clemens Metternich of Austria, the chief architect of the Vienna Treaty of 1815, in the light of Enlightenment political thought. Metternich is commonly considered a reactionary and practitioner of callous balance-of-power diplomacy, and this article seeks to refute this conclusion. By examining Metternich's deeply held theoretical beliefs on the nature of the European state system, and above all his Kantian belief in progress and federalism, this essay concludes that Metternich pursued a reformist, and indeed idealistic, program in international politics which cannot be divorced from late Enlightenment philosophy. His Conference System, which was designed to regulate European politics in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, represented a novel experiment in European union which remains a pressing concern in the contemporary international system.

In his magisterial analysis of late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century European politics, Paul Schroeder argues that the Vienna Settlement of 1815 marked a fundamental change in the "governing rules, norms, and practices of international politics." If this "transformation" did indeed occur—and evidence of it is plentiful—then much of the credit for effecting it must be attributed to Prince Clemens Metternich of Austria, the chief architect of the postwar settlement. Metternich conceived of his task at Vienna as far greater than redrawing frontiers and restoring nearly forgotten princes to their thrones. More critically, he articulated a profoundly normative program for the restructuring of the European state system, and sought actively to transcend the predatory milieu of eighteenth-century international relations and replace it with a political order that would insure what most philosophers of the Enlightenment could only visualize: perpetual peace.[1]

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1. Paul Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763–1848* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994], p. vii.

Metternich's Exposure to Enlightenment Thought

Metternich remarked near the end of his life that historians would judge him more fairly than his contemporaries, and his prophecy has proven uncannily accurate. In the not so distant past even a casual association of Metternich with Enlightenment liberalism would have been dismissed as ludicrous. However, the commonly received image of Metternich as a benighted reactionary is largely a product of late–nineteenth–century German nationalist historiography, which could barely conceal its disgust toward his attachment to European federalism rather than the cause of national self–determination.[2] This view has gradually been discredited in recent years by Metternich scholars and has been supplanted by a general (if at times uneasy) respect and even admiration of his ability to shape a constructive settlement out of the chaotic variables of the states–system that emerged from the Napoleonic Wars.

Although he was prone to frequent indulgence in self–congratulation, Metternich's political philosophy was more than the accumulated wisdom of elegant *soirée* conversation and idle reflection. The career of the man who considered himself "a kind of titular professor of fundamental truths" bridged the intellectual evolution of Europe from rationalism to romanticism without significant change in orientation. "The most outstanding moral element in me is immutability," he proudly observed in 1818. Most aspects of Metternich's personality and opinions, as well as the parameters of his political thought and diplomatic conduct, were

2. Quite naturally the main focus of these nationalist criticisms was Metternich's refusal to endorse German unification and his insistence that the German states should be incorporated in a federal, decentralized political system. This line of attack, which assumed a high profile in the early twentieth century, was followed most vocally and venomously by Heinrich von Treitschke in his magisterial—and widely read—*History of Germany in the Nineteenth Century*, 7 vols. (New York: McBride, Nest and Co., 1915–1919); and the later work of Viktor Bibl, *Metternich: Der Dämon Österreichs* (Vienna: J. Gunther, 1936). For an overview of this dimension of Metternich historiography, see Paul Schroeder, "Metternich Studies Since 1925," *Journal of Modern History* 33 (1961): 237–60; and James R. Sofka, "Metternich, Jefferson, and the Enlightenment: Statecraft and Political Theory in Early Nineteenth Century Europe and America" (Ph.D. diss. University of Virginia, 1995), conclusion.

shaped by the philosophical and cultural milieu of the late Enlightenment.[3] Born in 1773 in the Rhineland city of Coblenz, the young Metternich was raised in atmosphere of considerable wealth and political and intellectual sophistication. His father, Franz Georg Metternich, was an influential Rhineland politician who frequently represented the Habsburg Monarchy at electoral conferences.[4] Metternich's tutor, Friedrich Simon, was a deist fond of quoting Condorcet and d'Alembert who returned to Paris to take up the revolutionary cause in 1794. Though he did not agree with Simon's endorsement of the more radical dimensions of the French Revolution, Metternich admitted that he was influenced by some of his teacher's views and stressed the importance of French rationalism and materialism on his early philosophical and theological education. In 1788 Franz Georg Metternich enrolled his son in the University of Strasbourg, where he resolved to follow an academic career in medicine or chemistry. "My particular vocation," he observed later with a noticeable tinge of remorse, "seemed to me to be the cultivation of knowledge, especially of the exact and physical sciences, which suited my taste particularly." By his own admission he was attracted to the predictable and arithmetic universe of the physical sciences and viewed it as a model for political and social analysis.[5]

3. Metternich to Joseph Hübner, January 26, 1850, cited in Guillaume de Bertier de Sauvingy, *Metternich and His Times* (London: Longman and Todd, 1962), p. 31. Metternich to Princess Dorothea Lieven, 22 December 1818. Emil Mika, ed., *Geist und Herz Verbündet: Metternich's Briefe an die Gräfin Lieven* (Vienna: W. Andermann, 1942), p. 87. Hans Rieben, *Prinzipiengrundlage und Diplomatie in Metternichs Europapolitik, 1814–1848* (Aarau: H. R. Sauerlander and Co., 1942), p. 9.

4. For an overview of Metternich's intellectual tastes and erudite salon conversation, the memoirs of George Ticknor, a Harvard law professor who visited Metternich in July 1836, are instructive. George Ticknor, ed., *The Life, Letters, and Journals of George Ticknor*, vol. II. (Boston: J. R. Osgood and Co., 1876), chap. 1. The best surveys of Metternich's early life and family background are found in Heinrich Ritter von Srbik, *Metternich: Der Staatsmann und der Mensch*, 3 vols. (Munich and Vienna: 1925–1954], I: 53–96; Enno E. Kraehe, *Metternich's German Policy, volume I: The Contest with Napoleon, 1799–1814* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), chap. 1; and Dorothy Gies McGuigan, *Metternich and the Duchess* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), chap. 2.

5. Metternich reviewed his early education in a letter to the Russian Foreign Minister Karl Robert Nesselrode in 1817. He noted that "at the age of twenty a deep and long-continued research in the Holy Books made me an atheist after the fashion of d'Alembert and Lalande, or a Christian after that of Chateaubriand."

Consequently the emphasis Metternich would later place on "immutable truths" was a genuine reflection of his system of reasoning and not merely justificatory posturing. Like his predecessor Kaunitz, he used the scientific method to focus clearly on the forces motivating physical and social systems.[6] He unceasingly argued that rational principles guided his action, just as they governed chemical reactions in a laboratory. "Our calculations are never confined to the passing day or the needs of the moment," he wrote Paul Esterhazy in 1825. "Placed face to face with the future, and giving to temporary embarrassments no other value than that of transient and variable symptoms, our point of view is extended but unchangeable, and our line of action never varies in its direction." Indeed, Metternich often drew comparisons between principles of government and chemistry and pathology. "It has certainly never been questioned," he wrote in 1819, "that society and the advance of society are subject to fundamental laws just definitely as physical forces are subject to

Metternich to Karl Robert Nesselrode, 20 August 1817. Prince Richard Metternich, ed., *Aus Metternich's nachgelassenen Papieren*, 8 vols. (Vienna: W. Braumuller, 1880–1884). First five volumes translated in English as *The Memoirs of Prince Metternich* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1881–1882). Hereafter I will use NP to refer to the German edition and MM for the English text. This quote from MM, 3: 67–68. Metternich later observed that throughout the 1790s he "diligently attended lectures on Geology, Chemistry, and Physics. Man and his life seemed to me to be objects worthy of study" (MM, 1: 23). He assiduously studied Newton, Kepler, and LaPlace, and the latter's works so impressed him that he carried copies of them in his diplomatic bag throughout his tenure as foreign minister (McGuigan, *Metternich and the Duchess*, p. 496). Srbik maintains that Metternich's scientific training was responsible for his demonstrated "strong impulse to search in the psychological and physical world for universal laws and then test them empirically and experimentally in the factual realm and prove them correct" (Srbik, "Der Ideengehalt des 'Metternichischen Systems,'" *Historische Zeitschrift* 131 [1925]: 243–45).

6. For a comparison of Metternich's and Kaunitz's political views and Newtonian method of reasoning, see Peter Richard Rohden, *Die klassische Diplomatie von Kaunitz bis Metternich* (Leipzig: Koehler and Ameland, 1939), chaps. 1 and 2. On Kaunitz's legendary "political algebra" and its debt to the Enlightenment, see Walter Dorn, *Competition for Empire 1740–1763* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1940), pp. 296–300; Franz A.J. Szabo, "Prince Kaunitz and the Balance of Power," *International History Review* 1 (1979): 399–408, as well as Szabo's full-length study of *Kaunitz and Enlightened Absolutism, 1753–1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

other laws differing in many respects from those that function in society and the sphere of morality but less in conflict with them than is generally supposed."[7]

Metternich's rationalism further matured through his legal training at the University of Mainz, which began in 1790. His mentor, Niklas Vogt, was a respected legal scholar whose study of *Das System des Gleichgewichts* (1785) was one of the eighteenth century's most sophisticated studies of international politics. This work postulated the creation of a continental "equilibrium," as well as the necessity for some legal and rational regulation of the European state system, as the highest ethical goal of politics. Vogt, who believed that the "greatest goal of a truly enlightened society is the education of all men as to the importance of the maintenance of [the] balance among both nations and individuals," had a formative and lasting effect on the young Metternich.[8] Under Vogt's tutelage, the international system effectively became a laboratory for implementing the principles of natural philosophy and physical reactions that Metternich had studied at Strasbourg. Politics was understood by the young Metternich, as it was by Kant, in a clinical and rational fashion.

