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ANGLO-FRENCH RELATIONS IN THE AGE OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION 1787–1793*

What shall stand against the onset of a French army?
William Windham MP, November 1792[1]

Yet I think the enormities lately committed in France must draw down some signal vengeance on that accursed nation and I hope that a single campaign may open the roads and suffer peace and righteousness to substitute their holy kiss for the impious salute of anarchy and tyranny which has spread so much infection with its blasted exhalation... Satan surely is got loose and there is rebellion again in Heaven!
Reverend Brand, February 1793[2]

One of the most surprising aspects of current work on the French Revolution, both within and outside France, is the limited attention being paid to the diplomatic dimension of the Revolution. There is no lack of interest in the subject of French links with foreign intellectuals and radicals, particularly in Britain, the Empire and Italy. Far less attention has been devoted to the conservative response outside France, with the significant exception of the intellectual dimension. Even less has been lately and is being devoted to the international response on a diplomatic level. Partly this is a matter of academic fashion. It is more appealing today, to scholar, publisher and reader, to write on the French Revolution and poverty, crime or women than the French Revolution and Austria, Prussia or Russia. There has been a general movement away from interest in eighteenth and nineteenth-century international relations and the revolutionary period has not been exempt from it; indeed the range of attractive alternatives for study has possibly led to an exacerbation of it. In addition, there is the frequently privately expressed opinion that the subject has been ›done‹ that the great works published essentially in the period 1870–1914 have exhausted the topic. This view is unfounded. Not only has much new manuscript material been discovered or made accessible since 1914, but there were questions left untackled in the golden age of diplomatic history and modern perspectives on the subject of international relations can lead to the posing of new questions. Furthermore, the central importance of international relations to the revolutionary period requires stressing. T. C. W. Blanning closes his recent brilliant book with the obser-

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1 Windham to Grenville, 14 Nov. 1792, Oxford, Bodleian Library (hereafter Bodl.), Ms. Eng. Lett. c. 144 f. 306.
2 Brand to Robert Wharton, 20 Feb. 1793, Durham, University Library, Wharton papers, unfoliated.

vation »It was not the French Revolution which created the modern world, it was the French revolutionary wars«[3]. It is of course well known that the beginning of the wars helped to radicalize the Revolution, by no means an inevitable development, completing the process of radicalization begun with the collapse of authority in 1789. It is therefore surprising that more attention has not been devoted to these wars lately. Possibly this partly reflects a sense that conflict was inevitable, that the Revolution was so seminal a break with the continuity of ancien régime Europe that war was bound to ensue, that different ideas dictated struggle.

Such a view is erroneous. Not only does it assume that the revolutionary regime of 1792 was a natural product of earlier developments, but it also ignores the complexity of the European response to revolutionary France. Several European powers, including Britain and the United Provinces, did not join Austria and Prussia in their conflict with France in 1792. There was a longstanding tradition in European international relations that although major states might intervene in the domestic affairs of other major states they did so by means of intrigue, military action being generally reserved for minor states, or powers, such as Geneva, Liège and the United Provinces in the 1780s, affected by civil conflict. There is an interesting comparison between the effect of the Glorious Revolution in England (1688) and that of the French Revolution. Though the exiled Stuarts enjoyed considerable support in Catholic Europe, where their expulsion was regarded as an illegitimate act, rulers were not prepared to offer them military assistance, as opposed to financial support, until they found themselves in conflict with England. Similarly the émigrés received considerable sympathy and there was widespread concern about actual and potential developments in France, but other powers were not prepared to act in the early 1790s until particular political issues arose. Gustavus III of Sweden, the royal Burke, was an exception in seeking an ideological crusade against revolutionary France.

The revolutionary wars were therefore both important and in no way inevitable. There is need for a modern systematic study of the international relations of the revolutionary period. The only recent attempt, Blanning's excellent survey, is flawed because it has to cover several very large topics in a small space and because it is not based on extensive archival research, and is therefore dependent on nineteenth-century scholarship. This essay is an attempt to address several important issues in Anglo-French relations in the revolutionary period. Based on British and French archival material it concentrates not on the last months before war broke out in 1793, the subject of a brilliant but unpublished thesis[4], but on the issue of continuity in relations between the period prior to 1789 and the revolutionary period.

The most obvious sign of continuity was not so much the continual feeling of tension, summed up in the phrase the Second Hundred Years' War, as the ambivalence in relations between the two powers that characterised links before and after the outbreak of the Revolution. A sense of popular hostility, suspicion and fear had not prevented attempts on both parts to improve relations, either in order to

3 T. C. W. Blanning, The Origins of the French Revolutionary Wars, London 1986, p. 211.
4 J. T. Murley, The Origin and Outbreak of the Anglo-French War of 1793, unpublished D. Phil. thesis, Oxford 1959.

cooperate or to establish a *modus vivendi*, in the century prior to 1789[5]. Indeed in one marked sense there was a curious parallel between events before and after the outbreak of the Revolution. In the mid-1780s there had been a definite attempt to dissipate the tension surviving after the War of American Independence and to use a commercial agreement as the basis for improved relations. This attempt, which culminated in the trade treaty of 1786 and the British government's active defence of it in the face of severe criticism in Parliament early the next year, failed as a result of the Dutch crisis of 1787, when a British sponsored Prussian invasion overthrew a French supported government[6]. Similarly the outbreak of the Revolution was followed by a considerable amount of talk, both in Britain and France, of shared attitudes and interests between the two countries and by a number of attempts by the French government to improve relations particularly in 1792[7]. In February 1792 Pierre Lebrun expressed the hope that if war broke out between France and some of the continental powers Britain would at least be neutral, particularly insofar as the Austrian Netherlands were concerned, and might even accept an alliance and a reciprocal guarantee of colonies[8]. That September Lebrun, by then foreign minister, suggested that Britain, instead of fighting France, should attack Spain and seize Spanish colonies, such as Louisiana[9]. France would in short connive at a traditional form of ancien régime activity, the redistribution of colonial territories, in order to win a measure of British support in Europe. These suggestions came to nothing; there was to be no alliance. However, the French government did benefit from British neutrality in 1792. In military terms there is no doubt that Britain could have posed a serious threat to France, particularly if operations had been coordinated with Austria and Prussia. The successful naval mobilizations of 1787, 1790 and 1791 had demonstrated the strength of the British fleet[10] and there is little doubt that this was strong enough to defeat French naval forces, assist military operations by the émigrés and, possibly most important of all, mount an effective blockade of France. Even more significant might have been the effect of British intervention on other powers, either neutral or hesitant about the extent of their commitment to opposing France. Lebrun was concerned about the possibility of a British fleet being sent to aid Sardinia[11]. It is unclear how much weight should be placed on French attempts in

5 J. M. Black, Natural and Necessary Enemies. Anglo-French Relations in the Eighteenth Century, London 1986.

6 M. Donaghay, The Anglo-French Negotiations of 1786–1787, unpublished Ph. D. thesis, Virginia 1970; J. Black, Sir Robert Ainslie: His Majesty's Agent-provocateur? British Foreign Policy and the International Crisis of 1787, in: European History Quarterly 14 (1984) pp. 253–83; J. Black, The Marquis of Carmarthen and Relations with France 1784–1787, in: Francia 12 (1985) pp. 283–303.

7 G. Palain (ed.), Correspondance Diplomatique de Talleyrand: la Mission de Talleyrand à Londres en 1792, Paris 1887.

8 Lebrun to Talleyrand, 15 Feb., Chauvelin, French envoy in London, to Dumouriez, French foreign minister, 28 May 1792, Paris, Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Correspondance Politique (hereafter AE. CP.) Angleterre (hereafter Ang.) supplement 29 f. 202, 205, 581 f. 87–8.

9 Lebrun to Chauvelin, 14 Sept., Lebrun to Noël, French agent in London, 18 Sept., Chauvelin to Lebrun, 26 Sept. 1792, AE. CP. Ang. 582 f. 137, 167, 222.

10 Barthélemy, French minister in London, to Montmorin, 4 Ap. 1788, AE. CP. Ang. 565 f. 29–47; Report by Le Brasseur, 2 Oct. 1789, Paris, Archives Nationales, Ministère de la Marine (hereafter AN. AM.) B7 454.

11 Lebrun to Chauvelin, 24 Oct. 1792, AE. CP. Ang. 583 f. 75.

early 1792 to ease relations with Britain in the decision by the latter to remain neutral that year. The points at issue between France and her continental opponents in early 1792 did not really concern Britain. However, whatever significance is attached to Anglo-French diplomatic discussions in 1792, it is clear that by the following spring these had collapsed. On 1 February 1793 the Convention voted to declare war on Britain. The degree of parallel developments in 1786–1787 and the early 1790s should not be pressed too far, but it does indicate that there was no natural state of Anglo-French relations before or after the outbreak of the Revolution. This therefore obliges the historian to address the issue of contingencies and circumstances, to in short underline the chronological specificity of international relations in this period.

The impact of the French Revolution both on international relations and on those between Britain and France was first that of French weakness. The fluid state of European diplomacy before the Revolution made French weakness, both real and perceived, very important as it influenced France's allies and rivals and all powers concerned about the relative distribution of power within the European system. This weakness, both real and perceived, was naturally exacerbated by the events of 1789 and subsequent years. Civil disorder, apparent political breakdown and insubordination in both army and navy were important elements in this weakness. In December 1789 Montmorin, the French foreign minister, informed the French envoy in Vienna that France's domestic position dictated a cautious attitude to international affairs, a view he repeated on a number of occasions[12]. However, the crucial fact of French weakness was revealed, or, possibly, rather created in 1787, and it is from that year that the ›French Revolution‹ may be said to have begun insofar as international relations are concerned.

Explaining the Anglo-Prussian decision to intervene in the United Provinces in 1787 a French agent, the Baron de Groschlag, argued that the two governments had relied on French fiscal and domestic weaknesses. The British Foreign Secretary, the Marquis of Carmarthen, felt that *the internal situation of France* would make it likely that she would back down in the Dutch crisis[13]. French weaknesses were adduced as an explanation for the French failure to act, and, to a certain extent, this view was correct. However, these weaknesses, particularly those related to financial considerations, had not prevented France from taking an active role in European diplomacy over the last few years, nor were they to prevent revolutionary France from following an active, and in some eyes aggressive, course of action from 1792, even though they compromised the notion of bringing liberty to other peoples with the need to support French forces[14]. The role of financial considerations in the international relations of the period should not be exaggerated. It is more appropriate to suggest, as was argued at the time, both within and outside France, that the French government had a choice as to whether to act, and that the defeat of those ministers who pressed for an aggressive policy was more significant in affecting foreign views of France, and thus France's international position, than the domestic difficulties that

12 Montmorin to Noailles, 16 Dec. 1789, 13 Feb. 1790, AE. CP. Autriche 358 f. 278, 359 f. 111; Genet, French envoy in Russia, to Montmorin, 10 Nov. 1789, AE. CP. Russie 130 f. 177.

