



CHAPTER 10

THE LEGACY OF
WATERLOO

War and Politics in Europe in the 19th Century

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PREVIOUS
Wellington and Blücher meet
at the end of the battle, as
Napoleon's forces are finally
defeated. (Anne S. K. Brown)

'Quelle Affaire!' Field Marshal Gebhard Leberecht von Blücher's reputed exclamation to Wellington when they met at La Belle Alliance at around 9 p.m. on the evening of 18 June was an aptly chosen phrase to describe the momentous events that had occurred throughout that afternoon. Whilst most histories of the Battle of Waterloo conclude with this meeting, the military and political ramifications were only just beginning, and would have an impact on the course of European and global history for at least the next century. As Wellington and Blücher shook hands at La Belle Alliance, Napoleon was abandoning hope of rallying his troops at Genappe, and was preparing to retreat to Paris, where he hoped to orchestrate a defensive campaign.

Lieutenant General August Neithardt von Gneisenau, Blücher's chief of staff, continued to press Napoleon's retreating forces, eventually getting as far south as Frasnes, having captured 8,000 prisoners, 200 guns and over 1,000 supply wagons.¹ On top of this, the slaughter of French stragglers and wounded by the Prussian cavalry was brutal. 'That the French in their flight from Waterloo were unnecessarily butchered during many hours by the exasperated Prussians, is a fact,' wrote one British observer, 'which I can more easily explain than justify.'² This more than anything inhibited Napoleon's ability to defend Paris, but the Allied descent on the French capital was by no means clear cut.

Having failed to march to the sound of the guns on 18 June, Marshal Emmanuel de Grouchy managed to defeat the Prussian Lieutenant General Johann von Thielmann at the Battle of Wavre on the 19th. Thielmann had

nevertheless achieved his objective of tying down 30,000 French soldiers and thus preventing Grouchy from marching to Napoleon's aid. There was nothing he could do, though, to prevent Grouchy, upon hearing of Napoleon's defeat, from retreating in good order back into France with his force intact.

In Paris by 21 June, Napoleon began to plan a defence based, as he had the previous year, around Laon. A scratch force of 55,000, composed of Grouchy's retreating corps, 15,000 National Guard in Paris, and 17,000 volunteers was assembled. More generally, the military situation was comparable to the first half of 1813, and the impressive defence of Paris in 1814. Between them, Marshal Nicolas Sault and Marshal Louis-Nicolas Davout had 117,000 men, and 150,000 conscripts were already in the depots.³ Elsewhere on the frontiers, the Austrians suffered a sharp defeat outside Strasbourg on 28 June, while small Napoleonic French forces kept the Allied armies busy in sieges and delaying actions along the Swiss border, in the Alps and at Toulon. Rebel forces in Provence and Brittany were also successfully repressed by 25 July, while irregular Napoleonic forces hampered the Allied advance throughout late June and July.

By then, of course, it was all too late. The politicians in Paris, having received news of Napoleon's defeat, now demanded his abdication. Force was briefly considered as a means of maintaining his grip on power, but was quickly discarded. Napoleon had based the legitimacy of his regime on his military success against France's European enemies, not against her own people.⁴ 'I have not come back from Elba to have Paris run with blood.' Faced with declining political and popular support in Paris, Napoleon once again abdicated on 23 June, leaving for Malmaison, in the north-eastern Parisian suburbs.

The Anglo-Dutch and Prussian Armies commenced their advance toward Paris on the 19th. From his more advanced position, Blücher progressed rapidly, entering France and reaching Maubeuge by 23 June. Wellington's exhausted troops were unable to advance quite so rapidly, whilst Wellington also insisted on immaculate discipline: he did not want to excite the anger of the French population. Although British soldiers apparently behaved well, their Belgian counterparts caused serious concerns. By the same token, the Prussians were out to avenge the depredations of 1806.⁵

On 19 June, Wellington himself briefly returned to Brussels to oversee preparations for the reception of his wounded soldiers. Waterloo had been a devastating battle. 15,000 of Wellington's men lay dead or wounded on the field itself, along with a further 32,000 French and Prussian casualties. Some regiments had suffered particularly badly. The 1st Guards, for example, had lost 55 per cent dead and wounded.⁶

The final retreat of the last two
squares at Waterloo by Henri-Paul
Motte. (Topfoto)





The Battle of Waterloo had been devastating for the armies involved, as well as the village. Here the destruction is clear to see, with the dead and wounded littering the battlefield while camp followers tended to them. (Anne S. K. Brown)

There is a sense from Wellington's private correspondence that he was a little disappointed at the way the battle had unfolded. 'Never did I see such a pounding match,' he wrote to his old comrade, Marshal William Beresford. 'Both were what the boxers call gluttons. Napoleon did not manoeuvre at all. He just moved forward in the old style, in columns, and was driven off in the old style.' Still, the fact that the difference between defeat and victory balanced on a knife-edge did not escape Wellington. 'I had the infantry for some time in squares,' he continued, 'and we had the French cavalry walking about us as if they had been our own.' He concluded, 'I never saw the British infantry behave so well.'⁷ Although it is difficult to estimate precisely what military lessons Wellington took from his experience at Waterloo, it is clear from the tone of letters such as this, that he had reservations about pursuing innovative military tactics and strategies. Revolutionary warfare had achieved so much, but in the end, when confronted by a strongly positioned and disciplined force, a battle had developed that bore greater similarity to 18th-century campaigns than those of Napoleon's heyday. Such thinking was to have important repercussions in British and European military development.

By 23 June, Wellington, further north than Blücher, had also entered France and was investing the fortress at Valenciennes, and storming the fortress at Cambrai. Three days later, Wellington was outside Péronne, but the town refused to surrender, and Wellington was compelled to send in Major General Sir Peregrine Maitland's 1st Guards Brigade. 'The troops took the hornwork which covers the suburb on the left of the Somme by storm, with but small loss,'



GNMX1043_252 [LOW
RES FOR PLACEMENT,
HI RES TO COME]

The Duke of Wellington depicted as an old man surveying the battlefield of Waterloo, c.1840. (National Army Museum)

Wellington wrote matter-of-factly to the Secretary of State for War, Lord Bathurst. 'The town immediately afterwards surrendered, on condition that the garrison should lay down their arms, and be allowed to return to their homes.'⁸

Any sense that resistance was weakening and Paris would fall without a fight was dismissed on the following day when Grouchy attacked Blücher at Compiègne, checking the Prussian advance, and allowing Wellington to catch up. Grouchy attacked again on 28 June, before entering Paris on the 29th.⁹ Wellington estimated – correctly – that the French had between 40 and 50,000 troops in Paris, whilst they had 'fortified the heights of Montmartre and the town of St Denis strongly', while 'the heights of Belleville are likewise strongly fortified'. Ever the pragmatist, Wellington concluded that the French 'have a strong position on this side of Paris',¹⁰ and detailed his reservations to Blücher:

It appears to me, that, with the force which you and I have under our command at present, the attack of Paris is a matter of great risk. I am convinced it cannot be made on this side with any hope of success ... and even ... if we should succeed the loss would be very severe.

