

Collapse of the concert of europe



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

To What Extent Can The Collapse Of The Concert Of Europe Be Attributed To The Crimean War (1853-1856)?

The collapse of the Concert of Europe can be attributed to the Crimean War to a limited extent as there were many other factors which acted to undermine the Concert, causing instability and disputes amongst the nations involved. Although the Crimean War can be identified to have been a major instance in which participating countries disregarded their policies of peace in pursuit of national interest, this was not as significant to the collapse as earlier factors which essentially rendered the Concert obsolete. The rise of European nationalism and the conflicting ideology and differing aims of the countries involved created the unstable conditions for both the deterioration of the concert and the outbreak of the Crimean War. Therefore the Crimean War can be viewed as a final trigger, but not a sole instigation of collapse.

The 18th Century nationalistic movement which was beginning to assert a strong hold among many European countries, acted to undermine the concert by threatening stability throughout Europe. In particular, the revolutionary upheavals of 1848 seriously weakened the Concert by demanding that frontiers established in the Congress of Vienna to be reviewed. In the Hungarian revolution of 1849, riots on the 15th of March by Magyar nationalists in Pest-Buda, now Budapest, the capital of Hungary, demanding Hungary's political independence from Austria resulted in the resignation of the Austrian Prince Metternich, a key personality in the negotiations in the Congress of Vienna. In a letter to Tsar Nicolas I of Russia in March 1848, a primary source informing of his resignation, Metternich describes the social crises as a ' torrent... no longer within the power of man'. Revolutionary upheavals were also apparent in France, Italy,

<https://assignbuster.com/collapse-of-the-concert-of-europe/>

Germany, Switzerland and Poland. The balance of power maintained in Europe was shifting, and as expressed by Metternich, the Concert of Europe had little influence over it. This largely undermined the Concert's objectives, as stated in Article VI of the 1815 Quadruple Alliance between Britain, Austria, Prussia and Russia which formed the basis of the Concert, it was the responsibility of the ' High Contracting Powers... to renew at fixed intervals... meetings consecrated to great common objects and the examination of such measures as at each one of these epochs shall be judged most salutary for the peace and prosperity of the nations and for the maintenance of the peace of Europe'. As peace was not being maintained, the concert was, even at this point, somewhat defunct. Furthermore, this movement acted as an important impetus for the political unification of Italy in 1861 and Germany in 1871. Owing to the development of 18th Century nationalism, Europe was geographically altered as countries gained their independence. Consequently, European diplomacy was also altered causing a weakening of the concert, especially as conflict arose between the countries involved regarding intervention in revolution. iHu

A fundamental division amongst members of the Concert of Europe, caused by conflicting ideological perspectives regarding intervention against revolutionary movements, acted to undermine the relationship between the countries. A foremost concern for the preservation of peace was the manner of dealing with revolutions and constitutional movements as many statesmen feared the ideology of the French Revolution was still a powerful influence and as settlements in the Congress of Vienna had failed to satisfy nationalistic and constitutionalistic ambitions. Austria and Russia maintained

it was the responsibility and right of the great powers to intervene and impose their collective will on states threatened by internal rebellion, with the Austrian diplomat Metternich stressing that revolution was a 'terrible social catastrophe' and believed that 'only order produces equilibrium'. However, Britain did not wish to intervene in internal disputes and instead pursued a less reactionary policy. Britain's foreign secretaries, Castlereagh and later, Canning, acted to distance Britain from the policies of the continental powers with Canning clearly stating that 'England is under no obligation to interfere, or assist in interfering, in the internal affairs of independent states'. Thus, Britain disputed intervention within the Congress of Troppau in 1820, a response to revolts in Spain, Portugal, Piedmont and Naples, and at the Congress of Laibach in 1821 where Austria and Russia had prepared to mobilise soldiers against Italian revolts. The tension which resulted from these disputes led to Britain's increased isolation from Austria, Prussia and Russia while France maintained relations with both sides of the divide. Even though in 1825, a final Congress was held at St Petersburg in an attempt to resolve these disputes, only Austria, Prussia and Russia actively participated revealing the large extent to which the Concert had been weakened.

Despite the assertion that countries within the concert were acting for the greater interest of all of Europe, due to world economies becoming geopolitical, with a focus on imperialism, colonialism and economic rivalry, the individual interests of countries revealed cracks in the system. Britain's particular opposition towards intervention in Latin American revolutions was based on the grounds that Britain would be forgoing trade profit from the

Spanish if rebellions ended there, and hence, refused to cooperate on the grounds of nationalistic interest which existed despite the concert. Geopolitical competition and jealousy between European nations became particularly apparent in their decision to prohibit the entry of all foreign warships into the straits between Bosphorus and Dardanelles. As a reward for Russian military assistance against Egypt, Russia was rewarded with advantageous access to these straits by the Ottoman Empire in the Treaty of Unkiar-Skelessi in 1833, which closed the Dardanelles off to “any foreign vessels of war” other than Russian. This allowed Russian commercial vessels free access into the Mediterranean, a significant benefit for Russian export trade particularly considering the growing importance of ports such as Odessa in the Ukraine. The Concert was indignant of Russia’s access to the straits and so an attempt to inhibit Russian expansionism, the straits convention was held in 1841 in which it was declared that no country should be in an advantageous position regarding the use of the straits. Furthermore, European nations were competing for raw materials, markets and land in order to fuel growing populations. Russia was still eager to increase its influence in the Balkans, and to gain control of the straits between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea then under Turkey’s control. Britain and France viewed Russian control of the straits as a threat to their own trade interests, and Austria was uneasy about Russia’s growing influence in the Balkans. These tensions regarding the control of the Balkans in turn compounded the tension which already existed in the practically obsolete concert, and ultimately led to the outbreak of the Crimean war, in which the remnants of the Concert expired.