13 Groschlag to Montmorin, 6 Sept. 1787, AE. CP. Prusse 207 f. 103; Carmarthen to Ewart, envoy in Berlin, 21 Sept. 1787, London, Public Record Office, Foreign Office (hereafter PRO. FO.) 64/12 f. 40.

14 T. C. W. Blanning, The French Revolution in Germany, Oxford 1983.

were advanced by some as a reason for caution. The practicality for France of war in 1787 can be debated. What appears plausible is that more effort could have been put into threatening war. Military buildups and the diplomacy of brinkmanship were an essential part of eighteenth-century international relations, far less expensive than the recourse to conflict. It could be suggested that France failed in this sphere in 1787, though her situation was doubtless complicated by the unpredictability of Prussian policy, the speedy intervention of the Prussian army, a process made easier by the proximity of Prussian bases at Cleves and Wesel, and the perfunctory nature of the resistance of the Dutch ›Patriots‹, who had no experience in resisting a trained army[15]. The perception of French failure was exacerbated by the conviction that had France fought this would have united the country. On 5 November 1787 at the Hermitage Catherine the Great, having expressed her anger at the opposition of the French Parlements, told Ségur, the French envoy, that war might end French domestic divisions, excite patriotism and unite the country. A correspondent of Sir Robert Murray Keith, British envoy in Vienna, wrote from London, *We trust here to the incapacity of the French. It is true their finances are in a most deplorable situation and great agitations in the country – But I think the last may be a cause for government employing men abroad that are like to give disturbance at home*[16]. The accuracy of this analysis may be queried, but, as it was not put to the test, it served as an additional reason why the Dutch crisis could be presented and perceived as a serious blow for France.

There is no doubt that the Dutch crisis was a severe blow for France. Its impact on the domestic situation is incalculable, though there is no doubt both that an opportunity for gaining prestige through military action was lost and that prestige was lost through the defeat of France's Dutch protégés. The flight of a large number of Dutch ›Patriots‹ to Paris made the situation more apparent[17]. The loss of the Dutch alliance was also serious. The United Provinces was a major colonial and an important second-rank naval power. Her alliance, when added to that of Spain, enabled France to challenge Britain in both spheres. Conversely, in 1790–1791 Britain benefitted from the prospect of Dutch naval assistance in her disputes with Spain and Russia. French plans in the Indian and Pacific oceans and in India had been largely dependent on the Dutch alliance, one British diplomat observing *In India her alliance with Holland is her sheet anchor.* George Rose, an MP who was joint-secretary to the Treasury and a confidant of Pitt's, wrote to William Wilberforce, a fellow-member of Pitt's circle, *The struggle is whether this country or France shall have the assistance of Holland in future contests; I do not scruple to say that almost our existence both at home and in the East Indies depend upon that*[18]. Strategically the United Provinces was believed to be important for Britain's defence, a sensitive

15 J. Black (ed.), The Origins of War in Early Modern Europe, Edinburgh 1987, pp. 221–2.

16 Ségur to Montmorin, 6 Nov. 1787, AE. CP. Russie 122 f. 216–17; Mr Livingston to Keith, 25 Sept. 1787, Viscount Torrington, envoy in Brussels, to Keith, 30 Jan. 1788, London, British Library, Department of Manuscripts, Additional Manuscripts (hereafter BL. Add.) 35539 f. 160, 35540 f. 36.

17 Torrington to Keith, 30 Jan. 1788, BL. Add. 35540 f. 36.

18 Lord Auckland (William Eden's title from September 1789), envoy in The Hague, to Duke of Leeds (Marquis of Carmarthen's title from March 1789), Foreign Secretary, 1 Sept. 1790, Torrington to Keith, 22 Sept. 1787, BL. Add. 34433 f. 1, 35539 f. 151; Rose to Wilberforce, 27 Sept. 1787, Bodl. Ms. Wilberforce d. 17/1 f. 9.

topic in light of the recent invasion scare in 1779. It was also crucial for communications between Britain and Hanover.

The fate of the United Provinces was to be a central theme in Anglo-French relations from 1787 until their preservation led to war in 1793. They were of prominence not only in those two crisis years, but also in 1789–90 when the possibility of greater French influence in the rebellious Austrian Netherlands was regarded as a threat not least because of its consequences for the United Provinces. British diplomats and commentators referred frequently with alarm to the precarious position of William V of Orange in the United Provinces[19]. Indeed, to a certain extent, British foreign policy in 1787–93 is a tale of two rivers, the Scheldt and the Dnieper, the mouth of which, as of the Bug, was arguably controlled by the contested fortress of Ochakov. However it was not only because of the Dutch crisis that 1787 was disastrous for French foreign policy and for France's standing, which was one of the central objectives of this policy. The year also witnessed the disintegration of France's system of alliances, with the important exception of that with Spain, which was not to be challenged until 1790, when it failed to confront Britain adequately in the Nootka Sound crisis. Though the Austro-French alliance had encountered serious difficulties since its inception in 1756, the Emperor Joseph II's decision in 1787 to join his Russian ally in her war with Turkey posed a major challenge for France. Already suspicious of Joseph's attitude towards Prussian action in the United Provinces[20], the French were not consulted over his Balkan plans[21], and their efforts to dissuade him from attacking Turkey were unsuccessful. The failure to prevent war breaking out between Russia and Turkey had already posed serious problems for France, which sought to conserve good relations with both[22]. In addition, unlike in earlier international crises when Russian successes had led France to come to the diplomatic assistance of Turkey with the support of an Austria concerned about Russian schemes, in 1787–1788 Joseph II's decision to support Catherine II wholeheartedly undermined the basis of France's position in eastern Europe. For example the possibility of an Austro-French mediation of the Balkan war had been floated[23]. Furthermore, by suggesting that Joseph placed more weight on his Russian than his French alliance, his decision threatened the logic of French policy, namely that it could rely on a measure of Austrian assistance. This failure was a suitable recompense for France's refusal to support Joseph during the Scheldt and Bavarian Exchange crises of 1784–1785.

In addition 1787 witnessed the defeat of France's plans for compensating for the inadequacies of her Austrian alliance by seeking better relations with Prussia and Russia. French unwillingness to support Joseph II in the Bavarian Exchange scheme owed much to the former, and attempts had been made to improve relations with Berlin. Montmorin argued in 1787 that Austria would have an advantage over France

19 Lord North, later second Earl of Guilford, to Lord Sheffield, 1 Feb. 1788, BL. Add. 61980 f. 29.
20 Noailles to Montmorin, 15, 26 Sept. 1787, AE. CP. Autriche 353 f. 140–1, 157; Ewart to Keith, 27 Oct. 1787, BL. Add. 35539 f. 207.
21 Noailles to Montmorin, 14 Oct. 1787, AE. CP. Autriche 153 f. 204, 208.
22 Ségur to Montmorin, 12 Sept., 23 Nov. 1787, AE. CP. Russie 122 f. 50–2, 263.
23 Ainslie, British envoy in Constantinople, to Carmarthen, 25 Oct. 1787, PRO. FO. 78/8 f. 235–6.

if the latter was irrevocably embroiled with Prussia[24]. It was by no means inevitable that the Dutch crisis should lead to such an embroilment, either with Frederick William II of Prussia, or with another power that France had sought to woo, Britain. The Dutch crisis was preceded, accompanied and followed by considerable talk about the desirability of good Anglo-French relations by, among others, George III and, in particular, William Eden, one of Britain's representatives in Paris[25]. There was no inherent reason why the Anglo-Prussian cooperation evinced in the Dutch crisis should persist. Relations between the two powers had been very poor during the reign of Frederick II and British hopes that the accession of his nephew would lead speedily to an alliance had been disappointed. Prussian intervention in the United Provinces had been obtained only with great difficulty. However, the Dutch crisis was followed by a determined British effort to ensure continued cooperation with Prussia[26], not least because the re-establishment of Orangist authority was regarded as precarious.

The diplomatic changes of 1787 in Europe, which cannot be attributed to any sudden deterioration in France's domestic position, left her largely isolated, a humiliated spectator of developments elsewhere, not consulted, but forced to watch as her allies were defeated. The defeat of the Dutch ›Patriots‹ in 1787 was followed by Russian victories at the expense of the Turks. It was suggested in early 1788 that France's weakness would allow Austria to push through the Bavarian Exchange scheme. Former allies were protected by her rivals. Gustavus III of Sweden, a French protégé, was rescued by the Anglo-Prussian alliance in 1788 when apparently near to disaster at the hands of Denmark and Russia. This was a blow for France[27]. It was Britain that helped to bring a negotiated end to the Austro-Turkish war and sought to secure Turkey an adequate settlement with Russia. In short, the diplomatic situation of weakness and near isolation that faced France at the end of 1787, continued until the victories of revolutionary France in the 1790s, brought power, recognition and eventually allies. 1789 made little impact on this situation.

France's diplomatic problems in part reflected the weakness of the western European powers in face of the growing power and assertiveness of their eastern counterparts, particularly towards the traditional protégés of the former. However, her domestic problems were significant in hindering her efforts to escape from her weak position of late 1787. The perception of weakness bred the loss of foreign influence that is such a marked feature of French foreign policy from late 1787. When the news of the Prussian invasion of the United Provinces reached St Petersburg, Catherine II expressed the fear that French troops would not arrive in time[28]. Their failure to act at all did not affect Russian attitudes only.