Wellington understood that if an attack were necessary, 'we must incur a severe loss... But in this case it is not necessary.'¹¹ In a few days, the next of the Allied armies would arrive from the east, followed by the Allied sovereigns. Instead, Wellington proposed an armistice. In the event, in order to convince the French



Following his surrender to the British on 15 July 1815, Napoleon was exiled to St Helena, over a thousand miles off the West African coast, and was carried there on the *Bellerophon*. (Anne S. K. Brown)

THE RACE FOR PARIS, JUNE 1815

to accept the terms offered by the British and Prussians, Blücher moved his army to the south-west of Paris. With Paris surrounded on all sides, an armistice was signed, and the French Army retired south of the Loire, whilst the Prussians occupied the city.¹²

Napoleon meanwhile fled to Rochefort. As he fled, he reputedly wondered, 'What is to become of this poor France? I have done what I could for her.'¹³ Wonder he might. France had indeed briefly been master of Europe under his leadership. But his insatiable quest for military glory, bound as it was to his deep-seated need for the approval of the French people, ultimately brought about French ruin. As he departed France, intelligence was received by Wellington that 'a great proportion of the 87 departments are ruined, or in a state of revolt.'¹⁴

Having briefly entertained the hope of crossing the Atlantic, he eventually surrendered to the British aboard HMS *Bellerophon*. The British pondered what to do with the fallen emperor. The prime minister, Lord Liverpool, initially favoured trial and execution as a rebel, but was persuaded out of this stance by his foreign secretary, Viscount Castlereagh. In response, the cabinet held 'strongly to the opinion that the best place of custody would be at a distance from Europe', and ultimately they decided to banish him to the tiny island of St Helena in the South Atlantic.¹⁵ There Napoleon Bonaparte lived out the last of his days, reflecting sourly on his past successes, and providing copious explanations for his failures. He died in 1821, most likely of a form of stomach cancer, although several conspiracy theories exist as to the actual cause of his death.

With Paris in Allied hands, and Napoleon entering permanent confinement, attention now turned to securing the peace that had been so painstakingly decided at Vienna the previous autumn. Unmistakeably, Prussia wanted revenge. Prussian diplomats, and by extension the wider political and military class, including Blücher, had felt hard done by in the peace negotiations at Vienna. There the shifting sands of European diplomacy had one moment seen Prussia promised the whole of Saxony as compensation for the costs of the long war with France; whilst the next moment, that promise was diminished to no more than a third of Saxon territory.¹⁶

It is vital to view Prussian actions in the wake of Waterloo within this context. At Vienna, the tensions between the Great Powers over Prussia's claim on Saxony, and Russia's claim on Poland, had nearly resulted in another European war. If these questions could not be resolved quickly, Castlereagh had written, 'it will not suit the exhausted finances of Prussia to remain long armed and inactive; nor can Russia expose herself indefinitely to the encumbrance of large armies remaining unemployed ... on her own frontier.' France and Austria would quickly be drawn into a war in Germany, and with the newly established

independence of the Low Countries once more in the balance, Britain too would find it 'difficult ... to abstract herself from the contest.'¹⁷

In July 1815, the circumstances were little different. Prussia, with a decisive contribution to the final defeat of Napoleon, could now claim greater compensation at the expense of France. The immediate manifestation of this renewed belligerence came in the treatment of Paris by the occupying Prussian Army. They demanded a contribution from the city totalling 110 million francs, and even sought to blow up the Pont d'Jena. Wellington was desperately worried 'that we shall immediately set the whole country against us, and shall excite a national war, if the useless, and if it was not likely to be attended with such serious consequences, I should call it ridiculous, oppression practised upon the French people, is not put a stop to...'¹⁸

Wellington was at pains to persuade Blücher to postpone his actions at least until the arrival of the Allied sovereigns. He implied that by acting in haste now, Blücher would throw away long-term Prussian ambitions at the expense of the short-term appeasement of his men's desire for revenge. 'The destruction of the bridge of Jena is highly disagreeable to the King and to the people, and may occasion disturbance in the city,' the duke wrote to his Prussian counterpart. 'It is not merely a military measure, but is one likely to attach to the character of our operations, and is of political importance.'¹⁹ Blücher, though, was uninterested in political reasoning, and there was little Wellington could do to contain Prussian violence until the arrival of the Allied sovereigns.

CONVERT TO
MONO

A British review takes place in Paris, 1815. Following Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, the Allies marched into Paris on 29 June 1815. (Duplessis-Bertaux collection, courtesy of René Chartrand)



'The martial achievements of Great Britain and her Allies' – Napoleon is depicted captured and contained in a bottle, a trophy of the victorious Allies. (Anne S. K. Brown)



Blücher's obsession with vengeance gave Wellington and Castlereagh, who arrived in Paris on 6 July, the opportunity to lay the foundations for a stable and long-lasting peace. Perhaps the most important immediate objective was the question of who would replace Napoleon on the throne of France. Dissent amongst the Allies existed from the moment Napoleon so effortlessly deposed Louis XVIII upon his escape from Elba. Tsar Alexander favoured a pact with the Bonapartists to replace Napoleon with his son. Austria favoured the imposition of the Duke of Orleans, a line thought to be supported by Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord, the French foreign minister, who had been coldly rejected by Louis XVIII in favour of his émigré advisors. Partly out of the necessity of a legitimate aim in order to gain the support of Parliament for the prosecution of another European campaign, the British were alone in supporting the second restoration of Louis XVIII.

Castlereagh worked hard during the 'Hundred Days' to convince his allies to support Louis's restoration: a process that proved to be a two-way street. In order to buy Talleyrand's support, Louis had to be convinced to drop his incompetent émigré advisors, and appoint Talleyrand first minister. This was a difficult decision for Louis to take, as he viewed Talleyrand as untrustworthy and corrupt. Castlereagh agreed, 'yet I know not on whom H.M. can better depend. He has not a chance in the hands of those now around him. The fact is, France is a den of thieves and brigands, and they can only be governed by criminals like

themselves...'²⁰ Neither the Russians nor Austrians were convinced Louis was the right man for the job, and it was only Wellington's quick victory at Waterloo that enabled the swift restoration of Louis.

The armistice that saw the capitulation of Paris at the beginning of July also facilitated the 'quiet restoration of His Majesty to his throne'. This, Wellington argued, was 'that result of the war which all the Sovereigns of all of us have always considered the most beneficial for us all, and the most likely to lead to permanent peace in Europe.'²¹ In making this statement to Blücher, Wellington was plainly lying, but he knew better than anyone that once restored, none of the Allied sovereigns would act to depose Louis XVIII.

