METTERNICH, CONSERVATIVE EUROPHILIA AND CONTEMPORARY EUROPE: SOME ABSTRACTIONS FROM *A WORLD RESTORED: METTERNICH, CASTLEREAGH AND THE PROBLEMS OF PEACE, 1812-1822* BY HENRY KISSINGER

Muhammad Ahsan

Abstract

This article attempts to apply Henry Kissinger's inferences that he offers at the conclusion of his work A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace, 1812-1822 on contemporary European state of affairs. It is divided into two parts. The first part gives an extensive review, whereas, the succeeding one builds the case on the arguments as presented in the final chapter 'The Nature of Statesmanship'. Moreover, it is hypothesised that just as the period immediately after the liquidation of the Napoleonic empire was 'transitory'[1], the current age too finds itself in a sort of 'transition'. Metternich and those who belonged to his school of thought held a conservative conception of European unity. On the other hand, the modern Europhiles propound a post-1945/89 liberal conception. Irredentist and pugnacious nationalism succeeded the era of Metternich. The existing Brussels system may not be substituted by such a violent setting, however, this 'transition' will stabilize in a comprehensively different arrangement.

Key Words: Metternich, Conservative Europhilia, Populism

Statecraft is a poisoned chalice. There are never good choices. The job of a statesman is to constitute and sustain an order amidst international entropy. He must play with the cards he is dealt. He does not have the luxury merely to speculate like an armchair philosopher, for his is a job that entwines speculation and action. Thus, Kissinger lays out his case for conservative statesmanship in 'A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace (1812-1822)'.

[1] Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace 1812-1822* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1957), 320.

French revolutionary commotion had catastrophically altered continental geopolitics. Monarchies and Royalties were desperately gasping for air to escape radical asphyxiation. Not only did events in Paris radicalize a whole generation, the appearance of Napoleon raised the proportion of trouble already at hand.

From the outset, Kissinger makes a clear distinction between 'legitimate' and 'revolutionary' order. The former carries a historical context and is grounded soundly in tradition, whereas, the latter subverts the customary flow by unilaterally altering the rules of engagement. Besides, once order is restored, it becomes all the more important to keep the status-quo protected from ambitious allies. The obliteration of enemy is not the principle assignment. It's the *manner* in which it is done. Metternich perceived France and French Empire as entirely different entities. The country, after pushed back into its pre-revolutionary margins, becomes a valuable component in the overall balance of power. A vacuum is avoided at every step.

The book comprises of seventeen chapters. It also provides rich bibliography at the conclusion for further exploration. The initial pages justify the need to revisit the events of early 19th century in the "age faced with the threat of thermonuclear extinction"[2]. Written in the 1950s when Axis' annihilation by the hands of Allies was still fresh, the work entices its reader to make some interesting analogies. The 'problems of peace' had replaced the problems of war. An erstwhile ally (read: Soviet Union) attempts to tweak the post-war compromise. To stop it dead in its tracks, the most status-quo of the allies (read: The United States and the United Kingdom) rehabilitate their former adversary (read: Germany).

The first two chapters after introduction try to unlock the political personalities of Metternich and Castlereagh. Kissinger grounds their approaches to peace making upon their domestic historical contexts. Both desire the same goal i.e. a lasting equilibrium. Nevertheless, they perceive it from entirely distinctive vantage points. A body of land (Britain) surrounded by water and separated from the rest of the continent would not bother much about the 'morality' or 'legitimacy' of the system as long

[2] Ibid, 1.

as it effectively prevents a hegemon from undertaking any unilateral adventure. On the contrary, a country (Austria) situated in the middle of the continent at the crossroads of east-west confrontation would have to always endeavour beyond political consensus. This equilibrium must be baptized by 'legitimacy' and 'tradition' and this is where Allies may have to face the spectre of intervention to defuse social upheaval.

The author introduces Metternich, as 'The Continental Statesman'. He deftly manoeuvres Austrian Empire from apparently pro-French neutrality to custodianship of post-Napoleonic consensus. The "conservative conscience"[3] of Europe, he rests initiative with the Cabinets not with the masses. The stability of polyglot Austrian Empire hinges on an international structure that expressly disavows nationalism as the basic premise. It should passionately uphold the sanctity of treaty obligations.

Viscount Castlereagh is referred to as 'The Insular Statesman' who though personifies British aversion to continental entanglements, goes a step or two further and isolates himself domestically.