Montmorin's solution to France's diplomatic defeat in 1787 was the common one of the attempt to improve alliances. In place of Vergennes' concern with gaining the

24 Montmorin to Noailles, 2 Oct. 1787, AE. CP. Autriche 353 f. 176.
25 Barthélemy to Montmorin, 5 Oct. 1787, AE. CP. Ang. 563 f. 75.
26 Carmarthen to Ewart, 2 Dec. 1787, PRO. FO. 64/12 f. 197.
27 Thomas Walpole to Keith, 20 Jan. 1788, BL. Add. 35540 f. 25; Barthélemy to Montmorin, 22 Aug. 1788, AE. CP. Ang. 566 f. 200, 202; Charles Fraser, British envoy in St. Petersburg, to Keith, 4 Dec. 1787, BL. Add. 35539 f. 282.
28 Ségur to Montmorin, 5 Oct. 1787, AE. CP. Russie 122 f. 135.

support of Britain and the United Provinces, thwarting Joseph II's schemes and seeking to improve relations with Prussia, Montmorin argued in October 1787 that France needed a rapprochement with Austria and Russia, in order to counterbalance Britain and Prussia, and that if the partition of the Turkish empire could not be avoided France would seek a section for herself[29]. Ségur, who suggested that the Austrians and the Russians could conquer the Balkans, argued that an alliance of them and France would inspire fear in Prussia and Britain and be a brilliant revenge for the Dutch crisis[30]. France sought to create a quadruple alliance of herself, Austria, Russia and Spain and, while considering gains from the Turkish empire, particularly Crete and Egypt, attempted to bring peace to the Balkans[31]. However, the contradictory views of the powers in the Balkans, especially, after Austrian reverses, of Russia and Turkey, made mediation an impracticable proposition. The Russian retention of Ochakov proved one such stumbling block, the fortress already being significant in European diplomacy prior to the Pittite intervention in the affairs of Pontic Europe. In May 1789 Montmorin wrote that France only wished to mediate if Russia advanced reasonable demands. That November Noailles complained that the Austrian government was not keeping France informed[32]. France's attempt to bring life to her alliances failed with her Balkan policy. The speedy destruction of Austrian hopes in 1788 made plans for the partition of the Turkish empire, including a share for France, impossible, while Russian determination to retain gains made mediation impracticable. Furthermore, Russian suspicion of French assistance for Turkey, including the provision of information about Russian naval moves in the Mediterranean, angered Catherine[33]. Elsewhere in Europe, French diplomacy appeared singularly ineffective. France had scant influence in Baltic affairs and Barthélemy, the French minister in London, suggested that Britain and Prussia were determined to exclude France from any role in northern Europe. Russia's ambition to feature as a Mediterranean power had worried France and Spain for many years, serving to unite them in face of possible threatening developments rather as Britain did overseas and Joseph II in Italy. However in the spring of 1789 domestic circumstances prevented France from fulfilling plans to send a squadron of observation to sea that would manoeuvre jointly with that of Spain. The Spanish first minister Count Floridablanca was very disappointed, as he had hoped that the planned joint manoeuvres would impress the rest of Europe. Montmorin expressed the hope that it would be possible to stage joint manoeuvres in 1790, but in fact the failure of 1789 prefigured that of 1790 when France failed to provide adequate naval support to Spain in her naval confrontation with Britain[34]. As France's alliances were increasingly drained of

29 Montmorin to Noailles, 2 Oct. 1787, AE. CP. Autriche 353 f. 174; Montmorin to Ségur, 2 Oct. 1787, AE. CP. Russie 122 f. 123.
30 Ségur to Montmorin, 4 Dec. 1787, AE. CP. Russie 122 f. 295–6.
31 Vauguyon, French envoy in Spain, to Montmorin, 1 Jan. 1789, AE. CP. Espagne 626 f. 3–8.
32 Montmorin to Noailles, 21 May, Noailles to Montmorin, 8 Nov. 1789, 357 f. 5–6, 358 f. 187–8.
33 Ségur to Montmorin, 25 Sept., 2 Oct. 1789, AE. CP. Russie 130 f. 53–60.
34 Barthélemy to Montmorin, 21, 28 Oct., 18 Nov. 1788, AE. CP. Ang. 567 f. 43, 71, 146; Montmorin to Lemarchand, French chargé d'affaires in Madrid, 24 Mar., Lemarchand to Montmorin, 6 Ap. 1789, AE. CP. Espagne 626 f. 241, 267.

substance, she had watch actual and potential allies discussing arrangements with little if any consultation of French views[35].

The Dutch crisis had broken the spell of Anglo-French cooperation that Vergennes had sought to weave and the after-effects hindered any improvement in relations. Britain determined to consolidate her position in the United Provinces by widening her relations with Prussia, rather than repairing those with France. As Montmorin sought to exploit Austrian and Russian fears of and hostility towards Prussia in France's relations with them, this helped to ensure that a better Anglo-Prussian understanding was associated with increased suspicion between Britain and France. The Dutch crisis had left a legacy of bitterness and suspicion on both sides, engendered by the fears, intrigues and humiliation of the confrontation. British determination to benefit from her success by consolidating her position in the Indian Ocean further increased French anger. British concern over India had played a marked role in creating fears over French policy, and, in particular, French intentions towards the United Provinces, in 1783–1787. The difficulties that had attended mid-century victories in India were still remembered, but more important was the experience of the American war when French naval forces under Suffren, in cooperation with Hyder Ali of Mysore, had created formidable problems for the British[36]. Relations with Mysore remained poor after 1783, and the increased importance to Britain of her position in India and the Orient, both absolutely and relatively after the loss of her American colonies, increased British sensitivity. An Anglo-French convention on India, signed in August 1787, did not allay British fears[37]. Hyder Ali's successor and son, Tipu Sultan, was ›less enthusiastic about the friendship of the French and less willing to conciliate their feelings than his father‹, but the British were not aware of the tension in the relationship. On 1 April 1788 Barthélemy suggested that the Dutch alliance was still viewed in Britain as crucial to the defence of India. The alliance would close the Dutch bases of Trincomalee in Ceylon and Cape Town to the French, thus denying them the opportunity to attack Britain in any part of her vast Asian empire *dont la conservation occupe aujourd'huy toute sa prévoyance.* The Chevalier de la Luzerne, sent to London as French ambassador in January 1788, sought to reassure the British concerning their fears about French intentions in India, but British anxiety was difficult to assuage. Reporting that France was to send less troops to the Indian Ocean than had been feared, one British envoy nevertheless wrote in 1788, *but I still am of opinion, as I ever have been, something will happen in the East Indies, where France is in force by sea, and has vast advantages from her possession of Trinquemale, her numerous land forces, in the Isles of France, Bourbon, in the service of Typo Saib etc.* The Isles of France and Bourbon (Mauritius and Réunion) were seen as a potential staging post for any attack on India, while French schemes in Indo-China aroused concern also[38].

35 Lemarchand to Montmorin, 30 Mar. 1789, AE. CP. Espagne 626 f. 254.

36 P. Mackesy, The War for America 1775–1783, London 1964, pp. 494–500.

37 J. Ehrman, The Younger Pitt. The Years of Acclaim, London 1969, pp. 440–2; G. C. Bolton and B. E. Kennedy, William Eden and the Treaty of Mauritius 1786–1787, in: Historical Journal 16 (1973); Eden to Pitt, 25 Aug. 1787, BL. Add. 34426 f. 37.

38 S. P. Sen, The French in India 1763–1816, 2nd ed. New Delhi 1971, p. 517; Barthélemy to Montmorin, 1 Ap, Luzerne to Montmorin, 22, 29 Ap., 6 May, 20 June, Barthélemy to Montmorin, 12, 26 Aug.

That the upsurge in concern about India did not cease with Britain's success in the Dutch crisis is not surprising. This success did not make possible French schemes inconceivable; it only made them more difficult by denying the prospect of Dutch bases and assistance. The crisis of 1787 had revealed not that France was without forces, but that she was unwilling to use them in the circumstances of September 1787. France was believed to seek both revenge for her failure and an opportunity to reverse Britain's consolidation of her colonial position. That she would be unable to do so was certainly not clear in early 1788 when rumours both about her Indian schemes and, less plausibly and seriously, about possible action by France in Europe[39] circulated. However, what is striking is that rumours and concern about her Indian plans did not disappear thereafter. In November 1788 Barthélemy complained that whatever France did she could not calm British governmental fears about her plans for the Indian Ocean[40]. It was not until the breakdown of order in France in 1789 that British fears eased[41]. The Third Mysore War (1790–1792) was made considerably easier for the British by the fact that Tipu Sultan, unlike the American rebels, received very little foreign assistance.

The role of colonial concerns in keeping Anglo-French tension high is an intangible one. There is no doubt that in both the colonies and commerce competition was seen as the order of the day. The ministries, concerned about the fiscal implications of commercial strength, were also pressed by mercantile groups to provide support against foreign competition. A Liverpool merchant, Henry Wilckens, for example, wrote to Charles Jenkinson, Lord Hawkesbury, President of the Board of Trade, in October 1787 over his concern about French competition in the Guinea trade[42]. In France there was great anger over the consequences of the Anglo-French commercial treaty of 1786 which was blamed, sometimes unreasonably, for poor economic conditions in subsequent years[43]. Aside from the particular colonial and commercial points at dispute between Britain and France and the specific groups involved, these issues served both to encapsulate and to exacerbate more general tendencies of suspicion and fear. It is clear that mutual suspicions were based on fear. This frequently reflected a strong historical consciousness. French commentators feared a repetition of conflict preceded by unilateral British action[44]. These fears preceded the events of 1789. There was no sense that such actions were alien to ancien régime international relations. The interrelationship of domestic troubles and

1788, AE. CP. Ang. 565 f. 4–6, 97, 110–114, 141, 300, 566 f. 166–7, 240; Marianne, French naval agent in Rotterdam, to Luzerne, French ambassador in London, 31 Mar. 1788, Instructions to St. Priest, new French envoy to the United Provinces, 14 May 1788, AN. AM. B7 454; Torrington to Keith, 26 Ap., Straton to Keith, 19, 26 Aug. 1788, BL. Add. 35540 f. 214, 35541 f. 57, 75; Duke of Richmond, Master General of the Ordnance, to William Pitt, 29 Aug. 1788, Cambridge University Library, Department of Manuscripts, Additional Manuscripts (hereafter CUL. Add.) 6958, no. 534.

39 Torrington to Keith, 2, 18, 27 Feb., 8 Mar. 1788, BL. Add. 35540 f. 38, 67–96, 129; Vieregg, Bavarian foreign minister, to Halberg, Bavarian envoy in Vienna, 22 Febr. 1788, Munich, Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv. Gesandtschaften (hereafter Munich, Ges.), Vienna 731.