That said, the restoration was not quite so clear-cut, and Wellington was forced to negotiate with the treacherous Joseph Fouché, Napoleon's one-time head of secret police, with whom Wellington collaborated in order to ensure the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy and Louis XVIII.²² In the event, Louis XVIII was obliged to adopt constitutional government, and elections were held in September, and Talleyrand and Fouché were deposed in favour of the ultra-Royalist, and ultra-competent Armand-Emmanuel de Vignerot du Plessis, Duke of Richelieu.²³ Initially, Louis was initially far from popular. Nicknamed 'the King of the Tuileries' because of his constant presence at the Tuileries Palace and his staged garden parties, Louis was toothless, unable to influence the progress of the new negotiations that would determine the fate of his kingdom.²⁴

In this matter he would have to rely on Wellington and Castlereagh, who could now turn their attention to securing the balance of power in Europe. Charles Webster captured the severity of the situation the two Irishmen now faced. With hundreds of thousands of Allied troops streaming into France, they might have 'saved the dynasty[, n]ow they had the more difficult task of saving France.'²⁵ Wellington's new priority was the need to contain the worst excesses of his Allies.

During the preparations for the Waterloo campaign, Wellington had suggested the widespread use of commissaries, who would follow each of the

Joseph Fouché, Napoleon's one-time head of the secret police, with whom Wellington collaborated in order to ensure the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy and Louis XVIII. (akg-images)



armies and issue receipts to the population in anticipation of payment for the food and resources that they were compelled to provide the Allied armies. This system initially failed to protect anyone from the malevolence of the Prussian troops, who acquired supplies wherever they needed them with no concern for the property of the populations they took from, whether they be in Holland, Belgium or France. Wellington's system only found modest support amongst the cabinet in London. 'It is quite right to prevent plunder of every description,' wrote the prime minister, Lord Liverpool, 'but France must bear a part of the expenses of the war.'²⁶

This state of affairs continued after Waterloo, until the arrival of Tsar Alexander. The emperor of Russia had, in the months since the Congress of Vienna, become a religious zealot. Gone were the excessive demands for the punishment of France, replaced by an uncharacteristic liberal attitude. The first manifestation of this transformation was his support for Wellington's commissary system in place of indiscriminate pillage. With the Russians now leading by example, it gradually became possible to restrain the collected German armies, although depredations continued.²⁷

Castlereagh was left in no doubt of the danger to which the Allies had exposed themselves:

'If discipline and order are not upheld, King, Army, and People will forget their differences in one common feeling of resentment against foreign troops. The regeneration of France will be disappointed and the Allied armies will be involved in a protracted war,' he argued, 'and possibly compelled to retire from France without having effectuated their purpose of restoring it to peaceful habits.'²⁸

More generally, though, it would be more difficult to convince the Allies that France had to be maintained in a position of strength, rather than weakened so as to have no influence in the affairs of Europe. Indeed, it seems as though Castlereagh and Wellington were alone in holding these views. The British cabinet was, for the moment, decidedly hostile to restoring France to her pre-Revolutionary strength, and subscribed to populist sentiment that France should be severely punished. To do so, the prime minister himself argued, would 'be considered in no other light than as weakness, and not mercy... The prevailing idea ... is, that we are fairly entitled to avail ourselves of the present moment to take back from France the principal conquests of Louis XIV.' He continued:

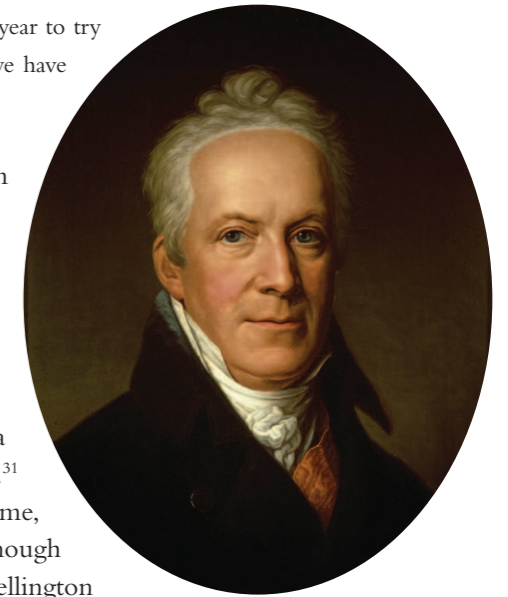
France will never forgive the humiliation which she has already received – that she will take the first convenient opportunity of endeavouring to redeem her military glory – and that is our duty, therefore to take advantage of the present moment to

prevent the evil consequences... It might have been not unwise last year to try the effect of a more magnanimous policy; but in the result of that we have been completely disappointed...'²⁹

Prussian long-term political ambitions matched the short-term depredations of her military. Whilst the chief Prussian negotiator, Karl August von Hardenberg, acknowledged there were difficulties restraining the Prussian army, there was no disguising the 'spirit of vengeance against France' within Prussian policy, aimed specifically at augmenting their possessions.³⁰ In particular, Hardenberg wanted to separate Alsace and Lorraine from France, thereby augmenting the Netherlands and Bavaria, while Prussia would in turn annex Luxembourg and Mainz to her own territory.³¹ Castlereagh and Wellington were decidedly opposed to such a scheme, and they broadly acquired the support of Russia and Austria, although the British cabinet remained cool on the issue. In mid-August, Wellington received intelligence that suggested that Prussia would act with or without the acquiescence of the Allies. 'The Prussians say out of doors,' reported the anonymous spy, "'Instead of negotiating about it, let us take possession, and hold fast.'"³² Moreover, the Prussians and the other minor German states wanted the French border fortresses in the north-east and east either ceded to the Allies, or razed, rendering the main route into France indefensible.

Castlereagh and Wellington, then, in attempting to secure the balance of power in Europe, faced an up-hill challenge. However, the main weight of political opinion in London, including that of the Prime Minister himself, reflected the British public mood, and was inclined to punish France by weakening her to such a degree that she would be unable to muster the strength to wage another war. Prussia was so too inclined, but saw the opportunity to expand her own territories as well. Castlereagh, though, saw that such exemplary punishment would, rather than reconcile France to her fate, merely encourage her to seek a means of regaining her territories at some later date. Far from securing the peace of Europe, it would light a fuse beneath it.

Wellington, also, was opposed to such a hard-line and unforgiving policy. In his view, any attempts to strip France of her territories and resources were to be firmly resisted. He had had bitter experience of a discontented France when he had served as British ambassador to Paris in 1814. 'The general topic of conversation,' then, he recalled in a formative dispatch on 11 August, 'was the recovery of the Left bank of the Rhine, and the unpopularity of the Government was attributed to its supposed disinclination to go to war to recover these possessions.'



