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JEREMY BLACK

ANGLO-FRENCH RELATIONS 1763–1775

Je trouve que la France et les branches de la maison de Bourbon font tres bien de s'entendre avec l'Angleterre, et de chercher son amitié dans cette conjoncture: c'est le seul moyen de conserver l'équilibre.

Count Seinsheim, Bavarian minister, on Polish crisis, 1772¹

I was very glad to find by your official letter that there is so much reason to think that France means to be quiet. I need not say how much we wish it here upon every account

Viscount Stormont, British Ambassador to France, then in London, 1773²

It is most certain that the state of the finances and general situation of the country require a lasting peace, which is more the wish of the nation, than ever it was, at any period of time. It seems to be strongly the wish and intention of those who are at the helm. Various circumstances may however force a war

Viscount Stormont, Paris, November 1774³

The Peace of Paris of 1763 marked the highpoint of British fortunes in the bitterly-competitive world of eighteenth-century European rivalries. Ending the Anglo-Bourbon sphere of the Seven Years' War (1756–1763) by recognizing Britain's gain of a number of key Bourbon possessions, including Canada, Florida, Senegal and several islands in the West Indies, it inaugurated another interwar period that was to last for France and Spain until 1778 and 1779 respectively. The last years of this period were overshadowed by the War of American Independence, which broke out in 1775, and by 1777 the crucial question in Anglo-French relations was not whether France would intervene but when, or rather, when her unofficial but crucial assistance to the Americans would be translated into formal recognition and the consequent outbreak of hostilities with Britain.

The years prior to the War of American Independence were not without moments of serious crisis in Anglo-French relations when war appeared imminent, most obviously in 1770 during the Falkland Islands crisis⁴. However, an obvious contrast

1 Seinsheim to Baron Haslang, Bavarian envoy in London, 3 Sept 1772, Munich, Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Gesandtschaft (hereafter Munich) London 250.

2 Stormont to Colonel Horace St Paul, Secretary of Embassy in Paris, 5 Mar 1773, Gosforth, Northumberland Record Office (hereafter NRO) ZBU B 3/24.

3 Stormont to Earl of Rochford, Secretary of State for Southern Department, 16 Nov 1774, London, Public Record Office (hereafter PRO) 78/294 f. 45.

4 N. TRACY, The Falkland Islands Crisis of 1770: Use of Naval Force, in: *English Historical Review* 90 (1975), pp. 40–75.

to previous interwar periods, 1697–1702, 1713–1743, 1748–1756, and to the next such period, 1783–1793⁵, was that in 1763–1775 European issues were not at the forefront of Anglo-French relations for most of the period. There were years when such issues were central, most obviously in 1768 in response to the French purchase of Corsica from Genoa⁶ and in 1772–1773 when the First Partition of Poland and Gustavus III's coup d'état in Sweden led both to tentative discussions about concerted Anglo-French action to restrain the partitioning powers and to heightened tension between the two countries⁷. However, these were more obviously years of naval and colonial competition, competition highlighted by a number of clashes, none of which led to war, but which served to sustain rivalry and exacerbate tension⁸. As such, they appear to exemplify the theme of maritime and colonial competition which has played such a prominent role in discussion of eighteenth-century Anglo-French relations⁹.

However, the very fact that such competition played such a prominent role in these years raises questions more generally about the nature both of Anglo-French relations during the century and of the international system. Colonial issues were important in other periods, leading Britain and France to begin hostilities over the North American hinterland in the mid 1750s and Britain and Spain close to war over trade with the Pacific coast of North America in the Nootka Sound Crisis of 1790.

- 5 D. MCKAY, *Bolingbroke, Oxford and the Defence of the Utrecht Settlement in Southern Europe*, in: *English Historical Review* 86 (1971); E. BOURGEOIS, *La diplomatie secrète au XVIII^e siècle. I. Le Secret du Regent et la Politique de l'Abbé Dubois*, Paris 1907; J. DURENG, *Le Duc de Bourbon et l'Angleterre 1723–1726*, Paris 1911; J. F. CHANCE, *The Alliance of Hanover*, London 1923; R. LODGE, *The Anglo-French Alliance, 1716–1731*, in: A. COVILLE and H. TEMPERLEY (eds), *Studies in Anglo-French History during the Eighteenth, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Cambridge 1935, pp. 3–18; BLACK, *Natural and Necessary Enemies. Anglo-French Relations in the Eighteenth Century*, London 1986; BLACK, *The Anglo-French Alliance 1716–1731*, in: *Francia* 13 (1985) pp. 295–310; BLACK, *Anglo-French Relations in the Mid-Eighteenth Century*, in: *Francia* 17/2 (1990) 45–79; BLACK, *The Marquis of Carmarthen and Relations with France 1784–1787*, in: *Francia* 12 (1984) pp. 283–303; 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. 253–283; BLACK, *Anglo-French Relations in the Age of the French Revolution 1787–1793*, in: *Francia* 15 (1987) pp. 407–433.
- 6 TRACY, *The Government of the Duke of Grafton, and the French Invasion of Corsica in 1768*, in: *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 8 (1974–1975), pp. 169–182.
- 7 B. du FRAQUIER, *Le Duc d'Aiguillon et l'Angleterre*, in: *Revue d'histoire diplomatique*, 26 (1912), pp. 607–627; M. ROBERTS, *Great Britain and the Swedish Revolution*, in: *Historical Journal*, 8 (1964) pp. 1–46.
- 8 J. F. RAMSEY, *Anglo-French Relations, 1763–1770: A Study of Choiseul's Foreign Policy*, Berkeley 1939; R. ABARCA, *Bourbon 'Revanche' against England: the Balance of Power 1763–1770*, Ph. D. Notre Dame 1965; TRACY, *Parry of a threat to India, 1768–1774*, in: *Mariner's Mirror* 59 (1973), pp. 35–48; TRACY, *The Gunboat Diplomacy of the Government of George Grenville, 1764–1765: The Honduras, Turks Island, and Gambian Incidents*, in: *Historical Journal* 17 (1974), pp. 711–731; TRACY, *British Assessments of French and Spanish Naval Reconstruction between the Peace of Paris of 1763 and the Resumption of Hostilities with France*, in: *Mariner's Mirror* 61 (1975), pp. 73–85; TRACY, *Navies, Deterrence, and American Independence. Britain and Seapower in the 1760s and 1770s*, Vancouver 1988, pp. 42–117.
- 9 G. NIEDHART, *Handel und Krieg in der britischen Weltpolitik 1738–1763*, Munich 1979; M. MILLER, *Der Einfluß kolonialer Interessen in Nordamerika auf die Strategie und Diplomatie Großbritanniens während des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Hildesheim 1983; A. RESSE, *Europäische Hegemonie und France d'outre-mer. Koloniale Fragen in der französischen Außenpolitik 1700–1763*, Stuttgart 1988; P. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, London 1989, pp. 140–154.

