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Unmasking Murder: Reconciling the Twin Depictions of Viscount Castlereagh

Robert Warrick

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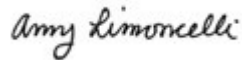
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Accepted for High Honors



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Introduction

Viscount Castlereagh's legacy has undergone several modifications in the years since his death in 1822. Journalist William Anthony Hay accurately describes his reputation in the years immediately after his death as that of "some backwoods reactionary bent on thwarting liberal hope."¹ Percy Shelley, Castlereagh's contemporary, described him as the embodiment of Murder.² Lord Byron publicly encouraged the desecration of his grave.³ Modern depictions of Castlereagh have been more sympathetic, choosing to emphasize his balance of power diplomacy over any possible ideological biases. Throughout his career, he worked to ensure British security by securing European stability. To that end, his image has gone from an anti-liberal demon to a chess master, weaving together whatever values necessary to reach his goals. Historian John Bew likens him to Robespierre.⁴ William Anthony Hay describes him as the Irish Machiavelli.⁵ Henry Kissinger described him as "The Insular Statesman," a diplomat with a realist perspective on international relations who was willing to adopt whatever position was necessary to achieve his ultimate goal of security.⁶ Castlereagh described himself as much when, as Kissinger paraphrased, he reminded Prince Metternich that Great Britain fought in the Napoleonic wars, "on the basis of material considerations in which British interests were obviously involved, not because of vague enunciations of principle."⁷ However, while Castlereagh may have claimed that he was unprincipled, his actions suggest that the modern understanding of his diplomacy has gone too far in removing ideology from his geopolitical

¹ William Anthony Hay, "The Irish Machiavelli," review of *Castlereagh: A Life*, by John Bew, *Wall Street Journal*, September 21, 2012.

² Percy Bysshe Shelley, "The Masque of Anarchy: a Poem," *The Examiner*, 1832.

³ George Gordon Byron, "Epigram," *The Liberal* no. 1, Oct. 18, 1822.

⁴ John Bew, *Castlereagh: A Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 15.

⁵ Hay, "The Irish Machiavelli."

⁶ Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), 29.

⁷ Kissinger, *A World Restored*, 31.

motivations. When one analyzes his motivations behind his major diplomatic affairs, the Act of Union of 1800, the Congress of Vienna, and the State Paper of May 5th, 1820, one will see that, while he may not have been as principled as his peers, much of his career was motivated by a fear of radicalism. Viscount Castlereagh did not simply want Britain to be secure in an abstract sense, he wanted Britain to be secure from radicalism.

In this context, “radicalism” refers to political movements that threatened to upend the traditional European order to the degree that they impacted Britain’s security. For Castlereagh, these movements largely pertained to national governments, manifesting in the form of the French Revolution, Napoleon, and post-Napoleonic republicanism. While each of these movements had their differences, their common quality was this element of upheaval.

Additionally, Castlereagh’s anti-radical stance was a means to an end and not an end in and of itself. He wanted Britain to be secure from radicalism so that it could pursue its interests, not so Britain could be left alone on its island.

It should be noted that much of this research comes from John Bew’s biography *Castlereagh: A Life*. The reason for its dominance here is that it is easily the foremost study on Castlereagh’s life from the modern perspective. When conducting the initial research, I would often cross-check articles and essays with Bew’s thoughts only to find that Bew’s take was more detailed, more thoroughly researched, and gave greater context. Bew himself takes up the modern perspective, so his influence on this thesis was more informative than argumentative.

Chapter 1: The Irish Destiny

Viscount Castlereagh's first major encounter with radicalism came in the form of the French Revolution and the effect it had on his homeland of Ireland. Much of his modern reputation comes from how he responded to this effect. The threat of the Revolution spreading to Ireland led Castlereagh to support British dominion over the kingdom. This support led to the traditional perception of Castlereagh as the monster who brutalized the Rebellion of 1798 and then sold out the kingdom to the British with the Act of Union of 1800. All of this was after joining the pro-independence Whigs, being elected to the Irish parliament on an anti-British platform, and working to secure the rights of the Catholic peasantry of Ireland. Presbyterian radical Steel Dickson went so far as to cite Castlereagh's election to the Irish Parliament a decade prior as the direct cause for the Act of Union, saying:

...had he been rejected, on that occasion, he would never have reached that pinnacle from which he hath fallen, at least unpitied – that Ireland would yet have been the independent, proud, powerful, and affectionate sister of Britain...¹

The modern depiction of Castlereagh tends to emphasize his character later in the nineteenth century, so much of this portrayal has survived into the modern day. He secured the passage of the Act of Union by excluding an element that would give greater rights to Irish Catholics. This element was of utmost importance to the Irish government but was undesirable to the British. By excluding the element, Castlereagh had seemingly pulled the rug out from under his Irish allies, so to speak, and secured a reputation for himself as the unifier of Ireland and Great Britain among the British. However, Castlereagh did not see this as an opportunity to gain power but instead an opportunity to defend his home from radicalism. Indeed, as the events and influence

¹ William Steel Dickson, *A Narrative of the Confinement and Exile of William Steel Dickson, D.D.* (Dublin: J. Stockdale, 1812), 21.

of Castlereagh's early life will show, he excluded Catholic emancipation from the Act of Union not out of a malicious fight for power but out of fear of the spread of radicalism.

At the time of Robert Stewart's birth, Ireland was part of a dual monarchy with Great Britain. When dealing with international politics the two acted as a single country, but domestically they behaved as two. Ireland had its own parliament, laws, religious expectations, and so on. Though this is not to say that Ireland and Great Britain were equal partners; Ireland was entirely lesser to Great Britain in this relationship. In fact, this description is a little too kind to the British. By this time, the British had drained Ireland of most of its resources and wealth, treating it closer to a colony than a political equal. The chief executive of Ireland was known as the Lord Lieutenant. The Lord Lieutenant was appointed by the British monarch and acted as a viceroy. In modern terms, a viceroy is an official representative of a monarch, but it traditionally referred to a noble who could wield royal power, as opposed to noble power, and therefore outranked any individual who was not the monarch. The traditional distinction had lost much of its relevance by Stewart's day, but Stewart and his peers would have been aware of this reputation. The Lord Lieutenant was advised by a privy council consisting of a Chief Secretary, who acted as the head of the Parliament, an Under Secretary, who led the civil service, and three Lord Justices, significant nobles or clergy who advised the Lord Lieutenant and occasionally led in his stead. With the Lord Lieutenant's position as a viceroy, the Irish government was, in practice, controlled by the British government.

The British government also had direct control over Irish social and religious life. Through centuries of oppression, Irish society had been stratified into the Protestant Ascendancy, a primarily Anglican class of elites in the vicinity of Dublin, wealthy but politically weak

Presbyterians who lived around Ulster to the north, and Catholic peasantry. Those at the top of Irish society were also the closest to the British and had the easiest access to power.

The circumstances of Stewart's birth left him completely excluded from the inner circle of Irish society. As a Presbyterian, he was excluded from the Protestant Ascendancy. While he was born in Dublin, he grew up in Ulster, meaning he was physically separated from the heart of Irish politics. Due to this, his only real political influence at a young age was his father. His father was one of the few Ulster Presbyterians who was active in politics as he was the Marquess of Londonderry. Londonderry was involved in the Irish parliament and pursued a platform of greater independence from Britain.² This attitude was not unexpected of someone like Londonderry since Ulster was one of the more progressive areas of Ireland. Belfast, in particular, was at the forefront of the Irish anti-slavery movement.³ In 1777, at the age of eight, Stewart wrote a letter declaring his utmost support for the American Revolution, saying, "I am... a true American."⁴ It may have been a naïve support, it was support, nonetheless. At an early age, the young Robert Stewart reflected his father's progressive ideals.

While Stewart may have been disconnected from the Irish elites, he was deeply connected with Presbyterian radicals. The American Revolution was popular in Ireland with much support coming from Ulster, in particular. According to John Bew, as many as four fifths of Ulsterians were dissenters who were frustrated that the Irish parliament was primarily Anglican and aristocratic.⁵ Stewart's father was among these dissenters and brought adolescent Stewart to meetings with him. It was here that Stewart met with leading radicals such as Steel Dickson. Dickson saw Stewart as a promising young radical. In his memoirs, he recounts a story

² John Bew, *Castlereagh: A Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 10.

³ Bew, *A Life*, 19.

⁴ Castlereagh quoted in Public Records Office of Northern Ireland, *Castlereagh Papers*, D3030, Belfast.

⁵ Bew, *A Life*, 20.

from 1783 where he rode past Stewart's home at Mount Stewart with a collection of men. The fourteen year-old Stewart declared, "I would rather be at the head of such a yeomanry than be the first lord ever a king created."⁶ Admittedly, Dickson's memoirs were published in 1812 and he tells this story before giving a summary of Stewart's Luciferian fall from grace.⁷ Therefore, while it is possible this story is true, it carries a curious amount of dramatic irony given Stewart's actions later in life and the context in which it was published. Either way, Stewart's political foundations were borne out of Presbyterian radicalism, not the conservative views he would adopt later in life.

