

Congress of Vienna

Finding a Balance of Power



Question: What did Great Britain gain from the Congress of Vienna?

Background

- 23 years of nearly continuous war:
 - French Revolutionary Wars 1792 - 1802
 - Napoleonic Wars 1803 – 1815
- Great Britain, Austria, Prussia and Russia form a special alliance
- Undertook not to negotiate separately with Napoleon

1815 - Napoleon has been defeated Or perhaps not

Europe in 1812



Agreement for a Congress

- Treaties made by combatants with France when defeated
- Great Britain, Austria, Prussia and Russia but also Sweden Portugal and Spain
- All former belligerents to send plenipotentiaries to Vienna
- Congress ran from November 1814 – June 1815
- Napoleon escapes from Elba 26 February 1815
- Waterloo 15 June – 8 July 1815

Delegates

- Delegates from 200 states and political entities
- Austria : Klemens, Prince von Metternich
- Prussia : Karl, Prince von Hardenberg
- Great Britain : Viscount Castlereagh / Duke of Wellington / Lord Clancarty
- Russia : Count Karl Robert Nesselrode but controlled closely by Tsar Alexander I
- Spain, Portugal and Sweden sent 'lesser' delegates
- Delegates of many minor states on occasion including Denmark, Switzerland, Papal States etc.
- And of course France: Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord

Objectives

- to avoid war in the future
- to establish the political machinery for lasting peace
- “Holy Alliance,” a peace covenant among the great powers for maintaining a war-free Europe proposed by Tsar Alexander I of Russia

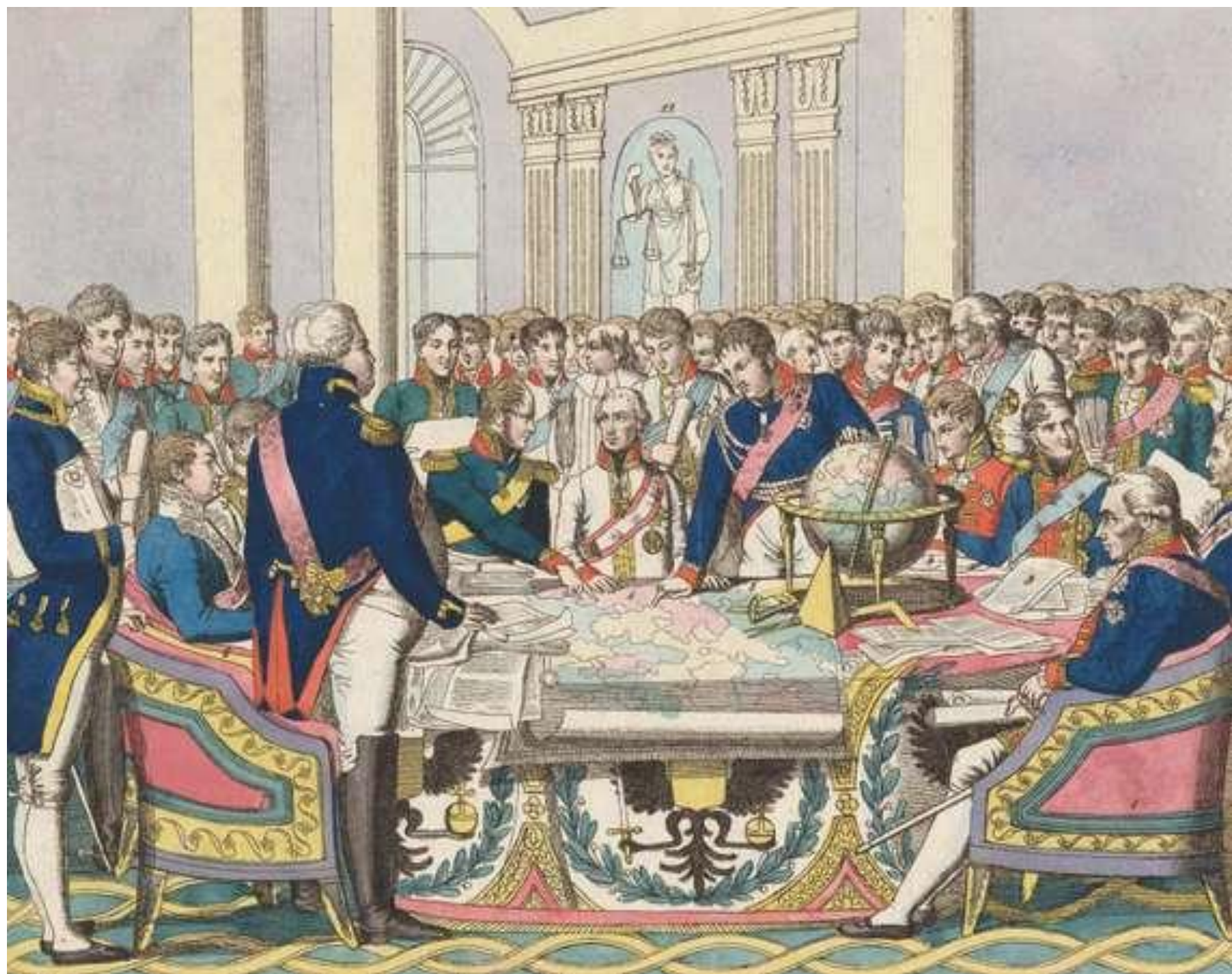
And/Or

- Restitution of territories – roll back to 1792
- Settle and maintain a balance of power
- Grab as much power and influence as possible