However, for most of the century these issues were overshadowed by concerns and disputes that were European in their origin. Between the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the decisive defeat of the Jacobite army of Scottish Highlanders at Culloden in 1746, the security of the Protestant Succession in Britain was a central theme¹⁰. Successive British monarchs and ministries were concerned about the apparently inexorable French threat, which seemed to challenge Britain with the prospect of universal monarchy by Louis XIV or at least French dominance of the strategically crucial Low Countries. This helped to lead to confrontation with France, from the Triple Alliance of 1668 to the dispatch of British troops to assist Frederick II of Prussia in 1758. France's strength and importance also made her a desirable ally, whether in attacking the Dutch in 1672, seeking to tackle the impending crisis over the Spanish succession by negotiating partition treaties in 1698 and 1700, or in counteracting threats from Russia, Austria and Prussia as in 1716–1720, 1725–1730 and 1729–1730 respectively. Thus, if Anglo-French relations were considerably more complex than is suggested by the commonly used term »the Second Hundred Years War«, it is nevertheless clear that, whether in enmity or friendship, European issues were foremost. The horizons of Louis XIV and Louis XV, William III, Anne, George I and George II were set on the Rhine and the Alps, not the Ganges and the Appalachians.

The shift to a more, though far from exclusively, colonial and maritime perspective in the post – 1763 period reflected changes both in Anglo-French relations and in those of Europe more generally. Crucial to the former was British disengagement from the interventionist diplomacy that had been championed so energetically by George II and his effective foreign minister, the Duke of Newcastle, in 1748–1756, and that had centred on the creation of a collective security system that would protect vulnerable Hanover from attack. George III and most of his ministers reacted against this legacy and, though not keen to gain continental alliances, wished to avoid expence and commitments¹¹. Newcastle, who had survived George II, who died in 1760, to face a new political world, criticised what he saw as a failure to win allies. Instead, Newcastle sought a collective security system aimed against France and her allies. In 1748–1755 this had entailed alliance with Austria and Russia against Prussia; in the 1760s he advocated various combinations all directed against France but all presented, as in 1748–1755, as serving defensive purposes. Thus, in May 1767 Newcastle wrote to Andrew Mitchell, the envoy in Berlin, about, *how sincerely I wished a thorough union with the King of Prussia, from the time our negotiation with Russia began. I am still of opinion, that a more proper opportunity of forming a firm union, between the powers in the north, for maintaining and preserving the peace, has been lost.* Two months later Newcastle warned the Marquis of Rockingham, a

10 BLACK, Culloden and the '45, Stroud 1990.

11 BLACK, The Crown, Hanover and the Shift in British Foreign Policy in the 1760s, in: BLACK ed, Knights Errant and True Englishmen. British Foreign Policy 1660–1800, Edinburgh 1989, pp. 113–134; BLACK, A System of Ambition? British Foreign Policy 1660–1793, London 1991, pp. 204–208.

former protégé who was one of the leading politicians in opposition, that France was *in a condition to strike*¹².

The ministers Newcastle criticised for the failure to create an alliance system were indeed concerned about France, but they concentrated on the maritime and colonial dimension of the supposed threat and directed their attention to the possible naval response¹³. The size and preparedness of the fleet was seen as the best deterrent of and most effective reply to French action, an obvious contrast to ministerial concern in 1753–1755 about the prospect of Austrian and Russian military assistance in the event of war breaking out in Europe. By rejecting the interventionist traditions of the 1750s, especially guarantees, subsidy treaties, concern about Hanover, and attempts to preempt likely problems by creating a powerful alliance system, George III directed attention to the maritime situation and this in turn made the policies and ethos of intervention appear more irrelevant. This shift was linked to the appearance of a new generation of politicians in senior positions in the 1760s, a development that helped to make Pitt's unrealistic quest for a Prusso-Russian alliance in 1766–1767 as anachronistic as Newcastle's views.

However, it would be misleading to discuss the change in British ministerial attitudes without considering their relationship to that in French policy. In part, the British ministers and politicians felt able to concentrate on colonial and maritime issues, and to devote far less time to foreign policy than to domestic developments, precisely because the apparently traditional agenda of French policy had been set aside. In place of territorial aggrandisement and diplomatic hegemony, Louis XV and his ministers were more concerned about stability and the threat to their conception of the European system and their traditional eastern European allies posed by the rise of Russian power. Choiseul, who returned to the French Foreign Office in 1766, strengthened the anti-Russian direction of official French policy, while Louis XV's *secret du roi* had similar objectives¹⁴. French governmental views and intentions were in large measure obscure as far as the British ministry was concerned. There was no confidential correspondence between the two powers. Furthermore, there was a significant legacy of suspicion between the two powers, distrust that was to play a role both in British replies to French approaches in 1772–1773 and in threatening British responses to French plans in 1773 for a naval demonstration directed against the Russian fleet in the Mediterranean. Nevertheless, the traditional indicator of the French threat, territorial expansion, especially in the Low Countries, was no longer threatening, while on the European scale France appeared less powerful and active

12 Newcastle to Mitchell, 19 May 1767, London, British Library, Additional Manuscripts (hereafter BL Add) 6832 f. 57; Newcastle to Rockingham, 8 July 1767, Sheffield, Archives, Wentworth Woodhouse Manuscripts R1-812.

