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After Napoleonic Wars, Allied Powers incorporated France into the European balance of power. The Congress of Vienna expanded that general concept into a comprehensive European settlement. Diplomats understood the geographic and historical characteristics of the different countries that determined their specific culture and interests. Their shared political culture was key to understand the complexity of the stakes at play. That forgotten lesson of the Congress of Vienna questions the strategic restraint that is applied in modern conflicts. The space left for negotiation in modern conflicts looks too narrow to transform victories into lasting peace.

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**TITLE:**

**The Congress of Vienna, 1814-1815: How Negotiators' Political Culture Enabled a True  
Peace in a Complex Environment**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
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**AUTHOR:**

**MAJ (FR) Alexandre THELLIER**

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Mentor and Oral Defense Committee Member:

Dr. Douglas E. Streusand

Approved: [Signature]

Date: 4-24-19

Oral Defense Committee Member: Norge Benitez

Approved: [Signature]

Date: 4/24/19

## Executive Summary

**Title:** The Congress of Vienna, 1815: How Negotiators' Political Culture Enabled a True Peace in a Complex Environment

**Author:** Major Alexandre Thellier, French Army

**Thesis:** The peace negotiated in Vienna in 1814-1815 underlines the importance of shared political culture in achieving an outcome acceptable by all parties. This point is still valid today. Lack of shared political culture has contributed to the inability to resolve contemporary conflicts.

**Discussion:** The diplomatic settlement of the Napoleonic Wars unfold in two stages. The first, the Convention of Armistice, defined the overall pattern of the peace. The Allied Powers would incorporate France, with redefined borders, into the European balance of power. The second, the Congress of Vienna, expanded that general concept into a comprehensive European settlement. The geographic and historical characteristics of the different countries determined their specific culture and interests. Despite their personal, cultural and political differences, the diplomats shared a common education and values that facilitated their conduct of negotiations; they eventually found a ground for agreement. Thus, it is their ability to put themselves in the minds of other actors—what I refer to as shared political culture—that was key to understanding the complexity of the situation and the stakes at play. The need for understanding geopolitical and cultural factors in order to negotiate successfully is a key lesson from the Congress of Vienna. It puts into doubt the way policymakers have approached the termination of modern conflict: Because they have failed to understand the deep concerns of a defeated party, they draw too narrow a space for negotiation to transform victories into lasting peace.

**Conclusion:** The strategic restraint that powers victorious powers applied when discussing the fate of European countries in 1815 enabled a durable peace because it reflected a deep understanding of the geopolitical circumstances and political culture of each party. Policymakers and strategists should learn this fundamental lesson to design effective settlements of conflicts.

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## *Preface*

Considering the length of conflicts in which Western countries have been engaged in the last two decades, I thought it was useful to reassert the primacy of the cultural understanding when considering the possibility of a solution to conflict. I am convinced that understanding the cultures and their complexity is key to framing successful negotiations. I consider culture in a broad sense, encompassing all the specific features of a country or population that in the end forge a unique mindset. Refusing to admit the relevance of alterity (awareness of otherness) provokes at best misunderstandings, at worst resentment and conflict. The variety of standpoints and the complexity of the relations between countries at the Congress of Vienna could only suggest a solution at another level, that is the establishing of a balanced order. G. John Ikenberry explores the validity of the concept of balance of powers nowadays, and shows that different orders are possible. This paper affirms that whatever the final order, the most important to achieve a lasting peace is to consider not only the will of victorious powers (Might is right), but also and foremost to acknowledge the specific characteristics of the defeated.

Besides the interest of the cultural question, the Congress of Vienna symbolizes the return to a classical order for fifty-five years after the troubles of the revolutionary period in Europe. This late and last resurgence of the aristocracy with all its codes in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century seems socially anachronistic. In a political perspective, the return to monarchy seems to go against the progress celebrated during the Enlightenment. Indeed, far from revolutionary ideals, the rights of monarchies superseded those of the people. However shocking from a contemporary perspective that favors the rights of individuals, the result of the restored order was a successful peace. The ever-faster changes in the modern world under the pressure of globalization and interconnected communications has brought the idea of continuous progress into question. Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord, Prince of Benevento, the French

plenipotentiary in Vienna, was a survivor of an old age, but his qualities made him at ease in his time. I like to think that if he and the other diplomats were so balanced and able to have so much foresight, it is because they always considered what the French historian and geographer Fernand Braudel later named the *longue durée*, that is, the structures and characteristics that persist over a long time. And in this perspective, the importance of culture appears in full light.

I am grateful to the advisors of the Command and Staff College for sharing their knowledge on the evolution of war throughout the centuries and among the different cultures. I am particularly indebted to the staff of the Leadership Communication Skills Center for their numerous comments on my works throughout the year. I hope they will find progress in this paper. I acknowledge tribute to Dr Linda DiDesidero who stimulated my thinking through her questions and guided me to start the research and writing processes. I finally pay tribute to the remarkable depth of knowledge of Dr Douglas Streusand; the clarity and precision of his thoughts and comments are invaluable to me. All the shortcomings of this paper are obviously my own.



In the recent decades, Western states have gotten involved in conflicts without end. The fall of Saddam Hussein led Iraq to chaos, and that of Qadhafi disorganized Libya, which led to massive migrations. Although these conflicts may have been successful militarily, they were disastrous politically. They raise concerns about the political assessment of the use of force and the definition of the desired strategic end states. The strict application of the will of the winner—under the constraint of its might—has led to unstable situations. On the other hand, a negotiation considering the interests of all parties would more likely set a durable peace. It seems indeed that the decision to resort to armed conflict does not always consider the outcomes, and sometimes lacks the strategic restraint that would ensure a more stable order after war.

