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Francia. Forschungen zur westeuropäischen Geschichte
Herausgegeben vom Deutschen Historischen Institut Paris
(Institut historique allemand)
Band 19/2 (1992)

DOI: 10.11588/fr.1992.2.57229

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FROM ALLIANCE TO CONFRONTATION: ANGLO-FRENCH RELATIONS 1731–1740*

Anglo-French relations in the 1730s have been relatively neglected for several decades. There are three major reasons. First, the general neglect that has affected *»ancien régime«* international relations in the scholarship of the last fifty years. Thus, the last major work devoted to French foreign policy during the administration of Cardinal André Hercule de Fleury (1726–1743) was published in 1936 and, although its author had an excellent knowledge of the published sources, he was only able to consult a small number of volumes in the foreign ministry archives[1]. Secondly, an excellent book on Anglo-French relations between 1731 and 1742[2] appeared to make any other study unnecessary. Thirdly, these years seemed less interesting than those when the two powers had been allied, 1716–31, and, in particular, than the years of war and imperial struggle between 1743 and 1763. The latter period appeared full of significance, the preceding decade inconsequential. Indeed, a very stress on war and struggle helped to make the 1730s appear not only inconsequential, but misleading, the last echo of the attempt to secure better Anglo-French relations that had since 1716 marked simply an interlude in what has been termed the ›Second Hundred Years War‹ between the two powers. This teleological perspective on Anglo-French developments is linked to a structural and schematic interpretation of *»ancien régime«* international relations. The assumption of fixed national interests produces a mechanistic viewpoint, one in which developments were inevitable, and any failure to conform to what was predictable was due to the incompetence or self-interest of individual leaders. Thus, the fact that Britain and France did not fight in the 1730s, especially during the War of the Polish Succession (1733–1735), was ascribed by contemporary critics of Walpole to his alleged pro-French tendencies, while Vaucher argued that Fleury tricked Walpole's brother Horatio during the British attempt to end the war by negotiation.

This interpretation fails to place sufficient weight on the degree of unpredictability in the international relations of the period, the extent to which if there was an international system it did not operate in a predictable or ›scientific‹ fashion.

* I should like to acknowledge the assistance of the British Academy and the Staff Travel and Research Fund of Durham University. I am grateful to Her Majesty the Queen for permission to consult the Stuart Papers and to Earl Waldegrave for permission to consult the Waldegrave Papers. I would like to thank Joan Pearce for her assistance. Unless marked (os), all dates are in New Style.

1 A. M. Wilson, French Foreign Policy During the Administration of Cardinal Fleury 1726–1743, Cambridge, Mass. 1936.

2 P. Vaucher, Robert Walpole et la Politique de Fleury (1731–1742), Paris 1924.

Unpredictability is an obvious point in the diplomatic correspondence of the period and indeed a marked contrast emerges between scholarly work based on such correspondence and that which takes a more synoptic viewpoint. The former tends to stress the role of chance, to present a less smooth narrative, and an analytical perspective that is more specific than schematic, while more synoptic accounts offer a more clear-cut narrative and a more schematic and systemic analytical perspective.

This tension poses a question mark against the manner in which international relations and foreign policy are integrated into more general histories, and raises the issue of how best to discuss these topics. It also reveals the contrast between the schematic nature of much contemporary theoretical and polemical discussion of international relations, with its stress on natural interests and the balance of power, and the more specific and unpredictable character of diplomatic correspondence. This contrast is not only one that can be found throughout the history of international relations, but also one that was central to eighteenth-century culture. The impulse for order which has been seen as a dominant motif of the age should not be regarded as a simple reflection of some political and social reality. Rather, the commentators, writers and artists of the period stressed the need for order because they were profoundly aware of the precarious nature of order and stability, and the threats to that stability around them. Stability was an aspiration, something which had existed in the past and was now increasingly lost or something which should be worked towards, not a reality, not something which had been achieved in the present – except through constant vigilance[3].

In the sphere of international relations this stability seemed challenged from two different directions. First, in the eyes of some commentators, was the problem of some states following their ›natural interests‹ in an expansionist direction. Thus, aggression could be seen as an essential facet of French policy. This could be counterpointed by the argument that an international system naturally counteracted any such aggression by constructing an alliance to maintain a natural balance within the system.

Such an alliance could, however, be subverted as an aspect of a more general second challenge to stability, namely the irrational, malevolent or corrupt preference for personal interests at the expense of those of the state[4]. This was but part of the more general sense of a precarious social, political, cultural, religious and personal order under threat from self-indulgence, passion and the volatility of the irrational.

For contemporaries, therefore, there was little sense of a stable international system, challenged episodically by deeper structural crises »within the global political system, generated by the need to readjust relations among the ›core states‹ in the system in line with intervening changes in power distributions and in a more general sense, to resolve prewar ambiguities in the order and status hierarchy of the system itself«[5]. Instead, the situation appeared unpredictable. This unpredictability owed much to the monarchical nature of most states. The importance of a small number of

3 J. Black and J. Gregory (eds.), Culture, Politics and Society in Britain 1660–1800, Manchester 1991, pp. 8–9.

4 J. Black, The Rise of the European Powers 1679–1793, London 1990, pp. 149–162.

5 K. Schweizer, The Seven Years' War: A System Perspective, in: J. Black (ed.), The Origins of War in Early Modern Europe, Edinburgh 1987, p. 242.

individuals led to unpredictability for three major reasons. First, the rulers were able to change the policies of their countries with ease, as indeed to appoint and dismiss ministers and diplomats. The extraordinary attention devoted by British and French diplomats to winning the support of Philip V of Spain and his second wife Elizabeth Farnese after the signature of the Second Treaty of Vienna on 16 March 1731 reflected their control over Spanish policy. On 22 July 1731 the representatives of Britain, Spain and the Emperor, Charles VI, signed an agreement at Vienna recognising Spain's acceptance of the provisions of the Second Treaty of Vienna. And yet, on 9 November 1733, Spain was to abandon her allies and sign the Treaty of the Escurial, better known as the First Family Compact, with France.

Secondly, the importance of the personalities and policies of rulers ensured that their births, marriages and deaths were of considerable consequence. Louis XV's attack of smallpox in late October 1728 paralysed British policy; Peter II's death from the same disease in 1730 was seen, misleadingly, as a challenge to the Russo-Austrian alliance; Frederick William I's severe ill-health in the mid-1730s led to anticipations of a change in Prussian policy with the accession of the apparently anglophile Crown Prince Frederick, later Frederick the Great.

Thirdly, the extent to which certain inheritances were contested posed a question-mark against the internal stability of particular states, and the political and territorial stability of the European ›system‹. The succession disputes of 1688–1714 had not been fully resolved. Philip V maintained Spanish claims to Italian territories, Naples, Milan and Sardinia, later Sicily, that had been transferred from Spain to Austria under the Peace of Utrecht. The Stuarts did not accept their exclusion from the British throne, nor the Holstein-Gottorps theirs' of 1718 from that of Sweden.

A new agenda of dynastic disputes rose to prominence in the 1720s and 1730s. Although there were a number of contentious issues, such as the successions to East Friesland, Jülich-Berg, Parma and Tuscany, the most important was clearly that to the dominions of Charles VI, Emperor from 1711 to 1740, dominions that by 1720 stretched from the North Sea to the river Oltul in Wallachia, and from Schwiebus, 100 miles from Berlin, to the southern tip of Sicily. His failure to produce sons, the respective claims of his daughters and those of his elder brother and predecessor, Joseph I, and the diplomacy and expectations that surrounded the marriages of these daughters produced an explosive situation. Just as it is misleading to see the foreign policy of all of Louis XIV's reign as being dominated by the Spanish succession, so it would be inappropriate to see the international relations of the 1720s and 1730s as being dominated by that of its Austrian counterpart. On the other hand, the Spanish succession was clearly central to the last decades of the seventeenth century and the Austrian to the 1720s, and, still more, the 1730s. Thus, the health of Charles VI was followed with great attention, and guarantees of the Pragmatic Sanction played a major role in diplomacy, as, more obviously, did the marital diplomacy that centred on the daughters of Joseph I and Charles VI.

If the general European situation was unpredictable, there were more specific causes of instability in Anglo-French relations. The health and position of the elderly Fleury seemed uncertain, while Sir Robert Walpole's dominance of the British political scene was challenged on a number of occasions, most obviously the Excise Crisis of 1733. The fragility of human combinations was underlined by the surpri-

sing death of Queen Caroline in 1737, although it did not have the impact on Walpole's political position that had been anticipated.