Karl August von Hardenberg, the chief Prussian negotiator who worked to create a long lasting peace and put aside the Prussian desire for vengeance following the Napoleonic Wars. (akg-images)

Better to begin the process of restoring France to her pre-Revolutionary status, providing a clear objective to be aimed for, and to marginalise nationalistic voices. ‘Revolutionary France is more likely to distress the world than France, however strong her frontier, under a regular government,’ Wellington argued. ‘That is the situation in which we ought to endeavour to place her.’³³ Wellington and his old friend Castlereagh found themselves making the same arguments: Wellington from the military point of view, Castlereagh from the political.³⁴

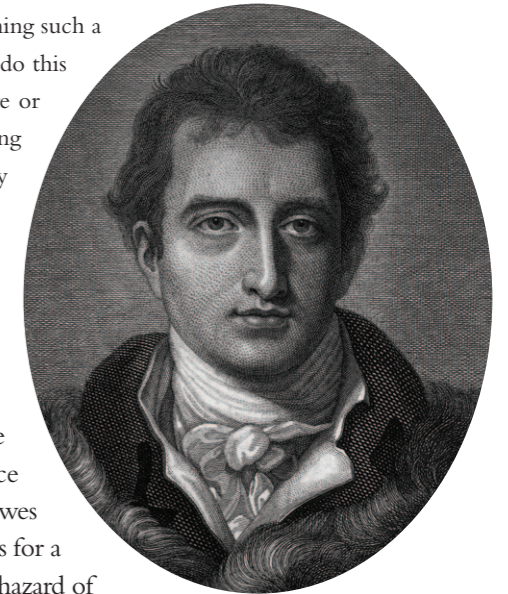
Castlereagh recognised that the best way to convince both the other Great European Powers and his own cabinet was to reframe the discussion, as Wellington had in his 11 August dispatch. The Allies wanted to punish France, but France was not at fault, *Revolutionary* France was. In a series of principles upon which the negotiations were to be based, Castlereagh argued that ‘the security to be required from France should be framed upon such principles, political and military, as shall afford to Europe an extraordinary and adequate protection against the *revolutionary* danger of France, so long as that particular danger may be presumed to exist.’³⁵ Castlereagh was overtly linking the expansionist ambitions of French power up to 1815 to the leadership of Napoleon Bonaparte, and the underlying conditions as set by the French Revolution. Forcing France to a position of economic destitution, with no means of recovery, would only recreate those conditions.

Moreover, the cessions demanded of France by Prussia and the other minor German states would need to be guaranteed by the Allies. To Castlereagh, this seemed preposterous. He wrote angrily to Liverpool:

Even despite Wellington’s best efforts, King Louis XVIII was unable to fill Napoleon’s shoes as a strong leader for France, leading others to direct him for their own purposes. (Anne S. K. Brown)



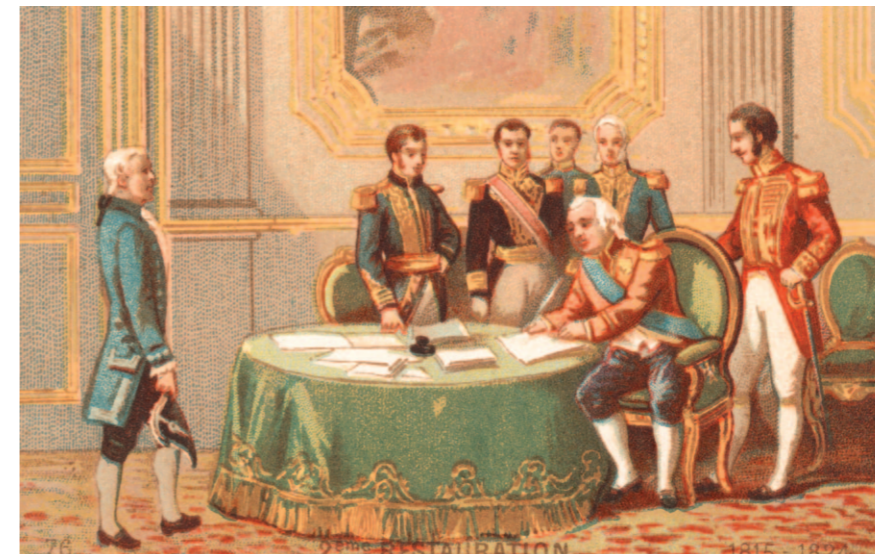
The more I reflect upon it, the more I deprecate this system of scratching such a power. We may hold her down and pare her nails, so I hope we shall do this effectually, and subject to no other hazards of failure than must, more or less, attend all political or military arrangements, but this system of being pledged to a continental war for objects that France may any day reclaim from the particular States that hold them, without pushing her demands beyond what she would contend was due to her own honour, is I am sure a bad British policy.³⁶



Instead, surely it should be the responsibility of the states themselves to defend their new gains.

Nevertheless, ‘strong reasons may no doubt be alleged to prove that the military power of France has long been too great for the peace and security of Europe,’ Castlereagh contended, ‘and that Europe owes itself now to repel the encroachments made by France upon its limits for a century past.’ In such circumstances, ‘it might be politic to incur the hazard of creating disunion amongst the Allies themselves by the difficulties to which these new distributions of territory would infallibly lead.’ With characteristic understatement, Castlereagh observed that ‘such a measure is at best problematical’.³⁷ Not only might Britain be drawn into a conflict between France and one or other of the states that had gained materially from France’s loss, but she might also be drawn into conflict between those states over the spoils of war. Any territorial dismemberment of France would lead inexorably to further conflict.

Viscount Castlereagh was the British foreign secretary. He represented British interests at the Vienna conference and worked closely with Wellington for a peace settlement, including the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy, as well as establishing a solid balance of power and peace in Europe. (akg-images)



Louis XVIII signs the Second Treaty of Paris, 20 November 1815. (akg-images)

Aware that these arguments alone were insufficient to placate those who believed that France represented a threat while she remained even as strong as she was in 1790, Castlereagh and Wellington suggested an army of occupation, totalling 100,000 troops, that would at French expense be garrisoned along the northern frontier, to the north-east and east of Paris. 'This position is both offensive and defensive in its character,' Castlereagh argued. 'It is too menacing to be passed, and it cannot be forced without a succession of sieges, whilst the army that occupied it is within ten marches of Paris, without an intervening fortress.' Moreover, 'the army that is to occupy it represents Europe. To menace or to attack that army is to declare war against Europe, the effects of which France will hereafter understand.'³⁸ The period of occupation initially proposed was five or seven years, whereupon, and only when the Allies were fully convinced that the flames of revolution in France had been extinguished forever, the fortresses would be returned to Louis XVIII, recognised by all as the representative of stability and security in France, weak and indecisive though he was.