40 Barthélemy to Montmorin, 14 Oct., 11 Nov. 1788, AE. CP. Ang. 566 f. 25, 121.

41 Barthélemy to Montmorin, 4 Mar. 1791, AE. CP. Ang. 576 f. 274–5.

42 Wilckens to Hawkesbury, 4 Oct. 1787, BL. Add. 38222 f. 133.

43 A. Young, Travels during the years 1787, 1788 and 1789, 2nd ed., London, 2 vols., 1794, I, 87.

44 Barthélemy to Montmorin, 9 Sept. 1788, Lebrun to Chauvelin, 6 Sept. 1792, AE. CP. Ang. 566 f. 268, 582 f. 90–1.

foreign policy and an atmosphere of fear and suspicion spanned the outbreak of the French Revolution, rather than being created by it.

For the French the alarming perception of weakness, both domestic and foreign, brought similar fears to those that had affected Britain a decade earlier, a concern about foreign intervention in internal affairs and a fear that her colonies would be lost. Whereas Britain shared the former place in the demonology of revolutionary France with, in particular, Austria, her naval strength and colonial presence caused the latter fear to be centred on her. Just as British ministers and diplomats worried that diplomatic isolation would make them vulnerable to French schemes in India in 1783–1787, so their French counterparts expressed concern over their West Indian colonies, which were the basis of the tremendous growth of French foreign trade in the 1780s[45]. In August 1789 Montmorin ordered Luzerne to send information concerning British naval moves and expressed the fear that Britain would seek to cause trouble in the French colonies[46]. The idea that the British government would seek to benefit from France's diplomatic isolation and internal disorders was axiomatic[47], particularly when these disorders spread to the French colonies[48]. British assurances were treated as hypocritical, doubt being expressed about the intentions both of George III[49] and of Pitt[50]. French diplomats were aware of sympathy for developments in their country in Britain, indeed tended to exaggerate its scale and impact, both actual and potential[51], and at times suggested that members of the ministry, even including Pitt, might be sympathetic or, more commonly and realistically, opposed to hostile action. However, even so, these diplomats were convinced that any positive attitudes and action were being and would be thwarted by hostile groups. The role of George III was seen as sinister[52] and it was alleged that he worked through a cabal of ministers, particularly Hawkesbury and Lord Chancellor Thurlow, whom he sought to promote and who shared his views[53]. Pitt's position was presented as threatened by the king's cabal and weak or precarious,

45 M. Duffy, Soldiers, Sugar and Seapower. The British Expeditions to the West Indies and the War against Revolutionary France, Oxford 1987, pp. 5–23.

46 Montmorin to Luzerne, 3, 10 Aug., Barthélemy to Montmorin, 15 Sept. 1789, AE. CP. Ang. 570 f. 202, 222, 369; Esterno, French envoy in Berlin, to Montmorin, 25 Aug. 1789, AE. CP. Prusse 210 f. 193.

47 Montmorin to Luzerne, 7, 27 July, Luzerne to Montmorin, 22 July 1788, AE. CP. Ang. 566 f. 20–3, 87–8, 105.

48 Barthélemy to Lessart, Montmorin's successor, 18 Nov. 1791, AE. CP. Ang. 579 f. 168.

49 Chauvelin to Dumouriez, 23 May, Chauvelin to Lebrun, 5 Oct. 1792, AE. CP. Ang. 581 f. 46, 582 f. 296.

50 Luzerne to Montmorin, 13 May 1791, AE. CP. Ang. 577 f. 241.

51 For differing views on the strength of British radicalism, Anon. to Clavière, – Nov. 1792, AE. CP. Ang. 585 f. 173–4; D. E. Ginter, The Loyalist Association Movement of 1792–3 and British Public Opinion, in: Historical Journal 9 (1966) pp. 179–90; A. Goodwin, The Friends of Liberty. The English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution, London 1979; I. R. Christie, Stress and Stability in Late Eighteenth-Century Britain. Reflections on the British Avoidance of Revolution, Oxford 1984; D. V. Erdman, Commerce Des Lumières. John Oswald and the British in Paris, 1790–1793, Columbia Missouri 1986, pp. 102–243.

52 Luzerne to Montmorin, 22 July, 16 Dec., Barthélemy to Montmorin, 9, 19 Aug., 30 Sept. 1788, AE. CP. Ang. 566 f. 90, 134, 193, 320, 567 f. 276.

53 Luzerne to Montmorin, 1 July 1788, 17 Mar. 1789, AE. CP. Ang. 566 f. 3–6, 568 f. 338–9.

British politics as a struggle between king and minister[54]. This view of secret cabals and intrigue fitted well with the conspiracy beliefs of the revolutionaries, but it was no new development. Paranoia characterised the unstable world of ancien régime diplomacy, was indeed a natural product of the intrigue that characterised court societies, and Catherine II had not been alone in attributing a *secret du roi* to George III[55]. The accuracy of this view is difficult to assess, as George III's role in foreign policy in the early 1790s is an obscure one. It accords however both with the modern tendency to stress the continued influence of the monarchy in eighteenth-century Britain, and with work on George III in the 1780s and late 1790s[56].

Naturally suspicious both of Britain and of monarchical governments, that of revolutionary France could only have been made more so by the reports received from French agents in London, both official and unofficial. Furthermore the fact that the links between the revolutionary government and the British political world were closest with a section of the British Opposition exacerbated the situation, for the Opposition was suspicious of royal influence, the general direction of British foreign policy and ministerial attitudes towards France[57]. Criticism was voiced in Parliament and the press, suspicion was endemic, belief in intrigue and intrigues widespread. In its issue of 6 January 1792 the »Morning Chronicle« declared, *Paris has been for sometime over-run with diplomatic forgeries, and we have no doubt, but they will be made an article of our import trade*[58]. It was scarcely surprising that the views of the British Opposition were transmitted to France and influenced French assumptions. The British ministerial attitude to the linked questions of French domestic difficulties, their effects on France's strength and foreign policy and the consequences for Anglo-French relations was neither uniform nor constant. Attention varied. In 1787 the novelty of developments in France and the potential clash between the two countries led to great interest in French developments in British political circles. In April Hawkesbury observed complacently, *The Revolutions that have lately happened in the Government of France afford a very flattering contrast to the stability and prosperity of our Administration.* Eden commented on the Assemblée des Notables, *Nothing ever was more contrary to the principles of a monarchical government.* John Mitford, who was to be elected to Parliament the following year, wrote at the end of a visit to France in late 1787, ... *matters in France seem drawing to that conclusion to which they will probably arrive e'er long all over Europe; for nations will not use their reason freely, and remain slaves. The crown must economise*

54 Barthélemy to Montmorin, 21 Oct. 1788, AE. CP. Ang. 567 f. 44. D. G. Barnes, George III and William Pitt, 1783–1806, Stanford 1939, pp. 202–65 is valuable, but a fresh treatment of the topic is required.

55 Barthélemy saw Burke as an instrument of British governmental intrigues against France, Barthélemy to Montmorin, 30 Sept. 1791, AE. CP. Ang. 578 f. 311.

56 J. Black, British Foreign Policy in the Eighteenth Century: A Survey, in: Journal of British Studies 26 (1987) pp. 39–41; T. C. W. Blanning, »That Horrid Electorate« or »Ma Patrie Germanique«? George III, Hanover and the Fürstenbund of 1785, in: Historical Journal 20 (1977) pp. 311–44; J. Black, Marquis of Carmarthen (see n. 6) pp. 296–7; P. Mackesy, War without Victory. The Downfall of Pitt, 1799–1802, Oxford 1984, pp. 187–201.

57 F. O'Gorman, The Whig Party and the French Revolution, London 1967, pp. 32–69.

58 Anon, A Letter to the Right Honourable William Pitt, on His Apostacy from the Cause of Parliamentary Reform, London 1792, pp. 35, 40.

or raise more money. Either will be accomplished with difficulty, and the accomplishment of either seems necessarily to lead to an alteration in the government... In France the people feel that the time is not fully come. But they think it will come; that the event is unavoidable...[59].

By the end of 1787 the attitude towards France's internal situation that was to prevail until late 1792 was firmly established. France was seen as weak, weakened by long term trends, ministerial instability and encroaching civil disorder, likely to become weaker, but yet possibly on the eve of a revival in strength and unity if circumstances, policies and leadership permitted. The latter was also the view held in French governmental circles, with the additional conviction that problems were due in part to external intervention and that hostile foreign forces might seek to prevent revival, because French weakness suited their purposes by allowing them to pursue policies in other fields and/or at the expense of France. Just as in Britain French difficulties were seen to work to the national advantage and the prospect of their removal aroused speculation and concern, so in France this situation was seen by many as explaining allegations of British interference in their concerns.

Because French weakness was seen as beneficial by the British, *the state of France sets us very much at our ease at home*, wrote the diplomat Sir James Harris in December 1787, French affairs were followed closely in the winter of 1787–1788 when a French riposte to their Dutch debacle was anticipated. Lord North wrote to Lord Sheffield in January 1788, *your publick account of the state of that country is very comfortable to those who wish well to Great Britain and to the publick peace of Europe*[60]. However, the possibility that French difficulties would only prove temporary was not solely expressed by French ministers. While Montmorin claimed to discern restored financial order and confidence and zealous provincial assemblies in December 1787 Eden suggested a month later that *the embarrassments in the French finances are suspended* even though he added *it would be easy to show that they are not permanently relieved*[61]. The possibility of reform, or at least altered circumstances, bringing renewed strength was never far from the mind of at least some British commentators, but, nevertheless, by the summer of 1788 this idea was not prominent. Luzerne, who had complained about Pitt's parliamentary comments on French finances, reported in May 1788 that Pitt had suggested to him that the summoning of the Estates General might improve French government. Pitt also told Luzerne that the conduct of the Parlements seemed to him irregular and unreasonable[62]. However, four months later Barthélemy noting great British interest in French developments, reported that there were widespread hopes, shared by George III, that the Estates General would be *l'époque d'un desordre sans remède*. Nevertheless he subsequently discerned a fear that the Estates General would lead to a revival of French strength as a result of royal power being based more solidly. Concerned about the extent of discontent in the United Provinces, Lord North was, nevertheless, not so worried

59 Hawkesbury to Eden, 30 Ap., Eden to Sheffield, 24 May 1787, BL. Add. 38309 f. 151, 61980 f. 40; Mitford travel journal, Gloucester, Gloucestershire County Record Office, D2002 F1.
60 Harris to Keith, 4 Dec. 1787, North to Sheffield, 29 Jan. 1788, BL. Add. 35539 f. 279, 61980 f. 26.
61 Montmorin to Ségur, 7 Dec. 1787, AE. CP. Russie 122 f. 308–9; Eden to Hawkesbury, 10 Jan. 1788, BL. Add. 38222 f. 249.
62 Luzerne to Montmorin, 13, 20 May 1788, AE. CP. Ang. 565 f. 156–7, 184–6.

about the promises of French assistance for the dissidents, *there I hope we are secure for some time and that Monsieur Necker's abilities great as they are will not be able to put that kingdom soon in a condition to disturb the public tranquility*[63].

