

Lord Aberdeen and Conservative Foreign Policy, 1841-1846**Samuel John Butcher****PhD****January 2015****School of History**

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Thesis Abstract

This study looks at Lord Aberdeen's second tenure as Foreign Secretary, in Robert Peel's government of 1841-46. The tenure is first contextualised by an analysis of Aberdeen's 'mental map', in order to reconstruct the personal influences and reasoning behind Conservative foreign policy. The study then engages with Aberdeen's dealings in Europe, where it provides an alternative interpretation of the Anglo-French *entente*. It considers Aberdeen and the Conservatives' approach to Russia and the 'Eastern Question' which, along with Chapter Two, treads historiographical *terra incognita*. Britain's engagement with America is then analysed; the discord of preceding years, various festering diplomatic sores, and America's growing influence had combined to throw relations into sharp focus.

This study re-examines archives that have, for the most part, been long neglected or examined in the light of historiographical debates long superseded by new developments. Where the present methodology varies from previous works is that different questions are being asked of the material in accordance with the new contexts in which Aberdeen and Conservative foreign policy are considered: these relate to conclusions drawn from the analysis of Aberdeen's 'mental map' and to the wider objectives of the Conservative government.

This approach facilitates a study in which Aberdeen's foreign policy is analysed on its own terms. The historiography has hitherto largely used Palmerstonian and/or liberal contexts as the parameters of debate about the foreign policy of the Peel administration, which only served to distort conclusions. This study's approach leads it to consider a rational and competent Foreign Secretary whose policy dovetailed with the objectives of the Conservative government and was crucial in helping Peel to deliver them. A consistent set of principles ran through foreign policy dealings – albeit with a flexibility reserved for the means by which they were applied – not least a focus on the maintenance and extension of mercantile intercourse as a means by which to consolidate and protect British power. These observations help lead the study to consider a reinterpretation of Aberdeen and the Peel government, and to ask new questions about mid nineteenth-century Conservatism.

Contents

<i>List of tables and maps</i>	4
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	5
1. Introduction	6
<i>-Aberdeen and Conservatism: A Historiographical Overview</i>	10
<i>-The Major Biographies: Iremonger and Chamberlain</i>	26
<i>-A New Study</i>	29
2. Aberdeen and his World	39
<i>-The Early Years</i>	42
<i>-Aberdeen in the Peel Administration</i>	64
3. Anglo-French Relations	73
4. Anglo-French Relations in Spain	109
5. Aberdeen, Russia and ‘The Crazy Machine’: The Eastern Question	144
6. Anglo-American Relations	172
7. Anglo-American Relations: The Oregon Question	198
8. Conclusion	220
<i>-Aberdeen and the Principles of Conservative Foreign Policy</i>	221
<i>-Reinterpreting Conservative Foreign Policy</i>	225
<i>-Reinterpreting Conservatism in the Mid-Nineteenth Century</i>	229
<i>Bibliography</i>	233

List of tables and maps

Genealogical Table of the Spanish House of Bourbon	119
Map of the Maine Boundary Controversy	186
Map of the Oregon Dispute	199

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This study is dedicated to my parents, whose support throughout my time at the UEA has made my experience there much the richer, be this the financial assistance that enabled me to do a semester of studying abroad during undergraduate study, or the moral encouragement provided throughout. I hope the following words go some way to repaying their support. It is further hoped that this study does justice to those whose academic help I have received.

The responsibility for any remaining errors is, naturally, my own.

Chapter One: Introduction

The period between 1841 and 1846 was an eventful one in British politics. Sir Robert Peel's Conservative government came to power seeking to improve Britain's economic and social health. The world trade slump of the late 1830s and early 1840s was exacerbated by the profligacy of the preceding Whig government; Britain was left with a huge budget deficit and a discontented population.¹ The dual objectives of improving the condition of the nation whilst reducing Britain's debt placed pressure on the Conservatives who faced all the normal challenges of nineteenth-century government. Simmering Irish discontent boiled over during the potato famine in 1845, which coincided with Peel's growing belief that Britain's tariff system was holding back economic development, leading the government to repeal the Corn Laws, which had hitherto placed prohibitive duties on the import of foreign corn and protected prices for British farmers. Repeal was a divisive measure that alienated much of the Conservative party faithful and precipitated the demise of the Peel administration. Many historians have been drawn to study these domestic aspects of Peel's government, especially given that this was a pivotal phase in British politics, when an era dominated by Conservative governments gave way to the largely liberal age of the mid-nineteenth century.²

The conduct of foreign policy has not always attracted the same level of historiographical attention, which is surprising given that 1841-1846 was also a significant period in Britain's international relations. The Conservative government oversaw the initiation of the first Anglo-French *entente*, at a time when a pro-French policy was identified more with the Whig Party. In the United States, the emergent doctrine of 'Manifest Destiny' helped exacerbate boundary disputes with British North America. British policy makers were also challenged by tensions with Russia relating to the fate of the Ottoman Empire.