In 1815, the Congress of Vienna offers an example where a sound compromise enabled a 55-year peace among major powers in Europe.<sup>1</sup> Despite the obvious domination of the Allied Powers over France after Napoleon's defeat, negotiators—diplomats from every European country—did not crush France or impose humiliating conditions, however much they sought to gain from the victory. They even allowed France to keep the territory that it had acquired between 1789 and 1792, depriving it only of Napoleon's conquests. Their conception of balance of power required strategic restraint in order to avoid future territorial claims and conflicts. After signing a peace treaty with France, the European countries resolved outstanding territorial disputes through negotiation in Vienna. Kings and negotiators had understood that it was better to reintegrate the defeated country in the international order, rather than crush it. Henry Kissinger captured this idea when he wrote that the “task of statesmanship is not to punish, but to integrate.”<sup>2</sup>

The conduct of the peace negotiations in Paris and then in Vienna revealed the importance of shared political culture in achieving a durable peace. All the countries admitted to the negotiations indeed had their own interests dictated by their geographies, their own histories, and their ideals. The environment of the negotiations was complex in the sense that connections between opposed parties were numerous and did not always align with the official position stated in official meetings. Previous negotiations had tested the diplomatic skills of the diplomats in Vienna. Certainly, their common values and characteristics made them more able to communicate directly without risk of misinterpretation. In

addition, their understanding of geopolitics and political cultures of other countries made them more concerned with the interdependence across Europe. That is how the balance of power concept emerged, and it eventually led to the agreement that enabled a durable peace.

Through its analysis of the protagonists and stakes of the Congress of Vienna in 1814, this paper investigates the conditions that led the diplomats to sign the treaty that ensured peace for a relatively long period. It then suggests that diplomats should draw the lessons from that watershed congress, focusing on political culture—including specific geopolitical situations. This understanding would then help to frame end states—defined in this study as the objective to reach for conflict termination—that will enable shorter conflicts.

### **Part 1: The Congress of Vienna**

*Every statesman must attempt to reconcile what is considered just with what is considered possible. What is considered just depends on the domestic structure of his state; what is considered possible depends on its resources, geographic position and determination, and on the resources, determination and domestic structure of other states.*

-- Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored*<sup>3</sup>

Understanding the stakes of the Congress of Vienna requires considering the situation in Europe during the previous twenty years. Since the Revolutionary Wars began in 1792, French armies had fought across Europe to spread their ideals. Neighboring monarchies saw their own power threatened and so they allied against the French. Then, successful in battles, Napoleon started to expand the frontiers of the Empire. At the same time, both upsetting the established order and using it to establish its own legitimacy, he set his siblings and marshals on the thrones of newly established or conquered states. After defeating Austria and Russia in Austerlitz, he established the Confederation of the Rhine. In 1814, after an outstanding record of victories and conquests, Napoleon faced a more effective alliance of the United Kingdom, Russia, Prussia, Austria, Spain and Sweden. The Allied armies entered Paris on 31 March: they had defeated Napoleon and the French Empire had fallen.

## **1. Towards the Congress of Vienna: The Former Agreements**

The Allied Powers now had the fate of France in their hands. Either they would partition the French Empire among themselves, or they would install a regime consistent with their values and priorities. They wisely rejected the first option, because British and Austrian interests in a long-term settlement advocated in favor of the second. The two-step process led to first to the end of combats, and then to the signature of the peace treaty of Paris.

### **a. The 1814 Convention of Armistice**

The political skills and sense of opportunism of Talleyrand enabled him to take appropriate action to prepare for post-Napoleonic Europe. He did not believe that the French Emperor was serving France anymore when he realized that Napoleon had expanded the French frontiers too far to achieve a durable peace. While the war was still raging, he tried to separate the responsibility of the unrest in Europe from the French people in order to save what can be in the preparation of the coming peace treaty. When the defeat seemed inevitable, he received the Russian Tsar's guarantee that foreign countries would accept the restoration of the Bourbon family's royal authority in France. With that insurance, as vice-grand-elect, he convened the Senate for an extraordinary session on 1 April 1814. The Senate voted for the formation of a provisional government. It then justified on 3 April the deposition of emperor: "Napoleon Bonaparte ... torn apart the pact that united him to the French people." The emperor abdicated three days later. On 6 April the Senate called Louis-Stanislas-Xavier de Bourbon, brother of Louis XVI, to accept the throne of France.

The convention of Armistice signed on 23 April 1814, between the Count of Artois (brother of King Louis XVIII, future Charles X) and the quadruple alliance was the first step towards more elaborated treaties. It reflects the two ideals that would characterize the Vienna Congress. The first is the respect of the defeated country: Allies granted France its pre-1 January 1792, frontiers. The Allies were to evacuate the French recognized territories while the French armies would evacuate the places still occupied beyond these boundaries. The second characteristic is the concept of balance of power. In rhetoric typical of the diplomacy of that age, the proclaimed objective of the Armistice convention was

to “put an end to the misfortunes of Europe, and to found its rest on a just balance of forces of the States that compose it.” A formal peace agreement would follow this armistice “as soon as possible.”

The representatives that signed this convention were those who had been implementing the foreign policies of their countries during the Napoleonic wars. They were also the same ones that would conduct the negotiations at the Congress of Vienna. Talleyrand represented France; Prince Klemens von Metternich spoke for Austria; Robert Stewart, Viscount Castlereagh represented Great Britain; Prince Karl August von Hardenberg and Baron Wilhem von Humbolt defended Prussian interests; and Count Andreï Razumowski and Count Karl von Nesselrode acted in the name of Russia—though Tsar Alexander I acted mostly on his own behalf. They were all aristocrats and seasoned diplomats, who had benefitted from cosmopolitan educations. Their understanding of the subtleties of European culture enabled them to find room for negotiation.

b. The First Treaty of Paris: 30 May 1814

The first Treaty of Paris acknowledges the new political situation in France, and the importance of establishing a just balance of power in Europe. While the Allied Powers had the opportunity to impose their will to a defeated France, they realized that their long-term interest was to prevent any future bitter claims. They applied strategic restraint.