The idea that the British government was frightened that a national assembly could help revive French strength led to the suspicion that Britain would intervene in order to prevent such an eventuality. Such a notion did not spring from the disturbances of 1789, but was already present the previous autumn, when Barthélemy suggested that when the Estates General met, the British, who always, according to him, had a large number of subjects in France concerned to observe all aspects of French affairs, would then both have more and use them to create trouble by underhand methods[64].

However, in late 1788 there was still a general conviction that her domestic problems would prevent France from thwarting Britain's diplomatic schemes[65]. As if to illustrate the unpredictability of international relations in a monarchical age the winter witnessed much speculation about the possible consequences of major domestic changes in Britain. Growing fears about George III's state of health in the second half of October 1788 culminated in a general conviction by mid-November that he was insane. This suggested a new political regime for either George would die, to be succeeded by his eldest son George, Prince of Wales, or be judged incapacitated, in which case there would be a regency, the powers of which would be probably exercised, largely or solely, by the Prince. Prince George was a keen supporter of the Opposition and particularly close to its leader in the House of Commons, Charles James Fox. Pitt's position was therefore severely weakened and a ministerial revolution, akin to that which had followed the accessions of George I and George III, appeared imminent. The government had to face the task of coping with the immediate increase in Opposition hopes in a volatile political situation that led some ministerial figures, such as Thurlow, to transfer their political allegiance. In addition, it was necessary to consider how the likely change in government could be best arranged. Richmond suggested to Pitt in early November that *it might not be improper to acquaint the Prince of Wales of what important concerns are going on with respect to foreign powers, and to ask his concurrence for pursuing them.* The possibility of change was not too encouraging for France. Barthélemy reported in early November that in the forthcoming parliamentary session the Opposition would criticise Pitt's foreign policy for allegedly serving the views and interests of France. He was certain that the Prince of Wales would recall Fox, who, both as Foreign Secretary and in Opposition, had been hostile to France. The well-known anti-French attitude of Sir James Harris, now Lord Malmesbury, who was believed sure of a place in any new government, was not encouraging. It was unclear how far a new ministry would maintain the Prussian alliance, as Fox's Russian proclivities were well known. One newspaper stated,

At no period whatever could the sickness under which His Majesty unhappily labours, have happened with greater danger to the general tranquility of Europe, than at the present. The negociations for peace, which are far advanced, and drawing to a favourable conclusion, will

63 Barthélemy to Montmorin, 2, 9, 23 Sept. 1788, AE. CP. Ang. 566 f. 252, 268, 306; North to Sheffield, 22 Sept. 1788, BL. Add. 61980 f. 36.
64 Barthélemy to Montmorin, 7 Oct. 1788, AE. CP. Ang. 567 f. 13.
65 Barthélemy to Montmorin, 18 Nov. 1788, AE. CP. Ang. 567 f. 139.

now probably be suspended, not indeed by our Ministry, but by the foreign powers with whom we are treating. These, dreading a new government in this country, and not knowing whether it may pursue the same line of politics laid down by the present Ministry, may hesitate to proceed any farther in the negociations now carrying on, until the recovery of his Majesty shall convince them that they may proceed with safety, or till they receive assurances from a new Government that their political views and intentions are the same with those of their predecessors[66].

Additional problems were created by the possibility that different provisions for a regency would be made in Hanover and Ireland[67]. The failure to devise a speedy solution to the crisis and the escalation of political tension led to a growing feeling that Britain would be unable to escape from protracted difficulties. On 16 December Luzerne reported that though he had no hope of pro-French sentiment, from the present or any future government, he nevertheless anticipated that the change would bring weakness, that the new government would be both unpopular and affected by domestic disputes and fiscal weakness which would lessen the confidence of foreign powers in it. A week later he added, *Dans ce cahos d'affaires intérieures, on ne pense pas plus aux affaires étrangères que si la Grande Bretagne étoit le seul Royaume de l'Europe*[68].

By early 1789 France did not appear to be in as poor shape relatively as she had been over the previous eighteen months. Austria was affected by growing internal disorders and stuck in an unsuccessful Balkan War. Catherine II had found that the Turkish Empire did not collapse like a pack of cards and was hindered by Gustavus III's tenacity while Poland showed increasing signs of independent action. British domestic instability seemed likely to give France more diplomatic opportunities. Vauguyon, French envoy in Spain, suggested in February 1789 both that this instability would make Britain more amenable, and that British diplomatic inactivity would calm the effervescence of her Prussian ally[69]. At the same time the possibility that the Estates General would bring renewed vigour to France could be advertised. The Count of Aranda, formerly Spanish ambassador in Paris, suggested to Montmorin that the third estate would support the crown, in order not to be crushed by the other two estates. He felt sure that the wealth and numbers of this estate would be of great consequence. A British pamphlet of 1789 is worth quoting at length because it suggests that some commentators were well aware of France's potential, even though the anonymous author admitted that his view was a minority one,

66 J. W. Derry, The Regency Crisis and the Whigs 1788–1789, Cambridge 1963; Richmond to Pitt, 6 Nov. 1788, CUL. Add. 6958, no. 568, Barthélemy to Montmorin, 22, 24 Oct., 4, 11, 18 Nov., Luzerne to Montmorin, 9, 16 Dec. 1788, AE. CP. Ang. 567 f. 57–8, 104–5, 123–6, 139–40, 142, 231, 271; Baron van Nagel, Dutch envoy in London, to Monsr. van de Spiegel, Dutch Pensionary, 2 Dec. 1788, Bodl. Bland Burges papers 50 f. 185; Felix Farley's Bristol Journal 15, 22 Nov. 1788; Vieregg to Halberg, 22, 29 Nov. 1788, Munich, Ges. Vienna 731.

67 Luzerne to Montmorin, 25 Nov., 2 Dec. 1788, 16 Feb. 1789, AE. CP. Ang. 567 f. 175, 199–200, 568 f. 201–2; T. C. W. Blanning and C. Haase, Kurhannover, der Kaiser und die »Regency Crisis« von 1788–1789, in: Blätter für deutsche Landesgeschichte 113 (1977) pp. 432–49.

68 Luzerne to Montmorin, 16, 23 Dec. 1788, 13 Jan. 1789 AE. CP. Ang. 567 f. 272–5, 312, 568 f. 37.

69 Vauguyon to Montmorin, 19. Feb., Lemarchand to Montmorin, 1789, AE. CP. Espagne 626 f. 141, 218.

France will not be quiet. To men who form opinions concerning future events, by connecting together the chain of causes and effects which produce them, nothing can be more provoking than the present blindness, both of the great and of the little in England, with regard to France. They say France is on the verge of ruin, at the very time when she is on the verge of greatness. Either, one event must happen relating to the finances of France within six months or another probably within eighteen; and whichever of them casts up, will exalt the wealth of the Government of France above that of England. For, the present disorders in the finances of France must soon end in one of two ways: either the Noblesse and the Church will consent to pay taxes in common with the rest of the subjects, or they will not. If they do, the debts of France will be consolidated, and one regular provision made for the payment of their interests, and another for a sinking fund to extinguish their principals, in the same way, as is done in England. In which case, the public credit of France, from the superior natural resources of the country over those of England, will start up in an instant far superior to that of England. Or if the Noblesse and Church will not consent to pay taxes in common with the rest of the subjects; then the Government of France will, nay must, declare a bankruptcy; because, without the aid of new taxes produced by that consent, Government has not revenues sufficient to pay the interest of its debts. In this last case, there will be a convulsion, perhaps for a year; while those who subsisted formerly on the employment given them by the creditors of the public, will be obliged to look for it from other persons: but the convulsion will subside when that employment is found, which never can be long lost in a country full of an industrious people, and of natural advantages. The Government of France will then rise, like a phoenix, more vigorous from her own ashes as she did after the Mississippi; and starting, when clear of debt, with a credit which she could not have got when in debt, and with a revenue which is now thirty millions sterling, will in every money market in Europe, beat England with a revenue not half so large, and loaded with above 250 millions debt.

If either of these two events happen (and one of them must happen, because no third can), then the French will fall either on England alone, or on the House of Austria alone, or upon both; because they have always done one or other of those things, whenever they could with a prospect of success[70].

These arguments are of interest for a number of reasons. They stress the importance of fiscal considerations which were of consequence not only for France's domestic politics and international standing, but also for Anglo-French relations. Both countries competed to borrow money at favourable rates, a situation that characterised both the pre-revolutionary and revolutionary position[71]. Also of interest is the sense that Britain was not without weaknesses. A belief in British vulnerability was to play a major role in French attitudes in 1792, and although this belief was based on different premises to that of 1788–1789, including an alleged widespread pro-French radicalism, it suggests that there is a degree of continuity in the perception of British weakness.

The possible consequences of the Regency Crisis for British foreign policy and domestic politics were cut short by George III's recovery in mid-February 1789. KING PERFECTLY RECOVERED announced the »Leeds Intelligencer« of 24 February under a London byline of three days earlier. This did not end speculation, Montmorin suggesting on 27 February that the administration would be

70 Aranda to Montmorin, 16 Jan. 1789, AE. CP. Espagne 626 f. 27; Anon, Considerations on the Prussian Treaty, London 1789, pp. 17–19.

71 Barthélemy was concerned about the movement of funds from France to Britain, Barthélemy to Montmorin, 26 Aug., 16 Sept. 1791, AE. CP. Ang. 578 f. 183–4, 258.

uncertain during George's convalescence. George's illness had already led Montmorin to consider the prospect of an Anglo-French coalition, an instance of the extent to which the international system was perceived to be unstable prior to the Revolution. He felt that such a coalition would be desirable, as it would assure the peace of Europe, a questionable assumption in light of the impotence of the two powers in 1772 when they felt unable to respond to the First Partition of Poland, but he argued that there was no basis for confidence. Montmorin claimed that the British government was jealous of France and hated her, that any alliance would witness an attempt by Britain to dominate France and that France would be foolish to sacrifice her continental alliances to arrange a precarious liaison with a rival[72]. In light of the commitment of so many British politicians to hostility to France and to the Prussian alliance, of the Franco-Spanish alliance and of conflicting British and Spanish interests, Montmorin's analysis was a reasonable one. It was not until the Revolution destroyed the reality of first the Austro-French alliance in 1789 and then that between France and Spain in 1790 that an Anglo-French alliance became more credible in Paris. This was due not only to a sense of ideological empathy but also to the realities of diplomatic opportunity, particularly after British hopes of Anglo-Austrian reconciliation following the accession of Leopold II in 1790 had proved abortive and the Anglo-Prussian alliance had collapsed in acrimony in 1791. It was diplomatically plausible for French politicians and diplomats to suggest alliance with Britain in 1792, even at the expense of Spain's position in the Americas. In early 1789 however an alliance was implausible, not simply because of French weakness, but also because of the diplomatic situation, in particular, the Anglo-Prussian alliance.

