

Castlereagh had limited success in the context of British Foreign Policy between 1815 and 1822. Explain why you agree or disagree with this statement.

On one hand I agree that Castlereagh achieved only limited success during his time as British Foreign Secretary as certain aspects of his policy such as the concept of a congress system and the apparent lack of an insular policy earned Castlereagh his critics within Britain.

However it can also be argued that the positive points of Castlereagh's foreign policy greatly outnumber the negatives, meaning that he achieved much more than "limited success." This is demonstrated in the fact that a similar system of Foreign Policy was followed by Castlereagh's successors, such as Canning, Palmerston and the Earl of Aberdeen, for the next century.

The fact that the success of Castlereagh's foreign policy can be described as far more than limited is evident in that he was able to achieve his 3 main aims of maintaining the balance of power, keeping the peace and ensuring co-operation within Europe.

Castlereagh understood the need for peace to be maintained as this would help to avoid another major war and would also ensure that Britain could continue to trade with ease and pursue her aspirations to gain colonies outside of Europe. This aim was successfully achieved in that there was no serious war in Europe for the next hundred years.

Castlereagh also succeeded in ensuring co-operation between the major British powers. He was the architect and mediator at the Congress of Vienna and the congress system that followed was one of his major achievements as it meant that countries would meet when they needed to sort out their problems and co-operate.

Another reason why I believe that Castlereagh achieved more than limited success is that the balance of power was maintained by using Austria as a buffer state and also preventing Russia from becoming involved in Spain which would have almost certainly disrupted the balance of power. If Castlereagh hadn't become involved there may not have been as much restraint placed upon Russia which could have led to a threat to the balance of power.

Another defence of Castlereagh's Foreign Policy is that he was keen not to punish France too severely following the war. Castlereagh was aware that if you were too harsh on a country then they may feel the need to look for revenge at a later date. It was important for the future of Europe that France could join an alliance so by ensuring that France did not face humiliation, Castlereagh was able to maintain the possibility of an alliance and keep the peace.

Castlereagh's success between the years of 1815-1822 can be further illustrated by studying the longer term impacts of his diplomacy. Castlereagh dealt with the immediate problems that followed the war in his role of "Architect of Peace" and he also contributed to the cause for long-term peace which meant that war was avoided for a further hundred years. In addition to this, securing European peace enabled Castlereagh to do as he pleased outside of the continent which allowed Britain to become the biggest Imperial power the world has ever seen.

Another reason as to why the view that Castlereagh achieved only limited success can be challenged is that Canning, and later others, continued to follow the same sort of Foreign Policy aims therefore vindicating that what Castlereagh had been doing was right.

On the other hand, there is truth in the proposal that Castlereagh's foreign policy was limited in its success as it did have several failings and the congress system was certainly limited in its success.

In 1815 during the immediate aftermath of the French wars, Castlereagh needed to ensure co-operation in order to try and guarantee peace and the congress system seemed like an ideal opportunity to allow the great powers to discuss their problems. However the Tsar's proposal of 1818 (that saw the Tsar calling for countries to guarantee its leaders and borders) began to weaken the congress system as Britain feared that this would upset the balance of power by allowing Germany to permanently absorb Germany. As of this point Castlereagh began to gradually draw away from the congress system and started to separate Britain from what the absolutists wanted.

Another limitation of the congress system was that both the Troppau Protocol and the Holy Alliance went against Britain's policy of non-intervention and Castlereagh issued his State Paper in response. The State Paper outlined that he believed that the congress system was being misused as it was designed to keep the peace, not to act as the "Superintendent" of Europe and interfere in internal affairs. This further weakened the congress system and further evidence of Castlereagh drawing away from it came when he did not attend the congress of Liabach, choosing to send his brother instead.

A further why as to why it may be true that Castlereagh's foreign policy achieved only limited success is that he was criticised by many in Britain for not having an obviously insular policy and not looking out for the interests of Britain enough. However by focusing on keeping the peace, ensuring co-operation and maintaining the balance of power, Castlereagh was actually greatly assisting British interests as a stable Europe meant that Britain could trade with ease and focus on its territorial ambitions away from Europe.

In conclusion I disagree with the statement that Castlereagh "had limited success in the context of British Foreign Policy." Despite failings in the congress system and coming under some criticism for being believed to be close to absolutist leaders and following what some thought was a non-insular policy, Castlereagh achieved the three main aims of his foreign policy which were to achieve co-operation between countries, maintain peace and maintain the balance of power. He was responsible for a system of democracy which saw countries sitting down to resolve their problems and the main principles of his foreign policy were followed by his successors for many years to come.