In the last decade of the eighteenth century, Robert Stewart drifted away from the radical values of his youth and towards a more conservative philosophy. In 1790, at the age of 21, he joined the Whig party and was elected to the Irish Parliament for his home county of Down on a platform opposing the British government.⁸ The Whigs were a party based on parliamentary primacy, with the Irish branch placing an emphasis on republicanism and independence from Britain.⁹ Stewart drew great support from Presbyterian radicals, including Steel Dickson.¹⁰ This same year, the Irish Whigs hosted the largest celebration of the one-year anniversary of the storming of the Bastille outside of France.¹¹ The following year, Thomas Paine published *Rights of Man*. While it was popular with the majority of the Whigs, Stewart believed it had, "done considerable mischief." He preferred the writings of Edmund Burke and defended Burke's thinking at every opportunity. That is not to say that Stewart necessarily disagreed with everything Paine had to say. He had criticisms of the ancien regime of his own and was not

⁶ Bew, *A Life*, 21.

⁷ Dickson, *A Narrative of the Confinement and Exile*.

⁸ Charles Vane, *Memoirs and Correspondence*, 7.

⁹ Amy Tikkanen, "Whig and Tory," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed Nov. 3, 2020.

¹⁰ Dickson, *A Narrative of the Confinement and Exile*, 20.

¹¹ Bew, *A Life*, 45.

afraid to voice them. Having been presented with a variety of conflicting opinions on the Revolution, Stewart decided to visit Paris to form his opinion from firsthand experience.

Over the course of his stay in Paris, Stewart slowly became disillusioned with the Revolution and its ideals. He actually visited Revolutionary Paris twice, once in 1790 and once in 1791, but for the purposes of narrative clarity these will be treated as a single visit. During this time, the French urban centers were in a struggle between the Jacobins and the Girondins while the rural areas to the south and the northern coast were caught up in revolutionary and counter-revolutionary violence. Stewart reported to his grandfather a “scene of savage barbarity” consisting of “indiscriminate assassination,” murder in the streets, and executions without trial, with women and children among the victims.¹² What he saw here made him want to avoid similar violence in Ireland at all costs, writing that, “The government of Ireland I do not like, but I prefer it to revolution.”¹³ This concern for revolution in Ireland may appear sudden on the surface, but for someone like Stewart it was not an unreasonable concern. At the time, Paris was the center of the world. The lingua franca was the French language. With the dismantling of the French monarchy, every monarchy in the world was called into question.

Notably, Stewart saw Revolutionary France as a lost cause. He wholeheartedly believed that France would forever be a republic, writing that France would never, “return under the dominion of an individual.”¹⁴ At the time, there were signs that Austria and Prussia would attempt to crush the Revolution at its source, prompting him to comment that he did not think foreign intervention in France would be successful. He stated that the power was now in the hands of the people and the people would never accept a foreign-installed monarch.¹⁵ This anti-

¹² Bew, *A Life*, 52.

¹³ Bew, *A Life*, 54.

¹⁴ Bew, *A Life*, 48.

¹⁵ Bew, *A Life*, 48.

interventionist position was one that Stewart would come to again later in life but in this particular instance it was grounded in the notion that once a nation had lost its monarchy it was unrecoverable. For Stewart, once France lost its monarchs it fell into an unending whirlpool of violence and murder.

Stewart's fears of the Revolution spreading to Ireland would only become more real. On February 1, 1793, Revolutionary France declared war on Great Britain and therefore Stewart's homeland. To better defend the British Isles, the Irish government disbanded their militia, the Irish Volunteers, and reorganized it as part of the Militia of Great Britain. On April 26, Stewart enrolled in the Militia's branch in the county of Londonderry under the command of Thomas Conolly, the uncle of Emily Hobart, Stewart's future wife.¹⁶ This was not unexpected for someone of Stewart's social stature, and especially not for Stewart himself due to his personal experience with Revolutionary France.

In 1794, Robert Stewart was elected to the British House of Commons for the seat of Tregony, Cornwall in addition to his seat in the Irish parliament.¹⁷ Considering he, like his father, was a supporter of Prime Minister Pitt and his pro-Irish policies, Stewart was an opportune person to represent the desires of Ireland in this critical period. Then, in 1795, he left the Whig party and joined their direct rivals: the Tories. While the Whigs could be considered a general Protestant political party, the Tories were solidly Anglican. In Ireland, the Whig and pro-Catholic emancipation Lord Lieutenant Fitzwilliam was replaced by the pro-British Earl Camden. The citizens of Dublin protested his arrival by rioting.¹⁸ To assist the inexperienced

¹⁶ Charles Vane, *Memoirs and Correspondence*, 13.

¹⁷ Charles Vane, *Memoirs and Correspondence*, 9.

¹⁸ Bew, *A Life*, 83.

Camden, Stewart was appointed as an advisor.¹⁹ Soon after, in the Irish parliament, Stewart crossed the floor and officially joined the supporters of the British government.²⁰

This turn was not as sudden as it may initially appear. To begin with, Stewart had already abandoned parliamentary reform in 1793 when Irish Catholics received the right to vote, thus enlarging constituencies to the degree that his ideal reforms were no longer tenable.²¹ Furthermore, according to Historian C.J. Bartlett, Stewart and his peers were “deeply preoccupied with the defense of Ireland, whether against French invaders or Irish rebels.”²² In other words, for Stewart and the British government, sacrificing respect in Ireland was worth it if it meant the British Isles were stable and secure. Appointing a Lord Lieutenant who was known to be loyal was a way to secure Ireland and allow the British government to give as much attention as possible to the war with France.

In 1796, as if to punctuate his turn to the British side, his father was created Earl of Londonderry, allowing Stewart to inherit his father’s courtesy title: Viscount Castlereagh.²³ Soon after, his fear of the Revolution spreading to Ireland threatened to make itself realized. In the winter of 1796, France was close to annexing the Austrian Netherlands, German Rhineland, and Western Italian Alps, and was now setting its eyes on the British Isles.²⁴ The target for invasion was Bantry Bay, Ireland. Irish discontent was reaching a breaking point, with certain groups, such as the United Irishmen, aiming for open rebellion. The goal was for French troops to make landfall, rendezvous with the United Irishmen, and work together to rid Ireland of British

¹⁹ Bew, *A Life*, 86.

²⁰ Bew, *A Life*, 87.

²¹ Charles Vane, *Memoirs and Correspondence*, 8.

²² C.J. Bartlett, *Castlereagh* (United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 1966), 15.

²³ Bew, *A Life*, 87.

²⁴ United States Army, *Strategic Situation of Europe, 1796*. Map. December 2006. From the United States Military Academy.

control. Unfortunately for the French, this plan would never come to be as bad weather left their ships scattered and sunken.²⁵

This failed invasion would lead Castlereagh to conclude that Ireland's survival depended on its unification with Great Britain. As he was both an officer in the Militia and an advisor to the Lord Lieutenant, he was more than knowledgeable of the capabilities and weaknesses of the Irish military. This meant that he knew that the invasion of Bantry Bay failed due to the weather, and only due to the weather. From Castlereagh's perspective, had the French managed to make landfall, the Irish forces would have been unable to repel them, saying that, "The Weather has solved the problem and saved us the hazard, but enough has pass'd to make it incumbent on this country not the trust its safety hereafter to the Elements."²⁶ More importantly, if the French tried again, they would more than likely be successful. Note that this is entirely Castlereagh's assessment of the situation. The French did, in fact, successfully make landfall in Ireland during the Rebellion of 1798 and were repelled. For Castlereagh, the Irish situation was as follows: without greater support from Britain, Ireland would fall to the French. Castlereagh still saw the French Revolution as meaning unending violence and suffering. Therefore, falling to the French meant succumbing to said violence and suffering. He thought the only way Ireland could receive the support it needed was by unifying with Great Britain and forming the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.²⁷ Castlereagh was not alone in this conclusion. Wolfe Tone, the leader of the Rebellion of 1798, commented that the British government was "mad if [they do] not attempt a Union, and the French are mad if they do not attack Ireland before it can be effected."²⁸

²⁵ William James, *The Naval History of Great Britain, Volume 2, 1797 – 1799* (London: Conway Maritime Press, 2002).

²⁶ Bew, *A Life*, 104.

²⁷ Bew, *A Life*, 158.

²⁸ Bew, *A Life*, 158.

The Act of Union would not come about for another four years, but one might already see how Castlereagh's motivations for unification at this early stage differed from the traditional portrayal. Instead of an anti-liberal desire for power, the seed of unification was planted in Castlereagh's mind out of a desire to protect Ireland from French invasion and by extension the ever-spreading Revolution. The modern perspective supports this interpretation of Castlereagh's decision. At this point, the goal of unification had no purely selfish benefit for Castlereagh. If anything, it would be a disadvantage. He was a minister in the British and Irish parliaments and advisor to the Lord Lieutenant. If unification were to suddenly occur in 1796, he would lose two of those roles with little possibility of career advancement in return.