An Irishman, he enjoyed a formidable standing amongst his colleagues. He cut his teeth on decisively crushing the Irish Rebellion (1798) which went a long way to hone his credentials as a reliable force against popular mobilization. He was to act as bridge between Europe and British political establishment. "Icy and reserved, Castlereagh walked his solitary pat, as humanly unapproachable as his policy came to be incomprehensible to the majority of his countrymen. It was said of him that he was like a splendid summit of polished frost, icy, beautiful, and aloof, of a stature that nobody could reach and few would care to. It was not until his tragic death that the world was to learn the price of solitude."[4]

Castlereagh's chief objective was to preserve British maritime superiority in the high seas. An invincible navy is the only assurance for an island nation against a potential aggressor. He was censured for dragging Britain too much into European affairs. Still, he was adamant that British participation was crucial. He calculated that sans British involvement, the Allies might not take cognizance of its strategic interests.

[3] Ibid, 231.
[4] Ibid, 30.

Henry Kissinger then moves to elaborate 'Political Equilibrium' in *Metternichean* terms. In December 1812, Napoleon's retreat from Russia had amply demonstrated his impotence. It had emboldened his previous victims. Metternich understood that time was ripe to make full use of Austrian geographic position. Austria had an 'auxiliary corps' in Polish territory, initially to secure the rare of Grande Armée, then after its retreat to hinder any Russian retaliatory advance. However, Austria would strictly manoeuvre under bilateral parameters it had with Napoleon. Here again, Metternich's conduct pointedly differentiates between a cabinet decision and popular one. It was not as an avenger of Austerlitz (1805) that he would now extract concessions but as one contractual party relaying its concerns to another; lest we forget that Francis II's daughter, who happened to be Marie Louise, was queen consort of French Empire.

At the very same time, Prussia and Russia were eager to acquire a pre-war status. In guise of Polish redressal, Tsar Alexander I had been contemplating influence beyond Vistula. Likewise, Prussian self-confidence could have tempted Berlin to make nationalist inroads into sovereign German principalities. Much as he detested another French campaign in the east, restraining Bonapartist victims topped Metternich's agenda.

Indeed, it was his industry to position Austria first as an intermediary between France and her adversaries then when France terminally wounded as a mediator of post-Napoleonic order.

Castlereagh was not impress by Metternich's peace overtures to Napoleon. As far as he was concerned, a separate peace was out of the question. If Metternich had shared all the subtleties of his plan with his British counterpart, the latter would have surely nodded his approval. But initial signals from the continent were rather ambiguous at best. Britain would accept nothing less than a France of 1792, confined in her pre-revolutionary frontiers. Yet, an increasingly volatile Alexander I demanded a cautionary approach. The last thing Britain wanted was to encourage another Bonaparte to embark on a juggernaut across the continent.

Hitherto, Britain's principle goal was the restoration of equilibrium even if it could be achieved with Napoleon. However, as he became acquainted

with Metternich's mode of policy, there was a realization that "the security of Great Britain was but an aspect of the European equilibrium."[5]

Napoleon's intransigence, nonetheless, complicated matters. He refused to put a cap on his ambitions and decided to negotiate with cavalry and artillery. He began hostilities in the spring of 1813. The campaign dragged on for a year. The Sixth Coalition ultimately prevailed and the Corsican was exiled to Elba in the summer of 1814. Although he escaped and managed his way into Paris, Waterloo (1815) finally buried his grandeur.

The House of Bourbons reclaimed their lost throne after almost two decades. Louis XVIII installation underlined the concept of 'legitimacy' that Metternich was so determined to uphold. According to the Austrian Prince, France was no longer a revolutionary state. It had been re-knitted into its historical context.[*]

Having said that, the work was only half done. The menace of patriotic underground societies had not gone anywhere. A whole generation had got radicalized when the French decided to off with their Monarch's head. A quilt of conservatism was needed to protect European rulers from the cold of radicalism. Goethe summed up this age, "I thank God that I am not young in so thoroughly finished a world".[6]

Conversely, Metternich had no such sigh. Never again, under his watch would there be a successful popular rebellion. Accordingly, it would require concerted intervention in affected territories. Hence, when a student of University of Jena assassinated Kotzebue, a monarchist writer, Metternich struck back with 'Carlsbad Decrees'. Universities were brought under heavy surveillance. The authorities were asked to keep an eye on dissident activities. He was to leave no stone unturned.

Tsar Alexander I's idea of a 'Holy Alliance' based on the principles of Christian brotherhood was too eccentric for Metternich. Yet, it was in instrument to keep an unstable Tsar with significant forces on his side.

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[5] Ibid, 105.

[*] A France that is not beyond the Rhine, the Pyrenees and the Alps.

[6] Will Durant, *The Story of Philosophy* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1962), 300.

Britain would tolerate an assembly now and then to *informally* discuss continental issues but to expect a periodic participation in a system of 'Concert' was beyond the realm of reason. On Castlereagh's part, he was getting increasingly lonely on the policy front.

Then came the Greek insurrection. The Greeks had revolted against an oppressive Ottoman rule. They expected a Christian Europe to come to their aid. Still, Metternich would have none of it. Notwithstanding his faith, Ottoman Sultan represented a legitimate seat of power[7] and assistance to beleaguered Greeks could ignite a similar set of events in southern Austria.