If unpredictability, chance and thus specificity are to be stressed, it is difficult to present Anglo-French relations in an abbreviated fashion. The situation is exacerbated by the number of available sources. Vaucher consulted manuscript collections in the French foreign ministry, the British Library, the Public Record Office and the Walpole papers, held then at Houghton and now in the University Library at Cambridge. This list can, however be extended, and, though not only for that reason, Vaucher's account needs to be revised. There are relatively few additional collections on the French side that require examination, though the Marine collection in the Archives Nationales is of great importance. On the British side the papers of James, 1st Earl Waldegrave, British envoy in Paris from 1730 to 1740, are a crucial source. They are held at Chewton Hall by the current Earl. Horatio Walpole's papers are held by the current Lord Walpole at Wolterton, while those of Edward Weston, one of the Under Secretaries, are partly held by a descendant, John Weston-Underwood, at Iden Green, Kent.

Possibly more serious is the general problem of approaching bilateral relations through bilateral sources. In order to study Anglo-French relations in the 1730s it is necessary to place them in the context of those with other powers. Vaucher looked at the series Mémoires et Documents Hollande in order to throw light on the discussions in The Hague in the winter of 1734–1735, but his grasp of the wider context of Anglo-French relations had its limitations. He failed to appreciate the extent to which during the War of the Polish Succession Britain negotiated with France's allies, Sardinia[6] and Spain, as well as France. The absence of any equivalent of a Mémoires et Documents series in the British records, ensures that British policy has to be assessed by reading instructions in the important State Papers series, especially, in the case of France, State Papers Austria, Holland and Spain. In addition, crucial issues in Anglo-French relations can only be followed fully if attention is not restricted to State Papers France. The extent to which the two powers might co-operate over the Jülich-Berg issue in the late 1730s was an important indicator of British attitudes towards France. The diplomacy of the issue cannot be assessed unless State Papers Holland is considered.

The task is therefore a vast one and Vaucher's study, while first-rate for what it covers, nevertheless omits much. Anglo-French relations were dominated by international developments, and can be compartmentalised accordingly into four periods. The first began with the unilateral British negotiation of the Second Treaty of Vienna with Austria, signed on 16 March 1731, a step that led to the collapse of the Anglo-French alliance. This was followed by a war panic that summer, as each power feared attack by the other[7], and then by a search for allies. The collapse of the Anglo-French alliance was a ›diplomatic revolution‹, if that term has not been overly used,

6 G. Quazza, Il Problema Italiano e l'Equilibrio Europeo 1720–1738, Turin 1965, pp. 263–271: Duke of Newcastle, Secretary of State for the Southern Department, to Lord Harrington, Secretary of State for the Northern Department, 30 May (os) 1735, London, Public Record Office (hereafter PRO) 43/86. A modern study of Anglo-Spanish relations in this period is necessary.

7 Black und A. Reese, Die Panik von 1731, in J. Kunisch (ed.), Expansion und Gleichgewicht. Studien zur europäischen Mächtepolitik des Ancien Régime, Berlin 1986, pp. 69–95.

and thus devalued, in work on the eighteenth century. Since 1716 the alliance had been the basic element in western European relations, the central theme around which other powers manoeuvred, creating combinations that were more tenuous and short-lived, such as the Austro-Spanish alliance of 1725–1729, better Franco-Spanish relations in the early 1720s, and attempts to create better Anglo-Prussian relations, successfully in 1723 and 1725, unsuccessfully in 1729 and 1730. The collapse of the Anglo-French alliance forced powers aligned or negotiating with it, such as Denmark, Spain, Sweden, the United Provinces and the Wittelsbach Electors, to reassess their position and decide whether to ally with Britain or France. This gave a unity to the period 1731–1733 as Spain and the United Provinces allied with the new Anglo-Austrian pact, while the French sought to inspire opposition to it, both in the Empire, where they unsuccessfully attempted to block the guarantee of the Pragmatic Sanction, and outside it.

This period came to an end in late 1733 for two related reasons. First, the outbreak of the War of the Polish Succession, with the Russian invasion of Poland in August 1733 and Louis XV's declaration of war on Charles VI on 10 October 1733, ended the period of cold war and forced Britain to confront the question of how best to respond and whether to fulfil her treaty obligations to Charles under the Second Treaty of Vienna. Secondly, Britain's alliance system collapsed, dramatically weakening her position vis-à-vis France. The Dutch unilaterally signed a neutrality agreement with France on 24 November[8]. Charles Emmanuel III of Sardinia, ruler of Savoy-Piedmont, and Philip V had already attacked Austria, and thus broken with Britain. The Franco-Sardinian Treaty of Turin of 26 September 1733, provided for the Sardinian acquisition of the Milanese. On the night of 3–4 December French and Sardinian troops entered Milan. One of the more decisive campaigns in a period mistakenly not noted for them, saw the Austrians vanquished.

As the Austrian position in northern Italy crumbled, it became likely that the conflict would end with a peace treaty acknowledging Austrian territorial losses. The second period of Anglo-French relations was that of the war, 1733–1735. It was dominated by the British response to French gains, and the likelihood of conflict between the two powers.

The third period lasted from the end of the war (Austro-French Preliminaries were signed in Vienna on 3 October 1735), to the outbreak of Anglo-Spanish hostilities in 1739, the so-called War of Jenkins' Ear. This was a period of French diplomatic hegemony and when war was declared in October 1739 Britain found herself isolated, a stark contrast to the situation during her most recent conflicts with Spain in 1655–1660 and 1718–1720. The extent, causes and importance of British isolation in 1735–1739 were debated at the time and have been discussed subsequently. It is possible to suggest that the situation was not as bleak as has been claimed[9], a recurrent feature of periods when Britain was not part of an important alliance system, for example 1763–1780[10]. Nevertheless, the situation was worrying and

8 H. L. A. Dunthorne, The Maritime Powers 1721–1740. A Study of Anglo-Dutch Relations in the Age of Walpole, London 1986, pp. 272–276.

9 Black, British Neutrality in the War of the Polish Succession, 1733–1735, in: International History Review, 8 (1986) pp. 365–366.

10 Black, A System of Ambition? British Foreign Policy 1660–1793, London 1991, pp. 204–215.

unsettling. The present threat posed by the Stuarts was not too serious in 1736–1738[11], but the prospect of France using her position to profit from the death of Charles VI was a matter of concern. The Austro-French understanding that lasted from late 1735 to early 1741 was unsettling to British commentators, politicians and diplomats, who were accustomed to poor relations between the two powers. In addition, despite the tensions in the relationship, many regarded an Anglo-Austrian alliance as natural[12].

This concern continued during the fourth period, that which began with the outbreak of Anglo-Spanish hostilities and lasted until France attacked Maria Theresa in the summer of 1741. On 15 August 1741 French troops began to cross the Rhine and on 19 September Marshall Belle-Isle, the principal French protagonist for war, obtained an offensive alliance between the rulers of Bavaria and Saxony. The outbreak of this conflict saved Britain from the threat that France would aid Spain in her war. In August 1740 France had sent a fleet under D'Antin to the West Indies to lend weight to her warnings that Britain should not make any territorial gains at the expense of Spain. Fearful of war, the British noted the consequences of French and Spanish naval expansion. From the summer of 1741, however, France was engaged in war with Austria, and therefore willing to consider better relations with Britain, as in the abortive discussions of 1742, or at least to prevent them from deteriorating into hostilities. In the autum of 1741 the French threatened Hanover, in pursuit of Imperial objectives, not Britain or the British West Indies.

The four periods that have been discerned in 1731–1740 were, therefore, linked by common themes of suspicion and anxiety. These were exacerbated and countered by the continual efforts of both powers to acquire and retain allies. Indeed, it was largely this search for allies that gave shape to international relations and marked the respective position of powers within an international hierarchy. The search can be approached from two related angles, military and political. The alliance of certain powers would clearly be useful in the event of war, and, in the meantime, allies helped to confer and reflect diplomatic influence. There is little sign on the part of the British that they based their foreign policy on plans for war, with France or any other power. Strategic awareness at the highest level of British decision-making was limited. George II and Lord Harrington, Secretary of State for the Northern Department 1730–1742, had served in the War of the Spanish Succession, but they do not appear to have introduced any strategic note into British policy making, while Walpole and the Duke of Newcastle, Secretary of State for the Southern Department 1724–1748, had neither military experience nor interests. In the event of a continental war involving Britain, it was assumed that the Whig model introduced by William III and gloriously developed by the Duke of Marlborough would be pursued: Britain would confront France, principally in the Low Countries, her troops serving as part of a multi-national army, much of which would be provided by allies, principally Austria and the United Provinces, and by subsidised troops, such as Hessians. This

11 J. Guite, The Jacobite Cause, 1730–1740: The International Dimension, unpublished Ph. D. thesis, McMaster 1987: Black, Culloden and the '45, Stroud 1990, pp. 47–49.