As Wolfe Tone explained, the people of Ireland were aware that unification was on the horizon, and many rose up against it in the Rebellion of 1798. Scholars generally define the Rebellion as beginning on May 24, but the country was not stable before that date. Martial law had already been declared in 1797. The goal of the rebellion was to overthrow the stratified socio-religious system and establish an Irish Republic with the aid of the French. As such, the rebellion was led by Presbyterian gentry and supported by Catholic peasantry. In particular, the organization and planning were headed by the United Irishmen, who were led by Wolfe Tone. In response to the Rebellion, the Earl of Camden was replaced as Lord Lieutenant on June 14 by Lord Cornwallis, who had experience in combatting republican rebels after leading the British forces in the American War of Independence thirty years prior. One of Cornwallis's first acts as Lord Lieutenant was to appoint Castlereagh as Chief Secretary.

During the Rebellion, Castlereagh had a personal policy of hunting the enemy leadership while being lenient when punishing the average peasant rebel. He refused to "shut the door of

mercy” on the individual rebels, which gained him much criticism from the Irish Parliament.²⁹ However, the government Castlereagh was a leader in and representative of was not so kind. Captured rebels were not prisoners of war, they were traitors to the Crown. Therefore, they were punished in the only way traitors could be punished: public execution.³⁰ While Castlereagh himself was lenient to rebels, his peers were not, and he received much of the blame for it.

With the Rebellion of 1798, Castlereagh had passed a point of no return. As Chief Secretary and head of the Irish Parliament, he was the face of the government that chose to slaughter and massacre its dissidents. He was the face of the government that sentenced Wolfe Tone to execution. No matter what clemency Castlereagh wished to give to the rebels, he now bore the iron fist. While Cornwallis may have been the one in charge, he was seen as British, so his behavior towards the rebellion was to be expected. But Castlereagh was Irish, so he was the traitor to his people. Steel Dickson, the Presbyterian radical Castlereagh had looked up to as a child, described him in this time as, “the unblushing betrayer of his country to a foreign Sanhedrin.”³¹ Bearing the responsibility of suppressing the Rebellion, he moved forward with what he believed to be the only way to save Ireland from the Revolution: unification with Britain.

The Rebellion of 1798 had brought centuries of British oppression to a head. The non-Anglicans of Ireland had demonstrated to the British government that the separate, stratified model would work no longer. Not to mention that, in violently suppressing the rebels, the British had created legions of martyrs for future generations. Modern scholars generally credit Prime Minister Pitt and Lord Lieutenant Cornwallis with the creation of a plan to solve both problems

²⁹ Bew, *A Life*, 117.

³⁰ Bew, *A Life*, 118.

³¹ Bew, *A Life*, 21.

at once: the Act of Union. This Act would dissolve the Irish parliament and combine it with the British parliament, thereby unifying the two nations and giving Irish counties direct representation in the national government at the cost of regional governance. This cost was large, and more than just political. Unifying Ireland and Great Britain meant the death of the Kingdom of Ireland and the death of the Irish national identity. A nation that had spent centuries suffering at the hands of another would finally succumb to that oppressor. Just two years prior, that nation had cried out against that fate and was silenced. Knowing what this Act would mean to the Irish public, the Irish leadership included a key provision in the Act: Catholic emancipation. While the Kingdom of Ireland may no longer exist, its Catholic population, its majority population, would finally be able to voice their wants and needs at any level of government. Pitt and Cornwallis both believed that Catholic emancipation was key to securing the Union as the Irish people would not accept it otherwise.³²

British attitudes towards Catholicism had not changed much in the three hundred years since the foundation of Anglicanism. The British Parliament was resistant to the prospect of Catholic emancipation and King George III was against it wholeheartedly.³³ As the role of Prime Minister was appointed by the Crown, rumors quickly began to spread that George III was planning to replace Pitt with the anti-emancipation Henry Addington.³⁴ In response to the British resistance, the Irish leadership, and Castlereagh in particular, began a campaign of rampant bribery to secure votes in favor of the Act.³⁵ Seats were bought, titles were sold, corruption reigned supreme. In the end, however, it was not enough. Even with the bribery and trickery, there were not enough votes in favor of the Act.

³² Eric Evans, *William Pitt the Younger* (London: Routledge, 2002), 68 - 69.

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ Evans, *William Pitt the Younger*, 68 - 69.

³⁵ Evans, *William Pitt the Younger*, 68 - 69.

That is, until Viscount Castlereagh made his final turn. With the fate of the Act uncertain, Castlereagh did the unthinkable: he omitted Catholic emancipation from the bill. Since the unfavorable element was gone, enough Members of Parliament changed their votes to get it passed by Parliament and made official by the Crown. With the passage of the Act, the people of Ireland had lost their national identity and gained little for it, and Castlereagh was almost single-handedly the one to blame.

In November 1798, Castlereagh and his wife Emily were separated for some time due to the Rebellion. Castlereagh was in Mount Stewart, which looked more like a fortress than a manor at the time, while Emily stayed at a safe distance in Dublin. He wrote to her every day from the 6th to the 10th, with each letter getting more impatient with their separation. On the 7th he wrote, “I have had no visitors and hope to escape.”³⁶ On the 8th he wrote, “You know that my letters say nothing,” meaning that he was writing simply so they can communicate, not to convey information.³⁷ He ended his letter on the 10th by asking her, “Which of the two words, better or worse predominates, my dearest Emily, in the Irish destiny you have chosen for yourself?”³⁸ Given what he had done and would do, given the circumstances he and the woman he loved were then under, one can only wonder what he meant to imply with the term “Irish destiny.” They loved each other dearly and, based on Castlereagh’s earlier choices of sentences, this week was particularly hard for them. Emily was one of the only people in the world whom Castlereagh was warm to, and in a trying time she was the person he posed this question to. For Castlereagh, the term “Irish destiny” had no particular positive or negative connotation. After all, he was asking Emily to fill in the blank, so to speak. However, the connotation it did have was himself. The

³⁶ Viscount Castlereagh to Emily Stewart, November 7, 1798, Public Records Office of Northern Ireland, D3030/T/3.

³⁷ Viscount Castlereagh to Emily Stewart, November 8, 1798, Public Records Office of Northern Ireland, D3030/T/3.

³⁸ Viscount Castlereagh to Emily Stewart, November 10, 1798, Public Records Office of Northern Ireland, D3030/T/3.

Irish destiny she had chosen for herself was their marriage. When Castlereagh was writing closest to his heart, when he was experiencing an especially difficult time in his life, Ireland was no separate entity. He saw himself and Ireland as innately connected.

This letter is relevant here, at the Act of Union, because it was here that Ireland had died, and Castlereagh killed it. But for Castlereagh, it was not a murder, it was a suicide, and perhaps an accidental one at that. Castlereagh was the young man who was excluded from the inner circle. This young man grew into a wide-eyed progressive who saw some of the worst civil violence of the century and became disillusioned. This now-cynical adult did as was logical and rose through government, trying to do what he saw as best to ensure that his home would not succumb to that violence he witnessed. But as time went on his home knew what was best better than he did. It is no surprise that Castlereagh would go on to adopt a motto from the Duke of Wellington: “I will not do what will please the people of England. I will endeavor to do what is good for them.”³⁹ He sought to use the Act of Union to save his home from radicalism and in doing so culminated a centuries-long era of oppression

³⁹ Martin Mansergh, “Statesman or Scourge?,” review of *Castlereagh: A Life*, by John Bew, *The Irish Times*, October 29, 2011.

Chapter 2: The Viennese Waltz

While Viscount Castlereagh certainly impacted the world stage with the Act of Union of 1800, his most renowned diplomatic affair was the Congress of Vienna. It was here that he worked closely with Prince Metternich of Austria to establish the Concert of Europe, a predecessor to modern collective security systems and a primary inspiration for the League of Nations and United Nations. Much like the Act of Union, Castlereagh's diplomacy at the Congress of Vienna was primarily influenced by his fear of radicalism, as seen in how he differed from his mentor Pitt and how he approached the issues of Prussian and Russian expansionism.

The modern and traditional perspectives on Castlereagh differ in focus in their depiction of him at the Congress of Vienna. At the time, he was depicted in political cartoons alongside his counterparts in Austria, Prussia, Russia, and France. Any opinion of Castlereagh at Congress was most often a reflection of an opinion of the Congress itself. If one held the Congress in high regard for bringing peace, then Castlereagh was one of the great peacemakers. If one disliked the Congress's installation of conservative monarchies, then Castlereagh was the same anti-liberal demon he was in 1800. Contemporary cartoonist George Cruikshank mocked the Congress as tedious and self-centered by portraying the diplomats as collapsing in fear in the face of Napoleon's return in the War of the Seventh Coalition.¹ In the modern day, opinions of Castlereagh at the Congress are most often directed at his balance of power diplomacy. The Congress is the source of the image of Castlereagh as the chess master weighing the costs and benefits of different diplomatic decisions.

¹ George Cruikshank, *The Congress Dissolved*, Cartoon, April 6, 1815, From University of Warwick Napoleon's 100 Days in 100 Objects, <https://100days.eu/items/show/53>

Between 1800 and 1815, the driving theme behind Castlereagh's diplomacy was international cooperation and mediation. It began in 1802 with Castlereagh's appointment as President of the Board of Control, wherein he oversaw the East India Company and acted as the chief official for Indian affairs in London. In this role, he mediated disputes between Richard Wellesley, the Governor-General of India, and the directors of the East India Company. Given that Castlereagh outranked both sides, it is notable that he opted to act as mediator rather than declare a correct side. In July 1805, Prime Minister Pitt appointed Castlereagh as Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, but he only held the position for half a year. Pitt passed away on January 23, 1806 and Castlereagh ended his tenure in the cabinet less than a month later. The Duke of Portland reappointed Castlereagh as Secretary of State for War and the Colonies in 1807 where he subsequently acted as the arm of the British government in the war against Napoleon. During this time, Castlereagh adopted a big picture approach to international relations with regard to the war effort. This approach is best illustrated by his infamous affair with Foreign Secretary George Canning.