Tsar Alexander I shared Greeks' Orthodox faith. His enthusiastic Greek foreign minister Capo d'Istria pressed his monarch to act in support of his religious kin. Obviously, it was an alarming prospect not only for Metternich but also for Britain. The latter had strategic interests in the Mediterranean that hinged on the stability of Ottoman Empire.

The narrative ends with Castlereagh's suicide on August 12, 1822. With his demise, a part of Metternich's delicate conservative edifice crumbled. His presence in the Alliance was a powerful counterpoise against an unstable Tsar. Henceforth, the 'problems of peace' would have to be tackled by Metternich alone.

In the following excerpt Henry Kissinger sums up the gist of conservative statesmanship,

> This book has dealt with conservative statesmen of countries with traditionalist social structures, of societies with sufficient cohesion so that policy could be conducted with the certainty conferred by the conviction that domestic disputes were essentially technical and confined to achieving an agreed goal. This enabled Metternich to pursue a policy of "collaboration" between 1809 and 1812 without being accused of treason and Castlereagh to negotiate with Napoleon without being charged with "selling his country". Statesmanship thus involves not only a problem of conception but also of implementation, *an*

[7] Henry Kissinger, *A Word Restored,* 288.

> *appreciation of the attainable as much as a vision of the desirable* [author's italics]. The description of the efforts of Castlereagh and Metternich to *harmonize the just with the possible* [author's italics] and the international with domestic legitimization was their story as statesmen. Their failure to achieve permanence for that which they held most dear was their story as men.[8]

Unbridled righteousness is more dangerous than wickedness. Politics is all about regulating the former.

Order precedes freedom. Social upheaval breaks free of the evolutionary continuum. A call to mass action is inherently hostile to reconciliation, the backbone of ordered freedom. For continental revolutionaries, back then, a government was just when it *catered to general will*. To a Lockean libertarian, it was a *compromise* (Freedom in Britain) between an individual and his government where both parties accept each other's necessary existence.

French revolution was one of the most tumultuous periods in European history. 'A World Restored' is, arguably, its finest interpretation.

The nature of modern European conservatism

In a way, much of contemporary conservatism is an attempt to radically alter liberal internationalism that appeared remarkably formidable at the conclusion of the 20th century. Liberal democracy faces a conservative rebellion. On both sides of the Atlantic, emphasis seems to have shifted in favour of populism. In an ironic twist, the 'elite' today finds itself in a similar tight spot the kind of which haunted Messrs Castlereagh and Metternich. The cosmopolitan Metternich defied the spectre of violent nationalism. His reactionary conduct was loathed and he became synonymous with all that was rotten and decayed. He called on the monarchs of his day to unite in the face of liberal/nationalist insurgencies[9].

[8] Ibid, 330.

[9] Béla Menczer, *Catholic Political Thought, 1789-1848* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962), 155.

Likewise, today, in the eyes of conservative radicals the liberal congregation personifies indifference, naivety and short-sightedness.

History never repeats itself in totality. Nor is it an intention of this treatise to search for parallels. Yet, what is striking about the two periods is their *transitory* nature. 19th century conservatives were desperately trying to resuscitate an order, which was fatally wounded. In the same spirit, modern liberal order is undergoing a struggle against a generation that scarcely finds solace in post-1945/89 globalism. Aggressive and irredentist jingoism succeeded the age of Metternich. The 'solidarity' of workers, the trans-national message of Marxism could not stop factory men from incinerating each other in the trenches during the First World War. The wars of Prussian unification triggered a catastrophic frenzy that ended with the Nazi surrender half a century later. It took almost 100 years for the spontaneity of 1848 to stabilise and that too with the help of a revolutionary Empire (USSR).

What will be the tapestry of international affairs when this transitory period stabilises? Are we going to find ourselves in another vicious circle of mobilisations and counter-mobilisations? Even a cursory look at the affairs of Europe discourages any such proposition.

Having said that, the supranational consensus in Europe has, arguably, been under sustained assault from organised Euroscepticism for the several years[10]. Britain is in a process of divorce from the European Union. The eastern Europeans and the Baltic states demand greater United States military presence to deter any Russian advance.

There are powerful diversions that keep the Europeans away from fierce confrontations among themselves. One of those distractions is the threat from terrorism.

Immigration, xenophobia and nostalgia occupy this 'transitory' era. It may be an overly unsophisticated way of looking at things but it is an endeavour to display affairs as they appear.

[10] "How 2008 changed everything", available from https://geopoliticalfutures.com/how-2008-changed-everything/.