The first part of the treaty considers the political situation in France. It asserts that the restoration of the monarchy is the best way to peace. That treaty begins “in the name of the very holy and indivisible Trinity.” It thus testified a return of the traditions of the Ancien Regime, which emphasized the importance of the Christian religion. Like the armistice convention, that treaty sought to “put an end to the long turmoil in Europe and to the misfortunes of the peoples by a solid peace, founded on a just repartition of forces between Powers, and carrying in its stipulations the guarantees of its duration.”<sup>4</sup> In its introduction, the Peace Treaty acknowledges the sound decision of the French people to have placed themselves again under the paternal protection of its kings. Other countries that feared that their people would become contaminated by revolutionary ideals considered the monarchy to be a guarantee

of security and stability. The restoration of the French monarchy satisfied the victorious Allied Powers and offered them a guarantee that France would not fight them again.<sup>5</sup>

The second part of the treaty defined the territorial gains and losses of each party, and reflected their geopolitical interests. Considering a true need to balance power and establish frontiers that countries would accept, the contracting powers recognized as French territory its limits of 1 January 1792, with some small territories taken afterwards. The difference with the more advantageous limits of the Lunéville treaty of 1801 was that France had now been defeated. France, having been the most dangerous country, needed to be weakened, not so much though as to foster the development of another continental hegemon. The expansion of Holland aimed to give it “proportions that enables it to support its independence.” The treaty awarded the former Austrian Netherlands to Holland in order to give it “proportions that enable it to support its independence.” It also recognized British sovereignty over Malta and guaranteed freedom of navigation on the Rhine. These steps indicated the intent of the powers to create more stable order in Europe.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, all the Allies renounced their claims against the French government as a consequence of prior contracts made during the past wars since 1792. Likewise, France renounced its claims against Allied Powers. This provision established a clear distinction of responsibility between the French monarchy and the regimes that succeeded as of 21 September 1792, after the proclamation of the First Republic. The Allies were willing to see the episode of the French Revolution and the Empire as an interlude of violence in a peaceful European order. They did not want to hold the monarchy accountable for it.<sup>7</sup> Kissinger writes: “The [First] Treaty of Paris was thus a peace of equilibrium, based on a recognition that stability depends on the absence of basic cleavages, that the task of statesmanship is not to punish, but to integrate.”<sup>8</sup>

Article 32 of the Treaty stipulates that “Powers that were committed in the signature of that treaty will send plenipotentiaries to Vienna in the two months to come, in order to settle in a general Congress, all the arrangements that will complete the dispositions of the present treaty.”<sup>9</sup> Diplomats recognized the importance of time to reach a balanced compromise. Although the Allies intended to establish a stable order that included France, they were not yet willing to give their former adversary a role in

determining that order. The victorious Powers authorized France to send observers but not to participate. The Congress started on 18 September 1814. Talleyrand, who was to represent the interests of the French government, arrived there on 23 September. He recognized then how the Allied Powers were still hostile to France, and seemed to have already divided up Europe among themselves. Because of their good personal relations, Nesselrode and Metternich invited Talleyrand at a meeting of the *conseil des Grands*, a close-door meeting of the ambassadors of the four major powers that had defeated Napoleon: Great Britain, Russia, Austria, and Prussia. When someone used the expression “allied powers,” Talleyrand took the opportunity to redefine the position of France: “Allied? Against whom? It is not against Napoleon: he is on Elba; it is not against France: peace was made; it is certainly not against the King of France: he is the guaranty of the duration of peace. Gentlemen, let us speak honestly, if there are any more allied powers, I am superfluous here.”<sup>10</sup> As the talks went on, France formed a coalition among the diplomats excluded from the negotiations, and was eventually able to negotiate with the two main Powers, Austria and Great Britain. As a result of these negotiations, France lost some territories, but the Allied Powers left it enough power so it would not be looking for revenge.

## 2. Presentation of the Major Powers, Their Initial Claims, and Their Delegates

The Allied Power sought to reverse the reordering of Europe that Napoleon had instituted and regain lost territories. This section examines the positions of the major powers on these territorial matters. It also describes the plenipotentiaries and analyses their cultural and educational backgrounds. This perspective makes their conception of balance of power and restraint more understandable. In addition, close attention to the interests of the different stakeholders sheds light on the concessions that countries had to make to achieve a durable peace. The section is organized by country, in order to highlight the role of history and geography in understanding negotiating positions.

A controversial point among negotiating powers was the existence and extent of the remaining Poland. It had disappeared from the map as the result of the Third Partition in 1795. Napoleon had revived part of it as the Duchy of Warsaw in 1807, and Russia and Prussia wanted to take back the territory they had ceded.



Figure 1. Isabey, *Le Congrès de Vienne*, 1815.

Talleyrand ordered the French painter Isabey to paint a representation of the Congress. The scene represents Metternich's office, where all the official negotiations took place. Musée du Louvre. <https://art.rmngp.fr/fr/library/artworks/jean-baptiste-isabey-le-congres-de-vienne-encre-sepia-plume-dessin-1815>

a. Austria--The Weakened, Landlocked Multinational Empire

Austria, in the center of Europe with natural geographic frontiers, regarded itself as vulnerable to aggression from all directions. In addition, the different nations that composed Austria (Slavs, Germans, Magyars, and Italians) made the cohesion of the country more uncertain at a time when revolutionary ideals included nationalism. The German origins of the Habsburg dynasty became suspicious to the non-German subject peoples. As a consequence, Austria supported the society of the *Ancien Régime* and welcomed the restoration of the monarchy in France. It looked for the stability that would avoid the split of the country into different ethnolinguistic groups. Any upheaval could indeed be fatal to the cohesion of the country. Austria sought to contain the expansionism of its more powerful neighbors. Because of its relative weakness, Austria had to rely on international treaties for its security. They therefore advocated preventing the expansion of states that would challenge the

*status quo* and upset the balance of power. So, Austria clearly wanted guarantees that all powers would respect international agreements.