Metternich initially paid scant attention to the French Revolution, which was unquestionably the greatest political event of the age of his youth. In his student years he deplored the Revolution's violent and often arbitrary excesses, but he did not categorically condemn its aims. Significantly, at no time during the 1790s or later did he endorse the intellectual and political program of the British and German counter-revolutionaries. Indeed, Metternich went to great lengths to distance himself from what he viewed as this "romantic" conservatism which he never ceased to condemn as retrograde. "It may be," he noted, "that someone

7. Metternich to Paul Esterhazy, 7 August 1825 (MM, 4: 222); Srbik, "Ideengehalt," p. 245; Metternich to Count Ludwig Lebzeltern, 15 December 1819, cited in Bertier, *Metternich and His Times*, p. 33.

8. Cited in Steven Stargardter, *Niklas Vogt 1756–1836: A Personality of the Late German Enlightenment and Early Romantic Movement* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1991), p. 137. I am indebted to this excellent and original study of Metternich's teacher. In his autobiography Metternich referred to Vogt as "one of my most zealous friends," even though the two later had serious disagreements over the structure of the German Confederation (MM, 1: 11). Indeed, in 1836 the professor would be buried on the estate of his most famous student.

in the year 2240 will discover my name, and tell the world that in this distant past there was at least one man less limited than the mass of his contemporaries who had pushed fatuity to the point of believing that they had reached the apogee of civilization."[9] With such a progressive outlook, it is not surprising that Metternich should seek to reform the workings of the European state system.

Metternich left Mainz in 1792 and began a series of diplomatic apprenticeships in the German states under his father's tutelage. In 1795 he married Eleonore von Kaunitz, granddaughter of the architect of the "diplomatic revolution" of 1756 and member of one of the most influential political families in Vienna, a move which further propelled his meteoric rise to power. He received his own diplomatic appointment to the court of Saxony at Dresden in 1801 and, with his father's intervention, was appointed Austrian ambassador to Prussia in early 1803. In 1805 he helped negotiate the alliance that would be soundly defeated at Austerlitz. Following Austria's defeat, he watched from Vienna as Napoleon reorganized the German states into the Confederation of the Rhine, an organization that would serve as a model for Metternich's own efforts to "federalize" Germany in 1815.

In 1806 Metternich was named Austrian ambassador to Russia, but at the request of Napoleon, who assumed he was Francophilic, he was given the post at Paris instead. Following Austria's decisive defeat at Wagram in 1809, he was appointed minister of foreign affairs. At the age of 36, Metternich had reached the pinnacle of ministerial power in the Habsburg monarchy. In this augmented capacity, he sought to structure a system of world

9. Metternich noted later that he was all but oblivious of the French Revolution in the early 1790s, as the bulk of his time was consumed in the laboratory. "I was happy in this scientific circle," he wrote, "and allowed the Revolution to rage and rave without feeling any call to contend with it" (MM, 1: 23). His only political act in this period was the publication of a short anonymous pamphlet—under the revealing pseudonym "A Friend of Universal Peace"—in 1794 urging the electors of the western German states to defend their lands in the event of a French attack (MM, 1: 340–47). On the revolution, see Srbik, *Metternich*, 1: 65–96; Kraehe, *German Policy*, 1: 10–18; MM, 1: 4–17. For his opinion of and disagreements with Burke and his adherents, see Henry A. Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh, and the Problems of Peace, 1815–1822* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), pp. 193–4; NP, 3: 451.

order that would preserve the peace of Europe after the defeat of Napoleon. As he wrote in a circular dispatch to his ambassadors in the spring of 1813, his aim was to create "not a precarious state of affairs, but a general arrangement which will put back the geographical and political relations of the powers on a just and lasting basis."[10] The legal and political theory of the late Enlightenment was his guide in this process.

Metternich, Kant, and the Idea of "Political Equilibrium"

In his 1784 essay "Idea for a Universal History From a Cosmopolitan Viewpoint," which Metternich read at Mainz, Kant argued that the incessant conflict that had plagued eighteenth century statecraft would hopefully—and counterintuitively—work to create the "perpetual peace" visualized by the Abbé St. Pierre in 1713. "Wars, tense and unremitting military preparations," he noted:

> and the resultant distress which every state must feel within itself, even in the midst of peace—these are the means by which nature drives nations to make initially imperfect attempts, but finally, after many devastations, upheavals and even complete inner exhaustion of their powers, to take the step which reason could have suggested to them without so many sad experiences—that of abandoning a lawless state of savagery and entering a federation of peoples in which every state, even the smallest, could expect to derive its security and rights not from its own power or its own legal judgment, but solely from this great federation, from a united power and the law-governed decisions of a united will.[11]

10. On the period 1806–1809, see Srbik, *Metternich*, 1: 99–122 and Kraehe, *German Policy*, vol. I, chaps. 2–4. Metternich's own account of his life in this period is in his Autobiography, but it was written late in life and should be read with a careful eye for details that began to escape his memory. MM, 1: 45–121; Kraehe, German Policy, 1: 51; cited in McGuigan, *Metternich and the Duchess*, p. 39.

11. Kant, "Idea for a Universal History," *Kant's Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 47. For an analysis of Kant's idea of universal federalism, see Charles Dupuis, *Le Droit des Gens et les Rapports des Grandes Puissances avec les autrés etats avant le pacta de la Societé des Nations* (Paris, 1921); Kurt von Raumer, *Ewiger Friede: Friedensrufe und Friedenspläne seit der Renaissance* (Munich: K. Alber, 1953); Patrick Riley, *Kant's Political Philosophy* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1983), chap. 6; Andrew Hurrell, "Kant and the Kantian Paradigm in International Relations," *Review of International Studies* 16 (1989): 183–205. For a broader view of eighteenth-century ideas on international

To Kant, the international "equilibrium"—a federation of states regulated by law and treaty—would logically result from a desire for peace that in turn arose from the horrors of war. Statesmen, observing the miseries of war, would use reason to construct a legal foundation for political interaction between states—as they had long done within them—to limit this tendency to violence. In such an arrangement the destructive forces that had animated world politics in the modern age could be reconciled through a rational analytical process, and the interests of all states could be secured and promoted by an equilibrium based on international law. The result would inevitably be stringent limitations on the ability of states to commit acts of aggression, just as the corresponding ability of individuals within states was restricted by judicial authority. If the competing state interests which divided world society could be mitigated by reason and law and if the autonomy of individual states could be limited, Kant maintained, then general peace could follow. In Kant's analysis, and in the view of earlier writers such as St. Pierre, Jeremy Bentham, and William Penn, the more destructive wars became, the more receptive statesmen would be to finding new ways to eradicate them.

Metternich endorsed the argument of "Idea for a Universal History" and it can be seen as providing the foundation for his approach to world politics.[12] Like Kant he abhorred violence and was repelled by the excesses of the revolutionary mobs he witnessed while in Strasbourg and Mainz, as well as by the battlefields of Germany he observed in the Napoleonic Wars.[13]

federalism, see Mario Einaudi, *The Early Rousseau* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), chap. 7; C. E. Vaughan, ed., *The Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, vol. 1, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1962), pp. 399–435; Stanley Hoffmann, "Rousseau on War and Peace," *Janus and Minerva: Essays in the Theory and Practice of International Politics* (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1987), pp. 25–51; M. S. Anderson, *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy, 1450–1919* (London: Longman, 1993), pp. 204–38; Francis Ruddy, *International Law In The Enlightenment* (New York: Oceana Publications, 1975); E. V. Souleyman, *The Vision of World Peace in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century France*, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1941); D. Heater, *The Idea of European Unity* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992).