In 1809, Britain was focusing its efforts on what was known as the Peninsular War, a campaign to free Spain from Napoleonic rule. The situation was rapidly deteriorating, and the British forces required a change in leadership if they were to change the tide. Castlereagh suggested the relatively inexperienced though promising Sir Arthur Wellesley, the future Duke of Wellington, for the role.² The Prime Minister agreed with Castlereagh and appointed Wellesley. Wellesley played his part splendidly and reinvigorated the Peninsular War, thus proving Castlereagh's intuition. Later that year, Vienna fell to the French forces, and the Austrians required immediate assistance if their empire were to be saved. There was much

² John Bew, *Castlereagh: A Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 242.

debate in the cabinet on what was to be done, with Castlereagh becoming a leading voice behind a proposed invasion of the Netherlands, known as the Walcheren Campaign, to destroy the French fleet and relieve the Austrian military.³ Canning, on the other hand, was one of its leading critics. Ultimately, they went through with the invasion and Canning's intuition proved greater as it ended in disaster. The invading British were plagued by literal plague as upwards of twelve thousand of the total forty thousand soldiers fell ill, with only one hundred and six of the four thousand deaths being due to combat.⁴ The situation was only made worse when the British troops were relocated back to the Peninsular War and spread the disease there.

A failure on such a scale led to brutal arguments in the cabinet, splitting it in two. Castlereagh led the defenders of the Campaign while Canning led its critics. After months of arguments, Castlereagh learned that the Prime Minister and Canning were planning to replace him with Wellesley, who was unaware of the plot.⁵ Greatly offended, Castlereagh challenged Canning to a duel on Putney Heath. Outside of one or two apocryphal stories from his youth, this was the only duel that Castlereagh ever took part in. Castlereagh had been a soldier and Canning had never fired a gun. Castlereagh shot Canning in the thigh and was declared the victor. While both men survived the encounter, their reputations were scorned. The fact that two members of the cabinet resorted to violence to solve their issues was a disgrace to the government. Both men resigned as a result.

The conflict between Castlereagh and Canning was borne from their different perspectives on international relations. One can see the basics of Castlereagh balance of power philosophy in this affair – he believed that Austria was suffering too much weight and needed to

³ Bew, *A Life*, 250.

⁴ Bew, *A Life*, 255.

⁵ Bew, *A Life*, 257.

be relieved by the Walcheren campaign. Canning was detail-oriented and saw that, no matter the motivation behind the campaign, the specifics of the matter made the plan untenable. Canning saw Britain as the main character of Europe, so to speak, while Castlereagh saw it as one piece among many.

Castlereagh's big picture philosophy and mediatorial skills became intertwined in 1814 with the beginnings of treaty negotiations. In February and March, he played a key role in the creation of an alliance between Britain, Prussia, Austria, and Russia in the Treaty of Chaumont. This alliance was meant to bring the signing powers into a closer alliance in case Napoleon rejected recently issued peace terms. The Treaty also set the expectation that France's borders would be reset to their pre-revolutionary locations after Napoleon's defeat. These borders were ratified with the subsequent Treaty of Paris, which Castlereagh also negotiated on behalf of Britain. This treaty also acted as a kind of rough draft for the Congress of Vienna as it set up several ideas that were to be discussed at the Congress, such as the concept of reorganizing the German States into an undefined federation.

The powers of the Treaty of Chaumont and the Treaty of Paris would go on to be the central members of the Congress of Vienna. While many nations were represented in Vienna, the principal diplomats were Prince Talleyrand of France, Tsar Alexander of Russia, Prince Metternich of Austria, Prince Hardenburg of Prussia, and, of course, Viscount Castlereagh of the United Kingdom. Talleyrand's goal was French stability within the continent. As France had been the aggressor in the preceding twenty-five years of war, it was at risk of being severely punished. Talleyrand had needed to fight for a seat at the table in Vienna, so to speak, and was not ready to stop fighting here.⁶ He also had the notable trait of having been in the French

⁶ Enno Kraehe, "The Congress of Vienna," in *Schubert's Vienna*, ed. Erickson Raymond (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1997), 55-76.

government under the Bourbons, the Republic, Napoleon, and the reinstated Bourbons, so he was an accomplished statesman and ideologically flexible. Metternich had similar goals, but for Austria. With the end of the war in 1814, there was a power vacuum in Germany that Metternich sought to fill with renewed Austrian dominance. However, he would be challenged by Tsar Alexander and Prince Hardenburg.

Tsar Alexander went to Vienna hoping to project Russia's power westward, namely by forming a personal union with the Kingdom of Poland.⁷ This meant that, while Poland would be separate from Russia on paper, Alexander would rule both. Hardenburg hoped to use the Congress to continue Prussia's increase in size and power, challenging Austria as the primary German power.⁸ He aimed to forward this goal at Vienna through a complete annexation of the Kingdom of Saxony, which had formed an alliance with Napoleon during the wars.

Lastly, Viscount Castlereagh's goal was three simple words: balance of power. No matter the outcome of the diplomacy of the continental powers, Castlereagh went to Vienna with the aim that the Congress would end in such a state that no one country could wage war without being overwhelmed by the rest.⁹ Much like how he supported the Act of Union of 1800 to ensure Irish security, he went to Vienna prepared to guarantee British security.

Given that Prince Hardenburg and Tsar Alexander both desired expansion despite the Napoleonic Wars, one might assume that there was a major difference in their experiences with Napoleon that led to these different perspectives, but this was not the case. In fact, every major diplomat at the Congress of Vienna suffered at the hands of Napoleon.¹⁰ Castlereagh served in

⁷ Mark Jarrett. "No Sleepwalkers: The Men of 1814/15. Bicentennial Reflections on the Congress of Vienna and Its Legacy." *Journal of Modern European History / Zeitschrift Für Moderne Europäische Geschichte / Revue D'histoire Européenne Contemporaine* 13, no. 4 (2015): 431 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26266200>.

⁸ Kraehe, "The Congress of Vienna," 62.

⁹ Kraehe, "The Congress of Vienna," 61.

¹⁰ Jarret, "No Sleepwalkers," 429.

the Irish Militia and fought against the resulting Irish Rebellion. Talleyrand was exiled from France by Napoleon under threat of death. Metternich was forced to evacuate Vienna when it was put under siege. Tsar Alexander put large swaths of Russian land to the torch, including the capital city of Moscow, to prevent Napoleon from seizing it. Hardenburg was in the direct path of Napoleon's eastward expansion. All five of them had deeply personal motivations for securing European peace and preventing the rise of another Napoleon, but Alexander and Hardenburg desired expansion.

This desire for peace was bolstered by the fact that every diplomat who went to Vienna lacked a significant diplomatic tool: war. In the modern day, war is a worst-case scenario, a failure of diplomacy. In these times, war was just another tactic diplomats could use to achieve their goals. It was a costly, deadly, inefficient tool, but a tool, nonetheless. However, the powers represented at the Congress had been at war for the better part of twenty-five years and had therefore exhausted most of their resources. The United Kingdom in particular was still at war with the United States for most of the Congress. While certain countries would ultimately threaten war, the nations represented at the Congress were exhausted by decades of it and sought to create a stable peace.

Castlereagh stood apart from his peers in Vienna. While the goals of the other major players were centered around the relationship between themselves and the other powers, Castlereagh's goal of a balance of power was grounded in the relationships of the other powers among each other. This dynamic is often referred to as Castlereagh having the role of a mediator.¹¹ The use of the term "mediator" reflects the fact that, whether or not he succeeded in this role, Castlereagh, and by extension Britain, would be substantially less affected by the

¹¹ Bew, *A Life*, 386.

consequences of the Congress than the other powers. This was because of the simple fact that the United Kingdom was on an island and the other powers were not. If, by some highly unlikely circumstance, the Congress were to end with Prussia being given all of Germany and the Netherlands, they might think to use their newfound resources to wage war with the rest of Europe as a new Napoleon. Should this occur, France, Austria, and Russia would have had to worry about invasion and how it would affect their overland trade routes and whether they would be able to communicate with their allies and so on and so forth. Meanwhile, as demonstrated during the Napoleonic Wars, Britain could focus its effort on the security of channel ports and not on a continent-spanning land border.