The negotiator of Austria was the seasoned diplomat Prince Klemens Wenzel von Metternich. Born in 1773, he received a typical 18th Century aristocratic education that brought him across Europe. Born in the German-speaking Rhineland, he attended university in Strasburg and was raised in Brussels. His posts as ambassador of Austria in Berlin (1803), then Saint Petersburg (1806), and finally Paris (1806-1809) completed his cosmopolitan education, as well as it developed his diplomatic talents. The Austrian emperor finally appointed him chancellor in 1809.<sup>11</sup> In his conception, a balance of power was to replace an unattainable solidarity of states in Europe, by achieving a “tolerable armistice.”<sup>12</sup> Acknowledging the paramountcy of state interests, he was what we would consider today a realist. Kissinger’s observations reflect what he learned from Metternich: “The great axioms of political science derive from the recognition of the true interests of all states; it is in the general interests that the guarantee of existence is to be found, while particular interests [...] have only a secondary importance . . . Modern history demonstrates the application of the principle of solidarity and equilibrium . . . and of the united efforts of states against the supremacy of one power in order to force a return to the common law.”<sup>13</sup>

Metternich’s experience of previous negotiations of alliances against Napoleon had proved to him how little value promises had when a firm resolution based on interest did not back them. He regarded Napoleon’s failure as the proof that force without legitimacy could not sustain an empire. In addition, he knew after the Austrian defeat in 1809 that Austria should not fight outside a coalition. The terms of the peace agreement with France were so harsh, that they left Austria so weakened that a wrong move could mean the disintegration and annihilation of the Empire. The position that Metternich used to defend Austria’s interests between 1809 and 1814 was consequently to act in a subtle manner in a very complex situation. An enhancement of the relation with France should avoid any new battle that would be fatal to the country. It meant an alignment with French injunctions against Great Britain. It should also preserve relations with countries opposing France, in order to have a share in the



negotiations that would follow the inevitable defeat of Napoleon. Metternich justified this policy as Austrian adherence to commitments made to France.

Metternich's conception of balance of power included prevention of any resurgence of revolutionary ideas that would threaten the Habsburg Empire. Its interest in Vienna is to prevent having major powers such as Prussia or Russia infringing on its borders. The threat of these two countries justifies a policy of appeasement with France, that should "remain sufficiently powerful to play its traditional role in maintaining a 'just equilibrium.'"<sup>14</sup> So, Metternich as a skilled diplomat had to negotiate for a balance of power that would meet Austrian interests. Great Britain, though for different reasons, was also seeking to establish that balance on the European continent.

#### b. Great Britain—The First Maritime and Economic Power

Secure from invasion when no country is dominating the continent, Great Britain advocated against interference in other countries' domestic institutions. It had acquired by the time of the signature of the Armistice the status of first power in Europe, because of the primacy of its economy. Great Britain had provided subsidies to encourage other countries to remain in the alliance they had formed against Napoleon. Its objective was to establish a balance of power on the European continent, to avoid the domination of a single power that could threaten its independence. The legitimacy of the regime that ruled was not as important as the need for a balance. British interests required a peaceful, but divided Europe. Castlereagh had realized in 1813 after coming to the Continent that Britain's natural ally in Europe to implement a balance of power was not Russia but Austria. However, the British conception differed from Metternich's. The British people considered it a fundamental right of each nation to have its own form of government; it therefore could not consider an intervention in another country's domestic affairs a universal right. In application, the British conception of balance of power sought to reduce the power of France and ensure that the Central European powers were strong enough to offset French capability. That policy required an increase in Prussia and Austria's power. In addition, Great Britain should maintain France under control. It should also maintain its maritime dominance. The extensive pretensions of Russia over Poland hurt the British conception of the post-Napoleonic order in Europe, because it would offset the balance. So, Castlereagh, on a personal basis, started to oppose

it. But the Parliament soon reminded him that Great Britain could not afford being at war on two fronts (it was at war with the United States in the meantime). Because British security relies so heavily on its maritime power, the protection of maritime rights would be of primary concern, as well as the security of Holland. Finally, Great Britain would like to appear as a natural mediator, as stability is its unique Continental interest.<sup>15</sup>

The British delegate to Vienna was first Lord Castlereagh.<sup>16</sup> After receiving an aristocratic education that had brought him across Europe, he exercised an authoritarian policy as Chief Secretary for Ireland. He became later Foreign Secretary in 1812. He struggled in the years prior to the Congress of Vienna to establish an alliance against Napoleon that would resist the temptation of separate peace declarations. He wanted British allies to be convinced that a British defeat would be worse for the Allies than for Great Britain itself.<sup>17</sup> In accordance with his direct character, his conception of foreign relations was that appearances are reality. He therefore could not accept the subtle and unclear position that Metternich adopted for Austria, that was trying to achieve its aims both ways. On the other hand, he could not risk a Continental peace that excluded Great Britain. Castlereagh intended to use the system of alliance he had built after the war, as a mutually restraining partnership: great powers could cooperate and in the meantime monitor, influence or restrain one another. The survival of the Alliance appears in the first separate and secret article of the First Treaty of Paris of 1814, which states that the Allied powers will determine among themselves in the Congress what would occur to the territories ceded by France.

### c. Prussia--The Expanding Country

Originally a Duchy of Poland, Prussia historically expanded its territory eastwards to the detriment of Poland. It also included some parts of the Holy Roman Empire. After the defeat of Napoleon, Prussia sought to expand westward and assert its dominance over all of Germany. Prussia was especially anxious to annex Saxony, as it had held its king prisoner since 1813. But it was also geographically in the center of Europe, and it feared the pressure of too powerful neighbors. It had indeed already suffered from the French hegemon and had lost territories. Now that Great Britain and Russia dominated Europe,<sup>18</sup> Prussia had to increase its power, while managing its alliance with these two countries. Prussia's reliance on military power, as opposed to wealth, made it respect only force. The importance of force in the negotiations reflected the personal features of the Prussian delegates.

The Prince Karl August von Hardenberg and the Baron Wilhem von Humbolt, who both represented Prussia, argued to dismantle France. The Prince had a personal thirst for revenge: Napoleon despised him so much that he demanded his dismissal from office as a prerequisite for the negotiation of the Treaty of Tilsit. He was then Prussia's state chancellor, but was almost completely deaf. Von Humbolt, the Prussian ambassador to Vienna was also present to support him. A liberal philosopher, he was also a renowned linguist who had founded the University of Berlin in 1809 and reformed the Prussian educational system. He had served in Rome and was ambassador in Vienna, and "his negotiation style was aggressive, and he was blunt for a diplomat. . . [he] also had a high-handed approach that often manifested itself in a stubborn and inflexible disposition."<sup>19</sup>

The expansionist claims of Prussia expressed interests understandable from a cultural perspective. But that did not make them legitimate.