13 Thomas Bradshaw, Secretary to the Treasury, to the Duke of Grafton, 1st Lord of the Treasury, 20 Oct 1767, Bury St Edmunds, West Suffolk Record Office, Grafton papers 423/301.

14 H. M. SCOTT, *Russia as a European Great Power*, in: R. BARTLETT and J. M. HARTLEY eds, *Russia in the Age of Enlightenment*, London 1990, pp. 20–22. The secret can be followed in E. BOUTARIC, *Correspondance secrète inédite de Louis XV sur la politique étrangère*, 2 vols Paris 1866; Duc de BROGLIE, *Le Secret du Roi Correspondance secrète de Louis XV avec ses agents diplomatiques, 1752–1774*, 2 vols Paris 1878; D. OZANAM and M. ANTOINE, *Correspondance Secrète du Comte de Broglie avec Louis XV*, 2 vols Paris, 1956–1961.

than Russia, and to a lesser extent, Austria, and at the very least, no longer as dominant as she had seemed in the 1680s or late 1730s.

Far from seeking opportunities for expansion in the Low Countries and only being restrained by coalitions in which Britain had played a major role, as between 1668 and 1748, the French sought to stabilise their frontiers. In 1769, 1770, 1772 and 1779 treaties between France and the Austrian Netherlands removed enclaves by a process of exchange¹⁵, just as in 1763 a similar exchange was agreed between Louis XV and the Prince of Nassau. The French made two important gains of territory, neither in the Low Countries and both in various degrees anticipated. On the death of Louis XV's father-in-law Stanislaus Leszczyński in 1766, his Duchies of Lorraine and Bar were inherited by Louis, but that had been foreseen ever since Stanislaus gained the duchies as part of the complex peace settlement following the War of the Polish Succession (1733–1735)¹⁶. The fate of Lorraine had therefore been debated by British politicians and newspapers seeking to make political points concerning British neutrality in that war. It was not an issue in the 1760s. After Stanislaus became Duke, Lorraine was effectively French as far as wider diplomatic and strategic questions were concerned.

The French acquisition and conquest of Corsica in 1768–1769 was more contentious¹⁷. French intervention in the island was not new and French ministers had expressed concern about British plans for it¹⁸. However, it was the British who were more worried, their fears a response to clear French interest¹⁹. The fate of Corsica encapsulated long-lasting British fears concerning French intentions in the Mediterranean, and appeared especially urgent because, unlike Lorraine but like the control of Scheldt in 1792–1793, there was a clear maritime and naval dimension. Corsica was an island, a potential naval base, and control of it would affect the struggle for naval dominance of the western basin of the Mediterranean, between the French at Toulon and the British at Minorca and Gibraltar, which had played such a major role in recent Anglo-French conflicts. In French hands Corsica could be seen as a threat to Britain's Levant and Italian trade in wartime and the Earl of Shelburne, Secretary of State for the Southern Department, made this point in 1768²⁰.

British pressure on the French not to annex Corsica was unsuccessful. It is relevant to enquire how far this reflected a more general failure of British diplomacy in this period. The Earl of Rochford, Ambassador in Paris, reported that the French invasion was *partly relying on our party divisions not allowing us to attend to it, and*

15 N. G. D'ALBISSIN, *Genèse de la frontière franco-belge. Les variations des limites septentrionales de la France de 1659 à 1789*, Paris 1979.

16 BOYE, *Stanislas Leszczyński et le troisième traité de Vienne*, Paris 1898; G. LIVET, *La Lorraine et les relations internationales au XVIII^e siècle*, in: *La Lorraine dans L'Europe des Lumières*, Nancy 1968, pp. 45–46.

17 T. E. HALL, *France and the Eighteenth-Century Corsican Question*, New York 1971.

18 Amelot, French foreign minister, to Bussy, envoy in London, 4 Jan 1742, PRO 107/52; Count d'Argenson, minister for war to Duke of Richelieu, Commander in Genoa, 13 Nov 1748, Paris, Archives Nationales, KK 1369.

19 Champion, 6 May, 19 July 1740; Joseph Yorke, Secretary of Embassy at Paris, to Lord Chancellor Hardwicke, 9 June 1751, BL Add 35355 f 330.

20 Shelburne to Earl of Rochford, Ambassador in Paris, 29 Apr 1768, PRO 78/274 f 210.

*depending at the same time on their close connections with the Courts of Vienna and Spain, and that the former would not make any opposition to it*²¹.

Thus, the Corsican episode could be seen to prefigure the War of American Independence, when Britain's failure to distract French efforts by the activities of continental allies allowed France to concentrate her strength against her and thus contributed to Britain's defeat²². France, it can be argued, felt able to acquire Corsica because she knew that Britain was in no position to fight to prevent her and could not rely on any allies to assist her. This would appear to support the criticism of British foreign policy advanced by Michael Roberts and reiterated by Hamish Scott²³. By failing to create an alliance system British ministers had left France unrestrained, and the consequences were to be dire for the British in 1778–1783, just as they had been for the Corsicans in 1768–1769. Thus, the Duke of Newcastle's quest for a collective security system was vindicated by subsequent events.

This argument is crucial to the question of the British response to France in the eighteenth century, but it faces several serious problems. It overrates the possibility of obtaining the support of other powers, overlooks difficulties of employing their military strength and neglects the problems that had faced such a strategy when last used and its collapse in ruins in 1755–1756. Catherine II of Russia, Frederick II of Prussia and Joseph II of Austria were more concerned about developments in eastern Europe, where the volatile international system provided both opportunities and threats, than in the more stable situation in western Europe and they displayed relatively little interest in colonial questions. In August 1769 Joseph and Frederick exchanged letters in which they promised to maintain the peace if war broke out between Britain and France²⁴. There was of course little they could do directly in the event of conflict beginning in and over places that most European statesmen could not find on the map, such as the Gambia or the Falklands.