The plans had Wellington's fingerprints all over them, and from a purely military perspective he argued coherently and persuasively. 'All persons appear to agree that the maintenance of the authority of the King is essential to the interests of the other powers of Europe; and, notwithstanding the difference of opinion regarding the extent of the force which ought to be maintained for a time in France,' Wellington wrote, 'it appears generally admitted that it is necessary to adopt it.' He continued:

It is necessary to adopt it with different objects in view; first, to give security to the government of the King, and to afford him time to form a force of his own with which he can carry on his government, and take his fair share in the concerns of Europe; secondly, to give the Allies some security against a second revolutionary convulsion and reaction; and thirdly, to enable the Allies to enforce the payment of those contributions which they deem it just towards their own subject to lay on France in payment for the expenses of the war.³⁹

The combination of these persuasive arguments, along with the forthright support of the tsar, convinced Whitehall and the Great Powers. 'In examining the confidential notes delivered in by the Russian, Austrian, and Prussian ministers, it appears that all are agreed' to the temporary military occupation of France, in order to stabilise the government of Louis XVIII, extinguish revolution and rebellion, and defend the position of the Great Powers in Europe.⁴⁰ Liverpool, meanwhile, expressed his approbation, in characteristic terms, as if he had been supportive all along, writing in October 1815:

With respect to those who think we ought not to have troubled ourselves about the internal situation of France, but have applied our exertions exclusively to the reduction of her power and the dismemberment of her territory, I have only to say that the policy of such a course of proceeding would have been at least doubtful ... totally inconsistent with all the treaties, declarations, and manifestos which were formulated at the commencement of the contest.⁴¹

There remained some finer details to resolve: the precise division of the 600 million-franc indemnity; the restoration of artistic and culturally important works stolen by the French over the course of the war; the deployment and composition of the army of occupation; and the precise location of new fortresses designed to make the Belgian frontier truly impregnable. It took another six weeks to negotiate these issues, and the Second Treaty of Paris was finally signed on 20 November 1815.

On its own, this might have been Castlereagh's crowning achievement. He and Wellington had advocated a policy that sought to ensure the balance of power in Europe. It was a policy that the tsar had adopted and persuaded his fellow sovereigns to support. Wellington had won the war. Castlereagh now won the peace.

The overthrow of the French army, the capture of Bonaparte, the continued union of Europe, and the protracted occupation of a military position in France, seem to provide adequately for the immediate danger, and at the same time to avoid the agitation of any new question which might disturb the settlement so happily effected at Vienna.⁴²

Waterloo had been important because it had secured the peace so painstakingly negotiated in 1814.⁴³

But this alone was only the tip of Castlereagh's ambition for peace in Europe. He wrote in a Memorandum at the end of August:

Let the Allies then take this further chance of securing that repose which all the Powers of Europe so much require, with the assurance that if disappointed in their primary object by the military ambition of France, they will again take up arms, not only with commanding positions in their hands, but with that moral force which can alone keep such a confederacy together, and which has hitherto proved its greatest strength.⁴⁴

Rather than a precarious balance of power in Europe, where peace was maintained by a combination of deterrence, coercion and, when necessary,



Following the end of the Napoleonic Wars, and well into the 19th century, unrest broke out across Europe, such as the Vienna Uprising. Barricades sprung up across European capitals as the people challenged their governments. The uprisings led to reactionary authoritarianism, increased nationalism and popular politicisation. (akg-images)

violence, Castlereagh proposed a new idea. This idea had various names throughout the 19th century: some called it ‘the European system’; others ‘the confederacy’, ‘the great alliance’ or simply ‘the union’. By the end of the 19th century it had acquired a single name: the Concert of Europe.⁴⁵ Rather than a balance, Castlereagh proposed a concert of power in Europe, where problems and crises were resolved by discussion and compromise. To enforce this, the defensive elements of the Treaty of Chaumont, the alliance that had united the powers of Europe against Revolutionary and Napoleonic France, were to be re-affirmed. ‘On the persuasiveness of which union,’ wrote Castlereagh, ‘it ought in wisdom to rely above every other measure of security for its future peace and preservation.’ The European powers agreed ‘to concert together and to take such measures as the security of Europe may require’.⁴⁶

In so doing, Castlereagh had laid the foundations of international governance, a means by which dialogue resolved crises that otherwise might have required

bullets and bayonets to determine. It is difficult to overstate the global significance of these decisions. The Concert of Europe helped maintain peace in Europe for the next century, and although destined to fail spectacularly in 1914, is arguably the blueprint upon which later attempts with the same aim were based.⁴⁷

The Quadruple Alliance was signed at the same time as the Treaty of Paris, although its development ran in parallel with a bizarre but related ‘Holy Alliance’ proposed by the tsar that sought to unite the sovereigns and peoples of Europe in accordance with the principles of true Christianity.⁴⁸ Although Austria, Prussia and eventually Great Britain acquiesced in this arrangement through varying degrees of subservience and respect, Castlereagh’s vision was much more realistic. The tsar appreciated this and supported it.

The sixth article was the only one that did not specifically pertain to France, and contracted the ‘four Sovereigns for the happiness of the world’ to ‘renew their meetings at fixed periods ... for the purpose

of consulting upon their common interests, and for the consideration of the measures ... considered the most salutary for the repose and prosperity of nations and for the maintenance of the peace of Europe’.⁴⁹

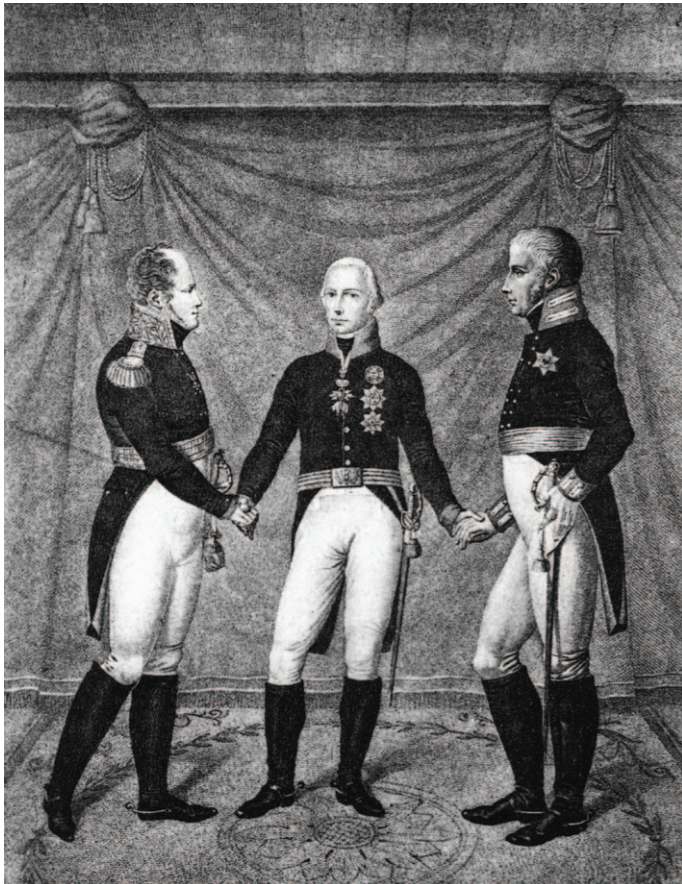
Castlereagh envisaged regular meetings of Europe’s leaders, to forestall looming crises and prevent future wars. All of this was guaranteed by a perpetual alliance of the Four Powers. Although the formal congress system broke down in 1822 because of fundamental disagreements between Britain and the continental powers, the Great Powers continued to reconvene on an *ad hoc* basis when new crises emerged. Webster counted 26 meetings in total between the first Congress at Aix-la-Chapelle in 1818 – which had seen the admission of Royalist France – and the final meeting in London in 1913. In that period, the Ottoman Empire was admitted in 1856, newly united Italy joined in 1867, and the German *Reich* replaced Prussia in 1871. The United States and Japan also began to participate towards the end of the century.