#### d. Russia--A Power Looking for a Role in Europe

Tsar Alexander I sought to make Russia the dominant power in Europe despite its position on the Eastern periphery. He was present in Vienna, as he was also in Paris where he gave to Talleyrand his approval for a French restoration of the Monarchy, on the condition that the King adopt a constitution. Kissinger underlines that “the Tsar had been greatly influenced in his youth by his Swiss tutor, La Harpe, who had sought to raise him as the ideal ruler of the Enlightenment.”<sup>20</sup> But he also had his own unpredictable character. He was finally more interested in liberal ideas for other countries than his own. Above all, he wanted Russia to be part of Europe. His conception of the balance of powers was that Russia should become the arbiter of Europe. The new international order would then reflect the will of the Tsar, and the purity of his maxims would safeguard the structure. That conception was in complete opposition with Metternich’s, which did not place so much a premium on self-restraint.<sup>21</sup> The Russian delegate, Nesselrode, had received his education in Berlin, where he was also ambassador. Despite his presence and cultural knowledge, he seemed to have played only a minor role, as the Tsar was involved in all the negotiations.

As a major contributor to the victory against Napoleon, the Tsar claimed his right to obtain all of Poland. He wanted to establish a *fait accompli*, and thus favored the unveiling of his true intentions when the military situation had developed. Within this general framework, Alexander sought to assert Russian control over all of Poland. In order to secure Prussian concessions in Poland, Alexander supported the Prussian claim to Saxony.

#### e. France—From Desolation to a Central Role at the Negotiating Table

Representing the defeated country that had been the cause of the turmoil in Europe during the last twenty years, Talleyrand had an uncomfortable position. His objective was to make France recognized as a power legitimate to take part to the negotiations. To that end, his strategy was to establish the legitimacy of King Louis XVIII and then to insist on the importance of the respect of the law and legitimacy.

His competence made him an invaluable asset for the French King, who knew his talents and abilities. They worked together on fixing the French objectives to achieve in the Congress of Vienna. The King's instructions were precise and opposed some of the Great Powers' interests. First, Naples' legitimate king Ferdinand IV of Bourbon should rule his country, which supposes the destitution of Murat. Second, Poland should never come under Russian domination. Third, Prussia should gain neither Saxony (to protect Frederic-August, who was an ally of France) nor Rhineland. Fourth, neither Austria nor none of its Princes should reign on the states of the King of Sardinia. But the King trusted Talleyrand's skills as much as he mistrusted him. So, he secretly entered in contact with Metternich via the Austrian minister in Paris the Count of Bombelles, and told him that he did not really require that Austria fight Murat in Naples.

In order to secure the right for France to participate in the negotiations, Talleyrand sought the support of the small powers that had participated in the Sixth Coalition but were excluded from the Vienna negotiations by the major powers. With Don Pedro Gomez, Marquis of Labrador representing Spain, he urged these nations to claim their right to take part to the negotiations, on the grounds they were signatories of the Treaty of Paris. The four major Powers had then the obligation to accept the small nations in their negotiations... and Talleyrand came with them. The major Powers also burnt the minutes of earlier meetings, as they were so unfavorable to the interests of the small nations. From that moment, plenary sessions would never end in important decisions, and small countries deserted these reunions.

### 3. The Character of the Negotiators and the Evolution of Negotiations

The diplomats in Vienna had a cultural understanding of each other that facilitated their negotiations. However, they struggled to find an agreement on the fundamental principles on which the negotiations would be based.

#### a. A Common European Culture

The negotiators for the great powers shared some characteristics: they spoke the same language and shared the same aristocratic education. Far from being narrow nationalists, they served their countries with the feeling that frontiers separated nations of a same civilization as a simple convention.

Intertwined interests of European nations only separated western Europe, which had benefitted from the Enlightenment, from countries of Eastern Europe. The Habsburg empire appeared to be a sentinel of Europe at the gates of Asia.

Because French was the common language of the European aristocracy as well as the language of diplomacy, the negotiators could communicate directly. Furthermore, all diplomats negotiating in Vienna belonged to the aristocracy, and as such, were defiant towards the revolutionary ideals. They believed—or in the case of Talleyrand who served so many regimes, pretended to believe—that the restoration of monarchies was the best way to maintain order and equilibrium in Europe.

Conducting the negotiations among so many different persons with their interests, cultures, and personalities was not an easy task. Diplomats in Vienna bypassed these difficulties, emphasizing the importance of interpersonal relations. Despite their education that made them typical European aristocrats, the delegates had different personalities: Metternich and Talleyrand were elegant and eloquent, while Castlereagh was solid and cumbersome in expression. That did not prevent them all from perfectly understanding the rules of the game they had to play in Vienna. Castlereagh and Metternich had discovered in 1814 that “the only successful way to keep together was to be together, in close physical contact, and to rely more upon constant meeting than upon the ordinary courses of diplomacy.”<sup>22</sup> The new method of conducting negotiations was more in accordance with Castlereagh’s direct character. But it was also a way to avoid taking into account the interests of smaller states. The multitude of kings or delegates present in Vienna to defend their own interests indeed had raised the problematic issue of who would effectively participate in negotiations. If the “Big Four” had initially planned to conduct the negotiations between them, Talleyrand’s advocacy for the inclusion of the representatives of the smaller states in the formal negotiating session encouraged the leading

ambassadors to settle matters informally, meeting at balls or to play whist. They reached agreements before the formal plenary sessions.

In that way of achieving state's interests, diplomacy used all available assets: Vienna's secret police—maneuvered by Metternich—spied everywhere, diplomats confessed secrets in alcoves, and cuisine highlighted prestige. Talleyrand knew that and brought his own chef, Carême, to Vienna. He even replied to King Louis XVIII as he enquired about the need of further ambassadors: “I have greater need for cooks than diplomats.”<sup>23</sup> Opening their salons, women such as the Duchess of Sagan or the Princess of Bagration played a crucial role. Their houses became places where it was necessary to be seen, and attending a party or not would soon become a diplomatic sign.

