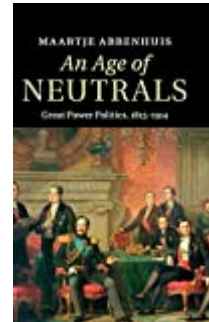
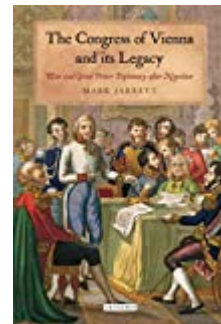


Maartje Abbenhuis. *An Age of Neutrals: Great Power Politics, 1815–1914.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. X, 289 S. \$95.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-107-03760-1.



Mark Jarrett. *The Congress of Vienna and its Legacy: War and Great Power Diplomacy After Napoleon.* London: I.B. Tauris, 2014. 544 S. \$110.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-78076-116-9.



Reviewed by Alexander Dracobly

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When the eminent American historian Norman Rich published his survey, *Great Power Diplomacy 1814–1914* in 1992, his bibliography on the Congress of Vienna reflected the state into which diplomatic history had fallen among academic historians. In spite of a steady trickle of monographs on more specialized topics, the most recent general work he cited dated from 1969 and most of them had been published well before then. Norman Rich, *Great Power Diplomacy 1814–1914*, New York 1992, p. 468. Much the same can be said of F.R. Bridge / Roger Bullen, *The Great Powers and the Eu-*

ropean State System 1814–1914, 2nd ed., Harlow, England 2005, the bibliography for which did not substantially change from the first edition published in 1980. In the last ten years the situation has changed substantially with the appearance of a number of good syntheses of the subject. Adam Zamoyski, *Rites of Peace: The Fall of Napoleon and the Congress of Vienna*, New York 2007; David King, *Vienna 1814*, New York 2009; Brian Vick, *The Congress of Vienna: Power and Politics after Napoleon*, Cambridge, MA 2014; I have been unable to consult Thierry Lentz, *Le Congrès de Vienne*, Paris 2015

(which has also appeared in German translation). For many scholars, Paul Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics 1763-1848*, Oxford 1994, has become a standard reference on the subject, especially in light of the importance of the Congress of Vienna for the author's theses. Only two of its seventeen chapters, however, cover the subject of the book under review.

Mark Jarrett's book, *The Congress of Vienna and its Legacy*, is an outstanding addition to this body of literature. Jarrett's work is a diplomatic history in the sense of negotiation between states and the story he tells is a familiar one. He starts with the alliance forged against Napoleon with the Treaty of Chaumont in 1814; he continues with the difficult negotiations at the Congress of Vienna and the creation of the Quadruple Alliance in 1814 and 1815; and he devotes the remainder of the book to the actual functioning of the Congress System and its eventual demise in 1823 in the aftermath of the Congress of Verona. In spite of the occasional nod in the direction of deeper economic and social needs of Europe, the focus of the book is almost exclusively on those few statesmen who were responsible for the policies that emerged from those meetings, the Castlereaghs, Metternichs, and Alexanders and their closest advisors. The Prussian representative Wilhelm von Humboldt thus figures prominently but Swiss strategist Antoine-Henri Jomini, also a member of the Prussian delegation, does not warrant a mention. Reading this book one would scarcely know that the great diplomats of the day possessed staff. But if there is a period that justifies such a treatment, it is surely this one. For not only did the principal statesmen spend a tremendous amount of time between 1814 and 1822 in face-to-face negotiations, they were able to impose the decisions they made on the rest of Europe. As Jarrett puts it, the Congress System institutionalized the collective hegemony of the Great Powers, albeit concealed behind a mask of seeming restraint, an observation that presumably justifies the almost complete disregard of the smaller states of Europe (Jarrett, p. 180).