¹ A famous summary of Britain's social ills, originally published in 1843, was T. Carlyle, *Past and Present* (New York, Gotham Library edition, 1965).

² See, for example, T. Crosby, *Sir Robert Peel's Administration* (London, 1976); P. Adelman, *Peel and the Conservative Party 1830-1850* (London, 1989); A. Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England 1846-1946* (Oxford, 1997); C. Schonhardt-Bailey, *From the Corn Laws to Free Trade: Interests, Ideas and Institutions in Historical Perspective* (Massachusetts, 2006); J. Charmley, *A History of Conservative Politics since 1830* (London, 2nd edition, 2008).

The foremost sources of interest in the study of nineteenth-century foreign policy remain practitioners such as Lord Palmerston, William Gladstone, Benjamin Disraeli and Lord Salisbury, all of whom attract significant attention.³ Whilst the subjects of study have remained largely the same, however, there have been recent works that point towards a historiographical shift in the way that foreign policy is approached by historians. David Brown's work on Palmerston has explored the relationship between foreign and domestic policy in the 1840s and 1850s, as well as the connection between 'high' and 'low' politics, and he recently extended his analysis in a full biography.⁴ Brown's approach to Palmerstonian policy pieced together the multifarious influences upon it, thereby avoiding the bureaucratic portrayal of politicians that often results from a focus upon diplomatic minutiae. Widening the scope to contextualise Palmerstonism within the wider political world, and to consider Palmerston's symbiotic relationship with public opinion, further represented a move away from the traditional accounts of diplomatic intercourse.

³ Post-1980 publications relating to Palmerston include, in chronological order, K. Bourne, *Palmerston: The Early Years, 1784-1841* (London, 1982); M. Chamberlain, *Lord Palmerston* (Cardiff, 1987); E. Steele, *Palmerston and Liberalism, 1855-1865* (Cambridge, 1991); G. Billy, *Palmerston's Foreign Policy: 1848* (New York, 1993); D. Brown, *Palmerston and the Politics of Foreign Policy 1846-55* (Manchester, 2002); P. Ziegler, *Palmerston* (London, 2003); J. Chambers, *Palmerston: 'The People's Darling'* (London, 2004); Brown, *Palmerston: A Biography* (London, 2010); L. Fenton, *Palmerston and The Times: Foreign Policy, the Press and Public Opinion in Mid-Victorian Britain* (London, 2013). For Gladstone see, for example, P. Butler, *Gladstone, Church, State and Tractarianism: A Study of his Religious Ideas and Attitudes, 1809-1859* (Oxford, 1982); R. Shannon, *Gladstone*, in 2 volumes (London, 1982-1999); H. Matthew, *Gladstone*, in 2 volumes (Oxford, 1986-1997); E. Feuchtwanger, *Gladstone* (London, 1988); T. Jenkins, *Gladstone, Whiggery, and the Liberal Party, 1874-1886* (Oxford, 1988); A. Ramm, *William Ewart Gladstone* (Cardiff, 1989); M. Winstanley, *Gladstone and the Liberal Party* (London, 1990); E. Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform: Popular Liberalism in the Age of Gladstone, 1860-1880* (Cambridge, 1992); D. Bebbington, *William Ewart Gladstone: Faith and Politics in Victorian Britain* (Michigan, 1993); R. Jenkins, *Gladstone* (London, 1995); Biagini, *Gladstone* (London, 2000); M. Partridge, *Gladstone* (London, 2003); R. Shannon, *Gladstone: God and Politics* (London, 2007). For Disraeli see, for example, T. Braun, *Disraeli the Novelist* (London, 1981); R. Blake, *Disraeli's Grand Tour: Benjamin Disraeli and the Holy Land, 1830-31* (London, 1982); J. Vincent, *Disraeli* (Oxford, 1990); R. Shannon, *The Age of Disraeli, 1868-1881: The Rise of Tory Democracy* (London, 1992); S. Weintraub, *Disraeli: A Biography* (London, 1993); J. Ridley, *The Young Disraeli* (London, 1995); C. Eldridge, *Disraeli and the Rise of a New Imperialism* (Cardiff, 1996); T. Jenkins, *Disraeli and Victorian Conservatism* (London, 1996); E. Feuchtwanger, *Disraeli* (London, 2000); C. Hibbert, *Disraeli: A Personal History* (London, 2004); D. Hurd and E. Young, *Disraeli: Or, The Two Lives* (London, 2013). For Salisbury see, for example, Lord Blake and H. Cecil, *Salisbury: The Man and his Policies* (London, 1987); A. Roberts, *Salisbury: Victorian Titan* (London, 1999); M. Bentley, *Lord Salisbury's World: Conservative Environments in Late-Victorian Britain* (Cambridge, 2001); D. Steele, *Lord Salisbury: A Political Biography* (London, 2001); E. Midwinter, *Salisbury* (London, 2006).