Finally, the arrangement of weddings within the European aristocracy had created bonds that opened other ways of communication. Marital diplomacy had been common practice in Europe for centuries. Metternich had convinced the Austrian emperor to marry his daughter Marie-Louise to Napoleon to appease the relations between the two countries. Talleyrand had married his nephew Edmond de Talleyrand-Périgord to the younger sister of the Duchess of Sagan, with the approval of the Tsar as a grateful gift for Talleyrand's support against Napoleon. These interconnections show that, despite all the difficulties the negotiations encountered, there was always a possibility to bypass official channels if necessary.

#### b. The Arrangement of the Negotiations

If the first treaty of Paris had fixed the fate of France, the Congress of Vienna was to fix the order of the entire Europe. Two essential problems arose: (1) what legitimacy should be recognized, and (2) on what basis would territories change sovereignty. The first question highlights the complexity of the historic precedence. Talleyrand once said that disloyalty was just a matter of dates. The Allies had to choose between Bonaparte's brother-in-law Joachim Murat, to whom the Emperor had given the throne of Naples in 1808, and the Bourbon Ferdinand IV whom Murat had supplanted. Austria wanted to maintain its domination in Italy by the way of intrigues, and thus supported the government of Murat. Russia supported France's plan to restore the Bourbon Ferdinand IV to the throne of Naples, in

return for French support for Prussia in Saxony. The main consequence of the inability to decipher objectively what kind of legitimacy would be recognized echoed in the inaptitude to design the legitimate delegates for the Congress. Holding the king of Saxony prisoner, Prussia had more liberty to close the door to any protestation from the Saxon delegates.

The second question raises the responsibility of the victorious powers. The Allied Powers had paid a heavy price to defeat of Napoleon. They considered it natural that an increase of their power—would it be population (in order to at least cover the war losses) or territory—compensated their efforts. On this matter, Prussia and Russia proved their great appetites. Organizing the division of former alliances, Talleyrand used Austria to restrain Prussian and Russian expansion in Saxony and Poland. Meeting with Metternich, he proved to him that Russia's claims would threaten Austria as they would have a common border. Likewise, Prussia would have a common border with Austria if they had Saxony. The solution was then to balance the powers, and the respect of public right was the means to limit their pretensions. The peace signed on December 24, 1814 between Great Britain and the United States of America permitted the British to modify their attitude towards Russia. The suspicions of Austria and Great Britain over the Eastern Powers had grown so high that they finally signed on 3 January 1815 a secret defensive alliance treaty against Prussia and Russia. Tsar "Alexander's character, however noble, was not a sufficient guarantee against a potential abuse of Russia's power."<sup>24</sup> Great Britain opposed many Prussian claims, but it eventually supported its claims on the Rhineland in a deliberate attempt to keep France under control—which in a longer term led to the Franco-Prussian War opposing the unifying Prussia to France.

### c. The 100-Days and the Second Treaty of Paris: A Blow for France

The news of the return of Napoleon arrived in Vienna on 7 March 1815. Talleyrand immediately worked at the adoption of a declaration of Europe against the emperor, now called "the Usurper". Convinced of the final defeat of Napoleon, he wanted to maintain the legitimacy of the French King that he had worked so hard to achieve, and upon which he had based his negotiations for peace. The Tsar Alexander now regretted his imprudence towards "the Monster" that he tolerated on the Elba island. He indeed had found it amusing to keep that threat upon Western Europe.<sup>25</sup> The declaration



signed on March 13 designates Napoleon as the “enemy and disrupter of the rest of the world.”

Prussia, willing to take advantage of the situation and achieve a more complete revenge, fueled the growing concerns about France. In France, King Louis XVIII, unsure of the fidelity of his armies, finally decided to quit Paris on 19 March, leaving Paris open to Napoleon.

The return of Napoleon indicated that the French had not completely abandoned their expansionist ideals. So the “Allied Powers”, confirmed in their instinctive defiance against a powerful France, proved much harder after Waterloo. France lost territories that it had had for a long time, such as the Duchy of Bouillon, Philippeville, Marienbourg, Sarrelouis and Sarrebrück, Landau, the Gex country and Savoy. It also had to pay a compensation of 700 million Francs and undergo foreign occupation for three years. However difficult the conditions, the government of King Louis XVIII adhered to all the clauses of the treaty, and France, after the Congress of Aix-La-Chapelle in 1818, became a full member of the Concert of Europe.

The Congress of Vienna, beyond the considerations of what to do with France, had been set up to allocate the territories lost by the French Empire, and organize the European order to avoid future wars (*Figure 2*). This large objective carefully avoided interfering with wider global developments; countries were still able to wage wars outside of European soil. The aim was indeed to enable reaching an agreement that was more delimited and stable.<sup>26</sup> Despite its many imperfections, the Congress emphasized the importance of self-restraint among the winners to enable a lasting peace. The negotiations between the delegates had proved the utility of a comprehensive cultural understanding to leave no claim unaddressed. As in any successful negotiation, no one was completely satisfied, yet no one was completely dissatisfied.



Figure 2. Europe as it looked after the redistribution of territories in Vienna.  
[https://www.larousse.fr/encyclopedie/images/LEurope\\_du\\_congrès\\_de\\_Vienne/1011229](https://www.larousse.fr/encyclopedie/images/LEurope_du_congrès_de_Vienne/1011229)

## **Part 2: Lessons to End Conflicts in the 2000s**

The Congress of Vienna was eventually a success: it set the conditions for an acceptable and durable peace with France, and it installed the Concert of Europe that enabled a 55-year peace on the European continent. It was in this regard a watershed congress for international relations. Negotiators had created an environment that enabled a deeper cultural understanding of each other's countries and their interests. Could these features apply to the resolution of conflicts faced by Western countries in the 2000s? Objections should not lead us to throw the baby away with the bath water. The main lesson that policymakers seem to have forgotten is the importance of cultural factors over technical ones to establish the conditions of a durable peace.

## **1. The Relevance of the Congress of Vienna in the 21st Century**

The contemporary world differs radically from Europe in 1814. This section proves that despite some well-founded objections, policymakers and strategists can find some valuable lessons in the way rulers and negotiators of the nineteenth century dealt with the issues they had to face.