Renewed British political stability after the Regency Crisis was to be cemented first by the government's success in the 1790 general election and secondly by the split in the Opposition over the response to the French Revolution in 1792–1793 and the eventual transfer of many Opposition politicians to the government, a trend prefigured by Edmund Burke's earlier emotional and ideological break with Fox. In contrast France became more obviously divided as hopes that the political initiatives of 1788–1789 would bring renewal receded. The disorders of 1789 were so striking precisely because they represented not only the breakdown of the ancien régime, but also of an attempt to reform it on which much hope had been placed. Robert Arbuthnot wrote to Keith from Paris in March 1789 in order to inform him of the violent disturbances in the French provinces. He added *In the present dispositions of men's minds I think the States* [Estates General] *if assembled would do very little good ... In general the expectations of the French are unreasonable and indeed ridiculous. They think that the whole constitution should be changed and all the abuses which have crept into their Government during several centuries should be rectified at one stroke. Perhaps there is something in the character of the French nation which renders them ill calculated to carry on business in a numerous and popular assembly. Their excessive love of talking will be a great inconvenience and I am told that in the provincial assemblies it is with the utmost difficulty that the members can be prevented speaking three or four at a time.*

72 Montmorin to Vauguyon, 27 Feb., Montmorin to Luzerne, 8 Feb. 1789, AE. CP. Espagne 626 f. 158, Ang. 568 f. 136.

By the summer violence was as apparent a feature of the French political scene as talk to British commentators. The violence had a direct impact on France's standing, not solely because of the defiance of royal authority, but also because it entailed first a commitment of military strength and secondly a lessening of it as disorder spread to the armed forces[73]. The French political nation responded to domestic disorder by alleging British intrigues[74] and suspecting British naval moves[75], the atmosphere of suspicion owing much to the British refusal in July to heed a request sent the previous month by Necker that the export of flour to France be permitted[76]. The atmosphere in Paris was recorded by Mrs Martha Swinburne,

its being reported that England was going to declare war and had already distributed 20 French millions in Paris – such nonsense could only have gained credit with the mob, but then it is King Mob that governs. However the Duke of Dorset's letter to Montmorin which was communicated to the Assemblée has had the desired effect ... The Ambassador himself was not safe before he took the resolution of justifying ... The merest trifle is enough to inflame the populace who never consider but takes fire at the first word[77].

The disorders in France led in the short term to diplomatic nullity and extensive speculation as to the likely consequences. In Vienna Noailles assured Chancellor Kaunitz that France was accustomed to monarchical government, but was himself told by the Spanish envoy that any fundamental attack on royal authority might lead to a change in Europe's political system. French diplomats disseminated a positive view of French developments, making assurances that Louis XVI was still popular[78]. British commentators were unconvinced. Colonel William Gardiner, a British army officer who was soon to become a diplomat, wrote to the Duke of Dorset from Paris in November 1789,

To infer from the present undisturbed state of this city, either that individual contentment existed, or that general order was likely to take place, would be to judge with very little knowledge of those essential reasons which oppose both. Where slavery is felt in a greater degree than in the most despotic government, and where no person can be certain, four and twenty hours, either of liberty or existence, the former supposition must be destroyed; and the picture Monr de Mirabeau lately drew of the decay and approaching ruin of all the manufacturing towns in this kingdom must place the latter at a very remote epoch. The truth is, every one complains, both of respective sufferings and of the state of the country at large; and remedy cannot now be applied to evils, which in the commencement were never foreseen, and which have already gone so far beyond all human speculation.

The attempt to show in how many parts this great machine is affected would be to go through every branch of every department; but it may shortly be described in the following summary.

The Destruction of Commerce – the annihilation of the army – the suspension of every article relating to the marine – public bankruptcy – and private penury – total loss of credit abroad and

73 Arbuthnot to Keith, 4 Mar. 1789, BL. Add. 35541 f. 191–2.
74 Luzerne to Montmorin, 31 July, 14 Aug., Montmorin to Luzerne, 3, 10 Aug 1789, AE. CP. Ang. 570 f. 181, 229–30, 201, 224.
75 Luzerne to Montmorin, 31 July, 14 Aug., Montmorin to Luzerne, 3, 10 Aug., Barthélemy to Montmorin, 15 Sept. 1789, AE. CP. Ang. 570 f. 180, 202, 222, 233, 367.
76 Luzerne to Montmorin, 7, 28 July 1789, AE. CP. Ang. 570 f. 76–7, 173.
77 Political Extracts from Mrs Swinburne's Letters, 28 July 1789, BL. Add. 33121 f. 15.
78 Noailles to Montmorin, 12 Aug., Montmorin to Noailles, 11 Oct. 1789, AE. CP. Autriche 357 f. 282–30, 358 f. 106; Ségur to Montmorin, 18 Sept., Montmorin to Genet, chargé d'affaires in Russia, 29 Oct., 14 Dec. 1789, AE. CP. Russie 130 f. 36, 127, 225.

at home – the desertion of the real proprietors of landed property, with the usurpation of their consequence by those who have none – and, to conclude with the emphatical words of the Abbe Maury, un Roi sans pouvoir, et un Peuple sans liberté.

If an objection can be made to this representation, it is only in respect to the bankruptcy; but surely no other title can fairly be given to the stoppage of all legal payment, and the breach of all public faith[79].

However, at the same time that lurid accounts of French disorders circulated in the British press, there was considerable concern about French ambitions in the Austrian Netherlands. Indeed this contrast prefigured a series of others that was to mark Anglo-French relations over the following years. Accounts of French chaos and disorders the following year were for example to be matched by concern that France would arm a powerful naval force and act in the Nootka Sound crisis. The fears of late 1789 were inspired by the collapse of Austrian authority in the Austrian Netherlands and the possibility that a political solution would be devised that had the unintentional effect of increasing French influence by making the territory independent and thus depriving it of the role within a non-French state that Austrian rule had entailed. Furthermore, it was feared that the Austrian Netherlands might be brought under direct French influence should it pass into the possession of the Duke of Orléans. Joseph II hoped that such a prospect would lead to a British reaction. During the winter of 1789–1790 Britain devoted much effort to seeking to arrange a satisfactory settlement of the issue, James Bland Burges, under-secretary at the Foreign Office, writing in March 1790 to Lord Auckland, the former William Eden, who had become British envoy at The Hague,

We, in this country, are more and more confirmed in the sentiments in which you left us; vizt: of the inexpediency of acknowledging the independence of the Low Countries on the one hand, and of suffering the French to obtain too great an influence there on the other.

Auckland agreed that it would be best if Austria regained her authority, though he was aware of the different view held by Britain's ally and Austria's enemy, Prussia, *it is grown good policy as well as good morality to discourage all insurgents, even though a temporary advantage may be gained by an opposite conduct*[80]. This difference of opinion was to place considerable stress on the Anglo-Prussian alliance in 1790, weakening it prior to the Ochakov crisis and possibly leading the British government to take a more assertive line in the latter. However the British government was no more willing to abdicate responsibility for the Austrian Netherlands in 1790 in order to please Prussia, than it was in 1792 in order to prevent conflict with France.

In the spring of 1790 the issue of possible French intentions in the Austrian Netherlands was pushed into the background as another central British interest, extra-European trade, came to the fore. The seizure by Spanish warships of British vessels trading on Vancouver island rapidly escalated towards war. Diplomatic

79 Gardiner to Dorset, 13 Nov. 1789, Bodl. Bland Burges papers 63 f. 2–4.

80 Joseph II to Kaunitz, 13 Nov. 1789, A. Beer (ed.), Joseph II Leopold II und Kaunitz: Ihr Briefwechsel, Vienna 1873, pp. 349–50; Leeds to Keith, 13 Nov. 1789, BL. Add. 35541 f. 337; Burges to Auckland, 12 Mar., Auckland to Burges, 13 Mar. 1790, Bodl. Bland Burges papers 30 f. 9–10.

exchanges were soon matched by major naval armaments[81]. The issue indicated both the intertwining of European affairs and their separation. Prussia, Austria and Russia, close to war, devoted only a limited amount of attention to the crisis, and the latter two, though in dispute with Britain and Prussia, were singularly unresponsive to Spanish approaches for assistance. On the other hand the crisis clearly affected Britain's ability to intervene in eastern European disputes and her attitude to them. It may even be suggested that by delaying the Anglo-Prussian attempted intimidation of Russia until the spring of 1791 it helped to lead to both diplomatic failure and to the linked parliamentary storm over the issue. Though the government found it expedient to blame their decision to back down in the face of Russian opposition in 1791 largely on the latter, much was in fact due to the diplomatic developments of the previous year, including the end of the Russo-Swedish war, the increasing tergiversations of Prussian policy and the failure to pin Leopold II of Austria down. The play of contingency was of crucial importance as was to be crucially illustrated in Anglo-French relations in 1792–1793. The discussion of the relationship between this play and more long-term or ›structural‹ features of international relationships, such as the division in the British political nation over poor relations with Russia, hostility towards Spanish pretensions in the Americas or concern over the possible ideological and territorial assault of revolutionary France is difficult and fraught with serious methodological problems. The role of contingency, rather than, in particular, ideology has recently been stressed by Blanning[82], and it is valuable in this context to consider the outbreak of war with France in 1793, alongside the maintenance of the peace with both Spain in 1790 and Russia in 1791. A number of differences are readily apparent. The points at issue in the latter two cases were not as crucial to national interests, however then defined, as the territorial integrity of the United Provinces, Britain's central concern in her disagreements with France over the Low Countries in the winter of 1792–1793. This ›diplomatic‹ difference was arguably as important as the ›ideological‹ one, namely the extent to which revolutionary France deliberately posed an ideological challenge both to Britain and to her allies, both present and future, and was believed to do so, both in Britain and in France. In contrast, though the disputes with Spain and Russia both, and in particular, the latter[83], became a subject of political debate, part of the currency of political partisanship, they neither aroused the fears and passions that relations with France inspired, nor were a public issue for so long. The last arguably was important not only in heightening tension, but also in causing the British political world to be transformed by the issue of relations with France, whereas, in contrast, the disputes with Spain and Russia were of transient importance, not only because they were relatively short, but also because they fitted into rather than transformed the existing political

81 C. de Parrel, Pitt et L'Espagne, in: Revue d'histoire diplomatique 64 (1950); J. M. Norris, The policy of the British Cabinet in the Nootka crisis, in: English Historical Review 70 (1955); V. T. Harlow, The Founding of the Second British Empire 1763–1793, vol. 2, London 1964, pp. 419–81; L. Marinas Otero, El Incidente de Nutka, in: Revista de Indias 27 (1967) pp. 335–407; P. Webb, The Naval Aspects of the Nootka Sound Affair, in: Mariner's Mirror 61 (1975) pp. 133–54.

