

CHAPTER 1

What principles guided Britain's foreign and imperial policies between 1846 and 1902?

KEY TERMS

Concert of Europe This was the idea that the great European powers would cooperate through collective action to ensure that peace in Europe would be protected over the long-term future. The Powers would seek to create a consensus, or general agreement, to prevent any one power, or group of powers, from threatening the order and stability established in Europe after 1815.

Balance of power A theory that peace and stability are most likely to be maintained by ensuring that no single great power, or group of powers, should be able to become strategically, territorially or diplomatically capable of dominating the other powers in a region.

KEY EVENT

The Crimean War, 1854–6 Fearing that Russia was about to attack the weak Turkish Empire and take control of the route from the Black Sea into the Mediterranean Sea, Britain and France went to war against Russia to protect Turkey. Any threat to weaken the Turkish Empire further, and thereby strengthen Russia's power in Europe, was to be resisted.

The foundations of British foreign policy towards Europe had been laid in 1815. The European great powers, of whom Britain was one, had established the **Concert of Europe**. Commitment to this was to be of primary importance to Britain for at least the next 50 years.

The Concert was a purely European arrangement, but Britain's interests extended well beyond Europe. Nevertheless, throughout the nineteenth century there was a direct link between order in Europe and the protection and expansion of the British Empire. A strategically and diplomatically stable Europe not only enabled Britain to retain its status as a regional and continental power, but also as an imperial power. This relationship between European peace and British imperial power was a central factor that drove Britain's foreign and imperial policies throughout most of the nineteenth century. There was a degree of consistency in the principles on which the policies were based, but the methods employed to ensure that Britain's vital national interests were guaranteed changed over time.

WHAT WAS THE BALANCE OF POWER IN EUROPE?

From 1846 to 1902, one of Britain's primary objectives was to maintain a **balance of power** in Europe. Throughout this period, Britain was only involved in one European war, the **Crimean War** (1854–6), fought to enforce and maintain the balance of power in Europe. The preservation of this stability was dependent upon a willingness by Britain and the other Great Powers of Europe to:

- recognise the central importance for all of them of preserving peace, order and balance in Europe
- put this objective above the national interests of individual states
- agree that no state should increase its territorial size or its political influence in Europe unless the other great powers agreed to it