Corsica was somewhat different. The Mediterranean was an area of strong Austrian concern and of rising Russian interest. The Russo-Turkish war of 1768–1774 saw the first dispatch of a Russian fleet to the Mediterranean and growing Russian interest in Italian politics²⁵. The basis for co-operation between Britain and Russia appeared to exist in their common opposition to French dominance of the Mediterranean, for France, the traditional ally of Turkey, was opposed to any growth in Russian power. Catherine II was interested in helping the Corsicans²⁶. Britain played a major role in assisting Russia to send a squadron from the Baltic to the Mediterranean²⁷.

21 Rochford to Shelburne, 7 July 1768, PRO 78/275 f. 122.

22 KENNEDY, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, London 1976, p. 111.

23 M. ROBERTS, *Splendid Isolation 1763–1780*, Reading 1970; SCOTT, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, in: *International History Review* 6 (1984), pp. 122–123.

24 S. K. PADOVER, *Prince Kaunitz and the First Partition of Poland*, PhD Chicago 1932, p. 42.

25 A. BODE, *Die Flottenpolitik Katharinas II. und die Konflikte mit Schweden und der Türkei (1768–1792)*, Munich 1979; F. VENTURI, *The End of the Old Regime in Europe, 1768–1776*, Princeton 1989, pp. 3–16.

26 VENTURI (note 25) pp. 7–38.

27 M. S. ANDERSON, *Great Britain and the Russian Fleet, 1769–1770*, in: *Slavonic and East European Review*, 31 (1952–1953), pp. 148–163, and more generally, *Great Britain and the Russo-Turkish War of 1768–1774*, in: *English Historical Review* 69 (1954), pp. 39–58.

However, it would be wrong to see 1768–1769 as a missed British opportunity for creating an anti-French alliance that would have included the leading European army and the foremost navy. Russian interest in Corsica was limited. The outbreak of war with Turkey in 1768 ensured that Russia was less able to adopt a forceful approach elsewhere, a process that culminated in her accepting Austrian and Prussian gains in the First Partition of Poland in 1772. Had Britain had closer relations with Russia she would have risked finding herself heavily committed to Catherine's plans while receiving in turn little assistance against the Bourbons, a situation similar to that which had bedevilled Anglo-Austrian relations earlier in the century²⁸.

In addition, there was little that Russia could do to help Britain in any war with the Bourbons. The advance of Russian forces into the Holy Roman Empire had played a major role in encouraging France to end conflict with Austria in 1735 and 1748, and in the latter case had been actively sponsored by the British. In 1763–1775 this was not a feasible proposition, thanks to the Franco-Austrian alliance negotiated in 1756. Whereas the Russians had been prepared earlier to intervene in order to assist their Austrian ally against Louis XV, they were not now interested in acting against France simply at the behest of other powers. To assume that they would was to adopt a western-European perspective in which rulers further east were believed to respond to a diplomatic agenda set by others, but this was certainly not true of Catherine II. Though keen to see France weak and unable to block Russian plans in eastern Europe, she sought to achieve her end by coercing France's traditional protégés, Sweden, Poland and Turkey, rather than by acting against France further afield. The Russian navy was certainly not strong enough to defeat that of France, and Britain was not really in need of naval assistance.

Austria, on the other hand, was in a position to take direct military action against the French. There was a common frontier in the Low Countries and on the upper Rhine, while Austrian power was also established in northern Italy in the Duchy of Milan. The number of effectives in the Austrian army rose from 107,892 in November 1740 to 170,562 in 1775²⁹. However, British commentators misunderstood Austrian policy, and failed to note her shared interests with France. In 1763 the veteran diplomat Joseph Yorke wrote,

hitherto the system of the Court of Vienna is much embroiled, and their finances too low, to shake off the fetters they entangled themselves with during the last war; the power of the Turk, the weakness of Italy, the nakedness of the Low Countries, and the money which has been advanced to them to fight the King of Prussia, have created a forced system which Count Kaunitz is obliged to support because he does not know how to form a better; a stronger party there certainly is in favour of Great Britain, but they don't quite know how to forward their views.

However, though the relationship was not free from tension, Austria and France were allies, their relationship reflecting their shared willingness to maintain the status quo in western Europe. This was just as much due to Maria Theresa's willingness to abandon her father's aggressive stance in the Empire and Italy as to Louis XV's lack

28 BLACK, On the 'Old System' and the 'Diplomatic Revolution' of the Eighteenth Century, in: *International History Review* 12, 1990, pp. 301–323.

29 P. G. M. DICKSON, *Finance and Government under Maria Theresia 1740–1780*, 2 vols Oxford 1987, 2, 355.

of interest in territorial aggrandisement. The War of the Austrian Succession had marked the last attempt in *ancien régime* Europe to reorder western Europe drastically through violence. Thereafter, the Low Countries were free from external (as opposed to civil) war until 1792, while the Rhineland and the western areas of the Empire were peaceful from 1763 until 1792. The settlement of Italian disputes in the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle of 1748 was consolidated by the Treaty of Aranjuez of 1752³⁰.

This stability was not to be disrupted by the French acquisition of Corsica, despite British hopes that it would harm Franco-Austrian relations³¹. However, rather than seeing this as a failure on the part of Britain, an aspect of the central inability to gain continental allies who could assist in confrontation and conflict with France, it might rather be argued that the maintenance of the existing European situation was actually in Britain's interest. Britain benefited from stability and, more specifically, from an absence of French territorial expansion, particularly in the Low Countries. Although the possession of the Austrian Netherlands by an ally of France was undesirable, and there had been concern on this head during the Seven Years' War, the situation was less alarming than it had been when the area was exposed to French invasion. The British were no longer required to defend the Austrian Netherlands, a task that they had failed in in 1745–1748, with serious consequences for British chances of retaining gains elsewhere in the subsequent peace treaty. Furthermore, the Austrians were unwilling to permit their use as a base for hostile action against Britain. In this they repeated the cautious approach that had characterised their confrontation with Britain in 1725–1730 and their poor relations during the Seven Years' War, as well as their acceptance of neutrality for the Low Countries during the War of the Polish Succession and the early years of the War of the Austrian Succession.