To suggest that the Concert of Europe was an unmitigated success would, of course, be misleading. No continent-wide conflict engulfed Europe between 1815 and 1914, but numerous wars between European states occurred, not least of which were the Italian *Risorgimento* (three wars of independence between 1848 and 1866), the Crimean War (1853–56), the Austro-Prussian War (1866), and the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71). The Concert framed these wars, and fed the development of European political ideas during the 19th century.

The Concert was not a formal structure or institution, had no written codes, charters or rules, and functioned entirely because of the submission of the Great Powers to its fundamental principles. Undoubtedly, the impact of Waterloo specifically, and of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars more generally, helped frame this submission. In the period after 1815, European Great Powers were conservative-minded, sharing a determination to maintain the treaties that had ended the great war with France, preserve the new status quo so painstakingly negotiated at Vienna, and resist revolutionary wars of aggression aimed at establishing new empires in Europe. This was a conscious reversal of the 18th-century dogmatic pursuit of the balance of power. Whilst Castlereagh and Wellington, Tsar Alexander, Klemens von Metternich (the Austrian foreign minister), Talleyrand and Hardenberg had all worked assiduously to produce a new balance, what they achieved was much more long lasting. As Paul Schroeder wittily puts it: ‘European statesmen had learned that eighteenth-century poker led to Russian roulette, and decided to play contract bridge instead.’⁵⁰

In this atmosphere, the Concert of Europe was given the oxygen it required to breathe and to function. Although no formal written rules regulating the behaviour of states existed, historians have identified informal unwritten rules

The Holy Alliance, agreed on 26 September 1815, between Russia, Prussia and Austria. Pictured here are the three monarchs. (akg-images)



based on precedent. When great European questions emerged, only the five Great Powers could negotiate and decide a solution, whilst lesser powers could bring influence to bear on issues that directly affected them, but they had no veto. Similarly, no power could wage an aggressive war or foment revolution elsewhere in Europe. The Concert of Europe was likewise bound to deal with European concerns, and was unable to raise international issues of vital interest to another Great Power without its consent, except where that issue was of such significance that it affected more than one of the Great Powers. In such circumstances, no Great Power could prevent its discussion in Concert. The logical extension of this argument was that confrontations between Great Powers had to be avoided at any cost, and would be referred to the Concert if a resolution proved impossible. Most important was the unwritten rule that one power could not directly threaten, undermine or humiliate another.⁵¹

The system worked on moral rather than legal grounds, and any such system needed to demonstrate flexibility. The Concert proved inadequate at dealing with crises within (as opposed to between) Great Powers' sphere of interests. Thus, Great Britain acted with impunity in South Asia; Russia did so in Central Asia and the Far East; and latterly France and Britain did so in Africa. But in Europe, crises that in the 18th century might have produced regional conflicts that spiralled into general European war, were resolved within the framework of the Concert. Thus, the Greek Revolution between 1821 and 1832; the Belgian Revolution that began in 1830; and the Italian Revolution of 1848, were all settled without Great Power conflicts. This is not to say that blood was not shed, or that violence was ended as a result of Great Power intervention. The Great Powers acted so as to contain the violence and prevent the eruption of a general conflict. This was a step-change in European affairs.

Nor did the widespread European revolutions of 1848 destroy the Concert of Europe. While the social and political fabric of Europe was shaken to its core in 1848, the revolutions did not produce a general war, as the French Revolution had in 1789. The reasons for this happenstance are manifold, but what is clear is that foreign policy remained conservative, and there remained a desire to preserve peace and restrict the export of revolutionary ideals: the single greatest cause of conflict in 1789. Nevertheless, within six years a war between the Great Powers threatened the stability of Europe: the Crimean War.

Although the Crimean War did not erupt into a general conflict, it served critically to undermine the Concert of Europe. Why, then, in circumstances where the Great Powers had sought to avoid conflict at all costs, did the Crimean War break out? The answer is quite simple: the extra-European spheres of interest of two of the Great Powers began to collide, and no diplomatic

mechanism within the Concert offered a solution to a problem born entirely outside the boundaries of Europe.

Ostensibly, the Crimean War erupted between Russia on one hand, and Austria, France, the Ottoman Empire and Great Britain, on the other, because of Russian aggression against the slowly declining Ottoman Empire. The prospect of Russian control of Constantinople was too great a strategic threat to Austria, France and Great Britain. After all, the Eastern Question dominated Concert diplomacy from the 1820s, and was, in fact, the subject of the final meeting in 1913.⁵² Yet, if this were the sole cause, a diplomatic solution would have been found through the mechanism of the Concert. The problem was that Russian encroachment into the Caucasus and Central Asia began directly to threaten British extra-European interests, namely those in South Asia.⁵³

A diplomatic solution proved impossible in 1853–54, because Britain did not want a diplomatic solution: Britain wanted to threaten, undermine and humiliate Russia.⁵⁴ To understand why Britain behaved in such a way to destroy the diplomatic architecture that Castlereagh and Wellington had so painstakingly assembled in 1815, we have to understand why Britain wanted a Concert of Europe in the first place.

As Britain emerged as a global naval power in the 18th century, a choice between two grand strategies confronted her: the 'Blue Water', or the 'Continental'

The Crimean War was a turning point in the 19th century, threatening the stability of the peace which the Concert of Europe had sought to protect. Here, French infantry storm earthworks in the attack at the Battle of Malakoff, 7 September 1855. (Anne S. K. Brown)



strategy.⁵⁵ Under Blue Water, British strategic aims were focused on colonial and imperial expansion, in order to expand her trading and commerce empire. By contrast, the Continental strategy saw British foreign policy focused on the stability of Europe, since only with an effective network of European alliances could Britain hope to expand her empire outside of Europe. In practice, of course, both were necessary and mutually dependent on one another.

