The Plot to Turn Back the Clock
Napoleon had been defeated. In 1814 he was shipped off into exile on the island of Elba. His enemies hoped that this would be the end of him. But somehow he escaped in 1815, and for a time known as “the Hundred Days”, he won battle after battle. His moment as a great conqueror had passed, however. The Battle of Waterloo was his final defeat. This time he was sent far away, to the island of Saint Helena in the South Atlantic. There he spent the rest of his days.

Now that Napoleon was gone, the scene shifted from the battlefield to the meeting room. Kings and ministers of the major powers of Europe met in Vienna, Austria, from 1814 to 1815. They redrew the map of Europe. There goal was to “turn back the clock” to the “happy days” before the French Revolution and Napoleon.

Let us see how they proposed to return to those good ole days. Here, we sit in on a meeting of Czar Alexander I of Russia, Prince Metternich of Austria, Viscount Castlereagh of Great Britain, and Tallyrand of France. The latter had served the king, French Revolutionary force, Napoleon, and now the counter-revolutionary forces.

Ask yourself why they wanted to turn back the clock. Do you think it was possible to do so? How would they prevent another rise of Napoleon?

The Congress of Vienna July 1815

**Casterleagh** There is one thing we call agree on, things have changed in Europe. We need to return to the days before the French Revolution. With the end of Napoleon we have turned back the clock to the way it was before the revolution.

**Tallyrand** Things change but everything remains the same. I have lived through all of it. I was a member of the First Estate, a Roman Catholic bishop, in the Ancien Regime, a diplomat, first for the revolutionary government, then Napoleon. Now I represent the restored Bourbon government of France here at the Congress of Vienna.

**Casterleagh** Don’t be a fool Tallyrand. Things will never be the same. We can try, but the French Revolution and Napoleon will always be with us.

**Metternich** Don’t say that. Thank God Napoleon is gone. We’ve shipped him off to St Helena this time. I could not sleep if he were as close as Elba. Put that man on the battlefield and you never know what might happen. He took boys and gave them guns. Somehow he won ten battles in twenty days! That man is dangerous!

**Tallyrand** This only goes to show that when a man rises from the lower classes chaos rules. We must prevent this from happening again by requiring that only those born of pure noble blood may sit on the thrones of Europe as rulers.

**Metternich** Ah, your highness, we have chosen old Louis, the dead king’s brother, to sit on the throne of France. King Louis XVIII will do our bidding, and prevent democracy from rearing its ugly head. There is no question that he is a legitimate ruler. It was a blessing that there was at least one real Bourbon left in France.
Czar Alexander. Not clever, Metternich—we were not clever at all. We are lucky that Louis happened to be available. The clever thing was to make it look as though the French people were calling Louis back to the throne. What fools they were! Now he is Louis XVIII. Stupidly, he thinks that he was made king of France by the grace of God.

Metternich. He looks like a fool and acts like a fool but he’s our fool. There will be no more change in Europe. The common people will never rule our nations. They will never be given a chance to gain control. We must keep the mob in its place. LEGITIMACY-inherited rank and privilege—that is the answer! (he says pounding the desk with his fist) We must never forget that.

Castlereagh. I repeat: You cannot turn back the clock! We can try to hold back the hands of the clock. We can try to prevent changes. But gentlemen, the world is not the same. It never can be!

Metternich (angry). Wrong again Castlereagh! We are going to keep things exactly the way they are. We will build a supportive international system to make sure we crush any revolutionary thoughts. Everything we do here in Vienna is to support one goal: Keep things as they are. We will make change and revolution impossible if we all join together in an international coalition and work for our common aims.

Talleyrand (points to a map of Europe.) Look at this map of Europe. The countries of our continent are all locked in. There is simply no room for change. No new nation can arise. Notice how Italy is broken up into many parts. The same is true for the area of German speaking peoples in Central Europe. We have divided this area into 38 weak states so that Austria can dominate the area. France is defeated, but rather than leave a power vacuum we have kept France strong. That way France Britain and Austria can prevent Russia or Germany from getting any expansionist ideas. We don’t want her moving into Central Europe.

Czar Alexander. I am offended by your assumption that we Russians are out for power.

Frederick William III of Prussia. And I resent your insinuation that the German states would become a threat to peace. Our ambitions go no further than annexing Saxony.

Castlereagh. I wonder—are we really clever here? Belgium ruled now by the Netherlands, Norway ruled now by Sweden? Do you think that will keep the power balanced? England can not be part of any alliance which crushes democratic movements. It is not to our advantage to support one side or another.

Frederick William III. Nonsense! Who suffers from change? We who have created legitimate governments are the ones who must pay. Look what happened in your own country, Great Britain, during your American revolt.