82 T. C. W. Blanning, French Revolutionary Wars (see n. 3) pp. 205–11; J. Black (ed.), The Origins of War (see i. 15) pp. 20–1.

83 A. Cunningham, The Oczakow Debate, in: Middle Eastern Studies 1 (1964–5) pp. 209–37.

divisions. If the contrasting situation over relations with France owed something to Edmund Burke and his determination to change the political world in order to confront his vision of the challenge posed by France, it also owed much to the combined impact of the British and French radical milieus in raising fears in Britain and to the manner in which French policies and success in late 1792 seemed to give substance to these fears.

The play of contingency and the success of the British government in resisting public demands, in this case overwhelmingly for war, played a major role in allowing Britain what was generally conceded to be a triumph in the Nootka Sound crisis. The crisis was also generally perceived as a significant defeat for France. If the Dutch crisis of 1787 marked the diplomatic bankruptcy of ancien régime France, that of Nootka Sound suggested that the subsequent changes, whether discerned as revolutionary or not, had brought no improvement and that the claims of commentators that France was indeed weak and weakening were correct. The Family Compact allowed Spain to call for French assistance, providing France with an opportunity to escape from diplomatic nullity. Hoping that success would have significant domestic results, that it would be possible to reverse the consequences of 1787, Louis XVI announced orders on 14 May to fit out 14 ships of the line. At the same time Montmorin offered French conciliation of the Anglo-Spanish differences[84]. Attention immediately centred on the attitude of the National Assembly, which insisted on debating the royal message of 14 May. Eight days later the Assembly decided that the king could not declare war without its approval at the same time as it renounced the idea of war as a means of making conquests. The latter was praised in the British press, the former appreciated by British ministers as a hindrance to French aid to Spain. The diplomat George Hammond wrote from Britain *The decision of the National Assembly, with respect to the prerogative of the Crown is considered here as an insurmountable obstacle to the avowed and concealed views of the court of Madrid.* Though Pitt's discussions with Luzerne about France's attitude were conciliatory, Luzerne was told that the British government suspected that a court party in Paris wanted war and that neither Luzerne nor Montmorin was in the secret. This prefigured the problem of credibility that was to affect France's envoys in London in 1792 as French diplomacy fractured under the strain of competing views, the struggle to control and execute policy and the partial breakdown of the diplomatic service in the face of other accredited and unaccredited agents. The conviction in 1790 that French policy was influenced by a secret cabal also played a role in the British decision to use intrigue and bribery in order to forestall its effect. Pitt's gold' may not have played any role in 1789, but it appears to have been used the following year[85].

However, British bribery and intrigue were not alone responsible for French conduct. On 16 June 1790 Spain made a formal request for French assistance, a request presented to the National Assembly on 2 August, when Montmorin warned

84 Montmorin to Luzerne, 17 May, Luzerne to Montmorin, 8 June 1790, AE. CP. Ang. 573 f. 116, 253.

85 Times, 26 May, Morning Herald, 31 May 1790; Hammond to Keith, 4 June, John Trevor, envoy in Turin, to Keith, 10 June 1790, BL. Add. 35542 f. 219, 236–7; Luzerne to Montmorin, 8, 15 June 1790, AE. CP. Ang. 573 f. 249–55, 285–6; J. Holland Rose, William Pitt and National Revival, London 1911, pp. 577–81.

that unless France sent aid she would lose the alliance of Spain. Montmorin feared that the British conviction of French weakness was responsible for the aggressive British attitude towards Spain. Puyabry, the French chargé d'affaires in Madrid, was told by Floridablanca that Britain would not have dared confront Spain if she had not been certain that Spain would receive no help from an ally, France, whose critical position prevented her from taking any part in the affairs of Europe. Puyabry argued in reply that France was preparing for naval action, only to meet with the retort that the French constitution was still unsettled, that the insubordination of French forces destroyed any hope of her assistance and that any military preparations would be very unpopular in France. Indeed Montmorin had hoped to avoid the crisis, his delay in presenting the Spanish demand to the National Assembly arising from his hope that a settlement would be negotiated speedily. On 26 August the National Assembly reached a decision, ratified by the king two days later,

Décreté en outre que le Roi sera prié de charger immédiatement son ambassadeur en Espagne de négocier avec les Ministres de S.M.C. à l'effet de perpétüer et de resserrer, par un Traité National, des liens utiles aux deux peuples et de fixer avec précision et clarté toute stipulation qui ne seroit pas entierèment conforme aux vües de Paix générale et aux Principes de justice qui seront à jamais la politique des françois. Au surplus l'assemblée nationale prenant en considération les armements des différentes nations de l'Europe leur accroissement progressif, la sûreté des colonies françoises et du commerce, décréte que le Roi sera prié de donner des ordres pour que les escadres françoises en commission soient portées à 45 vaisseaux de ligne[86].

Such a force would have had an appreciable effect in any Anglo-Spanish conflict, but the impact of the decision was lessened by a general conviction that the French could not and would not act. The French fleet was affected by what the newly appointed British ambassador Earl Gower termed a *spirit of insubordination*, and there was widespread doubt about its capacity to act adequately[87]. Furthermore there was uncertainty over whether the French government wished to act. On the evening of 26 August Montmorin told Gower that the armament would be made *avec la plus grande lenteur*. In contrast Floridablanca was informed that the French would arm as soon as possible[88]. How far their inability to rely on France affected the Spanish ministry is unclear, but Spain had no other power she could realistically turn to and the lateness and inadequacy of the French response made it clear that she would have to settle with Britain, as she eventually did.

In the Nootka Sound crisis France was treated not as a revolutionary state, but as a power suffering from domestic instability, though there were fears in Spain about the contagion of French ideas. By the following year she was increasingly regarded as a

86 Montmorin to Luzerne, 15, 26 June 1790, AE. CP. Ang. 573 f. 289, 312; Puyabry to Montmorin, 7 July 1790, AE. CP. Espagne 629 f. 112–14; Montmorin to Noailles, 7 Aug. 1790, AE. CP. Autriche 360 f. 111; Decret, AE. CP. Espagne 629 f. 235.

87 Gower to his father, the Marquis of Stafford, 20 Aug. 1790, PRO. 30/29/1/17; Spiegel to Auckland, 1 Sept. [1790], Burges to Auckland, 7 Sept., Ewart to Auckland, 15 Sept., George Rose to Auckland, 24 Sept., Anthony Storer to Auckland, 28 Sept. 1790, BL. Add. 34433 f. 23, 75, 119, 159, 185; Auckland to Burges, 25 Sept. 1790, Bodl. Bland Burges papers 30 f. 61; Puyabry to Montmorin, 26 Oct. 1790, AE. CP. Espagne 629 f. 355; Public Advertiser, 6 Nov. 1790.

88 Gower to Leeds, 27 Aug. 1790, O. Browning (ed.), The Despatches of Earl Gower, Cambridge 1885, p. 28; Montmorin to Puyabry, 1 Sept., Puyabry to Montmorin, 13 Sept. 1790, AE. CP. Espagne 629 f. 231, 264.

revolutionary state, which represented a threat simply by her existence, irrespective of her diplomatic weakness. France was also seen as increasingly unpredictable. Keith had observed from Vienna in October 1790 *As to France the wisest man is least able to foresee what will happen there.* The discourses both of revolution and of counter-revolution became more assertive, and governments that had no wish to go to war with France because of her revolutionary character, nevertheless sought to stem the influence of French ideas in their own countries. Britain was not in the forefront of this movement, to the chagrin of Burke, but diplomatic relations with France continued to be cool throughout 1791. French diplomats in London continually reiterated their suspicion of British intentions and their fear of British plans. For the British ministry, however, relations with France took a distinct second place, first to the disagreement with Russia that led to the Ochakov crisis, and secondly to the diplomatic consequences of that crisis. Despite French fears of British intrigues in France and hopes of colonial gains, the British ministry was essentially satisfied if France was reduced to the situation she was in in early 1791, a nullity that was diplomatically isolated. Insofar as the ministry feared, as Luzerne suggested in May 1791, a revival in French strength[89], they could rely on the increasingly apparent opposition to revolutionary France of other European powers, whether they were allied to Britain or not. In 1788–1790 the prospect of a revived France had entailed a monarchy that was stronger because of constitutional and administrative reform and national unity. Such a France would have been a powerful challenge to Britain because she would have been a more attractive proposition as an ally for other European monarchs. From 1791, however, it was increasingly likely that, short of a successful counter-revolution, which would probably bring chaos, a stronger France would be a politically radical France that would threaten, whether intentionally or not, the domestic position of other monarchs, several of whom were worried about developments within their own countries.