A stable western Europe ensured that in the event of war with France there was no need for Britain to seek continental allies or send forces to the continent. Hanover and the Low Countries, whose combined vulnerability and importance had impelled British intervention on the continent between 1689 and 1763, were no longer threatened. Far from being an advantage, the welcome distraction of France from the colonial struggle summed up by Pitt's phrase of conquering America in Germany, these commitments had hindered Britain both in wartime, as in 1755–1762, and in peace negotiations, especially in 1748. In addition, the need to divert French strength thus was limited. It was difficult for the French to transfer resources from land to maritime warfare³². The vulnerability of allies was further demonstrated by Portugal, which had to be protected by a British fleet in 1735 and an expeditionary force in

30 Yorke to Edward Weston, Under Secretary, 15 Nov 1763, BL Add 58213 f. 314; BLACK, *The Rise of the European Powers 1679–1793*, London 1990, pp. 88–119.

31 Chatelet, French envoy in London, to Choiseul, 27 May 1768, Paris Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Correspondance Politique Angleterre (hereafter AE.CP. Ang.) 484 f. 86; Count Viry, Sardinian envoy in London, to Charles Emmanuel III, 10 June 1768, Viry's successor Scarnafis to Charles Emmanuel, 10 Oct 1769, Turin, Archivio di Stato, Lettere Ministri Inghilterra (hereafter Turin), 74, 76.

32 N. A. M. RODGER, *The Continental Commitment in the Eighteenth Century*, in: *Festschrift for Michael Howard*, forthcoming.

1762, and which came near to war with Spain in 1775³³. Austria, Prussia and Russia were of course more powerful states, but the westernmost possessions of the first two were vulnerable to French attack, and, as wartime allies of Britain, they had revealed an understandable unwillingness to accept British priorities. In the Wars of the Spanish and Austrian successions the Austrians had been more concerned about Italian gains than the fate of the Low Countries and in 1757 Frederick II had been unable to defend Hanover.

Continental interventionism, both diplomatic and military, was troublesome, costly and frequently unsuccessful. It did not deter the French from hostile steps in peacetime and could not decide the fate of the colonial and maritime struggle in wartime. A stable western Europe might deny British ministers and diplomats the opportunity of creating anti-French coalitions. It was especially vexing if, as in 1736–1740 and 1763–1787, Britain played no role in the diplomatic combinations that created and sustained stability, but notwithstanding alarmist comments to the contrary, in neither case is it clear that Britain suffered as a consequence.

Trade benefited as a result of peace and stability. Many scholars have stressed the role of commercial considerations³⁴, although their impact on government policy should not be exaggerated³⁵. There is little sign of such issues playing much of a role in Britain's continental diplomacy after 1763. There were other reasons beside concern over the Turkey trade³⁶ to explain British reluctance to heed Russian pressure for an Anglo-Russian alliance to encompass support for Catherine II in the event of war with the Turks. Foreign policy after 1763 was more influenced by fiscal than commercial considerations. The pressures of financial retrenchment made war unwelcome and the interventionist diplomatic tradition with its subsidy treaties inappropriate.

Thus, for a number of reasons and from a variety of perspectives, the failure of successive British ministries between 1763 and 1787 to secure allies against France was less serious than is generally argued. For somewhat different reasons, the failure to devise a basis for diplomatic co-operation with France was also less obvious than is sometimes argued. The impetus for such an arrangement came from the French and reflected their growing concern about Russian strength and intentions, and the fate of their allies in eastern Europe. It was a measure of French concern, of the weakness of these allies and of the unwillingness of Austria and Prussia to act against Russia, that the French should have turned to Britain on a number of occasions. The most important was in response to the First Partition of Poland, although the British were also sounded about the fate of Poland in late 1763³⁷, and the possibility of

33 BLACK, *Anglo-Portuguese Relations in the Eighteenth Century*, and, *The British Expeditionary Force to Portugal in 1762: International Conflict and Military Problems*, in: *British Historical Society of Portugal. Annual Report and Review* 14 (1987), pp. 125–142, 16 (1989), pp. 66–75.

34 NIEDHART, *Handel und Krieg* (see n. 9); G. SYMCOX, *Britain and Victor Amadeus II: or The Use and Abuse of Allies*, in: S. B. BAXTER, *England's Rise to Greatness, 1660–1763*, pp. 151–184.

35 BLACK, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of Walpole*, Edinburgh 1985, pp. 93–111; and *System of Ambition* (see n. 11) pp. 87–101.

36 Earl of Buckinghamshire, envoy in Russia, to Earl of Sandwich, Secretary of State for the Northern Department, 1 Nov 1763, PRO 91/72 f. 210–211; Count of Guerchy, French envoy in London to Duke of Praslin, French foreign minister, 23 Dec 1763, AE CP Ang 452 f. 407.

37 Sandwich Buckinghamshire, 28 Oct 1767, PRO 91/73 f. 155–156.

concerted action against Russia was seriously entertained by the Count of Vergennes, who was foreign minister from 1774 until 1787. The willingness of Vergennes and his predecessor, d'Aiguillon (1771–1774), to consider such a possibility indicates not just the flexibility of French diplomatic thinking, but also the sense of a system in flux that characterised so much reflection on international affairs. Their willingness also suggests that colonial disputes with Britain have to be set in a context of a set of diplomatic suppositions and plans that were firmly European in their concern.

This had also characterised British governmental thinking during the alliance of 1716–1731, and at the time of the then French foreign minister, the Marquis of Puysieulx's, unsuccessful approach for better relations in the aftermath of the War of the Austrian Succession, but after the Seven Years' War the situation was different. It was not simply that British views on the European situation were different, as they had been in 1731 and 1749, but also that the British governments of the period lacked the degree of commitment of their French counterparts to continental affairs.