⁴ Brown, *Palmerston and the Politics of Foreign Policy 1846-55; Palmerston: A Biography*.

Jonathan Parry's work epitomised the changing approach to foreign policy demonstrated by Brown.⁵ Parry's account of English Liberalism and Europe examined the practical and philosophical grounding of Victorian liberal policy and, in doing so, demonstrated how liberals' interpretations of morality and patriotism led them to try and impose British values upon the international system. Parry's objective was 'to show that domestic, foreign, imperial and Irish issues all involved similar underlying themes – of the responsibility of political leaders and the political nation to form a strong and beneficent national community on healthy principles.'⁶ This extract reflected a further historiographical shift, by which foreign and domestic policy – and other aspects of an administration's responsibility – were treated as part of the overarching and interrelated approach of a government, rather than being considered as separate entities.

There has also been a recent resurgence of interest in the foreign policy of later Conservative governments of the nineteenth century, led by both Angus Hawkins and what one might call the 'Norwich School' of historians.⁷ These authors have taken a similarly panoramic approach to that of Brown and Parry, turning the spotlight on the Conservative Party after its split over the Corn Laws. Until recently, that era had lived out its historiographical afterlife in the shadow of Disraeli, but thorough studies of other key Conservative players, such as the fourteenth and fifteenth Earls of Derby, have helped to show the existence and execution of coherent Conservative policies based around a restraint that Disraeli never exhibited, nor wished to exhibit: foreign governments were not to be provoked in the name of prestige through interference in their internal affairs or by geopolitical brinksmanship. In pursuing such a policy – although never to the extent that British interests were consciously compromised – money might be saved, and the

⁵ J. Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe, 1830-1886* (Cambridge, 2006).

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 2.

⁷ J. Vincent (ed.), *A Selection from the Diaries of Edward Henry Stanley, 15th Earl of Derby (1826-1893): between September 1869 and March 1878* (London, 1994); J. Charmley, *Splendid Isolation? Britain and the Balance of Power 1874-1914* (London, 1999); A. Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister: The Fourteenth Earl of Derby*, in 2 volumes (Oxford, 2007-8); G. Hicks, *Peace, War and Party Politics: The Conservatives and Europe 1846-1859* (Manchester, 2007); G. Hicks (ed.), *Conservatism and British Foreign Policy, 1820-1920: The Derbys and their World* (London, 2011); G. Hicks, J. Charmley and B. Grosvenor (eds.), *Documents on Conservative Foreign Policy, 1852-1878* (Cambridge, 2012).

international system that protected British security and pre-eminence might be preserved.⁸ John Charmley's 1999 work looked at these themes in relation to the fifteenth Earl.⁹ In his two-volume biography of the fourteenth Earl, Angus Hawkins explored this restrained variety of Conservatism.¹⁰ Geoffrey Hicks developed this theme in his work, examining Conservative foreign policy in the years after the Peel government, in part by considering its close relationship to domestic affairs, as Brown and Parry had done regarding liberal subjects.

There have been recent publications that explored the politics of the Peel government: Richard Gaunt has authored a biography of Peel, Edward McNeilly has written a PhD thesis on the Conservatives and France and, in a short analysis, Laurence Guymer has explored British foreign policy-making towards Spain.¹¹ Whilst these works demonstrate a renewed interest in the period of Aberdeen's second tenure at the Foreign Office, that tenure receives limited coverage, and it remains to be re-examined in light of the historiographical shift exemplified by historians such as Brown, Parry and Hicks.