12. Srbik, "Ideengehalt," p. 248.

13. "Peace," Metternich observed in 1808, "does not exist within a revolutionary situation, and whether Robespierre declares eternal war against the châteaux or Napoleon makes it against the Powers, the tyranny is the same,

This escalation of international and internal violence convinced Metternich that drastic and immediate measures had to be taken to arrest what he perceived as a drift toward anarchy. As late as the summer of 1813, when the representatives of the three Allied Powers were formulating a new offensive against Napoleon, Metternich frantically arranged a peace conference in Prague and only reluctantly agreed to participate in the war upon the failure of this mediation attempt.[14]

Metternich's rationalism and aversion to disorder conditioned his profoundly antimilitaristic worldview. "One characteristic of war," he observed, "is that once it has begun laws are no longer imposed by the will of man but by force of circumstance, and another is that circumstances of pure chance become reasons, and that although one may know one's starting point, the same is not true of one's destination." Yet as a practical matter he ruefully admitted to Princess Lieven in 1818, "One is less concerned with those who prevent the cannon going off than with those who fire it. The one is more necessary than the other, but the world runs after the noise." Consequently, as Enno Kraehe notes, Metternich's goal was to structure a system "within which a balance would exist without permanently mobilized armies and interminably marching troops." Rather than ensure Austria's, and Europe's, security in a temporary and precarious "balance of power," Metternich "envisaged a system that would finally come to rest."[15] In championing this idea, Metternich made the attainment and preservation of an "equilibrium" his ultimate objective.

What, then, did the concept of "equilibrium" mean to Metternich at the time of the Congress of Vienna, the first test of this new system of politics? It certainly did not, as we shall see, mean a "balance of power." Although several attempts have been

and the danger is only more general" (Metternich to Stadion, 27 April 1808, MM, 2: 205).

14. On the abortive Prague Conference of July–August 1813, see McGuigan, *Metternich and the Duchess*, chap. 8 and Kraehe, *German Policy*, 1: 181–86. Metternich glosses over this effort in his "Autobiographical Memoir." No doubt he was unwilling to appear to posterity as an initial opponent of the ultimately successful coalition of 1813 (MM, 1: 196–99).

15. Metternich to Paul Esterhazy, 24 August 1821, cited in Bertier, *Metternich and His Times*, p. 69. Metternich to Princess Lieven, 6 December 1818 (Mika, *Geist und Herz Verbündet*, p. 69; Kraehe, *German Policy*, 1: 302).

made to analyze these concepts at a systemic level, few examine Metternich's own theory of world order and its application in the post–Vienna period.[16] Despite his early attachment to Newtonian physics, Metternich did not approach international relations entirely mechanistically, and he attempted to outline a higher stage of social existence than one analogous to reactions found in a chemical laboratory.[17] Indeed, the "rediscovery of the old international law," as Hans Rieben asserts, was the predicate of Metternich's thinking on the idea of "equilibrium." His approach to politics, like Kant's, was highly normative, and he was trained to analyze political relationships in a systemic fashion. His devotion to "immutable" principles of order led him to seek to

16. A representative sample of these arguments can be found in Harold Nicholson, *The Congress of Vienna* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1946), pp. 38–41; Henry A. Kissinger, *A World Restored*, chap. 4; and Edward Vose Gulick, *Europe's Classical Balance of Power* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1955). The problem of world order in the post–Vienna era has been subject to close examination in a series of articles in the *American Historical Review* 97 (1992): 683–735. These attempt to trace the roots of the balance of power—versus—equilibrium debate and offer new insights into Allied diplomacy in the Congress period. Paul Schroeder's essay, "Did the Vienna System Rest on a Balance of Power?" concludes that it did not, and this idea is echoed in his recent *Transformation of European Politics*. Enno Kraehe's rejoinder, "A Bipolar Balance of Power," contends that both Britain and Russia attempted to manipulate combinations in central Europe and that Metternich's diplomacy was centered on securing a pivotal role for Austria against a perceived Russian threat. Robert Jervis, in his essay on "A Political Science Perspective on the Balance of Power and the Concert," uses quantitative modelling to outline the theoretical basis of the Congress system. Wolf Gruner asks "Was There A Reformed Balance of Power System or Cooperative Great Power Hegemony?" and concludes that the system did indeed rest on a multipolar, or pentarchical, balance of power.

17. In taking this position Metternich followed the example set by other leading eighteenth century political philosophers. Many Enlightenment theorists, including Montesquieu, Diderot, Kant, and Holbach, wrote extensively on natural science before turning to political questions. See William Piper, "Kant's Contact With British Empiricism," *Eighteenth Century Studies* 12 (1978/79): 174–89; Ira Wade, *The Structure and Form of the French Enlightenment*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); Alan Charles Kors, *d'Holbach's Coterie: An Enlightenment in Paris* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), Part I; Nannerl O. Keohane, *Philosophy and the State in France: The Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), chap. 14; Georges Gusdorf, *l'avènement des Sciences humaines au siècle des Lumières*, (Paris, 1973); and Souleyman, *Vision of World Peace*.

implement and institutionalize a pan–European settlement in 1815 rather than focus solely on regional problems. The latter tendency was scorned by Metternich as "a selfish policy, a policy of fantasy . . . of miserable greed . . . which seeks profit apart from the simplest rules of right . . . and the [pursuit] of which constitutes political wisdom in the eyes of a restless and short–sighted policy."[18]

As conceived by Metternich, the European "equilibrium" was a stable arrangement of powers regulated by international law and operating according to universally recognized ethical principles and treaty obligations.[19] Equilibrium could be achieved if statesmen worked to limit the autonomy of individual states and ordered these actors in a federal system operating according to the principle of collective security. In this arrangement, all of the Great Powers would be united in upholding the general European peace and the legal norms upon which it rested, and would be restrained from pursuing "egotistical" policies by the sanction of international law. The resulting system would integrate states in a legally constituted alliance system that would eliminate the need to resort to force against an external threat. Instead, the system would be regulated by frequent consultations between governments and the resolution of disputes by diplomatic means. Metternich's equilibrium was to be an institutionalized body of cosmopolitan interests which would insure peace by reducing the friction between sovereign states through the means of political integration. Metternich argued that the duty—and in his vocabulary "duty" carried all of the prescriptive weight of Kant's

18. Rieben, *Metternichs Europapolitik*, p. 14. On this point see the important article by Srbik, "Metternich's Plan der Neuordnung Europas, 1814–1815," *Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichischen Geschichtsforshung* 50 (1936): 109–26. MM, 1: 36–38.

19. It is important to clear up some confusing terminology on the subject of "equilibrium." The "equilibrium" described by Metternich would in today's literature be referred to as a collective security structure or legal federation. Authors during and after the Congress of Vienna frequently used different terms to describe this order. Castlereagh commonly used "The Alliance" or "Union" to refer to it, whereas the more theoretically minded Friedrich von Gentz preferred "Gleichgewichts"—equilibrium—or "European Union." All of these are referring to the same architecture of a supranational federation of states regulated by treaty and operating according to the principle of reciprocity rather than the competitive and militaristic system of the balance of power. See below.

categorical imperative—of all states was "to submit to the common law." This principle, Metternich continued, "exists everywhere, and loses nothing of its correctness, or of the necessity of its application, under whatever form a Government may be placed."

In Metternich's theory, this "law," or institutionalized framework of reciprocal duties, would be negotiated among the European states through diplomatic exchanges and appeals to cosmopolitan interests. These consultations would establish the parameters and obligations of individual state action, and the resulting treaties would assume the force of contract and provide a basis for political interaction. In a succinct summary offered in 1831, Metternich argued that the formula for a European "equilibrium" he had devoted his career to building consisted of three basic principles:

1. The political independence of any legally recognized government, that is to say the liberty it must enjoy to adopt, in its internal affairs as well in its relations with other states, whatever system it judges most suitable in the interests of its own preservation, security, and tranquility, without damaging the rights of others;

2. The maintenance of all existing treaties, as long as they are not abolished or modified by common agreement between the contracting parties;

3. The pronounced resolution of the powers to assure, by the respect they show for these principles, the peaceful and enlightened relations existing between all of them and under the protection of which the internal peace of states and all the interests which they alone can guarantee, can flourish.[20]

This theoretical construct led to mixed results when it was implemented in the period 1815–1822.[21] However, Metternich never ceased to argue that a political equilibrium based on respect

20. Metternich to Esterhazy, 7 August 1825 (MM, 4: 225). Metternich to Count Anton Apponyi, 2 June 1831 (NP, 5: 161).

21. On this point, see Sofka, "Metternich, Jefferson, and the Enlightenment," Part I, chaps. 3–6.

for law and the common interest of the powers in preserving peace was the best practicable means of insuring continental harmony.[22] "The great axioms of political science proceed from the knowledge of the true political interests of all states," he noted. "In these general interests lies the guarantee of their existence, while individual interests to which the transitory movements of the day assign a great importance . . . possess only a relative and secondary value."[23] The paramount general interest that Metternich—a student of late Enlightenment philosophy—could visualize was that of a lasting peace that would benefit all of the powers.

Equilibrium, then, was a description of a goal. Metternich hoped that a European state system structured along the lines Kant had proposed, one which provided for legal stability and political adaptability at the same time, could help lay the foundation for a "durable international relationship" that would suit the interests of all European states.[24] Thus Metternich shared Kant's

22. As Friedrich von Gentz, one of Metternich's closest advisers, put it in 1818, "This scheme of things has its inconveniences. But it is certain that, could it be made durable, it would offer the best possible combination to assure the prosperity of peoples, and the maintenance of the peace, which is one of its first prerequisites." "Considerations on the Political System Now Existing in Europe," 1818. Full text printed in Mack Walker, ed., *Metternich's Europe* (New York: Walker, 1968), p. 72.