Immediately after the conclusion of the Seven Years' War the British stressed their desire for good relations with the French. In May 1763 George III told the French envoy, the Duke of Nivernais, that he thought peace necessary for both powers, that he trusted Louis XV and that he regarded the union of the two courts as inalterable. In October 1763 the Earl of Halifax, Secretary of State for the Southern Department, told Nivernais' successor, the Count of Guerchy, that George shared Louis' views on the election of a successor to King Augustus of Poland, while his Northern counterpart, the Earl of Sandwich, informed Guerchy that the government wanted peace and that he thought that the way to achieve that was for Britain and France to remain united³⁸. It is unclear how much weight should be attached to these statements. George III sought in the domestic political sphere to reject the legacy of his grandfather, George II, and his ministers, and this attitude clearly motivated his rejection of the Prussian alliance and of George II's devotion to Hanoverian interests. George III was an idealist who found it difficult to cope when others failed to share his views. Possibly his hopes on foreign policy encompassed an Anglo-French entente, but, if so, they had to confront an agenda of disputes that placed relations under strain, especially in 1763–1765. Post-war disputes were common in this period as diplomats and officials sought to translate the often vague clauses of peace treaties into agreements on the ground, a task that was made very difficult in the colonial sphere by the absence of reliable maps. In 1763 there were disputes over the implementation of the clauses in the Peace of Paris concerning the fortifications of Dunkirk and the Newfoundland fisheries, as well as over such matters as compensation for captured private property³⁹. The French ministry complained about British pressure, arguing that, in seeking to enforce their views, the British government was ignoring the principles of union that had been reestablished between the two crowns,

38 Nivernais to Praslin, 11 May, Guerchy to Praslin, 28 Oct, 12 Nov, Praslin to Guerchy, 11 Nov, 1763, Count of Guines, French envoy to Duke d'Aiguillon, French Foreign Minister, 31 July 1772, AE CP Ang 450 f. 337–338, 451 f. 473, 477, 452 f. 128, 29, 498 f. 345–346.

39 Guerchy to Praslin, 4 Nov 1763, AE CP Ang 452 f. 32–35; Earl of Hertford, Ambassador in Paris, to Earl of Halifax, 21 Dec 1763, Iden Green, Weston Underwood collection, papers of Edward Weston (hereafter Weston Underwood).

and that therefore the French should cease to be so compliant⁴⁰. At the same time George III was reiterating his desire for good relations and arguing that it was only in the interest of other powers for France and Britain to fall out, because they then received subsidies. However, Guerchy pointed out that George had no specific proposals to make. The following February Guerchy echoed George by arguing that it would be best if the two powers avoided war in India because in searching for allies there they helped the Indian princes to increase the size of their armies and this would eventually lead to the Indians being able to expel the Europeans⁴¹.

British public opinion, in so far as it can be gauged from the press, remained hostile to the French and critical of any apparent weakness or compliance towards them on the part of the government. An article by »Americanus«, accusing the French of inspiring attacks by Red Indians on British colonists, and published in the »St James's Chronicle« of 10 January 1764 was typical in its paranoia, accusations and strident tone,

The incapacity of the peace-making ministry is nowhere more evident, than in the affairs of America; our conquests there seem plainly to have been the chief object of their peace; yet so poorly did they provide for their security, that we see the French are wresting from us, by mere artifice, what we have purchased with millions of men, and ten millions of treasure. How long will the British government be the dupe of French policy? How long will it suffer in fatal supineness their sly encroachments? Will it not reflect, that a similar conduct gave birth to the late war, with all its expences and horrors? Let the ministers, who slumber on the bed of down, or riot in the feast of affluence and luxury, for a moment think on the miserable state of those who fondly trusting to their protection, are now devoted to the murderous knife of savage Indians, or to the cruel perfidy of the insinuating, and yet as murderous, Frenchmen; the father and the son, the mother and the tender infant, weltering in each others blood

Such sentiments would have been serious enough given George III's difficulty in creating a stable ministry that he could rely upon and which would command secure majorities in both houses of Parliament. They were made more so because they were also shared by some ministers and diplomats. Joseph Yorke wrote from his embassy in The Hague in April 1764 in order to criticise French cunning and revealed in his letter the destructive impact of personal experience of what was seen as duplicity,

frankness, candour and moderation have to my certain knowledge no effect upon them, and after having been witness to a solemn promise made by Louis XV to Lord Albemarle for the evacuation of the Neutral Islands, which was not only never fulfilled but never intended, I can never treat with that court but with the greatest reserve, and s'il est permis de le dire, la canne levée. No other argument has weight and I hope in God we shall long hold, as we do now, the right end of the staff⁴².

It was scarcely surprising that the British kept a wary eye on the state of the French navy and her naval preparations⁴³, nor that this was reciprocated by the

40 Praslin to Guerchy, 11 Nov 1763, AE CP Ang 452 f. 88–89.

41 Guerchy to Praslin, 12 Nov 1763, 7 Feb 1764, AE CP Ang 452 f. 128, 455 f. 271–272. The Palatine foreign minister Count Wachtendonck also thought that the Indians might learn the art of war from the Europeans and then drive them out, Wachtendonck to Haslang 21 Ap 1764, Munich, London 242.

42 Yorke to Weston, 6 Ap, 1 May 1764, BL Add 57927 f. 185, 201–202.

43 Etat de la Marine de France au 1er Novembre 1763, PRO 109/87; Halifax to Weston, 2 Jan 1764, BL Add 57927 f. 2333.

French⁴⁴. Without specific proposals to make, and averse to any co-operation over the Polish election because of the possible financial costs and diplomatic consequences, especially an estrangement from Russia, the British soon found that Anglo-French relations centred on irritating exchanges over disputes arising from the recent war⁴⁵. By June 1764 Halifax could tell the Sardinian envoy that France was clearly preparing to renew conflict as soon as her finances and navy would permit. Two months later, the British envoy in Stockholm was instructed to block an alleged plan to give France control over the Swedish navy⁴⁶.