12 Black, When ›Natural Allies‹ fall out: Anglo-Austrian Relations, 1725–1740, in: Mitteilungen des Österreichischen Staatsarchivs, 36 (1983) pp. 120–149; Black, Anglo-Austrian relations, 1725–1740. A study in failure, in: British Journal for Eignteenth-Century Studies 12 (1989) pp. 29–45.

was indeed to be the model followed after the fall of Walpole. British troops were sent to the Austrian Netherlands in 1742, moved thence into the Empire in 1743, and unsuccessfully defended the Low Countries against French invasion in 1744–1748[13].

Had Britain fought in the War of the Polish Succession, then any troops sent to the Continent would have probably followed the same path. Warships would have been sent to the Mediterranean, as the Austrians wanted, but few troops could have been spared, for logistical reasons and because an army in the Low Countries could have sought to cover Hanover if it were threatened, and could have sent troops back to Britain if invaded, as it was to do in 1745. Furthermore, the first call on military units sent to the Mediterranean would be the defence of the British possessions of Gibraltar and Minorca. There was little real sense of how an army in the Low Countries could win the war. Indeed the limited nature of British strategic thinking in the 1730s is readily apparent. Advocates of British intervention failed to make clear how Britain was to force France to disgorge her gains. At the end of 1733 she overran Lorraine, in the winter of 1733–1734 the Milanese fell to France and Sardinia and in 1734 and 1735 respectively Spain conquered Naples and Sicily.

The Duke of Marlborough and his successes as the head of an Anglo-Dutch-German army cast a long shadow, leading to an exaggerated sense of what Britain and her allies could achieve at the expense of France. This was seen in the unrealistic hopes of a successful invasion of France from the Austrian Netherlands in 1742. The Earl of Stair, a veteran of the War of the Spanish Succession and former envoy in Paris, was sent to The Hague in 1742 to try to inspire opposition to France. That April he urged the dispatch of British troops to Flanders as soon as possible.

I flatter myself that before the end of the summer, His Majesty may be in a condition with his other friends, to make the peace of Europe upon such terms, as he himself shall think proper, such a peace as France will not be able to break through for a great many years.... France, whose natural interest must always lead them to be enemies to Great Britain, they are our rivals in every branch of our trade, and we stand and have long stood in their way to hinder them from becoming masters of Europe.

Stair suggested that an Anglo-Dutch army could move from the Lower Rhine either to Bohemia via Saxony, or up the Rhine, or up the Moselle in order to seize Thionville and Saarlouis and take up winter quarters in Lorraine[14]. Such over-optimistic views were to be cruelly disabused. By 1747 the then Secretary for the Northern Department, the Earl of Chesterfield, could inform the British envoy at the peace talks at Breda that his Spanish counterpart's plans were impossible, adding, *the king has no objection to the general idea of dismembering France in that manner, if his Majesty could see the probable means of doing it*[15].

This reflected the benefit of experience, the shattering of the hopes raised first after the fall of Walpole and secondly after the victory of Dettingen. In the 1730s British commentators could only contrast past triumphs with, from 1733, present fears and

13 A. W. Massie, Great Britain and the Defence of the Low Countries, 1744–1748, unpublished Ph. D. thesis, Oxford 1988.

14 Stair to Lord Carteret, Secretary of State for the Northern Department, 27 Ap. 1742, PRO 87/8 f. 54–56.

15 Chesterfield to Sandwich, 13 Mar. (os) 1747, London, National Maritime Museum, Sandwich Papers V/49 pp. 73–74.

suggest that these arose from governmental cowardice, self-interest or treasonable preference for France. Austrian failure in 1733–1735 could be ascribed to British and Dutch neutrality. Thus, a misguided sense of what would be achieved at the expense of France in any war was sustained through the 1730s, inspiring misguided criticism of Walpolean caution, and laying the basis for the acute disappointment that was to greet the British war effort from late 1743.

The British had begun the 1730s in an expansive military mood, planning to enforce the terms of the Anglo-French-Spanish Treaty of Seville of 9 November 1729 by taking part in an attack on Austrian Italy. At the same time, Anglo-French-Dutch forces, supported by Danes and Hessians, would, it was hoped, prevent a response by Austria's Prussian and Russian allies against Hanover[16]. These plans, however, like the defensive commitment to Austria and the guarantee of the Pragmatic Sanction in the Second Treaty of Vienna[17], demonstrated the growing gap between Britain's understandings with her allies and the concern of Sir Robert Walpole, First Lord of the Treasury, to ensure a maintenance of the peace, and to obtain its political and financial benefits.

This concern played a role in British hesitation about following through some of the implications of the new alliance. The widely-reported secret clause to compel France and Spain, by force if necessary, to guarantee the Pragmatic Sanction, was not in the treaty, but, in addition, the British guarantee carried with it a secret proviso that it was not to be valid if Maria Theresa married a Prussian or Bourbon, which in this context meant one of the sons of Philip V and Elizabeth Farnese. What the British envoy, Thomas Robinson, told the Austrian ministers on 2 March 1731 offered the basis of possible Anglo-French co-operation,

that, as well for the present, as in all times to come, the great rule for guarantying the Emperor's succession, being the equilibre of Europe, as consequently, not to divide those possessions as they are, is the only means to maintain that equilibre, so it will be equally necessary to divide them, if augmented.

The British were also unwilling to accept Austria's commitments to her other allies, Robinson saying *I would not absolutely hear of any mention whatever of Muscovy and Holstein*[18]. It is clear from Anglo-Austrian discussions in 1731 that the British ministry was primarily concerned to end the confrontation and impasse that had characterised international relations since 1725, rather than seeking a new anti-French alignment in British policy. This could be seen as naive. The British government sought to assuage French anger, as did Gedda, the Dutch envoy in Paris, who presented the treaty as the means to secure the terms of the Treaty of Seville and an addition to the Anglo-French alliance, and argued that the British failure to consult the French reflected an excusable lack of formality, rather than a breach of faith[19]. Newcastle wrote to Waldegrave,

16 Black, The Collapse of the Anglo-French Alliance 1727–1731, Gloucester 1987, pp. 155, 163–164, 178, 184, 187–189.

17 PRO 103/113.

18 Robinson to Harrington, 9 Mar. 1731, PRO 80/72 f. 25, 22.

19 Gedda to Horatio Walpole, 14 Mar. 1731, London, British Library, Department of Manuscripts, Additional Manuscripts (hereafter BL.Add.) 32772 f. 2–3; Black, Collapse (see n. 16) pp. 205–206.

if your Excellency can be so happy as to satisfy the court of France, the work will be complete indeed[20].

Alongside mutual suspicion, the notion of some form of agreement that was compatible with other alliances was to be a persistent, though far less marked, theme in Anglo-French relations in the 1730s. The principal instances of this theme were the British attempt to retain French good wishes in 1731, abortive negotiations for a British-brokered peace during the War of the Polish Succession, and the post-war attempt to defuse the major immediate threat to the peace of the Empire, the Jülich-Berg question. Each of these was unsuccessful and can, indeed, be presented in a negative light. In 1731 the British can be seen as trying to lessen French resistance to a new alignment in which France could only have played a secondary role; in the Polish Succession France was attempting to prevent British intervention on the side of Austria; and over Jülich-Berg she was suspected of seeking to get Britain and the United Provinces to join in an Austro-French coercing of Frederick William I of Prussia, a task that would be dangerous for Hanover and the United Provinces, and that would wreck any possibility of a Protestant alliance.

These were indeed important elements, but suspicion of real or potential allies, and seeking to gain benefits from them played a role in most alliances. The history of Franco-Spanish relations from 1733 until the Revolution, or of those of France and Austria from 1756 were scarcely untroubled. Indeed, the precarious nature of alliances has been a major topic in recent work on »*ancien régime*« international relations[21]. Even when there were dynastic links, as between Britain and Hanover, there was significant tension[22]. Possibly an unrealistic model of close co-operation has been devised, against which all too many alliances, both »*ancien régime*« and modern, would be found wanting. Powers naturally sought alliances on their own terms, and the process of constantly establishing a successful basis for co-operation was inevitably one that caused tension. A degree of transience arose from the uncertainty that was central to a ›system‹ subject to the vagaries of dynastic chance and monarchical will. Tension and transience did not, however, preclude co-operation, as Britain, Austria and Spain demonstrated in 1731–1732 when resolving the issue of Don Carlos' accession in Parma and the entry of Spanish garrisons into Parma and Tuscany. Charles VI and Philip V had been bitter rivals for the Spanish Succession, and had subsequently fought between 1717 and 1720, and yet they were allied in 1725–1729 and 1731–1733.