With this perspective in mind, one must look to the ideas that Castlereagh brought to Vienna. There is a popular idea that Castlereagh's work at Vienna was but a vessel for the ideology of his mentor Pitt the Younger. Henry Kissinger describes it quite effectively in *A World Restored*, so that will be paraphrased here.¹² In short, the geopolitical situation of 1814 bore significant similarities to that of 1804, when peace negotiations for the War of the Second Coalition were occurring. Pitt, who was Prime Minister at the time, collaborated with Tsar Alexander to create a plan grounded in three objectives. First, to reset the borders of France to their extent prior to the Revolution by freeing the conquered land as independent states. Second, organize the newly freed countries as a wall of buffer states to protect against any future French invasions. Third, to create what would today be called a collective security system among the countries of Europe to enforce "public law." As Kissinger writes, this plan, "became the blueprint of Castlereagh's policy. So successful was he to be in achieving its goals that in 1815

¹² Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957), 38.

he could lay the Pitt Plan before the House of Commons as the justification of the Vienna settlement.”

The similarities between Pitt’s thoughts in 1804 and the ultimate settlement a decade later are remarkable. The first objective was complete to the letter. The second could arguably be seen in the form of the German Confederation. It was not a single state, but an organized system of minor states that had the capacity to act as a cushion for France. Finally, the third objective was seen in the Concert System, the balance of power that Castlereagh aimed to create.

However, to say that Castlereagh simply put forward the ideas invented by Pitt with no thoughts of his own ignores the reasons why Castlereagh continued Pitt’s ideas. To begin with, it was simply a good plan. As history shows, it prevented war among the European powers for forty years, until the Crimean War, and large-scale war on European soil for a century, until the First World War. It would have been spectacularly out of character for Castlereagh to reject the plan in its entirety just to break from the teachings of his mentor. Given this relationship, it would be more surprising if Castlereagh’s diplomacy did not reflect Pitt’s at all. There is also the simple fact that the Pitt Plan reflected Castlereagh’s ideas to begin with because he helped write it. As Castlereagh was the closest to Pitt out of the Pittites, and especially during Pitt’s final months, the two of them personally talked over the details of the Plan before it was written.¹³

The Pitt Plan only affected the final outcome of the Congress. It did not affect the Polish-Saxon Crisis, the specifics of the Austro-Prussian alliance, or Castlereagh’s thoughts on the legitimacy of the Bourbon dynasty. While it could be argued that the Polish-Saxon Crisis and the Austro-Prussian alliance were both influenced by the ultimate goal of a balance of power, the

¹³ Kissinger, *A World Restored*, 40.

specifics of either issue were entirely up to Castlereagh to decide. His diplomacy was a vessel for Pitt's in the same capacity that the ideas of any student reflect those of their mentor.

Everything that has been discussed about the Congress of Vienna so far is logical in a geopolitical context and seemingly free from any existential fear of radicalism. This is because this is but the skeleton of the Congress, so to speak. When one looks to the details of the discussions of the Congress and how they differed from Castlereagh's preparations, the evidence of an ongoing fear of radicalism becomes clear.

One must first look to Castlereagh's interest in Prussian expansionism. As part of the Paris Peace Treaty of 1814, the German states were to be "joined in a federal union," but the specifics of this union had yet to be ascertained.¹⁴ In a letter to the Duke of Wellington, Castlereagh described his two ideas for what was to be done with Germany:

Two alternatives alone [present] themselves for consideration – a union of the two great German Powers, supported by Great Britain, and thus combining the minor States of Germany, together with Holland, in an intermediary system between Russia and France – or a union of Austria, France, and the southern States against the northern Powers, with Russia and Prussia in close alliance.¹⁵

Within this same letter, Castlereagh went over the flaws of the idea of an Austro-Franco-German alliance. His primary concern with the idea was the fact that Austria and France had historically been rivals. He concluded the letter with the sentiment that he preferred the idea of an Austro-Prussian alliance as a solution for Germany. However, this idea had many of the same flaws as the Austro-Franco-German alliance. Notably, while Austria and Prussia were not strictly rivalling each other to the same capacity as Austria and France, they were certainly competitors.

¹⁴ Edward Baines. *History of the Wars of the French Revolution: Comprehending the Civil History of Great Britain and France During that Period* (United States: Bangs, 1855), 362.

¹⁵ Lord Castlereagh to the Duke of Wellington, October 25, 1814, *Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh, Volume 10*.

While their competition would not reach its climax for another fifty years, the two states were vying for control of Germany. Austria was the historic German power, having led the Holy Roman Empire for the previous four hundred years. Meanwhile, Prussia had been progressively increasing its power and influence for the prior century, slowly becoming a prominent European power outside of the realm of Germany.

This difference between the old leader and the up-and-coming rookie, so to speak, was reflected in their diplomatic goals during this period. As Kurt Reinhardt writes:

...as far as common partnership in the 'German Confederation' was concerned, the interests of Prussia and Austria were not identical but contradictory. While Austria's interests lay largely outside the Germanies, in Italy, in Galicia, in the Balkans, and in the Adriatic region, Prussia's interests in all important issues were in harmony with those of the minor German states.¹⁶

Austria saw Germany as being securely in their realm, so they focused on weaker areas for expansion. Prussia could only look to the rest of Germany for expansion, due to being bordered by Russia to the east and Austria to the south. If the two were in an alliance, then Prussia could not expand without impacting the interests of their primary ally. This difference in perspective is the reason that the Austro-Prussian alliance would have failed. Based on the wording Castlereagh used in this letter, this alliance would have been sold, so to speak, to the affected parties as an equal partnership. However, because Austria was the only one that could freely expand it was the more favored party.

These weaknesses existed in Castlereagh's plans for the German States because they were not intended to be equitable alliances but to curb Prussian expansionism. Within this letter, he spoke of the need to keep Prussia "within due bounds" and that "it was difficult to found a

¹⁶ Kurt Reinhardt, *Germany: 2000 Years*. Vol. II: *The Second Empire and the Weimar Republic*. (Revised Edition) (New York: Continuum Publishing Company. A Frederick Unger Book, 1961).

satisfactory system of balance in Europe, unless Prussia could be induced to take a part.”¹⁷ A realized Austro-Prussian alliance would have favored Austrian policy, but an Austro-Franco-German alliance would have limited Prussia as well. While expanding under the Austro-Prussian alliance would have, at worst, left Prussia alone on the diplomatic stage, attempting expansion while Austria was in an alliance with both France and the southern German states would have triggered a much larger and more costly war than was arguably worth the territory Prussia desired. In this scenario, Prussia would have been in an alliance with Russia, which may initially appear to be a benefit until one considers that Prussia would be reliant on Russian availability. If, for any diplomatic, economic, or geopolitical reason Russia was unable or unwilling to support Prussian expansion then there was nothing Prussia could do.

Castlereagh’s Prussia-centric organization of Germany was a major break from Pitt’s France-centric plan. Pitt desired that Germany be reorganized with the intention of preventing French expansion. Both of Castlereagh’s plans would have accomplished that goal – France could not have expanded into Germany without angering both Prussia and Austria in either scenario – but that was explicitly a side effect, not the primary intention, of the plan. Castlereagh even makes specific reference to French expansion being of lesser issue than German, saying that “France need never dread a German league: it is in its nature inoffensive, and there is no reason to fear that the union of Austria and Prussia will be such as to endanger the liberty of other States.”¹⁸ He would not have commented on the possibility of danger to France if it were the more threatening party. The Pitt Plan does not specifically mention curtailing Prussian

¹⁷ Lord Castlereagh to the Duke of Wellington, October 25, 1814, *Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh, Volume 10*.

¹⁸ Lord Castlereagh to the Duke of Wellington, October 25, 1814, *Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh, Volume 10*.

expansion, the closest it comes is in the collective security system, but curtailing Prussian expansionism was a primary motivator for Castlereagh with regards to the German states.

While Castlereagh was certainly worried about Prussian expansionism, it was not nearly as big of an issue as Russian expansionism, which appeared at Vienna in the form of the Polish-Saxon Crisis. Tsar Alexander's and Hardenburg's desires for expansion came into conflict with Metternich's dreams of security as their claims on Poland and Saxony, if realized, would form borders between their countries and Austria. Castlereagh went to Vienna hoping to curtail Prussia in favor of Austria. Therefore, opposing Alexander's and Hardenburg's claims to both Poland and Saxony was most in line with Castlereagh's goal of establishing a balance of power. Two sides quickly developed: Metternich, Castlereagh, and Talleyrand on one side and Hardenburg and Alexander on the other, with the former side creating a formal alliance, known as the Secret Alliance, among their countries in the event of war.

The Secret Alliance was a curious course of action for Castlereagh. While Metternich and Talleyrand were open to the alliance due to the Russo-Prussian threat, the British Parliament and Cabinet would not have agreed to it had they been given an opportunity to vote on it.¹⁹ Additionally, the British government was willing to sacrifice Poland if it guaranteed Saxon independence.²⁰ Castlereagh was strictly against allowing Tsar Alexander to rule Poland, stating that such an outcome would not sate the Tsar's hunger for conquest, instead encouraging it. Castlereagh considered Tsar Alexander to be part of a special class of ruler whose desires must have been curtailed. He was willing to disregard the desires of Parliament if it meant that Alexander's goals would be limited.

¹⁹ Bew, *A Life*, 386.

²⁰ Bew, *A Life*, 379.