The object of this study is to use Lord Aberdeen's tenure at the Foreign Office as a prism through which to examine the nature of Conservative foreign policy during the Peel administration. This endeavour inevitably involves analysis of the role of the individual, but contextualised within the domestic and international objectives of the Conservative government. The observations of recent historians about the coherence of an alternative Conservative approach to foreign policy – neither the Conservatism of Disraeli, nor the liberalism of Palmerston – can thus be considered in relation to the Peel government. This study will, therefore, re-examine the world of 'high' politics in an attempt to piece together the *raison d'être* of Conservative foreign policy. 'High' political history is no longer the ubiquitous historiographical feature that it once was but, as a survey of the historiography demonstrates, such a study is needed.

⁸ See, for example, Hicks, 'The Struggle for Stability: The Fourteenth Earl and Europe, 1852-1868', in Hicks (ed.), *The Derbys and Their World*, p. 82.

⁹ Charmley, *Splendid Isolation?*

¹⁰ Hawkins' challenge to the Disraelian narrative of contemporary Conservatism was partly informed by use of the hitherto neglected papers at the Liverpool Record Office.

¹¹ R. Gaunt, *Sir Robert Peel: The Life and Legacy* (New York, 2010); E. McNeilly, 'The Conservatives and France, 1827-1846' (Cambridge, PhD, 2011); L. Guymer, 'The Wedding Planners: Lord Aberdeen, Henry Bulwer, and the Spanish Marriages, 1841-1846', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, xxi, 2010.

Aberdeen and Conservatism: A Historiographical Overview

George Hamilton-Gordon, the fourth Earl of Aberdeen, was Foreign Secretary under the Duke of Wellington from May 1828 to November 1830 and under Robert Peel from September 1841 to July 1846. He also undertook a diplomatic mission to Napoleonic Europe, 1813-1814, and sat in the Cabinet as Peel's Colonial Secretary in the short-lived Conservative government of December 1834-April 1835. It is for his spell as Prime Minister of a divided coalition government (December 1852-January 1855) and that government's responsibility for the unpopular Crimean War, however, that Aberdeen is primarily remembered. He went to the grave fearful that his hitherto sound and respected political reputation had fallen alongside the ill-equipped and badly led troops in the Crimea and, perhaps inevitably by virtue of his ultimate accountability for Crimean shortcomings, his fears would come to be realised.

The historiographical developments of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries helped to marginalise the study of Lord Aberdeen and to hinder understanding of wider Conservatism thereby. Initial studies were penned by his political rivals, and this phenomenon gradually fused with the work of generations of historians whose interests and sympathies lay with liberal policy. The Second World War marked something of a shift as it helped to precipitate the contraction of the Empire and of national self-confidence, which contributed to a climate in which those with more conciliatory methods, such as Aberdeen, were seen to offer lessons in a world increasingly focused upon international cooperation. Nevertheless, Aberdeen still received only a fraction of the attention afforded to his contemporaries.

In the decades following disaster in the Crimea and Aberdeen's death in 1860, his reputation descended, in no small part due to the authors of such history as there was and where they focused their attentions. Stratford Canning, who frequently clashed with Aberdeen over the Eastern Question and also criticised his policy in Western Europe, benefited from Stanley Lane-Poole's admiring two-

volume *Life of Stratford Canning*.¹² Orientalist Lane-Poole cast Aberdeen as the villain for his clashes with Stratford, perhaps unsurprisingly given the romanticism with which Lane-Poole viewed the subjects of his study.¹³ Stratford's future biographers would continue Lane-Poole's criticism of Aberdeen: Elizabeth Malcolm-Smith described Aberdeen as 'timid and hesitating', particularly so in comparison with Stratford; Leo Byrne argued much the same.¹⁴

Shortly after Lane-Poole's biography followed the publication of the political diary of Lord Ellenborough.¹⁵ Lord Privy Seal at the beginning of Wellington's government in January 1828, Ellenborough coveted the Foreign Office in the government reshuffle that followed the resignation of many so-called 'liberal Conservatives' that June. Annoyed at Wellington's selection of Aberdeen and intolerant of Aberdeen's conciliatory nature – Ellenborough was far more confrontational and nationalistic – the diary portrayed Aberdeen as weak and incompetent. These charges, reinforcing those made by Lane-Poole, have stuck: the diary was uncritically proclaimed as an accurate and reliable indicator of contemporary political life as recently as 1998.¹⁶