23. MM, 1: 36. He added that "since an isolated state no longer exists, and is found only in the annals of the heathen world, or in the abstractions of so-called philosophers, we must always view the *society of nations* as the essential condition of the modern world." Metternich's emphasis. The reference to "philosophers" is, no doubt, directed against Hobbes's state of nature.

24. Rieben, *Metternichs Europapolitik*, p. 14. Naturally this state of affairs worked to Austria's advantage. However, it was equally beneficial to the other powers. This appeal to self-interest through cosmopolitan principles was one of the chief arguments Metternich used to persuade the other states to endorse this formula. As Kraehe notes, Metternich was convinced that "Austria's welfare was linked far more clearly to the European equilibrium than to any local advantages she might salvage in the form of territorial aggrandizement" (*German Policy*, 1: 29). If Austria's interests alone motivated Metternich's policies, it is arguable that he would not have pursued as ambitious or idealistic a design as this to provide for general peace. Rather, he could have employed the more expedient and direct tactic of forming a special alliance with Britain, France, or Russia in order to create an external guarantee of Austria's security, as Kaunitz did throughout the late eighteenth century. This idea, however, was rejected by Metternich on the grounds that it marked a continuation, rather than a departure, of the eighteenth

vision of "perpetual peace"; but his method of attaining it was considerably more pragmatic.[25]

Metternich's theoretical outline of European politics was based upon what Robert Kann termed "supposedly self-evident reason."[26] Significantly, he did not base his policy on the ideology of "legitimacy" popular among conservative contemporaries and which is frequently—and erroneously—assumed to have informed his policy in the postwar period.[27] His theory of

century system of coalition diplomacy which in his view was responsible for much of the disarray and militarism of the past six decades. See below.

25. Kant's vision of international federalism was predicated upon the idea that the domestic institutions of the constituent states should be modelled along similar federalist theory. On the domestic side of Kant's theory of "perpetual peace," see Riley, *Kant's Political Philosophy*, chaps 4–5; Hans Saner, *Kant's Political Thought: Its Origins and Development* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), chaps. 8–11; and Dieter Henrich, "Kant on the Meaning of Rational Action in the State," in *Kant's Political Philosophy: The Contemporary Legacy*, ed. Ronald Beiner and William James Booth (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). I argue that Metternich shared this view, although space here does not permit an extended evaluation of this theory. On Metternich's attempt to create a federal constitution for Italy, Germany, and the Habsburg Monarchy as a whole, see Sofka, "Metternich, Jefferson, and the Enlightenment," Part I, chap. 5; and Arthur G. Haas, *Metternich, Reorganization, and Nationality, 1813–1818: A Study of Foresight and Frustration in the Rebuilding of the Austrian Empire* (Wiesbaden: F. Skiner, 1963).

26. Robert A. Kann, "Metternich: A Reappraisal of His Impact on International Relations," *Journal of Modern History* 32 (1960): 333–39. He argued that in adopting this position Metternich presaged Woodrow Wilson's formula for the collective security structure of the League of Nations by over a century.

27. "I have struck out from my customary diplomatic vocabulary the use of the words *legitimacy* and *divine right*," Metternich wrote in 1837. "The words *legitimate* and *legitimacy* express an idea which is in my opinion more easily grasped by minds unaccustomed to serious discussion if it is represented by the word *right*. *Legitimacy* as a noun is used to qualify the right of succession to the throne; the same word, used as an adjective, can be applied to *anything*. One is the legitimate owner of a house or whatever it may be, and in the same way it expresses the idea of legal right. . . . The idea and the word *right* fulfills its duty much better in this respect than do those of *legitimacy* and *divine right*" (Metternich to Apponyi, 22 January 1837, cited in Bertier, *Metternich and His Times* p. 37). Emphasis Metternich's. His mockery of the conservatives—"minds unaccustomed to serious discussion"—is obvious. Compare this with Henry Kissinger's discussion of the term "legitimacy" in *A World Restored*, chap. 11. Kissinger argues that Metternich did indeed understand this concept in universal and normative terms, but provides little evidence to support this case and does not compare it to Kant's idea of "legitimate" right, the sense in which Metternich interpreted it.

international relations was predicated on his conviction that "all states exist as a supra-individual community of interests resting on their commonality as members of [international] society." What Gentz called "the great political family" of Europe was to Metternich a real entity that could function smoothly if statesmen used reason and a cosmopolitan outlook to overwhelm the ambitious parochialism that had characterized European politics for centuries. "By separating carefully the concerns of self-preservation from ordinary politics, and by subordinating all individual interests to the common and general interest," Metternich wrote in 1823, Europe could demonstrate "examples of union and solidarity" unseen in history.[28] Metternich's attraction to an institutionalized structure of international politics that would operate, as Kant had hoped, "automatically" led him to formulate ideas of world order beyond the calculations of day-to-day politics or local struggles for influence.

Metternich was convinced that Austria, like all states, could guarantee its security in only one of two ways: either by entering a federation of states regulated by treaties, or by a direct alliance with another power or coalition to overwhelm a potential threat. Kaunitz, of course, had followed the latter course since he became foreign minister in 1753. Metternich flatly rejected this policy because in his view it only perpetuated a culture of hostility and insecurity in the international system, as alliances invariably produced counter-alliances. His ultimate aim was to undo Kaunitz's system and transcend the predatory universe of eighteenth-century politics and anchor a European security system on a more stable, and predictable, foundation. As a result, Metternich wanted to replace force with law as a sanction on state behavior. His promotion of the idea of "political equilibrium," and his argument that Austria could only find security in a federal Europe was a clear departure from the popular mantra of eighteenth-century international relations theory, the balance of power.

Ironically, however, Metternich is commonly named among the greatest practitioners of balance-of-power diplomacy. Edward Vose Gulick, in his classic but thinly researched study of the con-

28. Srbik, "Ideengehalt," p. 250. Hans Schmalz, *Versuche einer gesamteuropäische Organisation, 1815–1820* (Aarau, 1940), p. 13; Metternich to Tsar Alexander, January [undated] 1823 (MM, 3: 672).

cept, argues that Metternich's statecraft was "beautifully illustrative of the thought process of a balance-of-power statesman."[29] Territory and military potential, according to Gulick, were in Metternich's mind the determinants of international relations. Although he notes Gulick's refusal to distinguish between the ideas of "balance of power" and "equilibrium," and faults his lack of documentation, Enno Kraehe also advances the thesis that Metternich focused primarily on the interests of Austria and was indeed conscious of the deterrent principle inherent in balance-of-power theory.[30]

Paul Schroeder is more receptive to a theoretical interpretation of European politics in the post-1815 period.[31] However, while he makes a vigorous effort to distinguish between "equilibrium," "balance of power," and "hegemony," his definitions of these terms

29 Gulick, *Europe's Classical Balance of Power*, p. 112. Unfortunately he bases this view entirely on the contentious Saxony issue at the Congress of Vienna in December 1814. Metternich's proposed alliance with Britain and France against Russia and Prussia on this issue has frequently been invoked as evocative of balance of power thinking (see Gulick, *Europe's Classical Balance of Power*, chap. 9). Yet it is doubtful whether Metternich would have followed through with this idea. Modern research by Kraehe and Schroeder places this question in a more appropriate setting: that Metternich was perhaps using the mechanisms of the old balance-of-power model in order to achieve a higher end: creating and preserving a general peace not just in Germany but also in Europe as a whole. Kraehe, *Metternich's German Policy, vol. 2: The Congress of Vienna, 1814–1815* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), chap. 10; Schroeder, *Transformation of European Politics*, pp. 523–38. Gulick, *Europe's Classical Balance of Power*, fails to take heed of these overarching ambitions and treats the Saxony affair as a purely dynastic dispute. The interests involved at the Congress were, however, indisputably greater.

30. See Kraehe, "A Bipolar Balance of Power," for this argument. This thesis also animates his two volumes on Metternich's German policy. As he notes in volume I, "The balance of power, Metternich sensed, is not primarily a doctrine but a condition, which exists when the various states, each pursuing its selfish interests, reach mutually recognized points of diminishing returns" (p. 255).

31. See Schroeder, "Did the Vienna System Rest on a Balance of Power?" for this argument. His earlier work, "The Nineteenth Century System: Balance of Power or Political Equilibrium?" *Review of International Studies* 15 (1989): 135–53, makes a similar case but with greater theoretical vigor. It is important to note that Schroeder's view of Metternich has evolved with further research. In an earlier study, he dismissed Metternich's post-Vienna diplomacy as devoid of any theoretical program or practical goal "other than to prevent change" (*Metternich's Diplomacy at its Zenith, 1820–1823*, [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962], p. 243).

are at times difficult to discern. In the process, he loses Metternich's own theory of international politics in his extended treatment of the Anglo–Russian rivalry which in Schroeder's view conditioned nineteenth–century European politics. Focusing on broad systemic dynamics, Schroeder does not fully explain how Metternich, the virtuoso of the Vienna settlement, personally interpreted these ideas or how they informed his political initiatives. Most significantly, he makes no attempt to relate Metternich's ideas to the larger corpus of writings on international politics produced in the eighteenth century, especially those of Kant, Vattel, and Montesquieu. The balance–of–power model understood by Schroeder is essentially Newtonian in theory and mechanistic in operation, while Metternich's theory of equilibrium was rooted in Kantian political philosophy and was legalistic in its structure. The differing conceptual and political implications of these competing approaches to world politics cannot be underscored too boldly.