The first objection to a possible relevance of the Congress of Vienna to the resolution of today's conflicts is that diplomats today do not have the same culture. Despite the absence of an international aristocracy with family bonds as in 18<sup>th</sup> and beginning 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, the existence of common traits among today's global elites is undeniable. Resorting to cultural specificities (like wearing traditional clothes in official meetings) is more a means to assert one's identity than an obstacle to common understanding. In addition, conflicts occur worldwide and countries do not limit their areas of interest to a culturally homogenous Europe. Each delegation participating in peace negotiations has its own culture. However, the lesson of Vienna is not about denying one's cultural identity; it is about understanding others' cultures. Diplomats today are selected on the basis of their skills, and whatever the country, they have often been formed to some extent in foreign—Western—countries, and understand the Western considerations. The opposite is not true, though, for Westerners do not usually study in less powerful countries. Western diplomats have generally developed their skills and knowledge in the course of their assignments. In addition, globalization, the increasing possibilities of networks, and media developed through the Internet had two effects: it made available more information and knowledge on the specificities of different cultures, and makes global culture more homogeneous. So, the obstacles to a better understanding are not so much technical as cultural, namely our own cultural biases.

The second objection to the application of Vienna's lessons today is that the defeated country in 1815 was a major power on the Continent that constituted a major threat to the other countries. As a consequence, it was a key element for future stability. But no great power has lost a war since 1945. This statement ignores the fact that the Congress of Vienna also dealt with the fate of much smaller nations. The (initially) Allied Powers and France had to agree on the definition of their aims, that is on the way to achieve peace. They saw it in the concept of balance of power. Today, the United Nations

Organization is to guarantee the sovereignty of states. Since 2001, major powers committed themselves voluntarily in conflict areas, whether to protect the population (responsibility to protect), their national interests (resources and citizens), or ideals (democracy). Their commitment carries with it a responsibility to find an end to the conflict. Considering the cost of conflicts and the loss in prestige that accompanies a government unable to end a war it has committed itself to, governments implement every possible means to achieve decisive political action.

The third objection regards the length of the Congress of Vienna. It took these nations a year to implement a durable solution. Nowadays, the pressure of the media and the political momentum favor short term solutions and do not leave time for lengthy negotiations. On that point, the reader should keep in mind that the Congress of Vienna was not supposed to last that long. Metternich thought at first that it would last a couple of weeks, no more than eight. In regard to the length of conflicts that seem to never find an end, even a year would finally look acceptable.

So, the conditions have evolved since the Congress of Vienna in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. But the overall paradigm is not that much different. Considered from a higher perspective, the synthesis of the lessons of Vienna lies in the importance of understanding and taking into account the cultural differences to achieve a successful negotiation.

## **2. Applying the Lessons of Vienna**

The diplomats who settled the peace in Europe had a principle (the balance of power) that they applied wisely, considering the cultural differences that dictated the position of each country. The application of strategic restraint restrained the victorious powers from imposing an unbalanced peace that would not match the long-term vision of a peaceful Europe. Today, these considerations translate to (1) better taking into account the geopolitical interests of the countries when defining end states in a conflict, and (2) accepting the leader that the defeated country chooses for itself.

a. Emphasize the Geopolitical Approach When Considering the Definition of End States

*To insist on a definition of war aims in front of the enemy may not be heroic and is never popular. But to create a vacuum without necessity may lead to permanent revolution.*

-- Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored*.<sup>27</sup>

The conflict that started in Afghanistan in 2001 aimed to overthrow the Taliban regime that hosted Al-Qaeda, the terrorist organization responsible for the 9/11 attacks in the United States. The military intervention would also deny Al-Qaeda a safe base of operations. The subsequent assumption was that Afghanistan should benefit from the merits of a democracy. After more than 18 years of conflict in the country, neither the United States nor the international coalition has managed to settle the conditions to establish a durable peace under a democratic regime in Afghanistan. A casual observer would note that Afghanistan is a divided country. First, its mountainous geography reinforces local particularisms. It makes communication more difficult—especially in the winter season—and encourages the development of local traditions. Second, its population is also very divided: the ethnic repartition of the population reveals cultural distinctions within the country. In such a divided environment, how would the population consider a democracy, which Alexis de Tocqueville and others qualified as the tyranny of the majority?<sup>28</sup>

Understanding the geopolitical determinants of a country is key to achieving a durable peace. That is the major lesson that the negotiators in Vienna had understood. Their geographic knowledge matched their sharp knowledge of history. Great Britain had suffered too much from Napoleonic wars to ignore the lesson that continental unification would be detrimental to its interests. This trauma—that started in the era of Louis XIV and repeated with Hitler’s Third Reich—explains its obsession with the balance of power in Europe.<sup>29</sup> The discipline of geopolitics offers in that regard an interesting perspective. It indeed offers a comprehensive set of tools of analysis to sharpen the observation of a political entity. Refusing to admit a monocausal explication of a situation, it considers variables as different as physical and human geography. The first encompasses relief, resources, climate, geographical position (center or periphery, insularity, isolation, etc.). The second deals with identities (language, religion, ethnicity). Being at the crossroads of different sciences, this discipline enriches the

understanding of practitioners. It enables a more strategic overlook rooted in the comprehension of Fernand Braudel's *longue durée*. If policymakers and strategists are able to identify long-term trends, they will not oppose it or attempt to impose changes that would be too radical changes and result in failures. They would then finally resort to the *histoire événementielle*, understood as “the daily vicissitudes of politics and diplomacy that are the staple of media coverage.”<sup>30</sup>

b. Let the Defeated Country Designate Its Own Leader

*They may argue that their government should offer certain concessions, and portray the settlement based on these concessions as the peace that can be obtained—as if the enemy did not have his own ideas regarding peace terms and be willing, and feel able, to fight for them.*