In such a context, the suggestion that Britain and France could co-operate after the Second Treaty of Vienna appears less surprising. There were naturally powerful contrary pressures. The political nation in Britain, as represented in Parliament, was suspicious of France. The Anglo-Austrian alliance cut across, indeed threatened, a

20 Newcastle to Waldegrave, 26 Mar. (os) 1731, BL.Add. 32772 f. 114.

21 R. N. Middleton, French Policy and Prussia after the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle, 1749–1753, unpublished Ph. D. thesis, Columbia 1968; P. F. Doran, Andrew Mitchell and Anglo-Prussian Diplomatic Relations during the Seven Year's War, London 1986; D. McKay, Allies of Convenience. Diplomatic Relations between Great Britain and Austria, 1714–1719, London 1986; Schweizer, England, Prussia and the Seven Years' War, Lewiston, New York 1989; Schweizer, Frederick the Great, William Pitt, and Lord Bute. The Anglo-Prussian Alliance, 1756–1763, New York 1991.

22 U. Dann, Hannover und England 1740–1760: Diplomatie und Selbsterhaltung, Hildesheim 1986.

major theme in French policy in the 1720s and early 1730s: concern over and opposition to the position of Austria, and the consequent attempt to gain the support of the leading German princes[23]. As France was unwilling to accept the new diplomatic order, the British mediated Austro-Spanish settlement in Italy, the British guaranteed Pragmatic Sanction, and the prospect of a match between Maria Theresa and Duke Francis of Lorraine, so every step she took to resist it was bound to increase British suspicions about her intentions and to exacerbate Anglo-French relations. In 1732 France negotiated a subsidy treaty with Augustus II of Saxony and encouraged the signature of a Saxon-Bavarian treaty of alliance[24]. The interests of neither power had been provided for in the Second Treaty of Vienna[25].

As long as Britain remained committed to an interventionist foreign policy, to sustaining and defending the Anglo-Austrian alliance, such French moves were bound to lead to tension and to counter-moves. It was only after the Anglo-Austrian alliance collapsed in 1733 and British policy became less optimistic and more cautious, that the possibility of an Anglo-French **modus vivendi** developped. This possibility was to be pursued most actively in the immediate post-war period.

This chronology was paralleled in that of British concern over French intervention in British domestic politics, in support either of the Jacobites or of pro-Hanoverian opponents of the Walpole ministry. The excellent British interception and decyphering system[26] decyphered in April 1731 a letter from Count Broglie, the French envoy, to Chauvelin, the French foreign minister, in which he reported on a conversation with a member of the opposition about how recent diplomatic developments could harm the Walpole ministry. This was followed by a false report that the Jacobite claimant, ›James III‹, had been received at Versailles, and by heightened British concern about French support for James, a course that Broglie had threatened[27]. The Jacobites were indeed hopeful of French support[28].

This concern played a major role in the growing conviction that France intended to invade Britain, concern that led the government to order defensive military moves on 11 July (os) 1731. British concern about French intervention in her domestic

23 J. Dureng, Mission de Théodore Chevignard de Chavigny en Allemagne, septembre 1726–octobre 1731, Paris 1912; Black, French Foreign Policy in the Age of Fleury Reassessed, in: English Historical Review 103 (1988) pp. 361–371.

24 A. Philipp, August der Starke und die pragmatische Sanktion, Leipzig 1908, pp. 119–120, 134–136; R. Beyrich, Kursachsen und die polnische Thronfolge, 1733–1736, Leipzig 1913, pp. 2–3; P. C. Hartmann, Karl Albrecht–Karl VII, Regensburg 1985, pp. 131–133.

25 George Tilson, Under Secretary in the Northern Department, to Sir Luke Schaub, envoy in Dresden, 23 Ap. (os) 1731, New York, Public Library, Hardwicke Papers vol. 53.

26 K. Ellis, The Post Office in the Eighteenth Century, London 1958, p. 74; Ellis, British Communications and Diplomacy in the Eighteenth Century, in: Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research, 31 (1958) p. 163; Black, British Intelligence and the Mid-Eighteenth-Century Crisis, in: Intelligence and National Security, 2 (1987) pp. 209–229.

27 Broglie to Chauvelin, 9 Ap. 1731, BL.Add. 32772 f. 254–255; Holzendorf, chargé at The Hague, to Tilson, 10 Ap. 1731, PRO 84/312 f. 85; Newcastle to Waldegrave, 1, 15 Ap. (os), Waldegrave to Newcastle, 20 Ap. 1731, BL.Add. 32772 f. 193, 250, 239; Information enclosed in Thomas Pelham, Secretary of Embassy in Paris, to Charles Delafaye, Under Secretary in the Southern Department, 12 June 1731, PRO 78/198 f. 34.

28 Arthur Dillon, Jacobite agent in Paris, to the Duke of Ormonde, 4 June 1731, Windsor Castle, Royal Archives, Stuart Papers (hereafter RA) 145/88.

politics increased at the end of 1731 when Chavigny was named to succeed Broglie. He was seen correctly as a diplomat willing and eager to intervene thus, and indeed in 1733 he pressed for action on behalf of the Jacobites[29]. During his embassy, British distrust of France increased, and the decision to recall him in 1736 and to replace him by the Count of Cambis, who was in London from early 1737 until his death in February 1740, helped to ease relations. The conciliatory Cambis was instructed not to meddle in British domestic politics. Conversely, Earl Waldegrave, the British envoy from 1730 until October 1740, when his ill-health forced him to return home, was a popular envoy, a skilled courtier and an emollient diplomat, sufficiently so for his loyalty to be suspected in 1732, when Thomas Pelham reported on his activities.

The policies and attitudes of Broglie and Chavigny can be seen as unfortunate for Anglo-French relations, but they were not alone among diplomats in seeking the overthrow of the Walpole ministry. Austrian envoys had intrigued actively with the opposition in the 1720s, but this had not prevented moves to improve relations, especially in early 1729, that were eventually successful in 1731. In addition, it was by no means clear that the Walpole ministry would survive. Broglie and, more particularly, Chavigny discerned some of its weaknesses, but they can be faulted not only for exaggerating them, but also for failing to appreciate sufficiently that the overthrow of Walpole might not be in France's best interests. This was certainly revealed to be the case in 1742 when Walpole fell. Richard Harding's argument that the commitment to Austria represented by the dispatch of an army to the Austrian Netherlands in May 1742 »was not the result of a clearer and more determined foreign policy directed by Lord Carteret«, but rather the realisation of an earlier direction of policy[30], does not accord with the contemporary sense, among politicians and foreign envoys, that a major shift had taken place when Walpole was replaced, one that committed Britain to active anti-French policies.

Broglie and Chavigny hoped that Walpole would be overthrown by politicians who looked to France. This made a Stuart restoration attractive, for ›James III‹, his son and the Jacobites could be expected to depend on French help. Financing Bolingbroke to campaign against Walpole, and supporting the Stuarts[31], did not necessarily wreck the possibility of better relations with the British ministry. Indeed, it could be seen as encouraging Walpole not to offend France. A more serious criticism, however, is that the French failed to place sufficient weight on the danger that the Walpole ministry would be replaced by one that was more aggressively anti-French.

The British ministry did not make this mistake. Although Horatio Walpole, Sir Robert's brother and key adviser on foreign policy, was inclined to place too much trust in French assurances and, in particular, on his faith in Fleury, the British government was correct in consistently believing that any replacement would be more likely to be anti-British. They were especially worried about the views of

29 Black, Jacobitism and British Foreign Policy, 1731–5, in: E. Cruickshanks and Black (eds.), The Jacobite Challenge, Edinburgh 1989, pp. 142–160.

30 R. Harding, Sir Robert Walpole's Ministry and the Conduct of the War with Spain, 1739–41, in: Historical Research, 60 (1987) p. 319.

31 H. T. Dickinson, Bolingbroke, London 1970, pp. 232–243; Cruickshanks, Lord Cornbury, Bolingbroke and a plan to restore the Stuarts 1731–1735, Huntingdon 1986, pp. 3–8.

Chauvelin, foreign minister 1727–1737, and as a result were willing to try to bribe him. The extent to which Horatio Walpole and, through him, the British ministry were tricked by Fleury's assurances and by the hard man/soft man techniques that Fleury and Chauvelin perfected is open to question. Vaucher presented Horatio Walpole as a dupe[32]. There is a measure of truth in this, but the extent to which Horatio influenced British policy may be queried. He had been ignored in 1730 when he had last pressed the case for trusting France, and he had played no role in the negotiations that led to the Second Treaty of Vienna. Horatio's lack of political sensitivity had already been demonstrated in December 1729 when he had replied to British domestic criticism of illegal French improvements to the harbour of Dunkirk in an offhand manner.