The speedy transition in 1763–1764 from talk of union to suspicion of bellicose intentions prefigured the fate of subsequent attempts to improve relations, in 1772–1773, at the end of the War of American Independence, and in 1786. Although it is possible to attribute blame to an aggressive British public opinion and a political system that ensured that such views had to be considered, it is also reasonable to point out that there was little basis for better relations. Whereas in 1713–1714 and 1716–1731 the two powers had both sought to pursue active interventionist policies in order to secure the peace settlement they had negotiated at Utrecht and their subsequent amendments, neither was in a state to do so after 1763. Both were in a difficult financial position and had to consider the domestic response⁴⁷. Neither enjoyed the diplomatic influence that they had possessed in the first quarter of the century, a consequence of the rise in the power and self-confidence of Austria, Prussia and Russia. Thanks to the stability produced by the Franco-Austrian alliance and the settlement of Italian questions, neither faced pressing problems in western Europe. Rejecting the idea of a subsidy to Russia, Sandwich wrote in December 1763, *nor does the situation of His [George III] kingdoms require that the King should purchase, or solicit an alliance in which the interests of Russia are at least as much concerned as those of Great Britain*⁴⁸.

Though Britain sought stability on the continent, she was not committed as a guarantor to the situation in central Europe, as she had played no role in the Peace of Hubertusberg, which had ended the Seven Years' War there, and was no longer in alliance with Austria, Prussia or Russia. There was little need for her to view the rise of Russian power with concern and, although Catherine II's sponsorship of the anti-British League of Armed Neutrality in 1780 was a cause of considerable worry, Britain did not adopt an actively anti-Russian policy until 1790–1791; a period in which she did not need to fear French power. As a »satisfied« power, that no longer saw the need for a collective security system, and was both without a large army and conscious of the need for financial restraint, Britain had neither the inclination nor

44 Guerchy to Praslin, 30 Jan, 21 Feb, Praslin to Guerchy, 11 Ap 1764, AE CP Ang 455 f. 385, 460 f. 67, 231.

45 Edward Sedgwick, Under Secretary, to Weston, 1 Feb, 4 Aug 1764, BL Add 57927 f. 137, 297; Praslin to Guerchy, 11 Ap 1764, AE CP Ang 460 f. 230–231; George Grenville, First Lord of the Treasury, to Halifax, 28 Ap, 23 July, Grenville to Sandwich, 6 Aug, San Marino California, Huntington Library, Stowe manuscripts 7 vol 1; Sedgwick to Weston, 21, 30 Aug, 4 Sept 1764, Weston-Underwood.

46 Marmora, Sardinian envoy, to Charles Emmanuel III, Turin 69; Sandwich to Sir John Goodricke 17 Aug 1764, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms Eng hist c 62.

47 Yorke to Weston, 6, 23 Mar 1764, BL Add 58213 f. 345, 351–352; State of the French Finances in Lord Hertford's Letter of the 22 March 1764, PRO 109/87.

48 Sandwich to Buckinghamshire, 20 Dec 1763, PRO 91/72 f. 237–238.

the means to join France in interventionist diplomacy. It is not therefore necessary to adduce domestic hostility to France, however powerful and influential that might or might not have been, in order to explain the unwillingness to ally with France.

It might still be asked whether the failure to negotiate an alliance was responsible for confrontation between the two powers, confrontation that did not lead to conflict over Turks Island and the Gambia in 1764–1765, Corsica in 1768–1769 and the Falklands in 1770–1771 because respectively the French, the British and then the French again were unwilling to push the issue to the brink in the face of determined action by the other side, but that led to war in 1778 when the French deliberately set out to exploit the success of the American revolutionaries. However, even had such an alliance been negotiated in 1763–1764 or 1772–1773 it is difficult to see it as having much substance or as lasting. Ministries and ministers fell, and this affected foreign policy. Franco-Spanish relations were adversely affected by the fall of Choiseul in 1770 and, in light of the replacement of d'Aiguillon after Louis XV's accession in 1774, it is difficult to see how the same would not have been true of any Anglo-French agreement negotiated in 1772–1773. British ministers sometimes stressed their weakness in order to persuade the French to make concessions, as in November 1763 when they argued that any new government would be led by Pitt, whose reputation was deservedly that of being bellicosely anti-French⁴⁹.

This was not a satisfactory basis for an alliance and there was no overriding issue, such as the need to protect the Hanoverian Succession from the Jacobite threat and the regency of the Duke of Orléans from that of Philip V of Spain, to override the impact of both ministerial changes and national animosity, as there had been in 1716–1730. Similarly, there was no serious international challenge to hold an alliance together, as there had been from France for Anglo-Austrian alliances in 1689–1697 and 1702–1713, and was to be again from 1793. In this situation it is likely that even had closer relations been secured, they would not have survived governmental changes or, more seriously, colonial and maritime disputes and requests for help from other allies, most obviously France's ally Spain, which had her own disagreements with Britain and Britain's ally Portugal. That did not make war inevitable, for other issues, both domestic and international, might well have risen to the fore. In 1740–1741 apparently imminent Anglo-French conflict as a consequence of the War of Jenkins' Ear between Britain and Spain was averted as a result of the death of the Emperor Charles VI and the crisis over the Austrian succession. Conversely in 1754–1756, fighting between Britain and France broke out before Frederick II's attack on Saxony radically altered the situation. After 1763, however, France was less likely to become involved in a continental war and indeed she played no military role in the War of the Bavarian Succession (1778–1779), or in the eastern European conflicts and confrontations of 1768–1774 and 1787–1792. Her concern to limit Russian expansion did not lead to war, although it did produce plans for a naval demonstration in 1773. Similarly, Spain was no longer taking an active and bellicose role in Italian affairs, as she had done in 1717–1748.