While the divide between the "balance of power" and "equilibrium" schools appears to be widening, careful reflection on the hypotheses of these arguments suggests that they may, to a great extent, be reconcilable. Metternich assiduously studied regional politics—specifically in Germany and Italy—and an investigation of his approach to these issues is instructive. However, it is important to remember that these were of secondary importance to his larger end: that of maintaining a general European peace.[32] The bedrock assumption of Metternich's theory of the equilibrium was that territorial settlements could not endure unless the broader political relations among the powers were guaranteed by legal means, as only through such a contractual arrangement could the rights of each state be protected. This type of settlement, one that would indeed "transform" the workings of the European state system, was precisely what had been lacking in the eighteenth century, with violent results. For a more accurate understanding of the relationship of local and general interests on the political level, as well as of the balance of power and equilibrium on the theoretical, it is necessary to examine Metternich's repudiation of balance–of–power theory as an adequate model for international relations.

32. Rieben, *Metternichs Europapolitik*, pp. 37–55.

Metternich's Attack on Balance-of-Power Theory

Metternich's concentration on systemic and legalistic principles of world order prevented him from joining in the acclamation of militaristic parochialism so common in the eighteenth century, and led him to conclude, though without the grace of Kant's phrase, that to obtain "a permanent and universal peace by means of a so-called *European balance of power* is a pure illusion." Metternich's attack on the concept of the balance of power was based on his own definition of the term, which did not differ substantially from those provided by contemporary or modern interpreters.[33] To Metternich, the balance of power was an essentially Newtonian construct that assumed that the international system evolved through cycles of peace and war, much as a swinging pendulum moved between fixed poles without ceasing its motion, and was predicated on the idea that international politics operated according to quantifiable principles.

33. Kant, "On the Common Saying: 'That May be True in Theory but it does not apply in Practice'," (1792), Reiss, *Kant's Political Writings*, p. 92. On the theory of the balance of power from the eighteenth century to the present, see M. S. Anderson, "Eighteenth Century Theories of the Balance of Power," in *Studies in Diplomatic History*, ed. R. M. Hatton and M. S. Anderson (London: Archon Books, 1970); Franz A.J. Szabo, "Prince Kaunitz and the Balance of Power"; Frank Manuel, *The Age of Reason* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1951), chap. 9; Raymond Aron, *Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), part 1, chap. 5; Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), part 2, chap. 5; Inis Claude, *Power in International Relations* (New York: Random House, 1962); F. H. Hinsley, *Power and the Pursuit of Peace: Theory and Practice in the History of Relations Between States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), part 2; Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: Random House, 1979), chap. 6; Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 3rd ed. (New York: Knopf, 1961), part 4; Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962), chap. 8; Richard Little, "Deconstructing the Balance of Power: Two Traditions of Thought," *Review of International Studies* 15 (1989): 87–100; Morton Kaplan, *System and Process in International Politics* (New York: Wiley and Sons, 1957); William B. Moul, "Measuring the 'Balances of Power': A Look At Some Numbers," *Review of International Studies* 15 (1989): 101–21; Jeremy Black, "The Theory of the Balance of Power In the First Half of the Eighteenth Century: A Note on Sources," *Review of International Studies* 9 (1983): 55–61; M. Wright, ed., *The Theory and Practice of the Balance of Power, 1486–1914* (New York, 1975).

By measuring and/or manipulating these variables, such as the size of armies, navies, or financial reserves, a state's "power," or capabilities, could be calculated. "Parity" could be obtained by matching these standards and competing with each other for economic and strategic assets, much as Britain and France did in North America throughout the eighteenth century.

Metternich, like Kant, looked upon this model of international relations with contempt.[34] In this model, each state aggressively pursued its own interests with little regard for others beyond simple prudence. No systemic principles of order existed in this Hobbesian universe of state relations, and in Metternich's view it was conducive to international anarchy. Concerned above all with limiting the role of force in international politics, Metternich could never endorse a model in which the potential for war was the only sanction on state behavior. This point introduces Metternich's two principal objections to the balance-of-power system.

First, Metternich condemned the absence of any legal regulatory mechanism in balance-of-power theory. He believed that pursuing such a mechanistic policy would only provide, at best, for "intermediate" political settlements. The systems created by supposedly "balanced" power from 1648–1783 had all quickly deteriorated into renewed violence. Metternich traced these conflicts to systemic weaknesses inherent in the balance-of-power arrangement. Under this theory, the only significant "check" that a state could impose on others was the application of force. Yet the frequent outbreaks of violence that characterized eighteenth-century statecraft seemingly negated the entire rationale for the "balance," and provided concrete illustrations of its limitations. In short, Metternich believed that the balance of power understood as the evaluation and maintenance of a "correlation of forces" was an inadequate basis for a stable European order. In his view, this approach could at best produce brief armistices and treaties devoid of prescriptive value or long-term durability, but could never yield the "perpetual peace" that was his ultimate goal in statecraft. For this reason Metternich in 1815 refused to follow Kaunitz's policy of securing Austria through exclusive alliances, as this would only create a polarized climate in which war was

34. See Metternich's explicit—and vigorous—condemnation of it in MM, 1: 37–9.

more, rather than less, likely to occur.[35] Metternich observed that the balance-of-power model was, by its premise, a temporary condition,[36] whereas his conception of the equilibrium could be institutionalized. This was a conceptual breakthrough in practical statecraft and required a fresh look at the intricacies of the European system and a command of the theoretical literature of the eighteenth century.[37]

Second, Metternich's idea of the role of the state in international relations differed from that customarily found in balance-of-power theory. The latter was predicated on the assumption that the state was a completely independent, autonomous actor, able (in the ideal) to enter into and abrogate treaties with perfect fluidity. In the eighteenth century, Kaunitz's "reversal of alliances" in 1756 and Frederick II's gambit for Silesia in 1740 were outstanding examples of this approach to world politics. In this model, states have no permanent legal ties to each other but only relationships of convenience to increase their deterrent value to the others. For this reason states frequently—and frantically—shopped for allies upon the death of a sovereign or the eruption of a minor territorial dispute, as balance-of-power thinking held that the outcome of a war could be determined as much by alliance pairings than by actual battlefield engagements.

Metternich, as a true cosmopolitan, flatly rejected this view of state behavior. To him the notion of the state as an end in itself, maximizing its particular objectives in the constant threat of war, was a misguided, if not inherently dangerous, conception of world

35. See Rohden, *Klassische Diplomatie*, chaps. 1–2, conclusion.

36. Kraehe, *German Policy*, 1: 255.

37. For this reason Metternich, upon taking over the Foreign Ministry in 1809, leaned heavily for advice on younger theoreticians such as Friedrich von Gentz, who were educated in the same tradition as he and shared his new approach to the international system. Significantly, Gentz was a student of Kant's at Königsberg and proofread his *Critique of Judgment*. Although he later became influenced by the romantic and historicist conservatism of Burke, Gentz began his career as a Kantian federalist who applauded Metternich's early efforts to make the conference system operational. See Murray Forsyth, "The Old European States-System: Gentz versus Hauterive," *The Historical Journal* 23 (1980): 521–38, and "Friedrich von Gentz: An Assessment," *Studies in History and Politics* 2 (1981–82): 127–55; Paul Sweet, *Friedrich von Gentz* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1941); Golo Mann, *Secretary of Europe: The Life of Friedrich von Gentz* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946).

politics.[38] Deploying a frequent organic metaphor, Metternich considered it symptomatic of an "illness" when a state pursued its ambitions without concern for the general peace of Europe, and went so far as to denounce "individual" state interests as meaningless "abstractions." He condemned this approach by observing that

> In the ancient world, policy isolated itself entirely and exercised the most absolute selfishness, without any other curb than that of prudence. The law of retaliation set up eternal barriers and founded eternal enmities between the societies of men, and upon every page of ancient history is found the principle of mutual evil for evil.[39]

Having observed the effects of two decades of war, including the occupation of Austria after its defeat at Austerlitz in 1805, Metternich insisted on limiting the autonomy of states rather than promoting it, as was the case in balance-of-power theory. Only a political arrangement in Europe that had the ability to "regulate the social field over a broader area than that contained within the borders of a state," could effectively insure a lasting peace.[40]

As a practical statesman, Metternich realized that a mild dosage of "balance of power" thinking was instrumental in diplomatic exchanges, and it would have been foolhardy for him to have ignored the material interests and capabilities of the Great Powers. At times he manipulated these traditional levers of power to help construct the European order he envisaged, as in the case of the alliance of 3 January 1815 among Austria, Britain, and France in the midst of the Saxony crisis at the Congress of Vienna.[41] Yet he never attempted to base the foundation of the entire postwar settlement upon this logic. It is important to remember—as Gulick does not—that these analyses and exploitations of temporary power relationships were a means, and never an end in themselves, in Metternich's statecraft.