Castlereagh held a similar attitude to another contemporary emperor: Napoleon. He believed that Russia and Tsar Alexander had the greatest capacity to become the next Revolutionary France and Napoleon. This exceptional attitude can also be seen in the similarities between Castlereagh's opinions on the Bourbon dynasty and those on Russia. When he visited Paris in 1791, Castlereagh argued that France would never again have a monarch, citing that power was derived from the will of the people and the people had rejected the monarchy as an institution.²¹ While he was incorrect in his prediction, he maintained his argument that the Bourbon dynasty had lost its legitimacy due to the French Revolution. When Napoleon escaped from Elba and began the War of the Seventh Coalition, the allied nations declared their intentions to oppose him, citing the need to reinstall the legitimate Bourbon dynasty. While Castlereagh supported the defeat of Napoleon and the reinstatement of the monarchy, he did not want the French monarch to be a Bourbon. He did not support Napoleon because Bonaparte was "incompatible with the Peace and Security of Europe."²² However, he did not support the Bourbons because they did not have "adequate national support."²³ This is a curious opinion because, as contemporary parliamentarians such as Samuel Whitbread noted, at that time the will of the people supported Napoleon, as they had welcomed him back into Paris with open arms.²⁴ Castlereagh held a double standard between what he saw as legitimate and radical forms of government. He was against Napoleon and the French Republic due to their radical nature, no matter their public support, but he was against the Bourbons because of their lack of public

²¹ Bew, *A Life*, 48.

²² Bew, *A Life*, 390.

²³ Bew, *A Life*, 391.

²⁴ Bew, *A Life*, 390.

support. As Castlereagh himself phrased it when defending the settlement regarding Genoa, “the prejudices of a people were entitled to attention when greater objects did not stand in the way.”²⁵

Castlereagh’s worries about similarities between Alexander and Napoleon extended to his views towards Russia. This idea is best reflected in the personal reflections of Castlereagh’s brother Charles, who was both ambassador to Austria and a Lieutenant General at the time. According to John Bew, this writing is indicative of Castlereagh’s views on Russia and Tsar Alexander. Charles wrote that:

If we consider the power of Russia, unassailable as she is in flank and rear, hovering over Europe with an immense front, ..., with forty million hardy, docile, brave, enthusiastic, and submissive inhabitants, with immense armies, highly disciplined, excellently appointed; her innumerable hordes of desolating cavalry; her adoption of the French maxims of war...²⁶

After this point, Charles further restates his fears of the Russian military in colorful language, but it is here that he stated his specific fears. In short, Charles sees Russia as a country that was difficult to invade due to its position on the edge of Europe and had a large, loyal citizenry with an excellent army to match. Castlereagh had spent the previous decade and a half battling France, a country that was difficult to invade, as he learned firsthand with the Walcheren Campaign, and had a large, loyal citizenry with an excellent army to match.

The loyalty element, what Charles polemically refers to as submissive, was of particular worry. Much of what made the French army of the Napoleonic period so successful was that its soldiers did not fight out of pay but out of loyalty to the ideals of their nation. Any rival army with similar loyalty was rightfully of worry to the Stewarts. When Charles mentioned the “French maxims of war” he was likely referring to Napoleon’s maxims of war. These were the

²⁵ Jarret, “No Sleepwalkers,” 433.

²⁶ Bew, *A Life*, 335.

basic principles that Napoleon used when devising military strategy and discuss terrain, marching, and general awareness as a military leader.²⁷ While these were not social principles, the prospect of Tsar Alexander adopting any element of Napoleon's regime was cause for alarm, as seen in how Charles equated it in threat to having a large, disciplined military.

Tsar Alexander, moreover, had been in an alliance with Napoleon from 1807 to 1812 and actively fought against Britain during this period.²⁸ Alexander had also maintained his friendly relations with Napoleon by allowing him to keep his title of Emperor while exiled on Elba.²⁹ No matter the reasons that Tsar Alexander was a deciding party at the Congress of Vienna, there was a precedent for his becoming the next Napoleon in the most literal sense.

Ultimately, the diplomatic dance of the Congress of Vienna required Castlereagh to compromise and sacrifice some of his demands to reach an agreement. While France's borders were returned to their 1792 boundary, a Bourbon king was installed as monarch. The Polish-Saxon Crisis ended with Prussia receiving three-fifths of Saxony and Alexander becoming King of Poland, albeit a smaller Poland than he initially desired. The German Confederation had similarities to Castlereagh's plans for Germany, but it is impossible to say whether Castlereagh's plans would have been more successful in preventing Prussian expansion later in the nineteenth century.

Castlereagh saw Prussia and Russia as the possible sources for a new era of radicalism in Europe. Not only did they desire expansion, they risked upending the systems of Europe that had only just been reinstated. As seen in a resolve that he rarely demonstrated, he was driven by his fear of radicalism to do everything he could to limit their expansion lest they only hunger more

²⁷ James G. Gregory, *Napoleon's Maxims of War* (New York: C. A. Alvord, 1861).

²⁸ Bew, *A Life*, 224.

²⁹ Bew, *A Life*, 355.

for conquest. While he may have ultimately needed to compromise on his desires to secure an agreement, it was this fear that drove his approach to the specific crises of the Congress of Vienna and its outcome.

The Congress of Vienna would go on to succeed in its lofty goal of securing a lasting, stable peace in Europe. War among the major powers would not occur for another forty years until the Crimean War, and it would not happen among several powers on the continent until the First World War a hundred years later. The threat of radicalism so too subsided in the years immediately after the Congress, but as a sailor's behavior is shaped by the coming and going of the tide, Castlereagh's diplomacy would be shaped by the coming and going of radicalism in continental Europe, as seen in the events surrounding the State Paper of May 5th, 1820.

Chapter 3: The Radical Tide

After the Congress of Vienna, Castlereagh maintained a noninterventionist foreign policy. As had been the case up to this point, he desired British security and the needs of the period deemed nonintervention as the most effective way to ensure it. With the end of the Napoleonic Wars, international cooperation was no longer a necessity for survival, so Castlereagh adopted a perspective like that of his former rival Canning and saw Britain as the main character of Europe, so to speak. Additionally, unlike his peers in Austria, Russia, and Prussia, Castlereagh was unwilling to stamp out foreign radical movements purely due to their existence. While he may have disliked foreign radical movements, he believed direct action was only necessary when Britain itself was threatened. However, while he may have consistently pushed for nonintervention, the arguments he gave for it changed from 1818 to 1821. Even though the policy remained the same, his arguments and motivations for the policy reflected the fading and growing presence of radical movements in Europe. This change in motivation is most evident when one analyzes the situation surrounding the State Paper of May 5th, 1820.

The modern perspective on Castlereagh emphasizes the State Paper as his most significant diplomatic statement of the post-Napoleonic period, and possibly of his entire career. It instituted a policy of European noninterventionism, confirming it as the default position of the British government and making the policy articulated at the Congress of Vienna permanent. The traditional perspective on this period instead focuses on Castlereagh's reaction to the Peterloo Massacre of 1819, highlighting the government's repressive response as indicative of Castlereagh's anti-liberal nature. These events are actually connected in how Castlereagh's attitude towards both reflect his attitude towards radicalism in this period. In a shift from the fear of radicalism that had previously motivated his diplomacy in the Act of Union in 1800 and the

Congress of Vienna in 1815, the State Paper was primarily influenced by the geopolitical situation surrounding its writing. However, this would only be a momentary shift as this fear would return in the following year. Changing domestic positions towards public opinion, evolving attitudes about republican revolutions in Europe, and the spread of noninterventionist thinking in the British cabinet all served as major inspirations for the State Paper.

Since 1815, Europe had been quite successful at not going to war. The Concert System, while beginning to falter, had been working effectively to organize regular consultations among the major powers. The Secret Alliance that Castlereagh had established with Austria and France at the Congress of Vienna had flowered into the Quintuple Alliance in 1818 with the additions of Prussia and Russia at the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle, thus broadening Europe's collective security. What Castlereagh would define as radicalism had subsided from the European continent, in many ways due to the work that had been accomplished at the Congress of Vienna. There had been republican revolutions in South America and domestic political unrest in European countries, all of which will be discussed later, but for the most part Europe was the most stable it had been in decades. However, all good things must come to an end, and by May 1820 they had indeed ended.

The State Paper of May 5th, 1820 was issued in direct response to a republican revolution in Spain. The other members of the Quintuple Alliance were divided over whether they should intervene with a military presence, with France being the most in favor of intervention. Castlereagh opposed France and instituted noninterventionism as official policy. His major justifications were not based on principle but the situation within Spain at that time. In his opinion, the Spanish people were unlikely to invade other nations as the French had when their revolution was successful. Additionally, he noted that no Spanish government had listened to the

Alliance's advice in the past, so their intervention would just worsen an already volatile situation. He then shifted to discussing the reasons for the Alliance's existence by remarking that it was created to defeat Napoleon and that it had succeeded in that goal. Castlereagh also noted that he believed the Alliance was not meant to be an international government or peacekeeper. Then, for the first major time in his diplomatic career, Castlereagh cited public opinion as a cause for his foreign policy. He wrote:

It is not merely the temporary inconvenience produced to the British Government by being so committed, ..., but is the exposing ourselves to have the public Mind soured by the effects of a meddling policy, when it can tend to nothing really effectual, and pledged perhaps, beforehand against any exertion whatever in Continental Affairs; the fatal effects of such a false Step might be irreparable when the moment at which we might be indispensably called upon by Duty and Interest to take a part should arise.¹

While Castlereagh previously disregarded public opinion when constructing the Act of Union and at the Congress of Vienna, it had suddenly become such an issue in 1820 that he explicitly cited it within this document. This interest in public opinion was not unique to the situation in Spain. In February 1820, Castlereagh had gone so far as to criticize the policies of Pitt, who he previously emulated at the Congress of Vienna, by privately saying that Britain was, "weakened for the first ten years of the War by a divided schism of publick [sic] opinion."²

The cause for this sudden interest in public opinion supportive of British government policy was the Peterloo Massacre. On August 16, 1819, sixty thousand people gathered in Manchester to peacefully protest in support of parliamentary reform. In response, the government ordered a cavalry charge into the crowd, killing eleven protestors and injuring hundreds of men, women, and children.³ The Massacre quickly entered the public consciousness

¹ Castlereagh (1820), *Lord Castlereagh's Confidential State Paper of May 5th, 1820*.