It was therefore more likely that a serious Anglo-Bourbon colonial clash would lead to war. British naval strength helped to ensure that France seized her opportu-

49 Praslin to Guerchy, 11 Nov. 1763, AE. CP. Ang. 452 fol. 88.

nity when the British were weakened by the American revolution. Thanks to the relatively minor role that France was taking in European relations, she was able to fight Britain without any other power wishing to give George III assistance. The very weakness of the French response to the Polish partition, thus helped to make the Anglo-French struggle appear somewhat inconsequential to other states. Neither Britain nor France had been able to dominate, or indeed really influence, the European diplomatic agenda in the years since 1763, and thus they could fight without their conflict having much effect on affairs after 1778. The long-term consequence of the War of American Independence were very serious for both powers: French bankruptcy, the political division of the English-speaking world, and the need to consider an independent, expansionist, unpredictable and powerful state in the western hemisphere. However, in the short term, the War of American Independence is striking for its limited impact on European international relations. The maritime powers were by the 1770s operating as a separate »system«. This had not been obvious to many contemporaries. The notion that Britain, France and their enmity played a major role in a European »system« was well established, both in diplomatic circles and in public discussion. An essay on »The Progress and Present State of European Politics« published in the »Miscellany« supplementing the »Reading Mercury and Oxford Gazette« of 17 May 1773 declared that,

The Powers of Europe may be regarded as one general state, such as the Grecian Powers were; whose interests, when understood, are common and reciprocal. They are one great machine, which when all its parts are well connected and judiciously regulated, performs the most admirable movements, and yields the most signal advantages; but, one wheel retarded, one ligature broken, every operation is interrupted, and universal disorder prevails. All the Potentates of Europe are dependent each upon the other by some species of connexion, whether by consanguinity, confederacy, or interest; and upon the harmony of this political union depend their dearest interests, whether power or happiness; yet so nearly does the great body politic resemble civil and domestic life, that the principles and passions which gain in the one, triumph in the other; they are alike sacrifices to jealousy, envy, ambition, or treachery.

More prosaically the Honourable Frederick Robinson, Secretary of Embassy in Spain, claimed eight days later that Franco-Swedish links might lead to a general war in which case Spain would support France, because both of Charles III's francophilia and of Spanish fears of Russian plans in the Mediterranean. There was little sense that the central and eastern European rulers would restrict their ambitions and actions to their immediate neighbourhood, extensive as that was. Fears were sounded about Prussian *strides... to become a maritime power*, D'Aiguillon pressing the British envoy in June 1773 on the fate of Gdansk in this context⁵⁰. Russia appeared more menacing.

And yet there were also important centrifugal tendencies. The pressure of confrontation and conflict in the east, narrowly averted during the 1764 Polish election, widespread in 1768–1774 and 1778–1779 and again in 1782–1783 before rising to a climax in 1787–1792, was not felt throughout western Europe. This was especially so for the less politically active powers. Robert Walpole, the British envoy in Lisbon, wrote thence in 1773,

50 Robinson to William Eden, Under Secretary, 25 May 1773, BL Add. 34417 fol. 240–241; St Paul to Rochford, 30 June 1773, PRO 78/289 f. 47.

*we have here so little connections with quarrelsome powers, that we are contented with the events, and do not trouble ourselves much with speculation: Jesuits and trade were the only objects of politics in this corner*⁵¹.

The British and French governments were more concerned, but the failure to react to the First Partition of Poland was both cause and consequence of an increasingly passive attitude. The French would not fight to help their eastern European protégés and indeed that had never been their understanding of the relationship: protégés should assist the patron and when the French had sent troops to help the Poles against the Russians in 1734 they had only provided a small force. In 1773, once certain that the French would not fight the Russians, the British ministry turned its attention elsewhere. The British had been more concerned to prevent French action than to adopt a purposeful approach to the problems of eastern Europe. Foreign diplomats soon noted that British ministers were occupied with American and Irish, but not Continental, affairs⁵². They did not seek to explore possible areas of common ground with the French, despite the danger that the partitioning powers would move on to seek fresh victims after Poland and that they might exploit such potential conflicts as the Bavarian succession. In January 1774 the Earl of Rochford noted,

The Duke D'Aiguillon is reported... to be meditating a project for joining with the British Ministry in case any steps should be taken for violating the independency of the German Empire,

but in a succeeding instruction he warned Viscount Stormont at Paris that

*The Court of France endeavours on every occasion to make their present harmony with us subservient to purposes, to which we have not in the smallest degree given encouragement: Any measures that tend to the preservation of the public peace tally so exactly with the King's views, that they cannot but meet with His Majesty's entire approbation. If your Excellency shall find out by your conversation with other foreign Ministers at the Court where you reside, that the French Minister has hinted a closer connection between us than really exists, you will do well unaffectedly to contradict it, that such Ministers, may not inadvertently mislead their respective Courts*⁵³.

Stormont saw a scrupulous observance of the treaties between Britain and France as *the natural foundation of our mutual friendship, and the only one upon which it can stand secure*⁵⁴, a cool and cautious analysis that reflected the reactive nature of British diplomacy. It could not counteract the stresses in Anglo-French relations. In the two months that followed his letter, Stormont corresponded on French factional moves, that might lead to a more bellicose ministry, and about French naval preparations⁵⁵. Thus, before Louis XV's death, which was seen by Stormont as a threat to peace⁵⁶, the Anglo-French relationship was already empty of trust and co-operation. D'Aiguillon and George III had not only failed to produce a concerted response to the

51 Walpole to Lord Grantham, envoy in Madrid, 4 Oct 1773, Bedford, County Record Office, Lucas papers 30/14/410/4.

52 Haslang to Baron Beckers, Palatine foreign minister, 3 Sept, 19, 30 Nov 1773, Bayr London 251.

53 Rochford to Stormont, 7, 11, Jan 1774, PRO 78/291 f. 7, 19.

54 Stormont to Grantham, 22 Jan 1774, BL Add 24160 f. 9.

55 Stormont to Rochford, 16 Feb, 30 Mar 1774, PRO 78/291 f. 93, 197–206.

56 Stormont to Rochford, 4 May, Stormont to Grantham, 11 May 1774, PRO 78/292 f. 27, BL Add 24160 f. 55.

Polish crisis. They had also failed to expand their shared »pacific sentiments«⁵⁷ into diplomatic combinations. There were no mutual allies, no common goals, to hold the two powers together. This was not of course different from the situation in 1740 and 1754, but then there had been important differences of opinion over the Continental views of the two powers to keep them apart. By 1774 such differences had become less widespread and less urgent, and it had become easier for the two governments to view each other with less concern. However, this did not provide a basis for co-operation and that was readily apparent before the death of Louis XIV and the growing crisis in the Thirteen Colonies produced new players and a new agenda of opportunity, rivalry, confrontation and conflict.

57 Stormont to Rochford, 1 June 1774, PRO 78/292 f. 104.