Such fears did not characterise the thinking of the British ministry in 1791. Instead ministers stressed repeatedly their determination not to intervene in French domestic affairs[90]. The culmination of this attitude was the British decision not to intervene when war broke out between France and Austria in April 1792 and their subsequent assurances of neutrality. In August 1792 Morton Eden, envoy in Berlin, wrote, *though I feel the most perfect indignation at the atrocious conduct of the French and am certainly in my principles rather aristocratic than democratic, yet I trust that our compassion will not lead us further. Perhaps it would have been better if a cordon had been drawn round France as in time of the plague and that they had been left to settle their own differences.* However, the reasons why less than a year later Britain was to be at war with revolutionary France were already apparent. The declaration of neutrality given to the French envoy on 24 May 1792 was subject to respect for Britain's treaty obligations and rights, which Chauvelin reported entailed respecting the territory of Britain's allies, Prussia and the United Provinces. At the beginning of the month Grenville, Leeds' replacement, had already told Chauvelin that the British

89 Keith to Auckland, 9 Oct. 1790, BL. Add. 34433 f. 272; Luzerne to Montmorin, 6 May 1791, AE. CP. Ang. 577 f. 212.

90 Barthélemy to Montmorin, 7 Oct. 1791, AE. CP. Ang. 579 f. 14; P. Jupp, Lord Grenville, Oxford 1985, p. 146.

ministry was unhappy about the war between Austria and France as it would bring conflict to the Austrian Netherlands[91]. Whether expressed in terms of treaty obligations or not, the British ministry did not wish to see any increase in French influence in the Low Countries and it had indicated that the position of the United Provinces was particularly crucial, an unsurprising gesture in light of British diplomacy over the past decade but one that political opinion in Paris took insufficiently to heart. In the spring of 1792 there seemed little prospect of France overrunning the Low Countries. The outbreak of war was not inevitable, but, more to the point, if war broke out, French success was not envisaged. In the event, the French plan for a speedy conquest of the Austrian Netherlands proved a dismal failure, while it became clear that Frederick William II, with whom France had hoped to avoid conflict, would support Austria. On 19 August 1792 Prussian troops first entered French territory. Chauvelin argued that the Austro-Prussian alliance menaced not only France, but the whole of Europe, and sought British diplomatic assistance in getting the invaders to leave. In Britain there was concern that though the alliance only menaced France the reestablishment of royal authority there which it seemed likely to achieve would be on terms that were not entirely welcome. However, it was not only in Opposition circles that some scepticism about Prussian chances was expressed. Auckland wrote to Grenville, *the French troops, however despicable they may be in point of discipline and command, are earnest in the support of the wicked and calamitous cause in which they are engaged... I fear that the Duke of Brunswick is engaged in an undertaking, the difficulties of which are not to be removed by the most brilliant and repeated successes.* Uncertain about what would happen, the British ministry nevertheless continued to stress its determination to preserve its neutrality, Grenville writing to Auckland on 21 August, *it is by no means the King's intention to depart from the line of neutrality which he has observed, or to interfere in the internal affairs of France or in the settlement of the future Government of that Kingdom*[92].

It was military success that radically altered this position in late 1792. On 20 September the Prussian army under the Duke of Brunswick faced a cannonade at Valmy east of Rheims, a seemingly inconsequential development that led Brunswick, with all the caution that had characterised the last central European war, that of Austria and Prussia over the Bavarian succession, to fall back. The French regained the initiative, overrunning part of the Empire and the kingdom of Sardinia, and on 6 November at Jemappes near Mons beat the Austrians, a success that was to be followed by the conquest of most of the Austrian Netherlands within a month. On 26 October Chauvelin had warned that because the British had done nothing to prevent French plans to conquer the area in the spring that did not mean they would support them in the autumn. He pointed out that the British had then relied on

91 Eden to Auckland, 28 Aug. 1792, BL. Add. 34444 f. 162; Chauvelin to Dumouriez, 1, 28 May, Chauvelin to Chambonas, Dumouriez's replacement, 22 June 1792, AE. CP. Ang. 580 f. 263, 581 f. 86–8, 187.

92 Chauvelin to Chambonas, 18 June 1792, AE. CP. Ang. 581 f. 177; George Rose to Auckland, 20 Aug., Auckland to Grenville, 31 Aug., Grenville to Auckland, 21 Aug. 1792, BL. Add. 34444 f. 107, 169, 114–15. Fox to Lord Holland, 12 Oct. 1792, Lord John Russel (ed.), Memorials and Correspondence of Charles James Fox, 4 vols. London 1853–7, II, 375.

Austrian strength[93], but he could have added that the British response was likely to be different, not only because of a marked growth of concern within Britain about French radicalism, but also because the changing nature of the French government and political nation ensured that French aspirations, even if similar in a territorial sense, had altered between the spring and the autumn. Initial setbacks and the experience of invasion had been traumatic and had helped to lead to the suspension of the monarchy of 10 August and the ›September Massacres‹ of 2–5 September 1792. Victory also brought a strident tone abroad. On 19 November the National Convention declared that fraternity and assistance would be given to all peoples wishing to regain their liberty, a decision made more worrying by the fact that the franchise would obviously be not a democratic one, but one confined to the voluntary and enforced refugees in Paris. Three days earlier the Executive Council in Paris had both ordered French generals to pursue the defeated Austrians wherever they sought refuge, a decision that effectively ended Dutch territorial integrity, and proclaimed the opening of the river Scheldt. If the first decision had no immediate consequence, the latter was followed by the passage of French warships up the river.

It was the fact of French victory as much as their declarations that led to alarm in Britain. The opposition politician William Windham reported on 14 November ... *At a party at Lord Loughborough's yesterday we agreed that some assurance must be given to Ministry of being supported should they be disposed to strong measures, and failing of them, that it would be right to make some more formal representation of the same tendency to the King.* French victory made the revolutionary threat apparent and concrete, both helping to make minds up in Britain and forcing politicians to determine and express their views, as it became increasingly obvious that the British government would have to respond to the situation in the Low Countries, at least before the next campaigning season. The second Earl of Fife summed up the opinion of the House of Lords in December 1792,

> *all uniting in saving our constitution from these foreign invaders and from these poisoned vipers at home ... every wise man will think Government rather delayed too long in putting the country in a state of defence – the best and most prudent way to avoid war is to be prepared for it. I always thought when they attacked Holland, that we must from interest and the faith of nations, be a party; can anybody wish to see the ambitious lawless invaders in possession of Holland*[94].

During the winter as ministers conducted discussions with French agents, directly or indirectly, aimed at averting conflict, domestic opinion hardened, a process in which reports of developments within France, including the treatment of the royal family, played a significant role. The pressure for action against France was criticised by some commentators, not all of them sympathetic to the then state of the Revolution, who argued that war would not be in Britain's interest. The opposition paper the »Morning Chronicle« complained, *we have suffered ourselves to be cajoled by a set of vehement and malignant spirits, who having rank prejudices to gratify or*

93 Chauvelin to Lebrun, 26 Oct. 1792, AE. CP. Ang. 583 f. 100.

94 Windham to Thomas Grenville, 14 Nov. 1792, Bodl. Ms. Eng. Lett. c. 144 f. 306; Chauvelin to Lebrun, 21, 27 Nov., Noël, French agent in London, to Lebrun, 22 Nov. 1792, AE. CP. Ang. 583 f. 286–7, 296, 334; Fife to his agent, William Rose, 14 Dec. 1792, Aberdeen, University Library, Department of Manuscripts, 2226/131.

having tasted the fruits of former wars, pursued only the gratifications of their passions, and did not disdain the jesuitical plan of obtaining their purposes through popular delirium[95].

These and similar criticisms were seductive to those who viewed with alarm the prospect of war with France, but it is reasonable to ask whether there was any viable alternative. This question has to relate not only to the negotiations of the winter of 1792–1793 and the circumstances of that period, but also to the possibility that peace could have been preserved in subsequent years. The latter is implausible unless it can be suggested that Pitt's government would have been prepared to accept French hegemony in western Europe, a hegemony more powerful, insistent and threatening than that toppled in 1787. This could have been possible only if the analysis advanced in French political circles of a feeble and weak Britain threatened by domestic radicalism had been accurate, but it was not. The French attitude to treaties and long-established rights scarcely encouraged any reliance on their assurances, and, as the instability of French politics affected her diplomatic policy and personnel, conspicuously so in the case of her representation in London, it was difficult to see whose assurances were to be sought. French talk about their desire for an alliance with Britain was of little assistance. It became clear that opinion in Paris as to whose alliance in Britain should be sought varied. Furthermore, French success threatened to define any Anglo-French alliance, the terms of which had always been vague, particularly as it would affect Britain's existing allies, in an unacceptable fashion.

There was little basis for any long-term Anglo-French alliance in the winter of 1792–1793, and the only possible positive solution to the negotiations was the avoidance of conflict for a while. However the likely timespan of any agreement was unclear and the British government faced the danger that domestic radicalism might increase if there was an agreement. Furthermore, it could hardly be expected that any agreement would make it easy to develop links with other European powers or to influence their views. And yet, as French constancy could not be relied on, such links would be necessary, both for the security of Britain's Dutch ally and for the guaranteeing of any Anglo-French understanding. An Anglo-French settlement in the winter of 1792–1793 would only have been viable in the long term had it been part of a larger international settlement, for, given the nature of French aspirations, it was difficult to trust in any French governmental promise to restrict war aims and respect neutralities, as ancien régime French ministries had done in the Polish Succession war and the early stage of the Austrian Succession war.

Distrust was as important in Anglo-French relations in 1792–1793 as it had been in 1790 and 1787, but in 1792–1793 it was no longer possible to measure the French threat by assessing their naval preparations. The unpredictability and potency of French aspirations and the links between British radicals and France, both real and imagined, made the situation appear more threatening. John Hatsell, Chief Clerk of the House of Commons, wrote in November 1792, *I wish every county was like Devonshire – but I fear that in Ireland, Scotland, the manufacturing parts of*

95 Morning Chronicle, 5 Feb. 1793.

Yorkshire and particularly in London, there is a very different spirit rising... the question to its true point – a contest between those who have property and those who have none[96].

The outbreak of war, or rather the failure to preserve the peace, cannot be explained solely on ideological grounds, but they played a major role in explaining why the fairly constant state of Anglo-French distrust developed into a tense situation in the winter of 1792–1793. However, crucial to this shift, both in terms of the fears of the British political nation and the anxieties of their government, was French resilience in 1792 and the dramatic impact of French strength in an area believed crucial to British interests, or at least vital to keep out of the hands of France. The possible consequences of a revival in French strength had been an important theme in British discussion of French developments from 1787 onwards. The possible nature of French schemes in the Low Countries had similarly been a significant aspect of the discussion of French diplomatic plans. Their combination in late 1792 was a potent one, which would have been judged dangerous prior to the radicalisation of the Revolution. Ideology played an important role in the British response to the Revolution, but much about the crisis of 1792–1793, not least the dispute over the Low Countries and their transition into an Anglo-French battlefield, was far from novel.

96 Hatsell to John Ley, 28 Nov. 1792, Devon, County Record Office, 63/2/11/1/53; Fife to Rose, 3, 16 Jan. 1793, Aberdeen, 2226/131.