38. As Srbik argues, to Metternich "the state was not an end in itself like the pure *Machtstaat*, but is bound to the others through the eternal moral order and the idea of justice" ("Ideengehalt," p. 250).

39. Rieben, *Metternich's Europapolitik*, pp. 13–4; Metternich to Kaiser Franz, 17 August 1819. Haus-,Hof-,und Staatsarchiv, Vienna: Staatskanzlei: Vorträge, 1819. Carton 219, fol. 31–4. These documents were used with the gracious permission of Professor Enno E. Kraehe of the University of Virginia. MM, 1: 37.

40. Cited in Srbik, "Ideengehalt," p. 247.

41. This incident is best discussed by Kraehe in *German Policy*, 2: 284–98.

As a result, it is most accurate to speak of the "balance of power" as an aspect of Metternich's diplomacy but never its governing principle. His fundamental objective was the realization of a political equilibrium based on treaty and codified in international law. This system would rest on law rather than military power, and operate by diplomacy and compromise rather than force. Metternich anticipated that the balance of power, because of its "self-evident" weaknesses, would become such a demonstrable failure as an organizing principle of international relations that statesmen would be compelled to reject it as a model. It could never support the equilibrium Metternich considered so instrumental in constructing and maintaining a European federation.

Metternich's Theory of a European "Confederation"

In his frequently neglected but important study of *The Confederation of Europe,* Walter Alison Phillips argues that Metternich's plan for European order was "an experiment in international government, an attempt to solve the problem of reconciling central and general control by a 'European Confederation' with the maintenance of the liberties of its constituent states, and thus to establish a juridical system" of international relations.[42] Phillips's thesis, when understood in the context of Metternich's identification with late Enlightenment philosophy, is persuasive and congruent with the facts. Metternich resurrected the idea of a federation of states, first proposed by Erasmus and later echoed by St. Pierre and Kant, to provide a

42. Walter Alison Phillips, *The Confederation of Europe: A Study of the European Alliance, 1813–1823 as an Experiment in the International Organization of Peace* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1914), p. 9. This highly original work was unfortunately eclipsed by the First World War. Phillips's articles in the influential *Cambridge Modern History,* ed. Lord Acton, made the same argument. See volume X, *The Restoration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907), chap. 1. These essays were influential on the succeeding generation of Metternich scholars such as Srbik, and were the first serious attempts to remove Metternich from the "reactionary" camp where he was unceremoniously placed by Treitschke. Schmalz's *Versuche einer gesamteuropäische Organisation* makes a similar case and is heavily indebted to Phillips's work.

framework for the reconciliation of political disputes among the Great Powers. His plan was legalistic, based on the assumption that political affairs were best directed by the rule of cosmopolitan reason rather than selfish "national interests" and *raison d'état*.

In a letter to Tsar Alexander, written in January 1823, Metternich argued that his formula for a European Confederation had always contained two basic ideas. "In the first place," he noted, governments "must make common cause and unite in one the interest of each in [their] own preservation; in the second place they must establish a central focus for information and direction." His formula for a "transformed" state system rested on the idea that the powers that had defeated Napoleon should retain and broaden their wartime cooperation into a lasting Alliance, or Union, that would ensure peace through a collective security system. Metternich anticipated that France itself would be incorporated into the system, and he sought moderate peace terms with Paris in 1814 and 1815 in order to provide for this contingency. Whereas a traditional coalition, in Gentz's phrase, was a partnership based on a temporary "congruence of interests," Metternich's proposed postwar Alliance—the practical collective security system that was the expression of the idea of "equilibrium"—was based on "the permanent underlying interests of [all] states within a given system." Metternich hoped to create a unity among the five Great Powers that was rooted in cooperation rather than competition.[43]

Under the familiar coalition system, which had characterized international relations from 1648 to 1815, alliances were based upon immediate threats and perceived security requirements. Coalition diplomacy was the operational mechanism of the balance-of-power model that Metternich found so misguided and dangerous. This formula provided no permanent guarantees to any of the contracting powers; a change in government, or the fortunes of war, could quickly shatter a coalition, as had happened in the Seven Years' War with the death of Empress Elisabeth of Russia in 1762. The advantage of his collective security proposal, Metternich reasoned, was that no power was the catalyst for the alliance, and thus there was no defensive animosity built into

43. Metternich to Tsar Alexander, January [undated] 1823. MM, 3: 672; Forsyth, "Old European States-System," p. 525.

the system. For this reason, Metternich's alliance system could be institutionalized and operate—as Kant had suggested—"automatically."[44]

Since his first study of legal and political theory at Mainz, Metternich viewed the concept of federalism as a logical basis for European order and an efficient and flexible means of conflict resolution. Metternich's assumption that states operated in a societal, and not anarchical, milieu and that the general interest of a durable peace must take precedence over individual interests and goals formed the core of his formula for a confederation of European states and was consonant with his training in late Enlightenment philosophy and its idealistic aspirations. Indeed, this type of union had never been attempted before, but Metternich saw it as the most ambitious means of preserving peace without the constant threat of war that was inherent in—indeed, vital to—the balance-of-power or coalition model. Metternich exulted in 1817 that this "revolutionary" idea would, if it remained the governing principle of European diplomacy, "insure for a considerable time what the good Abbé de St. Pierre wished to establish forever."[45]

Frederick II had quipped to Voltaire in 1742 that all St. Pierre's plan lacked was the "consent of Europe" along with "a few similar trifles." Metternich hoped to build this shared consent following the Napoleonic Wars, and invoked the horrific physical, human, and financial costs of this long conflict to underscore the "self-evident" rationalism of his proposals. The time to fashion a plan of European order, Metternich sensed, had never been more opportune. Building this confederation, as Metternich indicated to the tsar, was a two-stage process. First, the powers had to agree to enter into it and second it had to be maintained, or "enforced," by diplomatic means. The first task, ironically, would prove to be easier to accomplish than the second. In 1815 four of the five Great Powers had been allied with each other for two years, and some had been acting in concert since 1793. France, although defeated

44. Kant, "Idea for a Universal History," Reiss, *Kant's Political Writings*, p. 48. On the concept of collective security as a model for international politics, see Aron, *Peace and War*, part 4, chap. 23; Bull, *Anarchical Society*, part 2, chap. 6; Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration*, chap. 12; Hoffmann, "International Systems and International Law," *Janus and Minerva*, pp. 149–77.

45. Metternich to Nesselrode, August 20, 1817. MM, 3: 70.

in war, was under the control of a nominally friendly government and represented by agents receptive to some of Metternich's ideas. Each of the five states had a common interest in a comprehensive settlement which would establish a basic, and predictable, pattern for individual foreign policies. Each, of course, had its own ambitions, but the fact that these competing interests had been accommodated through cooperation in the wartime league was of dramatic importance in establishing the political and territorial settlement at the Congress of Vienna.

Metternich clearly realized, however, that this political "transformation" would not be accomplished immediately. The European federation he envisaged required careful and deliberate construction, and he believed that this process could best be served if the powers cooperated on points of fundamental common interests and reserved more controversial subjects for future discussion. In this manner he hoped that the Confederation would begin to settle differences that would, under the old balance-of-power model, likely have proven insurmountable. Cognizant that competitive ambitions and animosities would continue to erupt unless each power realized that it had a stake in preserving a general peace which none wanted to risk, Metternich planned to avoid confrontation by "concentrating on living in peace and harmony. The best way to achieve that desired end," he maintained, "is to avoid subjects of discussion on which agreement is unlikely and to attempt, equally carefully, to meet on grounds of common interests." Metternich's conviction that such a durable peace would serve the "common interests" of all states consequently became the theoretical bedrock of the Confederation, and he was not alone in this opinion. British Foreign Secretary Robert Stewart, Viscount Castlereagh, for his part, bluntly informed Liverpool in November 1814 that he was approaching the peace negotiations in such a manner "as to make the establishment of a *just Equilibrium* in Europe the first Object of my Attention, and to Consider the assertion of minor Points of Interest as subordinate to this great End."[46]

46. Metternich to Philip von Neumann, 31 October 1832. NP, 5: 384. Castlereagh to Liverpool, 11 November 1814. PRO: F.O. 92., v. 141. This excellent series of papers is in the microfilm set of "Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh From the Continent, 1814–1822," published by the Public Record Office, London. Castlereagh's emphasis. Note that Castlereagh did not use the more common—

Despite Castlereagh's optimism, the political interests of the Great Powers in 1815 were diverse and in some instances conflictual. In Metternich's view, these differences could be reconciled through a federal system, in which each state could pursue its interests within a system regulated by treaties and diplomatic exchanges. With each power restrained by these provisions as well as by its own interest in preserving peace, the Confederation could effectively preserve the "equilibrium" by guaranteeing that each state would be deterred from an offensive foreign policy for fear of automatically bringing the other four into league against it. Unlike the coalition model, the force of international law would trigger a response "automatically," as Kant had suggested, regardless of which power exceeded its limits. Yet Metternich hoped that such a state of affairs would never come to pass if the Confederation was properly managed by prudent and preventative diplomacy, and if rational statesmen understood that peace outweighed whatever benefits they might obtain through aggression.[47]

Like Montesquieu, Metternich recognized that "states have, like individuals, different temperaments." These differences in internal institutions and political cultures indicated, as he put it in 1821, that "a particular interest or situation will predominate in a state just as a particular passion or weakness influences individuals. These different attitudes are not slow to make themselves known, heard, and felt." This did not mean, however, that European politics would necessarily remain anarchical and ruthlessly competitive. If the individual governments were truly parts of a cosmopolitan society—and Metternich never doubted that they were—then "the same results that would be found in a family consultation should, by the same right, be found in a meeting of powers."[48] In short, competing interests could, and for the sake of reducing international tensions, should be permitted

and misunderstood—eighteenth-century phrase of a "balance" of forces or power. On Talleyrand's view of the equilibrium, see Guglielmo Ferrero, *The Reconstruction of Europe: Talleyrand and the Congress of Vienna, 1814–1815* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1941).