² John Bew, *Castlereagh: A Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 479.

³ Bew, *A Life*, 462.

as a symbol of tyranny. It inspired Percy Shelley to write *The Masque of Anarchy*, a poem wherein he described each member of the cabinet as the mask of a tool of a tyrannical government.⁴ Castlereagh was the mask of Murder. Additionally, the violent response to the protest in Peterloo spawned yet more protests across the north of England.

In response to these wider protests, Home Secretary Henry Addington introduced the Six Acts to Parliament. These were the Training Prevention Act, the Seizure of Arms Act, the Misdemeanors Act, the Seditious Meetings Act, the Blasphemous and Seditious Libels Act, and the Newspaper and Stamp Duties Act. Together, they banned unauthorized military drilling, allowed magistrates to search private property for weapons, reduced opportunities for bail, required state permission for meetings of larger than fifty people, and increased the severity of punishments for seditious newspapers and personal writings. As of April 2021, only three of the Acts had been repealed. The Seizure of Arms Act elapsed after twenty-seven months and the Seditious Meetings Act was repealed in 1825.⁵ The Training Prevention Act was only repealed in 2008.⁶ All of these Acts became infamous soon after their passage.

For Castlereagh personally, one of the greatest consequences of the Peterloo Massacre and the Six Acts was the Cato Street Conspiracy, a plot to assassinate every member of the cabinet as revenge for these controversies. Ultimately, the plan was foiled by a police informant and thirteen people were arrested. Despite its failure, the Cato Street Conspiracy is indicative of the general unrest in response to the Massacre and the Acts, especially considering that, to this day, the true size of the Conspiracy remains unknown. The executions of five of the conspirators took place just four days before the State Paper was issued. Together, the Peterloo Massacre, the

⁴ Percy Bysshe Shelley, "The Masque of Anarchy: a Poem," *The Examiner*, 1832.

⁵ Bew, *A Life*, 466.

⁶ "Peterloo Law Set to be Repealed," *BBC Manchester*, March 19, 2008.

Six Acts, and the Cato Street Conspiracy demonstrated to Castlereagh that if he wanted a diplomatic action to be successful without risking his life, he needed public support.

This realization of Castlereagh's is of particular note because it was not his first encounter with controversy. Both the Act of Union and his duel with George Canning directly led to his resignation from office. The former also resulted in violent conflict in the form of the Irish Rebellion of 1803. On a visit to Ireland with George IV in 1821, one of Castlereagh's peers remarked that the only reason an angry mob had not broken out at their arrival was because the Irish did not know that Viscount Castlereagh and Lord Londonderry were the same person.⁷ By that time, Castlereagh's father had passed away, allowing Castlereagh to inherit the Marquessate of Londonderry. Even the Congress of Vienna was not exempt from controversy. While that controversy was not of the same scale as these other events, Castlereagh's focus on alliance-building and abolitionism earned him a certain degree of enmity from some of his peers, such as Samuel Whitbread. Castlereagh actually considered resigning from government in late 1819, citing the stress from the "severe labors" of parliamentary life.⁸

While Castlereagh did not take personal responsibility for the Massacre and the Acts as he had the Act of Union and the duel, the controversy certainly colored his subsequent diplomacy. Outside of citing public opinion when instituting noninterventionism, Castlereagh became wary about recognizing the repressive measures of his allies. In December 1819, Prince Metternich instituted the Carlsbad Decrees in the German Confederation. The Decrees were a set of repressive policies designed to limit what was considered seditious thought and were similar

⁷ H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Strange Death of Lord Castlereagh* (London: Heinemann, 1959), 148.

⁸ Bew, *A Life*, 485.

in nature to the Six Acts. Castlereagh notably refused to approve of the Decrees publicly, though he did give Metternich his support privately.⁹

Castlereagh's newfound regard for public opinion also marks a great shift in his attitude towards radicalism. He previously showed great resolve when fighting against what he saw as radicalism. When he challenged Russian expansionism and Napoleon's legitimacy, he was more than willing to disregard whatever value or instruction was necessary to achieve his goal of curbing radicalism in 1815. However, by focusing on domestic issues regarding public opinion, he showed no such resolve in 1820.

This shift was also because the political makeup of Europe had changed since 1815. Prior to 1815, republican revolutions were a direct threat to European diplomats and Castlereagh in particular. Then, at the Congress of Vienna, the institution of the Concert System was developed to prevent future continental wars from occurring. Shortly after the Congress, the Holy Alliance was formed among the rulers of Russia, Austria, and Prussia. The Holy Alliance was designed to propagate Christian principles across the continent and annihilate republican governments. Unlike its counterpart the Quadruple Alliance, the Holy Alliance was ideologically driven. Given that Castlereagh already saw Tsar Alexander as a candidate for the next Napoleon at Vienna, it should be no wonder why Castlereagh was suspicious of Alexander leading a powerful, ideologically driven military force as Napoleon once had. By 1818, the nature of the European system was already called into question. At the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle, diplomats from Britain, Austria, France, Prussia, and Russia met to discuss the state of France in the three years since the Congress of Vienna. While the focus was intended to be on French reparations and the end of its military occupation, discussion also included the relationship among the five powers.

⁹ Bew, *A Life*, 478.

This discussion led to the creation of the Quintuple Alliance and further conversations over its jurisdiction. The most relevant matters were the ongoing revolutions in South America. Since 1808, Spain's colonial empire had been crumbling as its colonies were caught up in radical fervor. By 1818, Spain had specifically requested that the other major powers of Europe give their support in suppressing the rebellions, and France and Russia were likely to oblige.¹⁰ Castlereagh himself was against intervention in South America. By 1818, the threat of radicalism had subsided to the other side of the Atlantic and Castlereagh was not as concerned with it as it was not a direct threat to Britain. He was far less concerned with South American radicalism spreading to Europe than he was with Russian influence spreading as far as the Americas. Castlereagh saw Tsar Alexander as a possible new source of European radicalism after Napoleon. Therefore, in this instance he decided to allow one distant bed of radicalism to live so that another could not grow in power. One must note that at this point, Castlereagh did not believe that South American republicanism was at risk of spreading across the Atlantic.

As he would go on to do in 1820, Castlereagh established clear evidence for his position at Aix-la-Chapelle in 1818. He was very particular to note that Britain's cause for being a member of the Alliance was to preserve the settlement that came out of the Congress of Vienna. As John Bew writes:

...this was a long way from a general guarantee and only applied to France... Britain was bound to protect the territorial settlement at Vienna for twenty years, but she had never agreed to interfere in, or act as the guarantor of, any specific form of government within an independent state. Even in the case of France, the allies could only intervene if they considered 'their own safety compromised.'¹¹

¹⁰ Bew, *A Life*, 451.

¹¹ Bew, *A Life*, 454.

One can already see similarities and differences between this sentiment and the State Paper of May 5th, 1820. In both instances, Castlereagh cited the purpose of the Alliance as a primary reason for nonintervention, but he only cited public opinion in the State Paper.

Castlereagh also made no specific reference to radicalism in 1818. At Aix-la-Chapelle, the issue on the table was the jurisdiction and basic principles of the alliance, not whether the threat was of a high enough degree to warrant their involvement. Once again, this is a marked shift away from Castlereagh's previous resolve with regards to radicalism. Even though he said that Spanish republicanism was not a threat in the State Paper, the fact that he felt the need to mention radicalism at all is a notable change. Additionally, on May 6th, 1820, the day after issuing the State Paper, Castlereagh wrote a letter to Metternich in which he remarked that:

...although we have made immense progress against Radicalism, the monster still lives, and shows himself in new shapes; but we do not despair of crushing him by time and perseverance. The laws have been reinforced, but the juries do their duty, and wherever the mischief in its labyrinth breaks forth, it presents little real danger,¹²

This sentiment was in line with what he expressed in the State Paper the previous day. While radicalism was certainly a threat, it was contained.