Rather than seeing Britain as duped in 1734–1735, it is worth drawing attention to the limitations of the alternative courses. Negotiations with Spain were handicapped by the extent of Spanish demands, which included Maria Theresa for Don Carlos and major territorial gains in Italy, by the unpredictability of Spanish policy and by the difficulty of dealing with Philip V. Charles Emmanuel III was unlikely to abandon France unless Spain also did or unless Austrian military fortunes dramatically improved. British assistance to Austria would expose Britain to Bourbon help for the Jacobites, and, in the absence of Dutch backing, it was difficult to see what could be achieved in the Low Countries, which were anyway neutral throughout the war. In addition, entry into the war would expose Hanover to attack. The vulnerability of the Electorate to France, which was to be revealed in 1741 and, more clearly, 1757, was already obvious, not least because of the scare about a planned Prussian attack in the autumn of 1729. By not fighting in 1733–1735, Britain therefore avoided providing France with the bargaining counters that were to play a major role in peace and other negotiations during mid-century conflicts. The French agreement not to occupy defenceless Hanover in 1741 led George II to vote for their candidate for the Imperial throne. Their subsequent conquest of the Austrian Netherlands and part of the United Provinces gave the French a powerful position in the negotiations at the close of the War of the Austrian Succession.

The British ministry had a poor hand in late 1734. The Excise Crisis had been surmounted, the general election of 1734 won, and the arming of a sizeable fleet had closed the window of opportunity for the Jacobites that had opened in 1733. Nevertheless, the international situation was hardly propitious, while at home good reasons for neutrality were matched by domestic political pressure, from outside and, crucially, within the government on behalf of Austria. It was tempting therefore to hope that it would be possible to persuade France to accept terms that did not seem to affect the balance of power too grievously. Wartime negotiations had been commonplace during the Nine Years War and the War of the Spanish Succession, and, by exploring the possibility of such negotiations, the British ministry could avoid the problem of deciding what it would do to help Austria if the war continued.

These hopes help to account for British anger when they realised that the war would continue, that the negotiations had failed. In March 1735 surprise was expressed that the French agent in The Hague talks *had received instructions so*

32 VAUCHER, Politique (see n. 2) p. 120.

different from what we had reason to promise ourselves from the Cardinal's own private letters wrote to you at the same time. In addition, Fleury's recent letters were very different from his earlier ones. As a result, Fleury's sincerity was suspected, and Horatio Walpole was ordered to protest forcefully to him,

you should represent, in the strongest terms, to the Cardinal, the absolute necessity of agreeing immediately to an armistice, without which it will be impossible for us to give any credit, to his professions of a disposition for peace[33].

British disillusionment was soon marked. Horatio Walpole wrote of *the falseness of the Cardinal,* and again *it is the usual artifice of France, when they have flung difficulties in the way of a thing, that is so reasonable, that they cannot directly oppose it, to take care to have it given out, that they have consented to it*[34].

And yet, it was clearly in Britain's interest to have Fleury remain in power, rather than a minister who was more bellicose or one who was closer to Spain. The composition of the French ministry was more important to the British than it had been in 1731–1733. Then Britain had appeared to be part of a powerful alliance system. When French invasion had been feared in June 1731, the British had felt able to turn to Dutch and Austrian support[35]. There was no such support after 1733, and, in responding to the danger of a French-supported Jacobite invasion, the British had been obliged to rely on their own resources. In 1735 the Dutch made it clear that they would not act in support of Austria, or join Britain in helping Portugal, which was threatened with Spanish invasion[36].

It was not surprising that diplomatic difficulties led the British to devote more attention to the French ministry. Whereas in 1732 France had been without powerful allies and was affected by serious domestic political differences, the situation was now very different. This led to an attempt to cultivate Chauvelin. In March 1735 Horatio Walpole was instructed to establish a confidential relationship with him by forgetting all former suspicions, *It is plain, that the Cardinal is under great uneasiness, and that Mor. Chauvelin can determine him, to act a right part if he pleases; and therefore nothing ought to be omitted, that may engage him to do it.*

Sir Robert Walpole responded positively to Chauvelin's attempt to mislead him by means of a confidential correspondence. He attempted to turn Chauvelin against Spain, sensibly warning *how precarious any dependence must be upon a court made up as the court of Madrid is*[37], but his approach and advice scarcely came from a position of strength.

The British ministry was correct in arguing that the Franco-Spanish alliance was insecure, certainly while Fleury and Elizabeth Farnese were both influential, but their failure to predict the Austro-French reconciliation that followed the signature of Preliminaries in October 1735 was to leave them initially with few alternatives to

33 Private Instructions to Horatio Walpole, 13 Mar. (os) 1735, PRO 84/581 f.284–285.

34 Horatio Walpole to Harrington, 20 May 1735, PRO 84/343 f.4, 25.

35 Harrington to Robinson, 29 June (os), Harrington to Chesterfield, then envoy in The Hague, 29 June (os) 1731, PRO 80/75, 84/313.

36 Horatio Walpole to Newcastle, 3 June, Newcastle to Horatio Walpole, 30 May, 11 June 1735, PRO 84/343 f.81–92, 97, 200.

37 Newcastle to Horatio Walpole, – Mar. (os) 1735, PRO 84/581 f.290; Robert Walpole to Waldegrave, 7 Oct. (os), 4, 24 Dec. (os) 1735, Chewton Hall, Chewton Mendip, papers of James 1st Earl Waldegrave (hereafter Chewton).

watching the situation in Paris and hoping that the new alliance would collapse. In February 1736, Horatio Walpole wrote from Whitehall to his protégé Robert Trevor, now envoy at The Hague,

I am still under no apprehensions of the Emperor and France concerting anything to our prejudice, their interests, and views will still continue so opposite that I think if our conduct be tolerably prudent towards those powers it is highly improbable, I had almost said impossible[38].

Although most British commentators also saw the Austro-French alliance as unnatural, few were as optimistic about the situation as Horatio Walpole. Rhetoric and printed polemic about the French threat to Europe and Britain had existed during the years of the Anglo-French alliance, when indeed it could serve a domestic political point, but it revived markedly from the War of the Polish Succession. This appeared to demonstrate French military power, the feebleness of anti-French diplomatic combinations and the continuing reality of French aggrandisement, which could no longer be associated solely with Louis XIV. There was widespread alarm about the acquisition of Lorraine by Louis XV's father-in-law, with the reversion to France. This was not simply voiced by commentators concerned to demonstrate the evil consequences of the ministerial failure to act on behalf of Austria. Newcastle ordered Horatio Walpole in June 1735 to secure Dutch opposition to any cession of Lorraine to France,

It is indeed true, that Lorraine is, at present, an open country; and that the French are, in some measure, masters of it, when they please; But it must be considered, that when once they have it, they may, and will undoubtedly, have many strong places in it, that it borders upon Luxemburg; and, by that means, may properly be said to affect the security of Flanders. That it is the only inroad from France into Germany, which is not, at present, in the French hands... must greatly affect the safety, and security of the Empire[39].

In hindsight, Lorraine, which was not finally acquired until 1766, appears as the last major gain of territory on the continent of Europe by the *»ancien régime«* French monarchy, the last act in what had been the seemingly inexorable eastward advance of Bourbon dominion, and one that was more a filling in than a new thrust east. This was not so obvious to contemporaries. The course of the recent war had demonstrated the vulnerability of the Rhineland to French attack. The ministry had been concerned about French intentions towards Luxemburg, while Newcastle had expressed his concern about the possible terms of an Austro-French alliance, *the most fatal stroke of all, would be the yielding up Flanders to France*. He feared that this would eventually lead to the United Provinces being swallowed up by France. Thomas Robinson, envoy in Vienna, wrote in March 1736,

When the French are once nested in Lorraine; that single acquisition will give them strength, if they want any, to take Luxemburg upon the first trouble, of which they themselves will be the authors, upon the death of the Elector Palatine.

He also wrote of *the danger of France's erecting at one time or other, a Chamber of*

38 Horatio Walpole to Trevor, 13 Feb. (os) 1736, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire County Record Office, Trevor mss. vol. I, no. 109.

39 Newcastle to Horatio Walpole, 6 June (os) 1735, BL.Add. 32787 f.351–352.

Reunion, an obvious echo of the reign of Louis XIV, and reported that Lower Lorraine included Holland and Flanders.