It is not necessarily the arguments but the scope and presentation of Jarrett's book that make it so compelling. The author is well versed in the primary and secondary materials in nearly all the major languages. The book is deftly organized and the author has found a way to sustain the narrative without losing his analytic voice. Jarrett gives the reader a good sense of the interaction of personalities and policy, even if in his telling the policies pursued most frequently coincided with state interest. And while the author is clearly partial to Castlereagh (the subject of his dissertation and a forthcoming mono-

graph), the narrative is balanced and represents a remarkably successful attempt to tell the story from a pan-European perspective. Jarrett's book also contains a good chronology, a list of *dramatis personae*, and an extensive set of endnotes that are both useful and genuinely interesting, many of them containing long passages from unpublished manuscript sources. The chapter on the Congress of Vienna concludes with a discussion of historiography that students of the period will find especially useful.

What sets the book apart from its peers, however, is that it is the only recent synthesis that treats the period 1813-1823 as a whole. For Jarrett the Congress of Vienna is not the end of the story but a starting point whose endpoint the statesmen could not foresee. Events impinged on their understanding of the situation and the policies they developed. It is thus not by projecting the future from Vienna but by tracing out that history step by step that we can understand how these men developed their policies.

Jarrett's work is structured chronologically and he consistently privileges the narrative over any overarching thesis. In broad terms Jarrett's analyses tend to emphasize state interest over the repudiation of traditional international politics in the interests of a European concert. But he is also careful to note a strong undercurrent of idealism, especially in the conduct of Tsar Alexander I. In Jarrett's portrayal, the Congress of Vienna primarily concerned itself with the territorial settlement of the Napoleonic wars and the reestablishment of the European balance of power. The Quadruple Alliance of 1815, he argues, was originally designed to secure Europe from the threat of a resurgent France. Over the course of the book, however, Jarrett documents how the alliance was transformed from an instrument of peace into an instrument of counter-revolution. By the time of the collapse of the formal Congress System in 1823, the alliance had become frankly reactionary. As Alexander I explained to a French envoy in 1822, the sole aim of the alliance is that for which it was formed: to combat revolution, words that one cannot imagine him saying in 1815, when the alliance was formed (Jarrett, p. 326).

What, then, according to Jarrett, was the Congress System about? It is to Jarrett's credit that he gives no one answer to this question: it depended on the time, the issue, and the person in question. In most instances the statesmen of post-Napoleonic Europe were motivated by several factors at once, most of which tended to coincide in their own minds. For Metternich, for example, defense

of the existing social and political order, continental security, and Austria's state interest were simply different facets of the same set of issues. The Congress System collapsed when it became impossible to reconcile the diverse issues that separated the British, in particular, from their continental allies and Metternich's and especially Alexander's ever-increasing fear of revolution.

Jarrett concludes his book with an overview of political scientific treatments of the Congress System and its broader legacy. It is mostly the twentieth century legacy that concerns Jarrett, however. He addresses the relationship of the Congress of Vienna neither to the diplomatic practices of the Old Regime nor to the Concert of Europe that succeeded the Congress System. While his characterization of the Congress of Vienna as an attempt at reestablishing the European balance of power would seem to imply that it stands in continuity with older diplomatic practices, Jarrett never really takes up the point. Similarly, while he observes that the Congress System was "not quite the same" as the Concert of Europe, he offers no explanation of the transition from the one to the other (Jarrett, p. 369). Indeed, he maintains that the Congress System made no durable contribution to international law. While his emphasis on the importance of the personal relationships forged in the war against Napoleon would seem to predicate against an argument of continuity between the Congress System and the Concert of Europe, the question is left hanging.

One answer to this question of continuity and rupture can be found in Maartje Abbenhuis, *An Age of Neutrals: Great Power Politics, 1815-1914*, a book that makes a truly novel contribution to our understanding of nineteenth-century diplomatic practices. Neutrality defines the legal status and conduct of non-belligerents in times of war. Some states, most notably Switzerland and Belgium, were permanently neutralized; others, such as the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries, were long-term voluntary neutrals; and yet others "occasional" neutrals. But every European (and many non-European) states, large and small, declared its neutrality on numerous occasions over the course of the century. Indeed, one of the central themes of Abbenhuis's book is that far from being the mark of diplomatic passivity and weakness that neutrality conjures up today, neutrality was in the nineteenth century a well-established, active policy pursued by all of the great powers, most notably Great Britain, which was one of the great beneficiaries of neutrality.