Put overly simply, a balance of power in Europe was necessary to allow Britain to expand overseas; the empire was required to pay for the inevitable European conflicts that followed the repeated collapse of the balance of power. Historical precedent seemed to suggest the truth of this assertion. Britain had been successful in North America between 1758 and 1761 largely because her main enemy, France, suffered an attritional defeat in Europe at the hands of Britain's ally, Prussia. In the wake of victory in America, however, Britain abandoned her European alliances, and by 1781 had suffered her costliest colonial defeat at Yorktown that sealed the independence of the United States of America.⁵⁶

Similar strategic decisions had governed British involvement in the French Revolutionary War, whilst Napoleon's overt interest in extra-European expansion throughout his reign ensured Britain's constant involvement in the war until his final defeat at Waterloo in 1815. 'I will find in Spain, the Pillars of Hercules, but not the limits of my powers,' Napoleon had written in 1808 as his forces struggled to conquer the Iberian Peninsula.⁵⁷ Such a comment clearly indicated Napoleon's interest in the Orient, whilst the secret terms of his alliance with Russia in 1807 also (perhaps absurdly) mentioned India.⁵⁸ This perfectly encapsulates why Britain had fought for so long against French hegemony in Europe.

It also explains the primary manifestation of British strategy during that war. It is no coincidence that Britain repeatedly acted to neutralise French naval power. Toulon, Den Helder, Boulogne, El Ferrol, Cadiz, Ostend, Copenhagen, Flushing and Antwerp were all attacked, sometimes more than once, and sometimes with mixed success, during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. The primary aim of these assaults was not the capture of territory, but the destruction of French naval assets. The British Army was precision ammunition, and the Royal Navy was the gun that fired it.

The war had been devastatingly expensive, and had virtually neutralised the benefits of having an empire. Under the current system, building an empire would be pointless if the economic benefits were wasted on wars in Europe that were fought to enable Britain to build the empire. The Concert of Europe was therefore Britain's solution to this vicious circle. The basis of the Concert was to secure diplomatically what Britain had, in the past, fought for: the balance of power.

But by the early 1850s, Russia had emerged as a new France, a power that sought hegemonic power. The key difference was that Russia did not seek (at least for the time being) hegemonic power in Europe, but in Asia, and this directly threatened Britain's own imperial ambitions. Britain had already fought a costly war in Afghanistan between 1839 and 1842 over the perceived threat of Russian expansionism in Central Asia. Although an operational disaster, the war had nevertheless achieved its strategic objectives: a buffer zone to the north-west of British India that would, for the time being at least, prevent any Russian encroachment into Britain's sphere of interest.

In the Crimea, however, Britain perceived a different but related threat from Russia. The growth of Russian naval power in the Black Sea represented a clear

CONVERT TO
MONO

The reach of the British Empire is clear to see in this map. It was only by establishing a secure and long-lasting balance of power in Europe that Britain was able to build such an empire.
(Anne S. K. Brown)



threat to British grand strategy. The prospect that Russia might gain control of Constantinople, and therefore the eastern Mediterranean, and be within striking distance of Egypt, the Red Sea, and therefore India by a different route, was too much for Britain to stomach. True, Russian naval power was nowhere near so strong as to pose such a threat, but it would be easier to squash Russian naval plans when they were still embryonic. Britain did not want a diplomatic solution to the crisis in 1853–54, because a diplomatic solution would not see the neutralisation of Russian sea power. The war in the Crimea was designed to destroy Russian naval power.⁵⁹

This, and this alone, was reason enough for the British to act to undermine the Concert of Europe, while the other Great Powers struggled to find diplomatic solutions. Throughout the crisis of 1853–54, Russia, Austria and France all proffered solutions that met Britain's demands. In reality, the demands that Britain put forward were irrelevant, since they were a front, and Britain, represented by another great foreign secretary, Lord Palmerston, simply changed the goalposts.⁶⁰

Although Britain achieved her strategic objectives during the Crimean War, the war illustrated military developments of the first half of the 19th century,

The Crimean War clearly indicated that new thinking was needed on the application of military power. It would take six decades and the slaughter of the First World War for the process of technological and military innovation started in Crimea to reach its conclusion. Here, the British 55th Infantry cross bayonets with the opposing Russians. (Anne S. K. Brown)



and the failure of the Great Powers to keep pace with these developments. In part, this was the result of the Battle of Waterloo as well. There, line had defeated column, and square had defeated cavalry. Britain had fought at least eight large-scale colonial conflicts between 1815 and 1854. During those conflicts, none of the large-scale troop movements that determined Napoleon's success in Europe had been possible, because South Asia and the Far East lacked the industrial and agricultural infrastructure that had made them possible in Europe.⁶¹ Moreover, the lessons learnt from fighting large formations of disciplined infantry on the subcontinent reinforced Frederickian thinking on the use of infantry; that is to say that 18th-century ideas of the use of armies pervaded well into the 19th century.⁶² Therefore, the lessons learnt in Britain's colonial conflicts reinforced the lessons learnt at Waterloo.

This lends some context to the enduring relevance of Wellington's disappointment at Napoleon's inflexibility at Waterloo. 'Napoleon did not manoeuvre at all,' he had written in the days following the battle. 'He just moved forward in the old style, in columns, and was driven off in the old style.'⁶³ This has led many historians to conclude that the British Army rested on its laurels in the years succeeding Waterloo. In fact, as Hew Strachan has demonstrated, it was Wellington who held development back. Despite impressive localised reforms that illustrated progressive thinking on systems of discipline and professionalisation, Wellington prevented any attempts to render these peripheral developments in the centre. The army itself remained unreformed, whilst its regiments, away on colonial garrison duty across the globe, frequently in contact with unpredictable and culturally diverse enemies, adapted at varying speeds to the emergence of new ideas and thinking.⁶⁴

Whilst operational, tactical and administrative thinking and reform occurred unevenly and sporadically, thinking and reform in these areas was at least happening. Perhaps more egregious than his failure to foster centralised tactical and administrative reform, was Wellington's failure to adequately ensure sufficient articulation in the art and science of strategy. Considering that Wellington's success in the Peninsular War, and to some extent at Waterloo, was partly the result of his ability to link the political and military levels, his reluctance to engender a similar understanding in his subordinates and successors is particularly sad.⁶⁵

This resulted in an army that at least had the ability to fight, but lacked the ability to convey in a convincing and authoritative manner to politicians, when and where it should fight. Military thought occurred in Britain in the years after Waterloo, most of it focused on the process of fighting rather than strategy, and most of the thinking that was conducted was done so by middle-ranking officers at Waterloo who had gone on to greater success and recognition in the empire.