The cession of Luxemburg and the Barrier to France war rumoured in Paris. The pro-Walpolean London newspaper »*The Hyp-Doctor*« tried, in its issue of 23 March (os) 1736, to reassure readers. It reported that France had controlled Lorraine in the tenth century, adding *it is the ancient right of France, as truly as Yorkshire is part of England.... It was always in the power of France, whether conceded or not.*

On the other hand, Robert Daniel, agent in Brussels, reported the following January that it was believed there *that as soon as the Emperor shall be engaged in Hungary, the French will fall upon this country.* »Wye's Letter« of 18 February (os) 1737 referred to a repeated *report of the Emperor's design to weaken the Dutch Barrier by giving up Luxemburg, and some other places of the Austrian Netherlands to France, by way of mortgage*[40]. There was no sense that French aggrandisement had ceased, especially in the Low Countries. Indeed the weakness of the Anglo-Dutch alliance system seemed to make it more likely.

A sense of the transience of territorial arrangements helps to account for the concern felt about French strength. In January 1736 Newcastle was informed by the British agent at Dunkirk that it was being reported that France would acquire the Barrier forts that protected the Austrian Netherlands, or at least purchase Furnes and Ypres[41]. Concern about French intentions helped to account for British and Dutch hopes that the Jülich-Berg dispute could be settled peacefully, for they did not want the situation to become more volatile. Carteret and Chesterfield told the House of Lords in January 1736 that Britain and Europe would soon repent France's acquisition of Lorraine[42]. France's lack of interest in obtaining a British guarantee for the new peace settlement disconcerted British ministers, but their understandable unwillingness to seek an alignment with Spain and Sardinia, both dissatisfied with the manner and content of the unilateral French agreement with Austria, left them with few alternatives.

In the short term the British ministry sought an easing of tension with France, in the longer term it devoted greater attention to the possibility of a northern alliance system, primarily and initially with Russia, but with the hope that a change in Berlin might lead to a Prussian alliance. The French found it expedient to encourage British hopes of peaceful intentions and consultation with Britain because they did not want their new arrangments disrupted. Chavigny was sarcastic about the British desire for influence, and stressed French willingness for a reconciliation in letters that he knew would be opened and decyphered[43].

In some respects, the situation after the War of the Polish Succession was similar to that at the beginning of the Anglo-French alliance. Spain was the power most

40 Private Instructions to Horatio Walpole, 13 Mar. (os) 1735, PRO 84/581 f.286; Newcastle to Horatio Walpole, 6 June (os) 1735, BL.Add. 32787 f.353; Robinson to Weston, 3 Mar., Robinson to Harrington, 7 Mar. 1736, PRO 80/120; 12 Mar. 1736, Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, MS 10165 f.119; Daniel to Harrington, 16 Jan. 1737, PRO 77/84 f.3; Cyril Wych, envoy in Hamburg, to Harrington, 26 Nov. 1737, PRO 82/58 f.168.

41 Mr. Day to Newcastle, 12 Jan. 1736, BL.Add. 23797 f.91.

42 Account of parliamentary debate sent with Chavigny's dispatch of 6 Feb. 1736, Paris, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Correspondance Politique Angleterre (hereafter AE.CP.Ang.) 393 f.106–107.

43 Chavigny's reports, 30 Jan., 14, 16 Feb., 2 Mar. 1736, AE.CP.Ang. 393 f.105, 138, 140, 146, 179.

dissatisfied with territorial arrangements and keenest on war. Britain, France and Austria did not want any territorial changes in western Europe, and Anglo-Austrian relations were cool. There were, however, important differences. The death of Charles VI would inaugurate a struggle for influence and territory that was likely to be far greater than that touched off by Philip V's attacks on Sardinia and Sicily in 1717 and 1718 respectively. The collective security system based on the Anglo-French alliance that had resisted Philip V had rested essentially on a clear basis that was agreed between its major proponents, the defence of the Utrecht settlement, albeit with important variations in Italy. No such clear basis existed for any similar diplomatic combination in western Europe after the War of the Polish Succession. The securing and subsequent defence of the terms of the Preliminaries was an important goal, but only for France and Austria. Much diplomatic effort and covert military pressure was devoted to persuading Spain to withdraw her troops from northern to southern Italy, while the Lorraine and Tuscan succession issues involved a lot of diplomacy.

There was little value for Britain in becoming involved in such contentious processes, not least because of the wish to avoid Anglo-Spanish tension, which, past experience suggested, would complicate commercial disputes. More seriously, the Preliminaries and the Austro-French entente could not form a reliable basis for future arrangements after the death of Charles VI. In one sense Britain, France and most other European powers were involved in a collective security system as guarantors of the Pragmatic Sanction, but the French guarantee, given in the Third Treaty of Vienna of 1738, was construed by the French as not nullifying the prior rights of third parties, and on 16 May 1738 they secretly signed an agreement with Bavaria promising to support her just claims[44].

Uncertainty over French intentions was compounded by Fleury's age – he had been born in 1653 – and by the manoeuvres surrounding the succession to him, manoeuvres that helped to produce the fall of Chauvelin in 1737, and that were in no way stilled by this change. Horatio Walpole saw the French willingness to guarantee the Pragmatic Sanction in 1736 as

> *indeed a good earnest for the preservation of the public peace during the Cardinal's life, as it is also so far a check upon France, after his death, that the violation of so solemn a treaty will be an undoubted evidence of the infidelity of France, and of her designs to destroy the balance of Europe; and may perhaps have such an effect upon those powers concerned for the preservation of it, as the breaking through the Treaty of Partition had on the death of King Charles the Second of Spain* [1700]. *But a security that depends upon the life of the Cardinal, considering his age, and the fidelity of France, from the experience of the faith of that crown, is not, I am afraid, built upon a very solid and lasting foundation notwithstanding the present seeming good intelligence between the Emperor and that crown, an eternal jealousy of their reciprocal ambitious views must ever keep those two rival powers more or less asunder, and their friendship cannot be cordial.*

The following year, the Dutch Pensionary told Horatio Walpole that *the stability of the peace of Europe appeared to be at present upon a very loose and tottering foundation, and depended perhaps upon the life of one man, who was above fourscore*

44 A. Duc de BROGLIE, Le Cardinal de Fleury et la Pragmatique Sanction, in: Revue Historique, 20 (1882) pp. 257–281.

years old[45]. Any attempt to negotiate an alliance with France was therefore of dubious value for Britain, leaving aside that, as rapidly became more obvious in 1736, France would reject an approach. Austria was to learn in 1741 that reliance on French policy was misleading, Spain and Sardinia had already done so in 1735, and French efforts in the late 1730s to retain or improve good relations with both parties in disputes, Turkey and Austria, Prussia and the Palatinate, did little for France's reputation as a power that could be trusted. As at other moments when close Anglo-French relations seemed attractive, for example 1772–1773 and 1786, the diplomatic agenda of the French and the likely longevity of their ministry gave rise in Britain to criticism of any such links.

It is therefore inappropriate to see the late 1730s, 1736 in particular, as a missed opportunity when the Walpole ministry could have sought to readjust Anglo-French relations to the new facts of French power and influence. When in February 1736 Horatio Walpole brought up the issue of the Imperial succession, Chavigny assured him that France *desires only what may be agreable to the equilibre of Europe*[46], the sort of bland remark that encouraged concern. Better Anglo-French relations would of course have helped Britain in her negotiations with Spain in late 1738, in the subsequent last minute moves and confrontation when they failed, and in the eventual conflict, but Britain's experience in that war scarcely suggested that expectations based upon alliance or gratitude were appropriate. The Dutch refused to help against Spain, as did the Portuguese, despite the fact that Britain had kept a fleet in the Tagus in 1735–1737 in order to dissuade Spain from attacking.

It was not therefore surprising that in April 1736 Robinson was instructed that George II

will not think fit to give his opinion or explain himself about the particulars, unless any such new scene should arise, as might necessarily demand the interposition of the Maritime Powers – for the sake of their own interests, and for the equilibre of Europe[47].

Chavigny had been told by both Sir Robert Walpole and Newcastle that a general treaty guaranteeing the Preliminaries would be best[48], but, alongside such ›public‹ diplomacy, which can be followed in the official diplomatic archives, the British ministry was increasingly disenchanted with the very process of negotiation with France, with both Chauvelin and Chavigny,

The private correspondence with our friend [Chauvelin], *seeming to be at an end, or at least wholly useless, I have not for some time troubled your Lordship about it, although I cannot but say there is something in it, that appears a little mysterious, that so great hopes should be conceived in the beginning, and the whole drop at once, as if no such things had ever been thought of. Its a great opportunity lost, if ever it could have been had....* [Chavigny] *I am convinced his present conduct is more offensive now, and more prejudicial to the King's affairs, than ever he had a power to make it before. The opposition here is now in so low a state, that*

45 BL.Add. 1931 f.157–158; Horatio Walpole to Harrington, 20 Aug. 1737, PRO 84/367 f.7; P. R. Campbell, The Conduct of Politics in France in the time of the Cardinal de Fleury, 1723–42, unpublished Ph. D. thesis, London, 1985 is the most recent survey of ministerial politics.