The outbreak of the Crimean War in 1853 signified the downfall of the Concert of Europe as the great powers engaged in war with one another over matters of national interest. In making an expansionary thrust at the Ottoman Empire, Russia disregarded any pretence of backing an altruistic balance of power. The causes of the Crimean War conflicted with the doctrine of the concert as an aspect of the preservation of the balance of power in Europe had been directed at preventing a single nation from gaining control of the Ottoman Empire, which was intended by Metternich to be a solution to the Eastern Question. As Russia sought to take exploit the decaying Ottoman Empire, in effect, it undermined the remnants of the Concert and the balance of power, leading to France and Britain, along with some assistance from Sardinia engaging in war to ironically, maintain peace in Europe. Effectively, this simply acted to sacrifice the Concert system with the war having the highest casualty rate of any European conflict between the Congress of Vienna in 1815 and 1914, the Outbreak of World War One, as more than 450 000 Russians, 95 000 French and 22 000 English lost their lives during the conflict. Renowned historian A. J. P. Taylor states that regarding European international relations, the Crimean War destroyed the charade of Russian military dominance in Europe, which led to Russia's diminished influence in European affairs subsequent to 1856. Through sheer number, the Russian army had been the largest force and yet it was still defeated by the comparably smaller French and British armies. The internal effects of the war on countries within the Concert of Europe are also highly significant when considering the destruction of the balance of power. Having been made aware of Russia's social and industrial backwardness through military weakness within the war, the Russian Tsar Alexander II became

convinced of the need for Russian reform. Napoleon III of France sought to adopt new foreign policies which eventually led to conflict in the 1860s with Austria and Prussia. Austria had been isolated as its ties with Russia were severed due to Russia's expectation as a result of its assistance in suppressing the 1849 Magyar revolts in Hungary, Austria would remain neutral in the war.

The Treaty of Paris reached in 1856, permanently altered the balance of power and highlighted the strain which had been placed on it through the Crimean War. At the conclusion of the war, severe penalties were placed on Russia by the other countries, restricting its influence. Russia was made to surrender Bessarabia, situated at the mouth of the Danube, had to forgo claims as protector of Orthodox Christians, and lost influence over the Romanian principalities which, along with Serbia, were granted greater independence. Furthermore, the Black Sea was declared neutral, closing it off to all warships which effectively left Russia with an undefended southern border. This left Russia with little incentive to uphold the goals of the Concert as it was now at considerable disadvantage to the other European powers. Upon the conclusion of treaty negotiations the Concert was obsolete, with its goals abandoned and communication at a stand-still. Through the treaty of Paris it became apparent that the Crimean war had disrupted nineteenth-century diplomacy, thereby destroying the decayed Concert of Europe.

Although the Crimean War can be identified as the first major instance in which countries within the Concert of Europe clearly disregarded the policy of peace and turned against one another, it can only be held responsible for the concert's demise to a limited extent. The rise of Nationalism in Europe

and the instability caused by the widespread outbreak of revolution caused a strong divide amongst countries. Britain's refusal to assist in intervention particularly acted to undermine the authority and cohesion essentially making the Concert practically obsolete prior to the outbreak of the Crimean War. Therefore the war can be seen to have been the conclusion of the concert, but was by no means the sole cause of collapse.

Bibliography

Fisher, H. A. L, A History of Europe Volume II, Eyre & Spottiswoode 1935

Langhorne, Richard, The Collapse of the Concert of Europe: International Politics, 1890-1914, Macmillan, 1981

Lee, Stephen J., Aspects of European History 1789-1980, Routledge, 1982

Medlicott, William N, Bismarck, Gladstone, and the Concert of Europe, Athlone Press, University of London, 1956

Robinson, James Harvey, Readings in European History, Vol. II, Boston: Ginn and Co, 1906

Schroeder, Paul W., Austria, Great Britain, and the Crimean War: The Destruction of the European Concert, Cornell University Press, Ithaca NY, 1972

Sweetman, John, The Crimean War, Osprey Publishing Limited, London, United Kingdom, 2001

Taylor, A. J. P. The Origins of the Second World War, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1961

<https://assignbuster.com/collapse-of-the-concert-of-europe/>

Robinson, James Harvey, Readings in European History p. 464

Schroeder, Paul W., Austria, Great Britain, and the Crimean War, p. 211

Lee, Stephen J., Aspects of European History, p. 26

Lee, Stephen J., Aspects of European History, p. 27

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/276910/Treaty-of-Hunkar-Iskelesi>

Langhorne, Richard, The Collapse of the Concert of Europe: International Politics, 1890-1914 p. 38

Sweetman, John, The Crimean War p. 42

A. J. P. Taylor, The origins of the second world war, Ch. 3 p. 71