Conduct of the Congress

- Initially, the 4 Powers wished to exclude France and decide the future of all the conquered territories
- Minor powers insist on inclusion in decision making
- Talleyrand proved a diplomatic master and manipulated minor powers
- Congress never met in plenary session
- Smaller groups in smoke-filled rooms made real decisions
- Secret treaty to prevent Prussia and Russia getting too much



Decisions of the Congress – Northern Europe

- Duchy of Warsaw → **Russia** as 'Kingdom of Poland' with Tsar as king
- Galicia, Lombardy, Venice & Tyrol → **Austria**
- 2/5 of Saxony & Westphalia & Rhine regions → **Prussia**
- United Provinces & Belgium become Kingdom of the Netherlands
- Bavaria, Württemberg, Baden and Hanover gained territory
- New constitution for Germany as loose confederation
- Norway → Sweden from Denmark
- Lauenburg → Denmark
- Swedish Pomerania → **Prussia**

Decisions of Congress – Southern Europe

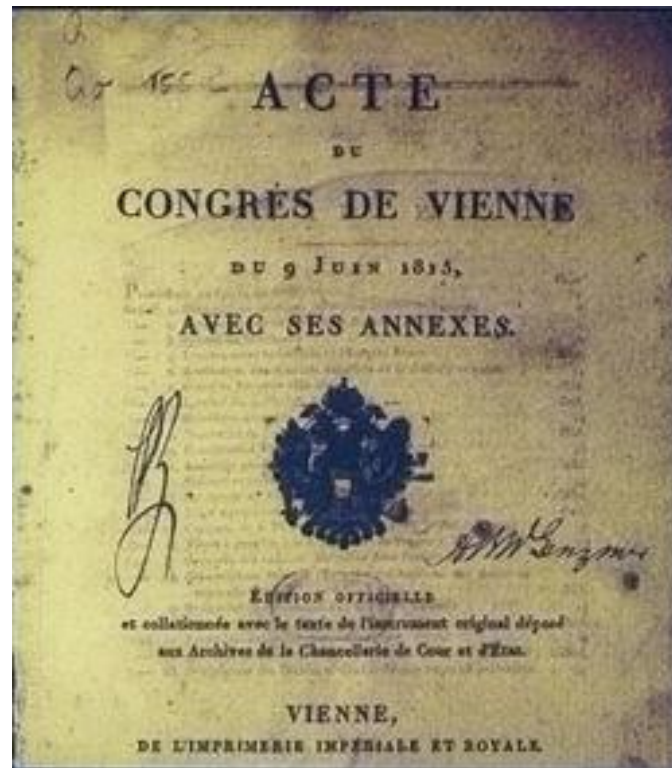
- New Constitution for Switzerland
- Papal States restored to the Pope
- Piedmont absorbed Genoa
- Tuscany & Modena went to an **Austrian Arch-Duke**
- Duchy of Parma & Piacenza to Marie-Louise, Napoleon's consort
- Naples → Kingdom of Two Sicilies
- Some territory 'stolen' by Spain to be restored to Portugal

Decisions of Congress – Other Issues

- Agreement on the free navigation of international rivers and diplomatic precedence.
- Proposals for abolition of the slave trade were rewarded only by a pious declaration.

Final Act of Congress

- Final Act signed June 9, 1815
- Except by Spain which was upset over the Italian settlement





Positive Effects of the Congress

- “The Congress was the first occasion in history where on a continental scale, national representatives came together to formulate treaties instead of relying mostly on messages between the several capitals”
- Political boundaries laid down by the Congress lasted, except for one or two changes, for more than 40 years.
- Successful delineation of the ‘Balance of Power’
- Established a method for diplomatic resolution of conflicts
- Prevented another widespread European war for nearly 100 years (1815–1914)

Negative Effects of Congress

- Idea of nationality had been almost entirely ignored
- Territories bartered about without much reference to the wishes of their inhabitants
- Failed to establish an institution to adapt to changing circumstances
- Fear of revolutionary movements meant a reactionary settlement – the Conservative Order
- Effective suppression of liberties and civil rights
- Led to revolutions 1848 – democratic and liberal in tone

Further Congresses

- Aix-la-Chapelle (1818)
- Carlsbad (1819)
- Troppau (1820)
- Laibach (1821)
- Verona (1822)
- London (1832)
- Berlin (1878)

In the Longer Term

- By 1823 the diplomatic system developed by the Congress by which the main powers could propose a conference to solve a crisis had failed.
- In 1818, the British decided not to become involved in continental issues that did not directly affect them and did not support the Tsar in his vision to prevent revolution.
- No Congress was called to restore the old system during the great revolutionary upheavals of 1848; thus, nationalism and liberalism began to triumph over the conservatism of the Congress system.
- The diplomatic alliances that formed out of the Congress were shattered during the Crimean War, in which Russia was defeated by the other Powers.

Question: What did Great Britain gain from the Congress of Vienna?

Great Britain's Gains #1

- Received parts of the West Indies at the expense of the Netherlands and Spain
- Kept the former Dutch colonies of Ceylon and the Cape Colony
- Kept/gained Malta and Heligoland
- Obtained a protectorate over the United States of the Ionian Islands and the Seychelles.

Great Britain's Gains #2

- Stability for trade
- Rebalance of power between major nations
- Restrictions on the expansion of the Netherlands
- Settled trading arrangements with North America
- End to French competition for Caribbean territory (but switched it to Africa)