--Fred Iklé, *Every War Must End*.<sup>31</sup>

The Iraq War started in 2003 with the intervention of a coalition led by the United States against the Ba'athist regime of Saddam Hussein. The war aims as allies emphasized them at that time were to end the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, and to seize Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) that posed a threat to the United States and its allies. American troops quickly overwhelmed Iraqi's forces, and the regime soon collapsed. Inspections proved that there were no WMD. As the coalition had reached its war aims, why did it fail to achieve peace? Getting rid of the officials of the old regime, the coalition tried to establish a new order in Iraq. This attempt to impose a ruler to the country led in turn to a civil war in Iraq, as the religious rivalries resurfaced between the Shia and Sunni communities. When Allied Powers defeated Napoleon, the French senate called for the restoration of the Bourbons. That option was not the first call of other countries, but Talleyrand had managed to show how good it would be for all Europe. It provided a good start for the peace negotiations, and more important, a recognized legitimate government. In the long run, establishing a government that the conquered population serves the interests of the victors better than imposing a settlement that will provoke lasting resentment. It sets a frame to start the negotiations talks; the population would then naturally accept the outcome of the negotiations. Supporting a popular government implies recognizing the importance of the cultural prism in understanding a country. The geopolitical analysis helps to determine the emotional significance of some territories, that may also contradict pure rational theories. Victorious

countries are wise when they apply the strategic restraint that was so useful to ensure the success of the Congress of Vienna.

### **Conclusion**

Establishing a durable peace with France, which had threatened so many European States during the Napoleonic era, meant for the Allied Powers to accept to negotiate conditions that they could have made far worse. The victorious powers first let France choose its own government, and then negotiated the conditions for peace with the newly restored monarchy that was now the legitimate government. At the Congress of Vienna, representatives all had instructions reflecting their countries' interests and culture. After months of negotiations, the diplomats eventually found an arrangement that was drawn out of the concept of balance of power. Among the complex environment of intrigue and informal connections, the geographical and political understanding of the diplomats proved key to achieve a positive outcome. The Congress indeed enabled a 55-year peace in Europe that ended only with rise of the nationalism that French armies had spread across the continent during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. At this point, it is worth noticing that the Congress of Vienna did not regard the rights of the people. Diplomats and kings drew the new frontiers without much consideration for nationalities or languages. Though it seems inconceivable today, populations counted merely as numbers in a balance. The important thing was to ensure the legitimacy of the ruling powers on the international stage. The accuracy of the lessons we drew from these international negotiations is beyond doubt, because they emphasize a constant point in the historic perspective: the prevalence of geopolitical factors. The best way to achieve a durable peace is to design an outcome that reflects long-term trends. As such, considering the cultural prism of a defeated country can help policymakers to design better tailored end states, that would in the end make today conflicts shorter.

The international community has now designed institutions to enhance the stability of the world. They are however unable to prevent conflicts from happening. Because countries that participate in a conflict have a moral responsibility to set a stable environment before disengaging, they must consider all courses of action and options in advance. A comprehensive geopolitical understanding

encompassing all the dimensions of that discipline provides a solid foundation to design viable and realistic strategic goals.



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<sup>1</sup> There is no consensus among scholars about the duration of the peace that the Congress of Vienna enabled. I consider that the Austro-Prussian war of 1866 marks the end of the peace in Europe. The Franco-Prussian war follows only four years later.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored* (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957), 142. Citations refer to the Peter Smith edition.

<sup>3</sup> Kissinger, *Restored*, 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Traité de Paris*, 30 May 1814. <http://mjp.univ-perp.fr/traites/1814paris.htm>

<sup>5</sup> *Traité de Paris*, 30 May 1814. <http://mjp.univ-perp.fr/traites/1814paris.htm>

<sup>6</sup> *Traité de Paris*, 30 May 1814. <http://mjp.univ-perp.fr/traites/1814paris.htm>

<sup>7</sup> *Traité de Paris*, 30 May 1814. <http://mjp.univ-perp.fr/traites/1814paris.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Kissinger, *Restored*, 142.

<sup>9</sup> *Traité de Paris*, 30 May 1814, Article 32. (Translation from the author) <http://mjp.univ-perp.fr/traites/1814paris.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Quoted by Jean Tulard, *Les vingt jours (1<sup>er</sup> – 20 mars 1815), Louis XVIII ou Napoléon ?* (Paris : Fayard, 2001), 106.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Klemens-Furst-von-Metternich>

<sup>12</sup> Kissinger, *Restored*, 13.

<sup>13</sup> Kissinger, *Restored*, 13.

<sup>14</sup> G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton University Press, 2001), 89.

<sup>15</sup> David King, *Vienna 1814, How the Conquerors of Napoleon Made Love, War and Peace at the Congress of Vienna* (Three rivers press, New York, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Until Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington, who had previously been appointed British ambassador to France, replaced him in February 1815.

<sup>17</sup> G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton University Press, 2001), 91.

<sup>18</sup> G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton University Press, 2001), 88-89.

<sup>19</sup> David King, *Vienna 1814, How the Conquerors of Napoleon Made Love, War and Peace at the Congress of Vienna* (Three rivers press, New York, 2008), 59.

<sup>20</sup> Kissinger, *Restored*, 90.

<sup>21</sup> Kissinger, *Restored*, 111.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Langhorne, « The Development of International Conferences, 1648-1830, » *Studies in History and Politics*, Vol.2, No.2 (1981/82),77. Quoted in G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton University Press, 2001), 103.

<sup>23</sup> Jean Orioux, *Talleyrand, ou le Sphinx incompris* (Paris : Flammarion, 1970), 613. (Translation from the author).

<sup>24</sup> Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics*, 533. Quoted in G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton University Press, 2001), 111.

<sup>25</sup> Jean Orioux, *Talleyrand, ou Le Sphinx Incompris* (Paris: Flammarion, 1970), 582.

<sup>26</sup> G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton University Press, 2001), 113.

<sup>27</sup> Kissinger, *Restored*, 123.

<sup>28</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *De la démocratie en Amérique*, Tome II, Chapitre 7, Quatrième édition (Bruxelles : Société Belge de Librairie, 1837), 241.

<sup>29</sup> Olivier Zajec, *Introduction à l'Analyse Géopolitique* (Monaco : Ed. du Rocher, 2016), 191.

<sup>30</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography* (New York: Random House, 2012), 323.

<sup>31</sup> Fred Iklé, *Every War Must End* (New York: Columbia University Press, Second revised edition, 2005), 85.

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