46 Chavigny to Chauvelin, 20 Feb., decyphered by the British and enclosed in Waldegrave to Newcastle, 4 Mar. 1736, Chewton.

47 Harrington to Robinson, 13 Ap. (os) 1736, PRO 80/120.

48 Chavigny to Chauvelin, 1 Mar. 1736, AE.CP.Ang. 393 f.170–171.

they scarce think of giving any trouble. His intimacy, and communication with them is in every respect the same, as it always has been, though insignificant from the circumstances of time and things, But he is diligent and industrious among all the foreign ministers, full of insinuations to the prejudice of this court, and where he gains any credit, it must be thought, that the friendship between the courts of England and France is... of no longer duration than until it shall be proper for France to take off the mask.... It was thought more advisable that I shall write upon this subject, than a Secretary of State, it being not properly the business of an office letter[49].

Chauvelin's disgrace in February 1737 has been variously ascribed to Fleury's hostility to his foreign policy views, specifically to his secret correspondence with several French diplomats, and to differences over French domestic politics. Followed by the arrival of Cambis with emollient instructions[50], Chauvelin's fall also led to a revival in confidential discussions between Fleury and Waldegrave, discussions which Waldegrave reported to Robert Walpole. Fleury made it clear that he was worried about Austrian strength, specifically her power in Germany and the need to prevent her from encroaching on the German princes, a point that could be expected to appeal to George II, the danger that she would gain Tuscany and thus become too powerful in Italy, and the threat that on the failure of male issue Württemberg would become a Habsburg territory[51]. British reluctance to play a role in the Jülich-Berg question, ensured that there was little possible specific basis for any reconciliation. The Dutch were keen to settle the question while Fleury was alive, but the British government did not wish to force Frederick William I to agree to any plan, as they feared his wrath and the implications for Hanover[52].

Despite the removal of Chauvelin and Chavigny, the situation seemed increasingly worrying, in large part because the Austro-Turkish war of 1737–1739 went badly for Austria. Militarily weakened in the east, it was also clear from the state of the Barrier and of the Austrian forces in the Austrian Netherlands[53], that the French would have little difficulty in invading the Low Countries. On the French part, there was relatively little interest in relations with Britain. Campbell's claim that Fleury's »foreign policy from 1737 to 1740 was directed at achieving the isolation of Britain«[54], is not supported by the evidence. Fleury would have preferred a workable compromise with Britain, and certainly did not want any British attempt to create a threatening diplomatic combination, but reports from London stressed that, although the ministry would like to take a role in the affairs of the world, it needed peace[55], and there were very few French instructions to their envoys in Britain in 1737. Cambis did not respond to the new opposition, centred on Frederick Prince of Wales, as Chavigny had done to earlier opponents of Walpole. He did not intrigue

49 Robert Walpole to Waldegrave, 21 Mar. (os) 1736, Chewton.

50 Pour Mr. le Comte Cambis, 4 Mar., Cambis to Amelot, French foreign minister, 23 Sept., 6 Oct., Amelot to Cambis, 2 Oct. 1737, AE.CP.Ang. 394 f. 91, 395, f. 215, 252, 216.

51 Waldegrave to Robert Walpole, 13 Ap. 1737, Chewton.

52 Amelot to Bussy, chargé d'affaires in London, 4 Ap., 11 June 1737, AE.CP.Ang. 394 f. 192, 321; Harrington to Trevor, 17 May (os), Trevor to Harrington, 28 May 1737, PRO 83/365 f. 113, 117; BLACK, The agenda of Ancien Régime International Relations, A Case Study, in: Durham University Journal, forthcoming.

53 Trevor to Harrington, 14 June 1737, PRO 84/365 f. 202.

54 CAMPBELL, Conduct of Politics (see n. 45) p. 279.

55 Bussy to Amelot, 28 June 1737, AE.CP.Ang. 394 f. 397–398.

with it, reported correctly that it was unlikely to succeed[56], and argued with reason that the ministry would survive the loss of Queen Caroline, but he also stressed the size of the national debt and the harm that war would cause to British trade[57].

Relations with Britain were not the central theme of French policy. Those with Austria and Spain were more important, and the war in the Balkans and Jülich-Berg issue more pressing problems. Britain had a minor role in both, not least because she wished, in alliance with the Dutch, to mediate a Balkan peace, but she was neither interested nor apparently capable of playing a role that might inconvenience France. Animosity between George II and Frederick William I, the unpredictability of the latter and a preference for a revived Anglo-Austrian alliance, all helped to ensure that there was little danger of an Anglo-Prussian understanding while Frederick William remained king. Rising Anglo-Spanish tension over the new British colony of Georgia and Spanish depredations upon British trade in the Caribbean, both lessened the possibility of any Anglo-Spanish understanding and occupied British attention. There was no reason for the French to offer assistance. When in December 1737 Newcastle suggested to Cambis that the two powers co-operate against the depredations he received a discouraging reply[58].

At the same time, British concern over the direction of French policy remained strong. The conduct of this policy had become less offensive with the departure of Chauvelin and Chavigny, but discussions with Fleury had not lessened British fears. In this the ministry echoed the concern of members of the opposition, although they did not blame their own policies, past and present, for the dangerous situation. One bitter critic, Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, wrote to another, the Earl of Stair, *Your Lordship agrees that my apprehensions are just, that we are in a great deal of danger from France: which is so plain, that I am amazed that everybody who has a stake is not of the same opinion*[59].

Newcastle was similarly concerned. He wrote at the beginning of 1738 to Waldegrave, the letter *private and particular, to be opened by himself,*

> *The King is glad to find that the Imperial Ministers Prince Lichtenstein and Mr. Schmerling, seem now to be sensible of that which all the world have seen, ever since the conclusion of the late treaty between the Emperor and France; viz. that the French court have been all along amusing and deceiving that of Vienna; and it is but too evident, that France has been making use of the absolute authority, which they have, over the Imperial court, to form such alliances, and establish such a power, both in the north, and elsewhere (and that, with the appearance of the Emperor's consent,) as may enable them to disappoint the views of the House of Austria with regard to the Emperor's succession, and future interest, and to attempt, whenever they may think proper, the overturning the balance of power in Europe.*

Newcastle argued that France was delaying the peace in the Balkans in order to exhaust Austria and Russia, that French views in Sweden were sinister and that, although she might not have *an intent to make any immediate attempt upon the tranquility of Europe*, France wished

56 Cambis to Amelot, 22, 28 Oct., 2 Dec. 1737, AE.CP.Ang. 395 f. 288, 299, 363–364; Fleury to Cambis, 11 Dec. 1737, PRO 107/21.

57 Cambis to Amelot, 28 Oct. 1737, AE.CP.Ang. 394 f. 301–302.

58 Cambis to Amelot, 22 Dec. 1737, PRO 107/21.

59 Marlborough to Stair, 15 July (os) 1737, BL. M/687.

to be in a condition to do it, now, or hereafter, according, as events shall arise, either in the North or South, and to put it out of the power of others, to give then any opposition therein: and it is for that reason, that His Majesty is to be excluded out of all these negotiations, as the power, that, they know, would not be imposed upon, to give into any schemes, that may hereafter affect the balance of Europe.... Let the Cardinal make what professions, he pleases, of his desire to continue the peace; it is plain, his views are as much, to increase, and advance the power of France, and perhaps with more effect, than if he were actually beginning a war for that purpose. He is erecting himself into a general arbitrator of all the differences, that have, or may arise, between the other powers of Europe; and putting himself in a condition to decide them, which way he pleases; and his measures for that purpose, instead of being designed for the preservation of the peace, must be looked upon, as productive of the most certain, and dangerous, war, if some stop cannot be put to the torrent of their success at present.

Newcastle placed his hopes on an Austrian change of policy, inspired possibly by French support for Spanish aggrandisement in Italy[60], but Fleury was careful not to encourage Austria's enemies, especially Bavaria and Spain, and it is understandable that Charles VI did not turn to Britain. He had been let down by her in 1733–1735, while France as an ally could be expected to restrain Bavaria and Spain. In a similar fashion, France under the leadership of her able foreign minister, Vergennes, was seen as enjoying diplomatic hegemony in Europe, especially western Europe, in 1783–1786. British ministers and diplomats hoped to damage her position by exploiting differences between her allies, Russia and Turkey, in 1783–1784, Austria and the United Provinces in 1781 and 1784–1785.