Talleyrand. Do you think that those who have once tasted freedom will forever be satisfied with rule by others?

Metternich (Angry). Enough talk of freedom and revolution! Britain may help, but it will not be part of our plans. We will arrest anyone who supports terrorist acts.
You can arrest a Liberal, but it is hard to arrest an idea. Metternich!
Napoleon spread the ideals of the French Revolution too far and wide. Now every man and
woman believes in the idea of equality under the law.
Some believe that there should be equality of property. Can you imagine a world run on that
impossible notion!
Listen Metternich, we in Great Britain certainly support your idea of a Balance of Power among
the states of Europe, but we can not go so far as to intervene in the affairs of other countries in
order to put down Liberal ideas. Britain has had its own Glorious Revolution. We are a
constitutional monarchy. We believe in human rights and property rights. So we can't keep
others from pursuing these goals. Surely you understand our position. We will support you in
maintaining a balance of power among nations, but we can not intervene within nation states.

Metternich:

But we can turn back the hands of time with enough force. Keep your democratic disease
contained on your island or soon you'll have women voting.
(Everyone laughs at the idea of women voting)

Talleyrand:

What can we all agree on? Legitimacy—we can all agree on that. Only legitimate rulers must
occupy the thrones throughout Europe. The Bourbon ruling family can be placed in Spain and
Naples and Louis XVIII shall sit on our French throne.

Metternich:

But we in Austria think that France shall have to pay the price for the damage done by Napoleon.
Indemnity must be the included. Those who fought on the side of Napoleon must pay. For
example, Denmark fought on Napoleon's side; thus, we should give Denmark to Sweden who fought Napoleon.

Talleyrand:

We can work out the details later. But let me caution you. If we make France too weak it will
only encourage war.

Czar Alexander:

What do you mean?

Talleyrand:

Remember the Thirty Years War when central Europe had no strong power. Catholics and
Protestants fought with each other and devastated the area. It was one of the most destructive
wars in history. When there is a power vacuum there is always a power play by nations seeking
to grow stronger. For balance we must allow France to be somewhat strong.

Czar Alexander:

Your balance of power idea sounds like Montesquieu—

You English are too accepting of these Enlightenment notions. Your talk is blasphemy. Equality and unity are
transcendent. We should not separate the power of the State. We must strengthen the state into
a mighty fist. The problem of the world is that it is not united under one transcendent principle, a
sacred principle. We in Russia believe that religion and state must be united under a strong
monarch.

Let us form a new alliance dedicated to these principles—a HOLY ALLIANCE. Without religion
the whole society will break apart. Is it not true that in England families are separating and
women are going to work in factories instead of spinning at home. Children are working too. It
is a disgrace!

Talleyrand:

You should thank the French for bringing an end to German fragmentation. When
Napoleon found you he took all of your many principalities, ecclesiastical states and free cities
and consolidated them.
Metternich:
Yes, but he gave the kingdom of Westphalia to his brother Jerome. However, you are right—he did do the German speaking people a favor. The resentment of the Germans against the French gave the Germans a common enemy. This has brought us unity and a call for German speaking people to form one nation under Austrian leadership.

King Frederick William:
Metternich, we in Germany do not need your Austrian leadership. Prussia, not Austria should lead.

Castlereagh:
Keep it up gentlemen. We British love it when you Germans fight among yourselves.

King Frederick:
I have listened to enough of this talk. Who do you British think you are fooling with this balance of power idea? You English want the states on the continent to fight among themselves so that you can build your industrial power on your island. You want to dominate the world with your technology.

Castlereagh:
And what would your policy be in our position? Do you remember how Napoleon almost defeated us with his blockade around the island. You are right. We want no power stopping our trade. Trade is our lifeblood.

King Fred. Will III.
Blood! That is what we Prussians understand. We are a race of warriors. Your mystical talk of moral principle is childish Alexander. We in Prussia want to strengthen our army and build a the world’s largest navy. Today it is iron that rules. Iron ships, iron weapons.

BLOOD AND IRON that is our policy!

1. How does Britain differ from Russia and Austria in their position regarding intervention in sovereign nations? Why?

2. Despite the defeat of France after Napoleon’s fall, why does Tallyrand insist France should remain a strong intact nation? Do you think this argument valid?

3. Czar Alexander makes a case for an alliance of nations organized on the principle of religion—a Holy Alliance. This kind of argument is known as a moral imperative or appeal to morality. Should nations set foreign policy based upon morality?

HERE ARE THREE PRINCIPLES DIRECTING A NATION’S FOREIGN POLICY

BALANCE OF POWER  SELF INTEREST/REAL POLITIK  MORAL IMPERITIVE