Carl von Clausewitz. In the wake of Waterloo, the Prussian military officer would write *On War*, destined to become a definitive piece of military strategic thought. Clausewitz's ideas did not gain much traction in Britain, where eighteenth century Fredrickian thinking remained popular following the success of such tactics at Waterloo. (akg-images)

They published their thinking in monthly or fortnightly publications such as the *United Service Journal* (founded in 1827), the *Naval and Military Gazette* and the *United Service Gazette* (both founded in 1833).⁶⁶

Of the foreign military theorists, it was Baron Antoine de Jomini, avidly read and promoted by the Francophile William Napier, who dominated British military thinking in the first half of the 19th century, with his focus on getting military forces into action and achieving the desired effect.⁶⁷ Although Clausewitz gained traction in Germany by the 1830s, it was not until the 1840s that German-speaking English enthusiasts emerged, whilst the Prussian thinker's *Vom Krieg* was not translated into English until 1873.⁶⁸

Whilst he remained the preserve of German-speaking English military officers, Clausewitz's important ideas on strategy failed to gain any substantial degree of understanding. Indeed, British interpretations of Clausewitzian principles were, at best, simplistic, at worst, dangerous. 'Even the greatest of the Continental battles lasted entire days,' wrote one, Lieutenant Colonel John Mitchell. 'They were fought for the possession of posts or villages on which the world's fate seemed to depend ... one bold contest would have been worth all this strategy a hundred times over.'⁶⁹

Mitchell's interpretations of Clausewitzian principles suggested that he believed the primary aim of an army should be to fight, and do so with all available resources. In essence, a decisive battle should be sought and joined as rapidly as possible. This was emphatically not what Clausewitz held to be the key to strategy. Mitchell, along with other thinkers and writers in the period, British, Prussian and French, overlooked Clausewitz's argument that policy, means and national character were intimately linked in the development of a national strategy. Mitchell, and the army at large, failed to recognise, as they failed to recognise throughout the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, that the British Army was, in essence, an expeditionary force; in the words of Admiral Lord John Fisher, 'a projectile to be fired by the navy'.⁷⁰

Wellington had recognised this during the Peninsular War, when, despite repeated arguments with his naval counterparts, he acknowledged that he would have been unable to fight without the continued support of the Royal Navy.⁷¹ This knowledge governed his actions in the days before Waterloo, as he sought to prevent an outflanking manoeuvre by Napoleon that would cut the British off from their lines of communication to the sea. When Napoleon attacked the central position between the British and Prussian forces, Wellington was hard pressed to bring his widely dispersed forces into action at Quatre Bras on 16 June 1815.

Wellington, then, understood it. And there is some evidence that others understood these principles in the years prior to the Crimean War. In an *Aide-Memoire to the Military Sciences*, an attempt was made to define a 'British way of war'. Strategists could either adopt a continentalist view, which 'leads to operations of immense armies and objects which menace the very existence of states', or adopt 'the insular position of the empire and local conditions which resulted from it... Principally defensive measures at home, assistance to an ally abroad, and offensive expeditions to distant countries; mainly depending on the superiority of the Royal Navy, and with land forces in no case amounting to more than 50,000 national troops.'⁷² Here, then, was the closest approximation to an accurate view of the British way of war that was encapsulated before the Crimean War, but it was in a book written for sappers and engineers, and therefore unlikely ever to be read by anyone in command.

It certainly was not on the bookshelf of Wellington's military secretary, FitzRoy Somerset, who, as Lord Raglan, commanded the British expeditionary army during the Crimean War. British grand strategy during that war was primarily aimed at eliminating the Russian naval presence at Sebastopol, and with it Russian naval superiority in the Black Sea, and beyond. This accorded with the strategic vision Britain had followed for at least 100 years. What Raglan lacked was Wellington's most important ability: to communicate effectively the limitations of military power to the strategic decision-makers in London.

Had Raglan understood British grand strategy in the 18th and 19th centuries then he might have understood that he would be required to command an amphibious assault against Sebastopol, and then he might have been able to explain that in 1854 the British Army was not capable of attacking an un-reconnoitred, well-fortified and strongly held peninsula. He did not understand, he did not explain, and the British Army became committed to a costly, bloody and attritional series of battles and sieges.

A dispassionate assessment would arrive at the conclusion that this was ultimately strategically successful. Russia was defeated and her naval power in the Black Sea was crippled. But at what cost? Casualties were horrendous. Of the 200,000 Allied forces committed to the Crimea, well over half fell, most – 75,000 French and 16,000 British – dying from disease. Russian casualties were similar in number.⁷³ Britain, with her limited manpower resources, could not fight wars of such magnitude herself. She did so by paying others to do it for her. This had not been possible under the Concert system, as Britain had wanted to make a particular example of Russia for her own strategic ends.

The Concert was not destroyed by the events leading to the Crimean War, although it was perhaps mortally wounded, as international relations



The Waterloo Banquet. Every year on 18 June, the Duke of Wellington hosted the famous Waterloo Banquet to which all serving field officers at the battle were invited, along with surviving politicians of the era. This famous painting by William Salter depicts the 1836 banquet, the last that King William IV attended before his death the following year. (© English Heritage)

commenced their long deterioration until 1914. The Great Powers of Europe continued to meet to discuss their differences until the year before the outbreak of the World War I. But they did so in a period that saw the early rise of the World Great Powers – the United States and Japan. This dichotomy produced varying reactions in Europe. Britain, perhaps as a result of the miserable disasters encountered in Afghanistan, the Crimea and in India in 1857, fostered Victorian moralism, and renewed its support of the Concert system, adopting a progressive agenda that highlighted internationalism. Germany, by contrast, as the only European Great Power lacking a significant overseas empire, turned in the other direction. Initially supportive of the Concert system in the wake of Waterloo, post-Crimea, and more so post-unification in 1871, Germany became anti-European, espousing nationalistic ideals.⁷⁴ The course seemed set for the emergence of the rivalries and disagreements that would spiral out of control in 1914.

The shadow of Waterloo fell long into the 19th century. From the outset, the post-war tensions between the Allies were apparent. Britain acted with apparent altruism, but her actions were primarily intended to recreate a European system that mirrored the old but replaced violence with discussion. This would give Britain ever-greater flexibility in expanding her empire. Castlereagh's greatest contribution to the history of international governance was the foundations for massive imperial expansionism. Perfidious Albion was unmasked in the crisis of 1853–54, but her army had not learnt the lessons of the Napoleonic War or of

Waterloo, and it wasted itself in the Crimea. For Prussia, Waterloo provided the opportunity to reclaim some of the prestige she had failed to reclaim in 1814, but she found her way blocked by Britain, and initial engagement with the European Concert turned slowly to a quest for unification, the seeds of which had been apparent at the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Europe, opined Castlereagh in 1814, 'need never dread a German league; it is in its nature inoffensive, and there is no reason to fear that the union between Austria and Prussia will be such as to endanger the liberties of other states'.⁷⁵ In 1814, he was right. It was the failure of the European Concert adequately to account for the imperialistic ambitions of the Great European Powers that made Prussia, and then Germany, anti-European. Austria and Russia gained much from Waterloo. Austria became undisputed master of Central Europe, only facing eclipse in the 1860s. Russia, her position in the east reinforced, could, like Britain, now turn to empire-building, a process that would eventually bring her into contest with Britain and the other European states. Perhaps the biggest winner from Waterloo was France. She might have expected to pay an enormous price for the brief re-awakening of her support for Napoleon in 1815, but Britain, Russia and then Austria, held the line, and French power was maintained. It was essential to the success of the Concert of Europe.