47. Srbik, "Ideengehalt," p. 258.

48. Metternich to Prince Paul Esterhazy, 5 March 1821 (cited in Bertier, *Metternich and His Times* p. 68).

to express themselves, but only under the controlling aegis of the European Confederation.

Castlereagh, whose own ideas on the efficacy of such a system had been refined through conversations with Metternich, expressed this federalist logic succinctly in his important State Paper of 5 May 1820, in which he argued that

> We cannot in all matters reason or feel alike; we should lose the Confidence of our respective Nations if we did, and the very affectation of such an Impossibility would soon render the Alliance an Object of Odium, and Distrust, whereas if we keep it within its *common sense* limits, the Representative Governments, and those which are more purely Monarchical, may well find each a common Interest, and a common Facility for discharging their Duties under the Alliance, without creating an Impression that they have made a surrender of the first principles upon which their respective Governments are founded. Each Government will then retain its due faculty of Independent Action, always recollecting, that they have all a common Refuge in the Alliance, as well as a common Duty to perform, whenever such a danger shall really exist, as against that which the Alliance was specially intended to provide.[49]

Beyond the legal and normative force of treaties, the principles upon which the Alliance would operate, therefore, were a shared interest in peace and cosmopolitanism. Although each state, with its unique form of government and political culture, would define and pursue its interests differently, the "law of nations" would provide a basic outline for the conduct of international relations.[50]

Metternich never lost sight of the security needs of Austria, but he realized that these requirements, as well as those of the other powers, ultimately depended on the respect for treaties and international law he had been trained to uphold. In short, the interests of individual states were best secured, in Metternich's logic, if they stopped "going it alone" and cooperated in securing a peace that would be injurious to none. This idealistic approach was completely alien to the balance-of-power tradition, which

49. Castlereagh's State Paper of 5 May 1820 (cited in Thomas G. Barnes, ed., *Nationalism, Industrialization, and Democracy 1815–1914: A Documentary History of Modern Europe*, 3 vols. [New York: Little, Brown, 1980], 3: 12. Castlereagh's emphasis).

50. That is why Talleyrand was so insistent that the phrase "law of nations" be inserted into the declaration announcing the opening of the Congress of Vienna on 1 November 1814. Ferrero, *Talleyrand*, pp. 164–65.

sought to maximize the diplomatic options of the individual state, and was ridiculed by its practitioners, such as British Foreign Secretary George Canning in his famous aphorism of "Every nation for itself and God for them all."[51] Metternich, who ceaselessly argued that the smooth operation of the European federation was dependent upon restraint, dismissed the idea that any one state could or should manipulate the Alliance for its own ends. He noted in 1822 that the power of the European Alliance

> can neither be replaced nor supplemented by another. Imagine one monarchy controlling the combined resources of the Alliance—not only would such tremendous power not take the place of the Alliance, but it would gain nothing by attempting to do so, because it would be contrary to the *moral* power of the Alliance. It would be contrary for the very reason that the Alliance is clearly composed of heterogeneous parts and because, although it works towards a single, positive end [European Union], it embodies guarantees for the most widely varying interests.[52]

Although Bertier de Sauvingy notes that Metternich's thinking on the nature of the postwar union underwent "at least four consecutive and at times even simultaneous forms," each embodied the idea of guaranteeing the interests of each of the Great Powers through a federal arrangement. "If such is the spirit of the Alliance," Metternich argued, "then in its active application to special cases it should submit to the common law. . . . To attack the principle of the Alliance is to attack society."[53]

Metternich first conceived of the European federation as an extension of the cooperation that had underscored the wartime Quadruple Alliance of 1813–1815 in a legally institutionalized form. In 1818 he managed to thwart Alexander's efforts to establish a Franco–Russian alliance and, with Castlereagh's backing, ensured that France did not reenter the state–system under

51. Metternich, upon reading this part of Canning's speech of 12 December 1826, which was intended as a blatant repudiation of his idea of a European League, stated that "it comes close to delirium." Metternich to Count Heinrich Bombelles, 8 January 1827 (cited in Bertier, *Metternich and His Times*, p. 219).

52. Metternich to Lebzeltern, 10 January 1822, cited in Bertier, *Metternich and His Times*, p. 144. Metternich's emphasis.

53. On Metternich's four conceptions of the Alliance, see Bertier, *Metternich and His Times*; "Sainte–Alliance et Alliance dans les conceptions de Metternich," *Revue Historique* 233 (1960): pp. 249–75; Metternich to Esterhazy, 7 August 1825. MM, 4: 225–26.

exclusively Russian auspices.[54] On paper at least, the five Great Powers, despite their divergent interests, were united by treaties and regulated by international law, and ceased to manipulate combinations against a specified "outside" actor. In this model foreign policy would ideally become, as Ferrero observes, "the projection of reciprocal confidence." Throughout his career Metternich argued that all states could participate in this union and share in its benefits and responsibilities regardless of their form of government or geographical position. As late as 1847 he still held out hope that "a community of interests" could be found to protect the European peace.[55]

Implementing the Confederation: The Origins of the "Conference System"

Metternich's idealism was not devoid of a pragmatic appreciation of the political system of Europe. Unlike St. Pierre, Rousseau, or Kant, Metternich was a minister with political responsibility for the interests of a state. He recognized that a simple appeal for harmony would, as a general rule, be a useless deterrent unless it was supported by a concrete political agenda, and fully realized that the theoretical programs of the eighteenth century philosophers all lacked enforcement mechanisms beyond fanciful descriptions of "ought to be." To prescribe a political equilibrium and European federation was one thing; to preserve it in a universe of competing state interests was another. It was the latter problem, that of translating "ought" into "is," that

54. In reviewing the nature of these deliberations, Metternich used mathematical notation to illustrate the difference between his view of French integration and that proposed by Alexander. The formula he outlined succinctly captures the basis of his thinking on a European collective security system:

"Present state of the Alliance: 4
Future state of the Meetings: 5
(1)Prince Metternich's Proposal: 5=1+4
(2) Russian Proposal: 1+1+1+1+1=5
Positive results of these proposals: Given (1): 5:4+1
Given (2): 5:2+3"

(cited in Bertier, *Metternich and His Times*, p. 138).

55. Ferrero, *Talleyrand*, p. 167; Metternich to Apponyi, 12 April 1847 (cited in Bertier, *Metternich and His Times*, p. 152).

Metternich sought to resolve in the period 1815–1822 with his "conference system." This policy, a completely novel approach to international politics, reflected Metternich's faith in reason as well as his observation of the dynamics of continental politics.

Shortly after the Congress of Vienna, Friedrich von Gentz suggested that Metternich work toward the creation of a permanent European "Assembly" in a neutral capital as a means of preserving continental peace. Gentz proposed that this body could be structured along the lines of the German Confederation, with representatives of the powers deciding on "European" foreign policy collectively through a deliberative process. Metternich was sympathetic to the legal premises of Gentz's reasoning, but he nevertheless rejected his colleague's suggestions on the basis of his concern that a permanent Congress of European states would become inefficient and hobbled by bureaucracy.[56] Moreover, there was always the risk that one or two states might dominate such an assembly given unequal financial or military resources. Metternich's preferred solution to the enforcement question was not a permanent "league of nations," but the "conference system," which he developed in conjunction with Castlereagh.