Newcastle in early 1738 sketched out a direction for British policy that was to be taken up with greater vigour, in more opportune circumstances, by Carteret. It was not a view that commanded total support within the ministry. Frustration with Austria led some, most prominently Horatio Walpole, to press for alliances with Prussia and Russia, while commercial and colonial differences with Spain were to be the central theme for British policy for the rest of the period until the deaths of Frederick William I and Charles VI in 1740 provided a new agenda of opportunities and threats.

Anglo-Spanish problems were both separate from and related to Anglo-French relations. They could be pursued separately, and France refused Spain military assistance. On the other hand, the danger that France would assist Spain played a large and increasing role in British discussion over foreign policy from 1738: it was the sub-text of much of it. In place of Jülich-Berg and the Balkans, issues remote from the concern of most British politicians, let alone the informed public, the West Indies, trade and national honour came to dominate discussion. France seemed more threatening because she could help Spain and it was this aspect of French policy that attracted attention. At the same time as the British press presented France's continental policy as malign, but malign in a vague sense, centring on manipulation and dominance, much more pointed concern was expressed about French views on Anglo-Spanish relations. In October 1739 the Attorney General, Sir Dudley Ryder, met Sir Robert Walpole deer hunting in Richmond Park,

He assured me the French had never offered their mediation between us and the Spaniards, that they had not yet agreed to assist Spain, who does not come up to their terms. That,

60 Newcastle to Waldegrave, 5 Jan. (os) 1738, BL.Add. 32800 f.24–35.

however, they would have a squadron of 20 men of war at Brest in a month's time, which though it would not act offensively against us at present, could not be neglected. That by this means they will put us to the expense of a war and the running away with our trade[61].

And yet, as already indicated, the direction of French and then British attention was to shift back towards Europe the following summer, as the deaths of the rulers of Prussia, Austria and Russia dramatically altered the situation, bringing present occasion and urgency to long-harboured hopes and anxieties. What is readily apparent is that this shift was not welcome to many within Britain, who were more concerned about the prospect of colonial gain[62], while, conversely, most British diplomats had continued from 1731 on to think of foreign policy largely in terms of challenging France in Europe. Alongside the relatively well-known ›blue-water‹ versus ›continental‹ strategic debate have to be set the overlapping but subtly varying divisions between groups that were real if nebulous: ›outsiders‹ and ›insiders‹, polemicists and experts, politicians and diplomats. If the history of British foreign policy in the late 1730s it written from the diplomatic archives, then it becomes an account of the search for an alliance system that could counter France. This search is set within a context of French diplomatic hegemony. The British press offers a very different account: one that is firmly focussed on commercial, colonial and maritime issues, with these issues presented in a very aggressive fashion. In this perspective there is considerable continuity in British foreign policy, for the French challenge was presented as but one, albeit the most important, aspect of the Bourbon threat. This was possibly the greatest mistake made by public critics of the foreign policy of the Walpole ministry, for it totally ignored the strains in Franco-Spanish relations, strains that are also ignored in schematic, synoptic and structural accounts of eighteenth-century international relations. Instead, it was weaknesses in the relationship between the two Bourbon powers that was so crucial to Britain's position on a number of occasions, most obviously in 1748–1760 and 1770[63]. The late 1730s were another instance of the same process. The consequences of British diplomatic isolation were lessened by Franco-Spanish differences, although, to be fair to opposition critics in Britain, the British government was itself unsure about the extent and severity of these differences. This was a product both of its poor diplomatic links with both powers and of the general atmosphere of mistrust. Such mistrust had been exacerbated by the kaleidoscopic changes and realignments of the last quarter-century, most obviously those in 1725, 1729, 1731, 1733 and 1735.

Given these abrupt changes, it was not surprising that there was considerable anxiety about the possibility of a Franco-Spanish reconciliation in the late 1730s; indeed the principal task that his British paymasters assigned to 101, François de Bussy, their agent in the French foreign ministry, was to report on links between the two powers. The health of Fleury exacerbated British concern, as he was believed to be the major bar to any reconciliation.

61 London, History of Parliament, Harrowby Transcripts, Ryder diary, 6 Oct. (os) 1739.

62 R. Harris, A Patriot Press: National Politics and the London Press in the War of Austrian Succession, 1740–1748, unpublished D. Phil. thesis, Oxford, 1990, is valuable although some of the arguments and conclusions are questionable.

63 Black, Anglo-Spanish Naval Relations in the Eighteenth Century, in: Mariner's Mirror, 77 (1991), pp. 235–258.

And yet the two powers were divided. It was possible to wonder, as the Jacobites did, what they could achieve together if, unlike in 1733–1735, they had no continental enemies, but that was not the position in the late 1730s. Fleury wanted peace; his rivals at court hoped for war, but with Austria, not Britain, while Spain, having nearly gone to war with Portugal in 1735, was most concerned about the future of the Austrian possessions in Italy. Her willingness to settle with Britain was demonstrated in her negotiations with her in late 1738, culminating in the Convention of the Pardo of 14 January 1739.

If British critics of the ministry ignored Franco-Spanish differences and, in concentrating on the Bourbon threat, misleadingly saw the remainder of Europe as a potential anti-Bourbon league that only required a determined Britain to organise it, British diplomats were all too aware of differences between the other powers, especially when they involved Hanover. They sought to persuade rulers to see the threat posed by French power, but this notion required belief in an integrated European system. Although many subscribed to that, if only subconsciously, by using the language of the balance of power and of European interests, in practice rulers thought in more specific terms and their attention was focussed on their immediate region, albeit with the realisation that developments elsewhere could be of importance. British diplomats were aware of this situation, although they often regretted it; the press and most parliamentarians were not.

Attention to detail therefore reveals the limitations of both eighteenth-century and modern schematic accounts. If attention is focussed on a narrow period, especially 1736–1738, the history of which is largely unwritten, this is readily apparent. This indicates the danger of neglecting the propaganda element in the polemical works produced in the British public debate over foreign policy, because they deliberately sought simplicity, stressed continuity and found their strength in rhetoric. Given the current historical trend in emphasising the development of ›Patriotism‹ if not nationalism, the role of the middling orders and the vitality of urban politics, it is not surprising that foreign policy has been seen in these terms. An ideology of »closely intertwined... Patriotism, nationalism, and commercial expansion« has been discerned[64]. And yet, attention to detail reveals that, although this ideology existed, it had little direct impact on the development of foreign policy towards France in this period. Whatever the state of the argument over the role of public opinion in causing the outbreak of war with Spain in 1739 (and the most recent account stresses other factors)[65], it is clear that there was no such traumatic event in Anglo-French relations until 1742–1743, and that the move then towards war with France reflected ministerial rather then public priorities.

Thus, the notion of inherent animosity to France for reasons of inevitable colonial and maritime competition, a thesis that has been recently stressed, although it is far from new, is of limited value for understanding the development of events. This is true of British relations with France and, more clearly, of British foreign policy in

64 N. Rogers, Whigs and Cities. Popular Politics in the Age of Walpole and Pitt, Oxford 1989 p. 397; K. Wilson, Empire, Trade and Popular Politics in Mid-Hanoverian Britain: The Case of Admiral Vernon, in: Past and Present 121 (Nov. 1988).

65 P. L. Woodfine, The Anglo-Spanish War of 1739 in: The Origins of War in Early Modern Europe, edited by Black, Edinburgh 1987, pp. 185–210.

general. By treating Britain's continental policies as essentially a search for allies for an inevitable maritime conflict with the Bourbons, the notion of a dominant Anglo-French animosity does not allow for the role of Hanover in motivating British policy. The collapse of the Anglo-French alliance in 1731 naturally made it both easier and more necessary to consider Britain's continental position in the light of hostility to France, but the course of international relations in the 1740s, especially the struggle between Austria and Prussia and, to a lesser extent, the rivalry between Prussia and Russia, could not readily be seen in terms of a system dominated by Anglo-Bourbon rivalry, however attractive it might be to seek to do so. The course of Anglo-Spanish relations was similarly independent.

To return to the question of how best to integrate a stress on the specific with the general desire for pattern. The very lessening of the centrality of international relations in historical teaching, and thus in synoptic works, offers the possibility that scholars can emphasise the absence of pattern as the essential theme. By focussing on disorder and unpredictability, scholars can help account for the importance of international relations, and the need to be both vigilant and prepared, diplomatically and, crucially, militarily. The uncertainty of the past is itself a major historical lesson and one that is of value against the consequences of reductionism, whether directed to history or to the modern world. The weight of different interests and a xenophobic British public opinion did not prevent periods of alliance, co-operation, understanding or, more significantly, rivalry well short of conflict. The years 1731–1740 were a good instance of the last. They are worth detailed study precisely because they indicate that hostility did not have to lead to conflict.