Castlereagh's attitude towards intervention reflected that of his peers in Lord Liverpool's cabinet, such as George Canning and the Duke of Wellington. Liverpool himself held similar views towards international relations as Castlereagh. He was the one who allowed Castlereagh to operate at the Congress of Vienna and approved the Secret Treaty with Austria and France. The Duke of Wellington, a personal friend of Castlereagh's, also held the belief that Britain should distance itself from the continent. As he commented to Prince Esterhazy of Austria, "The British

¹² Lord Castlereagh to Prince Metternich, May 6, 1820, *Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh*, Volume 12.

cabinet wishes the Alliance sleep.”¹³ Similarly, George Canning continued much of Castlereagh’s foreign policy decisions when he succeeded him as Foreign Secretary in 1822, including a policy of noninterventionism. Canning even cited the State Paper of May 5th, 1820 as a primary influence in his own foreign policy decisions.

By 1821, the threat of radicalism had spread across Mediterranean Europe. It began quietly in late 1820 when a rebellion broke out in Sicily and Naples. This was not a republican revolution akin to those of France and Spain; the rebels only desired a constitutional monarchy, not a full republic. Castlereagh believed that the revolution did not require the intervention of the Quintuple Alliance, saying that it was unnecessary “when danger springs from the internal convulsions of independent States...”¹⁴ He also hoped that the Alliance would make its decisions “upon the particular case, without hazarding general declarations, containing universal pledges that cannot be redeemed...”¹⁵ The threat was purely domestic, so it was of no threat to Britain and therefore did not need intervention. However, his allies disagreed and after the Congress of Troppau the Holy Alliance intervened, having declared their universal pledge to annihilate revolutionary governments.

On February 21, 1821, the Greek War of Independence began. This revolution was republican in nature; in 1822 it even established the “First Hellenic Republic,” using the same style of name as the First French Republic. Once again, the geopolitical situation of Europe posed the question of intervention to the major powers. Over the course of 1821, Castlereagh wrote two letters directed to Tsar Alexander, urging him not to intervene in Greece. On the surface, this may appear to be an instance of Castlereagh having no fear of radicalism, but the

¹³ Bew, *A Life*, 480.

¹⁴ Lord Castlereagh to Lord Stewart, September 16, 1820, *Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh*.

¹⁵ *ibid*.

precise arguments he used to convince Alexander say otherwise. Additionally, one must consider that Alexander remained the person Castlereagh saw as the most likely candidate to become the next Napoleon.

In the first letter, which was written on July 16, Castlereagh argued that Russia should not intervene in the Greek War of Independence.¹⁶ This letter contained similar sentiments to those Castlereagh presented on May 5 and 6, 1820 and at the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle. He said that Russia was of no risk of falling victim to the revolution, as long as they amassed soldiers on their border, and that a military occupation of Greece would be unwise. The warning to amass soldiers on the Greco-Russian border is noteworthy because it suggests that Castlereagh believed that the Greek revolutionaries would attempt an invasion of Russia. This is a change from 1820 when he believed that Spanish republicans would make no attempt at invasion. While it could be argued that Castlereagh was actually trying to coerce Alexander into an invasion by moving his army to the border, this does not fit with Castlereagh's subsequent request for non-intervention. It was more important to convince Tsar Alexander to not exert further influence than it was to stop an ongoing revolution.

The second letter, which was written on December 14, had a much different approach. This letter was not addressed to Tsar Alexander but to Charles Bagot, the British ambassador to Russia. Though its message was intended for the Tsar, it was a private letter that Castlereagh explicitly "[did] not wish to enter officially."¹⁷ Once again, he urged the Tsar not to intervene in Greece, but instead of focusing on precise disadvantages he emphasized general principles. Castlereagh described the revolution in Greece as "in no respect distinguishable from the

¹⁶ The Marquess of Londonderry to the Emperor of Russia, July 16, 1821, *Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh, Volume 12*.

¹⁷ The Marquess of Londonderry to Sir Charles Bagot, December 14, 1821, *Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh, Volume 12*.

movements which have preceded it in Spain, Portugal, and Italy” except in that it was connected to the Ottomans.¹⁸ Utilizing flowery imagery, he illustrated that “it is impossible that the Emperor should not see that the head of this revolutionary torrent is in Greece, that the tide is flowing in upon his southern provinces in almost an uninterrupted and continuous stream from the other side of the Atlantic.”¹⁹ There is a change in opinion between this last point and Castlereagh’s opinion in 1818. At Aix-la-Chapelle, Castlereagh believed that South American republicanism could not spread to Europe. In 1821, it was the source of a movement that had spread across the Atlantic Ocean. Additionally, Castlereagh once again stated that Russia must be defensive with regards to Greek republicanism. He claimed that Russian intervention would only aggravate an already volatile situation and risk spreading radical ideals through the Russian army should it occupy Greece.

One might assume that this letter was an instance of Castlereagh using manipulative tactics to secure his desired outcome, but this assumption is contrary to his reputation as a diplomat. In this cynical version of events, Castlereagh recognized that his logistical argument in July was ineffective, so he switched to the tactic of exaggerating his fears of a spreading Greek Revolution to convince Alexander. However, as Kissinger so wrote, Castlereagh’s diplomatic style was “solid, ponderous, pragmatic, . . . , matter of fact and direct.”²⁰ He had a “reputation for integrity, consistency, and goodwill, which was perhaps unmatched by any diplomat of [this] era.” For Castlereagh to have engaged in such manipulative tactics would have been a sudden departure from decades of straightforward diplomacy.

¹⁸ The Marquess of Londonderry to Sir Charles Bagot, December 14, 1821, *Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh, Volume 12*.

¹⁹ The Marquess of Londonderry to Sir Charles Bagot, December 14, 1821, *Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh, Volume 12*.

²⁰ Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), 30.

Castlereagh had regained the fear of republicanism he once held. While he did touch on the fact that Russian intervention in Greece would bring the Tsar into conflict with the Ottoman Empire, the driving force in this letter was the broad issue of the spread of radicalism. He even specified that, in any other case, the Tsar should have intervened, but it was only due to the precise problems in this instance that they needed to refrain.²¹ In particular, a Russian invasion of Greece would have brought Alexander into conflict with the Sultan, thus distracting both parties from suppressing the rebellion. He also noted that the Tsar needed to wait to air his grievances with the Sultan until after the revolution had been suppressed as the mere possibility of distracting the Sultan from stopping the rebellion was too great a risk.²² He wrote that Russian intervention would only risk “fostering revolutionary principles.”²³ While both of these letters come to the conclusion that Russian intervention in Greece would be a mistake, the later one was far more concerned with the threat of republicanism than the earlier letter. Therefore, Castlereagh was much more driven by that personal motivation in 1821, as he was in 1800 and 1815, than he was in 1820.

In 1820, with the direct threat of republican revolution firmly behind him, Castlereagh could at last look away from his personal motivations and towards the world around him when constructing his diplomacy. As seen in his newfound concern for public opinion, his emphasis on specific diplomatic issues and not broad principles when dealing with Russia, and the opinions of his close peers, Castlereagh reflected the situation of his day in 1820. However, by 1821, the spread of radicalism from Spain to Italy and Greece led Castlereagh to once again become

²¹ The Marquess of Londonderry to Sir Charles Bagot, December 14, 1821, *Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh, Volume 12*.

²² The Marquess of Londonderry to Sir Charles Bagot, December 14, 1821, *Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh, Volume 12*.

²³ The Marquess of Londonderry to Sir Charles Bagot, December 14, 1821, *Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh, Volume 12*.

fearful of the ideology that had already influenced so much of his legacy, as seen in the changing motivations behind his foreign policy.

Conclusion

Over the course of his diplomatic career, Viscount Castlereagh was motivated by a personal aversion to radicalism. With the Act of Union of 1800, he aimed to protect his homeland from French radicalism by bringing it directly under British sovereignty. At the Congress of Vienna, he strove to protect Britain from radicalism, past and future, by working to ensure the old sources stayed down and that what he saw as the new sources were limited in their aims. In the post-Napoleonic period, radicalism had subsided as a direct threat to Britain, allowing Castlereagh to take issues such as public opinion into consideration when deciding his foreign policy. This anti-radical motivation gave rise to the traditional perspective on Castlereagh: Bloody Castlereagh who crushed the Irish Rebellion of 1798, was one of the faceless diplomats who repressed all of the peoples of Europe at Vienna, and became the Mask of Murder who stained Peterloo red.

No matter Castlereagh's personal motivations and desires, geopolitics dictated that sacrifices and compromises were required if Britain's security were to be ensured. In 1800, he sacrificed Catholic emancipation to secure the defense of Ireland. In 1815, he allowed Russia and Prussia to gain territory and influence to reach a greater agreement at Vienna. In the post-Napoleonic period, he saw nonintervention as the ideal method for maintaining British security, no matter how much he personally disliked foreign radical movements. These pragmatic decisions led to the modern perspective on Castlereagh: the insular chess master who did whatever was necessary to ensure his goal of British security.

However, neither perspective exists in a vacuum. Both views are grounded in the idea that the other is incorrect, but, in fact, both of them are true in their own way. Castlereagh sacrificed Catholic emancipation because he saw defending against radicalism as being of greater

importance. While he ultimately allowed Russia and Prussia to expand, he fought against it for as long as he could. Even though he instituted nonintervention as official policy, his arguments for this policy changed alongside the recurrence of radicalism across the Mediterranean. The modern perspective illustrates Castlereagh's actions, but the traditional perspective emphasizes his motivations. To have a full understanding of who Castlereagh was as a diplomat, one must understand both.

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