The conference system, outlined in Article VI of the Vienna Treaty, was intended to be a diplomatic framework designed for the efficient and peaceful resolution of international disputes. It operated on a provisional basis and was therefore, according to Metternich, more responsive to immediate political needs than a formal international tribunal or court. Article VI provided for a means of conflict resolution by mandating that each power, before taking action which might be injurious to the interests of others—such as pressing a territorial claim or authorizing a military intervention—would agree to discuss its grievances, concerns, and

56. On this idea and its origins, see Dupuis, *Droit des Gens*, chap. 3; Schmalz, *Versuche einer gesamteuropäische Organisation*; Forsyth, "Old European States-System"; and Mann, *Secretary of Europe*. Metternich put the question bluntly in 1823: "Must European politics be subjected to a representative diplomatic system? Would the most delicate problems be settled by meetings of 40 or 50 Minister-Delegates, independent of each other, voting by a show of hands, reaching, by means of a majority that would often be problematical or inadmissible, decisions on matters which an intimate meeting of 3 or 4 governments, experienced in prudence, barely manage to settle satisfactorily?" Metternich's Comments on the Circular Despatch of the Württemberg Cabinet, 2 January 1823 (NP, 4: 30–31).

objectives at a meeting convened specifically for this purpose. Conference diplomacy was predicated upon Metternich's avowed assumption that "the establishment of international relations upon the basis of reciprocity, under the guarantee of respect for acquired rights, and the conscientious observance of [pledged] faith constitutes, at the present day, the essence of politics, of which diplomacy is only the daily application."[57] In practical terms, the Conference System was the instrumentality through which the Confederation was sustained and functioned on a regular basis.

Metternich anticipated that this formula would best enable the powers to assess the case at hand and reach a satisfactory agreement by rational diplomacy and shared interests in upholding the principles and aims of the European Confederation. Through the mechanism of the Conference System, each state retained its autonomy—more so than under Gentz's proposed league—but it was bound to the others by an intricate series of multilateral diplomatic exchanges. To be effective, the system required close cooperation among the European governments, as well as a willingness to debate problems rather than attempt to resolve them by an immediate recourse to force. In short, the conference system upheld the Confederation by requiring that each state receive permission from the others before embarking on a course of action which might destabilize the peace. By dealing with specific issues as they arose, Metternich hoped that each conference could cover the matter at hand in considerable detail and from a variety of perspectives.[58]

To Metternich, the greatest advantage of this program of frequent meetings between the powers was its ability to resolve conflicts in a preventative, rather than *post-facto*, manner. The Vienna conference was an example of the latter: it sought to restructure European politics in the aftermath of a catastrophic war. Metternich's progressive political outlook led him to regard

57. MM, 1: 37. On Castlereagh's role, see C. K. Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Castlereagh, 1812–1822*, 2 vols., (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1925–1931), 2: 29–73; Hinsley, *Power and the Pursuit of Peace*, pp. 200–12.

58. As he noted later in life, "For a conference of Powers to be of use, it is in the first place necessary that *the object of the meeting should be precisely defined*. . . . Next, it needs to be well organized, for without this, meetings quickly turn into real anarchy." Metternich to Apponyi, 25 January 1832 (cited in Bertier, *Metternich and His Times*, p. 121. Metternich's emphasis).

the necessity of such "reconstructive" meetings as epitaphs on shortsighted statesmanship: with proper management, the wars they resolved should never have started. In Metternich's view it was more rational—and politically advisable—to deal with potential threats to the peace before they became overwhelming. For this reason, preventative diplomacy was the form, as well as the objective, of the conference system. Supremely confident in his own diplomatic abilities, Metternich placed almost unlimited faith in the capacity of rational statesmen to resolve virtually any obstacle to continental peace. As he euphorically remarked at the Congress of Laibach in 1821, "Is there anything in the world which today can take the place of ink, pens, a conference table with its green cover, and a few greater or smaller bunglers?"[59]

Following this logic, Metternich argued that frequent consultations among the powers would reinforce the bonds of treaties that united them, and would therefore not only "enforce" or "guarantee" the peace by efficient resolution of disputes, but would strengthen the Confederation by reducing competition among individual states for primacy. According to Kant and Metternich, the threat of a general war destructive to all powers acted as "Nature's guarantee" that rational statesmen would find their interests best secured through cooperation and compromise rather than the unpredictable fortunes of war.[60] The delicate machinery of the Confederation of Europe, the first practical attempt at "European" government, was designed to integrate all states into a system based on law, reciprocity, and respect for each other's interests. This zealous adherence to the formula of the conference system informed Metternich's approach to international relations after 1815, and was the source of his early impressive success and later overwhelming failure to establish and preserve a "European" foreign policy in the competitive universe of the postwar state system.[61]

59. Metternich to (addressee unknown), 10 January 1821 (MM, 3: 480–81).

60. Kant made this point in "Perpetual Peace" (1795). Reiss, *Kant's Political Writings*, pp. 108–14.

61. On the collapse of this system, see Sofka, "Metternich, Jefferson, and the Enlightenment," Part I, chap. 3.

A Review of Metternich's Theory of European Order

Metternich's theory of international relations was anchored on the idea of "political equilibrium." This concept, which was an extension of eighteenth-century federalist theory, led Metternich to conclude that the states of Europe should be structured in a legally regulated system in which each would possess sovereignty but would be regulated at the supranational level by mutual respect for interests as well as the restraint inherent in any legally constituted political system. This vision was completely distinct from the competitive, militaristic, and anarchical milieu of eighteenth-century statecraft. Metternich's theory of international relations was heavily indebted to Kantian ideas of universality and cosmopolitanism and shared assumptions about the utility and practicality of a general European peace. It was, without question, a highly normative interpretation of world politics. Metternich promoted Wilhelm von Humboldt's idea of "the limits of state action" rather than the vigorous pursuit of selfish objectives in which the autonomy of the state was considered sacred. This idea informed his diplomacy throughout his career and was the source of both his stunning successes up to 1820 and his eventual disillusionment later. As Srbik concludes, in Metternich's statecraft "theory and action were in balance," and the latter was consistently directed towards achieving the goals set by the former.[62]

Few statesmen of the eighteenth century were more faithfully wedded to the philosophical program of the late Enlightenment than Metternich. Castlereagh, impressed with his broad view of the international system, called him an "Inveterate Theorist" of politics, a view shared by most of Metternich's contemporaries yet surprisingly by few modern observers.[63] Metternich approached international relations from a strictly legalist perspective. He condemned the old "Cabinet diplomacy" and the idea of the balance of power as insufficient guarantors of political stability, and supplanted them with an idea of a general and perpetual

62. Srbik, *Metternich*, 2: 559.

63. Castlereagh to Charles Stewart, 19 January 1821. Text of letter in Webster, *Castlereagh*, 2: 600.

continental peace achieved and maintained through the rule of law and the pragmatic recognition that it served the interests of all states. It was not without justification that Metternich could inform Wellington in 1824 that "Europe," and not his adoptive Austria, was his true "fatherland."

Metternich's lasting contribution to the study of theories of international relations was his reliance on the principle of a confederal and cooperative states–system regulated by the principle of collective security. This permanent alliance could, in Metternich's view, accomplish what the traditional coalition system could not: successfully insure a lasting and enlightened peace in Europe.[64] Metternich believed that states could be united without reference to a common enemy, but rather on the conviction that all were pledged to uphold a peace that was injurious to none. The Confederation would be supported and enforced by the "conference system," which would resolve disputes proactively through diplomacy rather than war. If this logic became the institutional basis for European politics, he doubted that a serious external threat would ever arise within the European system. Metternich, in short, worked to restructure completely the methodology of eighteenth century diplomacy. He rejected militarism, distrusted the balance of power, condemned standing armies, and never tired of pointing out the dangers of narrowly "particularist" statesmanship. This was a restatement, and practical refinement, of the earlier logic of Erasmus, St. Pierre, and Kant; but Metternich's diplomacy marked the first time that it had ever been tried in practice.

It is indeed appropriate, therefore, to speak of Metternich's statecraft as emblematic of a conceptual and practical "transformation" in the methodology and objectives of European

64. It should also be noted that Metternich conceived of international politics in truly global terms, and frequently commented on the rise of the United States and its effect on Europe. He noted to Kaiser Franz during the Latin American revolts in 1819 that "for Europe there remains nothing more to do than to watch the fire [in Latin America] burn, the results of which must necessarily strengthen the power of the United North American States to an incalculable extent. As things stand now and in the foreseeable future, America can in five years get to where it otherwise would have taken two centuries." He was, with the promulgation of the Monroe Doctrine four years later, proven quite right. Metternich to Kaiser Franz, 24 August 1819 (HHSA: St.V., Carton 219, folio 153–4).

diplomacy. The idealism of the late Enlightenment, inculcated in Metternich since his adolescence, as well as his recognition that the endless cycles of war that characterized eighteenth century politics needed to be conclusively—and irrevocably—arrested informed his approach to the issue of postwar order at Vienna in 1815.[65] Metternich's goal was no less ambitious than that repeated in the endless stream of "peace projects" of the eighteenth century, but his means of attaining it were considerably more pragmatic. It is impossible to separate this "transformation" from the philosophy of the Enlightenment, as the peace of 1815, although long vilified by nationalists hostile to Metternich's cosmopolitanism, represented an attempt to translate these norms into practice. With current attempts at cementing a "European Union" sparking tremendous scholarly and political interest, Metternich's formula pays revisiting.

65. See Schroeder, *Transformation of European Politics*, pp. 579–81.