Lesson 2
Vienna Congress:
Action and Reaction, 1815–1830

Assignment: Read + Ans. Questions (1) + (2)

Question: (1) How did the goals at Vienna compare with the Napoleonic Era in Europe?

Question: (2) Why were the European Dynasties both allied and opposed to each other?

Though armies were constantly on the march and boundaries were continually shifting, the great focus of the Renaissance was in changing modes of philosophy, theology, art, and literature. At the Congress of Vienna and in its subsequent Concert of Europe, the focus centered on politics, geography, economics, and maintenance of the status quo. Eastern Europe and Western forces took each other’s measure, anticipated political maneuvers, and provided for their own interests against threat of domination by the other partners.

While Napoleon had been rampaging across the Continent, Britain, from its island stronghold, had acquired outposts for trade from the China Seas to the tip of South Africa, and brought the subcontinent of India under her command. Though the loss of the American colonies in the eighteenth century was a setback to national pride, it was not the end but rather the beginning of her far-flung empire in other quarters. Having obtained control of the gateway to the Mediterranean by occupying Gibraltar, Britain was not interested in vying for continental territory. Moreover, Britain’s industrial creativity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries put her in the forefront of nations. The strength of her navy gave her dominance over the seas and important ports of call for her trade. She welcomed and supported achievement of independence by the South American nations because she had already established a lucrative trade with them and her astute bankers saw opportunity for profitable investments.

Meanwhile, Austria, Prussia, and Russia, set on maintaining their precious autocratic monarchies, were united on one point—to suppress nationalism and liberalism in any part of the European continent, even to the point of sending in their armies to shore up weak monarchs. At the same time, they jealously guarded their own territorial claims and strove to maintain the balance of power. What they did not see was the handwriting on the wall, evident by the success of the American and French Revolutions. It had become a historical fact that the lowly and downtrodden of the earth had successfully used violent revolt against their mighty oppressors and had won, the Americans permanently, the French, within limits, having been set back by Napoleon.