

Congress of Vienna and Concert of Europe

• THEME MUSIC

The Vienna settlement and Concert of Europe defined diplomacy in the 19th century. To appreciate the diplomatic issues of this period (SP), you may want to create a balance of sheet of the possible positive and negative assessments of this most important of treaties and efforts at collective security.

The Vienna Settlement, 1814-1815

After the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, the great powers of Europe met in Vienna to rebuild a stable diplomatic order. Twenty-five years of violent upheaval and warfare had convinced conservatives of the need to reestablish legitimate governments and create mechanisms to subdue revolutionary movements. Negotiations were interrupted by the escape of Napoleon from Elba and his 100 Days campaign culminating with his defeat at Waterloo. In general, the victorious powers treated France leniently – though somewhat less so after the 100 Days – so as not to saddle the restored Bourbon monarchy with a harsh treaty. The Congress of Vienna, then, was guided by the following three principles:

Legitimacy – Monarchs were restored to those nations that experienced revolutions. This meant the Bourbons back in France (Louis XVIII, brother of the executed king), Spain, and Naples. Though some monarchs conceded constitutions in deference to public opinion, power remained in the hands of conservative interests – “throne, altar, and estate” – that is, monarchy, church, and aristocracy.

Compensation – Nations that lost territory in one area received compensation in another. For example, Austria surrendered possession of the Austrian Netherlands (Belgium) but gained control of several states in northern Italy.

Balance of power – Key to the Congress’s deliberations, balance-of-power considerations led to the creation of a series of buffer states to quarantine France so that a revolution would not break out there again. The new Kingdom of the Netherlands combined the former Dutch republic and Austrian Netherlands, Prussia gained extensive territory on the Rhine, and Piedmont-Sardinia in Italy was strengthened on France’s southern border.

AP ACHIEVER

The chart below provides an overview of the key players and their nations' goals.

Nation	Leader	Goals
Austria	Klemens von Metternich (1773-1859) The dominant personality at the Congress.	As the most multiethnic of the great powers, Austria wished to repress nationalism and build a system of collective security to maintain the status quo. Owing to Metternich's association with the Congress of Vienna, the period 1815-1848 is sometimes termed the Age of Metternich.
France	Talleyrand (1754-1838) Wily political survivor who represented revolutionary France, Napoleon, and then the restored Bourbons.	France wished to be readmitted into the family of the great powers by demonstrating its return to legitimacy. Talleyrand won over Metternich by exposing the plan of Prussia and Russia to take all of Saxony and Poland without consulting the other powers.
Great Britain	Castlereagh (1769-1822) Focused on protecting British commercial interests.	Britain saw the Congress primarily as reestablishing the balance of power on the continent, its long-time goal. Britain did not wish to be involved in a kind of international police force to crush revolutions.
Prussia	Prince von Harden berg (1750-1822) Older leader often outmaneuvered by Metternich.	Least influential at the Congress, Prussia generally followed the lead of Austria, the other German power. Prussia also desired to incorporate its long-time enemy, Saxony, into its territory.
Russia	Alexander I (r.1801-1825) Began as a reformer, but grew conservative and more religious in response to revolution.	The largest of the powers and growing in influence, Russia under the once-Liberal Alexander wanted to control Poland and also gain support for a Holy Alliance of powers committed to stopping "godless" revolution.

The resolutions of the Congress of Vienna reflect the traditional diplomacy of elites redrawing the map of Europe to meet their goals. After almost nine months of deliberations and another war against Napoleon, the great powers finally completed their work in June 1815, with the following decisions:

Territorial adjustments: Some have been addressed above. The Polish-Saxon question almost led to war among the powers, but as a compromise, the Prussians gained 40% of Saxony and the Russian tsar was named King of Poland, though in reality ruled Congress Poland directly. To ensure stability in central Europe, a 39-state German Confederation was created with Austria as the dominant power. France relinquished conquests from the revolutionary wars.

Alliances: To ensure peace and stability, the great powers formed the Quadruple Alliance, which became the Quintuple Alliance with the inclusion of France after 1818. In addition, the three conservative central and eastern European powers – Austria, Prussia, and Russia – created the Holy Alliance, envisioned by Alexander I as a brake on revolutionary movements.

Indemnities: After Napoleon's return and the 100 Days, the victorious powers placed some moderate sanctions on France. The nation was required to return the art Napoleon had stolen from conquered lands and had to support an occupation army, which was removed in 1818.

Collective Security: To ensure peace and stability, the great powers agreed to meet periodically to discuss issues of mutual concern, especially related to war and revolution. This Concert of Europe provided a degree of informal security in the first half of the 19th century; however, Britain disagreed with Metternich's vision of collective security as committing the members to the suppression of revolutionary movements.

The Congress System

Several times after the meeting in Vienna, the great powers invoked the Concert of Europe to address revolutionary situations. The details of these meetings follow:

Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle, 1818: Based on French compliance with the treaty, the army of occupation was removed and France admitted to the Concert of Europe and Quintuple Alliance.

Congress of Troppau, 1820: Revolutionaries in Spain and Naples forced the kings of those nations to admit to constitutional limits on royal power: Metternich perceived the situation as the beginning of revolutionary violence and urged the other powers to sign a protocol committed to united action. When France and Britain demurred, Austria (with Prussian and Russian backing) subdued the revolt in Italy.

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Congress of Verona, 1822: Two situations preoccupied the great powers—the continuing instability in Spain and Latin American revolts against Spanish control. On the first question, the great powers, excluding Britain, authorized a French army to subdue the threats to the Spanish monarchy and punish the revolutionaries, which was successfully done. Britain strongly objected to armed intervention in Latin America, as it wished to exploit the breakup of the Spanish empire to enhance its own trade. More importantly, the United States issued the Monroe Doctrine in 1823 warning against further European colonial ventures in an American sphere of influence.

No congresses met after Verona, demonstrating the differing visions of the Concert of Europe among the Big Five. Even if the great powers failed to create an institutional structure of collective security, its spirit of cooperation lingered until 1848. In assessing the Vienna settlement, some historians point out how its failure to recognize the forces of Liberalism and nationalism ‘ led to over 30 years of continuous revolution. However, the great powers did provide a framework that avoided a general war among all of the great powers for almost a century (until 1914). Regardless of interpretations, clearly the Congress of Vienna fundamentally shaped the political and diplomatic climate for the first half of the 19th century.

• EXAMPLE BASE

Though the examples in this section go beyond what is specifically required in the Course Description, they will assist you in making an interpretation regarding the success or failure of the Concert system.