Kissinger writes,

> To Metternich's contemporaries the unity of Europe was a reality, the very ritualism whose invocation testified to its hold on the general consciousness. Regional differences were recognised, but they were considered local variations of a greater whole. Unity was not yet equated with identity, nor the claims of the nation with the dictates of morality. All of Metternich's colleagues were therefore products of essentially the same culture, professing the same ideals, sharing similar tastes. They understood each other, not only because they could converse with facility in French, but because in a deeper sense they were conscious that the things they shared were much more fundamental than the issues separating them. When Metternich introduced the Italian opera in Vienna, or Alexander brought German philosophy to Russia, they were not being consciously tolerant or even aware that they were importing something "foreign". The ideal of "excellence" still was more important than that of origin. Thus the Russian Prime Minister, Capo d'Istria, was a Greek, the Russian ambassador in Paris, Pozzo di Borgo, was a Corsican, while Richelieu, the French Prime Minister, had been governor of Odessa. Wellington gave military advice to Austria in its campaign against Murat, and in 1815 both Prussia and Austria asked Stein to serve as their ambassador with the Assembly of the Confederation. And Metternich with his cosmopolitan education and rationalist philosophy, Austrian only by the accident of feudal relationships, could be imagined equally easily as the minister of any other state. If he had any special ties to Austria, they derived from a philosophical not a national identification, because Austria, the polyglot Empire, was macrocosm of his cosmopolitan values. "For a long time now," he wrote to Wellington in 1824, "Europe has had for me the quality of a fatherland [*patrie*]."[11]

[11] Ibid, 320-21.

Now juxtapose this above-mentioned state of affairs with the mechanism of the European Union. A Polish, Italian, or Luxembourgish Europhile may today discover himself/herself to be in comparable conundrum. How to sustain its relevance?

The EU, like Metternich, revels in cosmopolitanism and transnationalism (of a liberal kind) but it increasingly appears to be living on borrowed time. The circumstances of post-1989 optimism have collapsed. Brussels could soon be a relic of the past.

Modern Euro-conservatives reminds one of the liberal revolutionaries of early 19th century inasmuch as they too have a transnational outlook. Just as Byron, Shelley and Keats eulogised the Greek uprising against the Ottomans, French National Front, Austrian Freedom party, German Alternative für Deutschland and Dutch Partij voor de Vrijheid[12] share a mutual disdain for the Brussels consensus. This ideological alliance identifies Muslim immigration into the continent and institutional supra-nationalism as its principle adversaries. It espouses a distinct kind of European-ness. The one that closely identifies itself with Christianity.

Here it is pertinent to share an excerpt from T.S Eliot's *Christianity and Culture*,

> The dominant force in creating a common culture between peoples each of which has its distinct culture, is religion. Please do not, at this point, make a mistake in anticipating my meaning. This is not a religious talk, and I am not setting out to convert anybody. I am simply stating a fact. I am not so much concerned with the communion of Christian believers today; I am talking about the common tradition of Christianity which has made Europe what it is, and about the common cultural elements which this common Christianity has brought with it. [. . .] It is in Christianity that our arts have developed; it is in Christianity that the laws of Europe have—until recently—

[12] "Marine Le Pen leads gathering of EU far-right leaders in Koblenz", available from https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/21/marine-le-pen-leads-gathering-of-eu-far-right-leaders-in-koblenz.

> been rooted. It is against a background of Christianity that all our thought has significance. An individual European may not believe that the Christian faith is true, and yet what he says, and makes, and does, will all spring out of his heritage of Christian culture and depend upon that culture for its meaning. Only a Christian could have reproduced a Voltaire or a Nietzsche. I do not believe that the culture of Europe could survive the complete disappearance of the Christian faith. And I am convinced of that, not merely because I am a Christian myself, but as a student of social biology. If Christianity goes, the whole of our culture goes.[13]

Nevertheless, this author does not maintain that this conservatism is in any way theological or clerical. On the contrary, it is asserted that in its search for a distinct outlook vis-à-vis the European Union or contemporary Liberalism, it possibly will place itself close to a classical more gothic conception of Europe. And it is this ideological skirmish that lies ahead. The current supranational and Europhile elites may have to face the task to conceptually redefine the continent.

Conclusion

This article has ventured to relate Henry Kissinger's interpretations, which he provides in the conclusion of *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace, 1812-22* with the contemporary state of affairs. Juxtaposition has been attempted to connect the Metternich era with the present day Europe. The study asserts that the continental consensus (concert of Europe) after Napoleonic wars sought a restoration of traditional/conservative governments and political system that were in smithereens after Bonapartist export of French revolution. At that time, it was a trans-national scheme against popular movements to overthrow monarchies. Today, the roles have been reversed in the sense that a supra-national liberal idea (European Union), conceived at the end of the Second World War, faces far-right/nationalist populism even in the founding member states of the EU.

[13] T.S. Eliot, *Christianity and Culture* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1976), 199-200.