Abbenhuis's narrative distinguishes between three

phases or moments of neutrality. A first phase runs roughly from the Congress of Vienna to the outbreak of the Crimean War in 1853, during which neutrality was employed as a means of stabilizing the conservative political order. In this respect the Congress of Vienna did make a contribution to international law, even if later developments loom as far more important to the story. In the second half of the century, neutrality was increasingly tied to attempts to secure the liberal system of global trade and empire in times of war. Finally, the last decades of the century witnessed the emergence of a more idealistic concept of neutrality tied to internationalist concepts of diplomacy. The last was particularly important in the development of national identities tied to concepts of neutrality, echoes of which still exist today in countries like Sweden and Switzerland.

The author also describes the development and institutionalization of neutrality in international law in the second half of the long nineteenth century. One aspect of that story is the connection between "cultural internationalism," the roots of which Abbenhuis places firmly in the nineteenth century, and neutrality. The emphasis of the book, however, is on the development of international law as a pragmatic tool of diplomacy that could be used simultaneously to pursue state interest and the stability of the broader international system in times of war. Neutrality, in other words, was not usually regarded as an end in itself, an ideal pursued by diplomatic means, but rather as a means to an end. This emphasis has some interesting implications for our broader understanding of the nineteenth century. During the period 1853-1871, for instance, neutrality played an important role as a stabilizing mechanism in a period of widespread war. In Abbenhuis's telling, it was the recognition by belligerents of neutral rights that made possible the limitation of those conflicts. In contrast to many accounts, in which this period is often treated as a hiatus in the Concert of Europe, the shift to a "neutral" perspective has the effect of integrating this period into the history of the broader Concert of Europe as, paradoxically, a period of notable success in managing crisis situations.

While many of the episodes that Abbenhuis examines will be familiar to readers, her signal contribution is to integrate a history of neutrality into the broader history of the Concert of Europe and its operations. Broadly speaking her work fits into the interpretive position that describes the Concert as a system in which the member states agreed to restrain their pursuit of state-interest for the sake of the stability of the whole. There is an ambiguity at the heart of the argument, however: it is never en-

tirely clear whether Abbenhuis sees the nineteenth century as an *âge of neutrals* because the Concert of Europe was so favorable to neutrality, or because neutrality was the key to the stability of the Concert. At a minimum Abbenhuis shows that neutrality was one of several mechanisms by which the stability of the Concert was achieved. But at times she seems to suggest that neutrality should be regarded as the key to the entire system.

One way of resolving this problem is to observe that neutrality and its place and significance in European politics changed over the course of the century. Through most of the century neutrality played a vital role in limiting war in Europe. But while neutrality remained important, as witnessed by the Hague Conference 1899 and 1907, both of which concerned themselves with the clarification of the international law of neutrality, the concept and practice of neutrality was eventually overwhelmed by the crises that beset the international system in the years leading to the outbreak of war in 1914. Even there, however, a focus on neutrality can have an interesting effect. As Abbenhuis points out in the years prior to 1914 European states not only planned for the possibility

of war, they also planned for the possibility of neutrality in war. The possibility of neutrality may not have been as robust as before, but it remained a conceivable option for European statesmen. That fact by itself, she observes, supports recent arguments that the outbreak of the war was anything but inevitable. Holger Afflerbach / David Stevenson (eds.), *An Improbable War? The Outbreak of World War I and European Political Culture before 1914*, New York 2007; William Mulligan, *The Origins of the First World War*, Cambridge, UK 2010; Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914*, London 2012.

What we have are two excellent contributions to our understanding of nineteenth-century international politics. Jarrett's book is aimed at a general audience but will be read with profit by nearly any student of early nineteenth-century European history. Abbenhuis's work represents a synthesis of original and existing scholarship. It assumes a certain familiarity with nineteenth-century international history in its broad outlines but almost every scholar of the period will learn from it.

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