Lane-Poole and Ellenborough's works were significant, but it was Lord Palmerston and his biographers who cast the longest historiographical shadow over Aberdeen's career. Palmerston, three times Foreign Secretary (1830-4, 1835-1841 and 1846-1852) and twice Prime Minister (1855-8 and 1859-1865), attracted numerous studies by virtue of his extended centrality in British politics, the popular perception of his being John Bull incarnate and his overall association with mid-Victorian success (some, including Henry Lytton Bulwer, were also attracted by personal association).¹⁷ The prevailing liberal values of the British intelligentsia

¹² S. Lane-Poole, *Life of the Right Honourable Stratford Canning, Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe*, in 2 volumes (London, 1888).

¹³ See also Lane-Poole, 'Sir Richard Church', *The English Historical Review*, v, 1890, pp. 7-30, 293-305 and 497-522.

¹⁴ E. Malcolm-Smith, *The Life of Stratford Canning (Lord Stratford de Redcliffe)* (London, 1933), p. 123; L. Byrne, *The Great Ambassador* (Ohio, 1964).

¹⁵ Lord Ellenborough, *Political Diary 1828-1830*, in 2 volumes (London, 1881).

¹⁶ P. Jupp, *British Politics on the Eve of Reform: The Duke of Wellington's Administration, 1828-30* (London, 1998). Ellenborough's diary was cited throughout.

¹⁷ H. Lytton Bulwer, *The Life of Henry John Temple, Viscount Palmerston*, in 3 volumes (London, 1869-1874); E. Ashley, *The Life and Correspondence of Henry John Temple, Viscount Palmerston*

assisted with a sympathetic view of Palmerston's policy, for this was associated in part with a proselytising liberal benevolence that ostensibly spread British values and influence around the world. This resulted in accounts of Palmerston's career that, in accordance with the political proclivities of their authors, often bordered on hagiography. Aberdeen was either by implication or outright criticism portrayed as the opposite of Palmerston: unpopular, unpatriotic, unsuccessful and illiberal. It did not help that Aberdeen's second tenure at the Foreign Office fell between two periods of Palmerstonian foreign policy, which reinforced the notion that Aberdeen was an aberration in a Palmerstonian and liberal age.

A fixation with Palmerston and its concomitant effect of a reduced interest in contemporary Conservatism can, with some inevitable degree of theoretical generalisation, be incorporated into what has been described as the Whig interpretation of history. Writing in the early twentieth century with a domestic focus, Herbert Butterfield argued that many historians conformed to this Whig interpretation of history, by which they sought to 'emphasise certain principles of progress in the past and to produce a story which is the ratification and glorification of the present'.¹⁸ This narrative was written and celebrated by pitting 'progressive' values against those of the 'tyrants and the Tories'.¹⁹ Butterfield did not consider the historiography of foreign affairs, but his ideas can be applied to that area without any great modification.

Among early chroniclers of the nineteenth century, concentration upon liberal foreign policy and favour for Palmerston's methods seemed to derive from historians' national pride in the history of British constitutionalism, belief in the benevolence of British influence abroad, commendation of the liberal Whig values of British history that its great men extolled and exported, and celebration of British supremacy and power. Those seen to contradict this self-confident liberalism were pilloried. Within this model, Palmerston became a great progressive liberal and Aberdeen an obstruction to the march of British and human progress.²⁰

(London, 1879); A. Trollope, *Lord Palmerston* (London, 1882); Marquis of Lorne, *The Queen's Prime Ministers: Lord Palmerston* (London, 1892).

¹⁸ H. Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (London, 1931), p. v.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

²⁰ C. E. G. Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston*, ii (London, 1951), p. 785.

Whiggish approval of Palmerston continued to overshadow Aberdeen's career well into the twentieth century. Frederick Stanley Rodkey, for example, produced a number of articles on Palmerston's Eastern policy that largely overlooked his geostrategic and practical concerns in a narrative of benevolent liberalism.²¹ That Palmerston's 'liberal' cause changed from the rebellious vassal Mehmet Ali to the Ottoman Empire when it became politically expedient was overlooked.²² That neither Mehmet Ali nor the Ottoman Empire could be considered particularly liberal did not matter to Rodkey either. The intricacies of the policies of those who did not fit such authors' views got lost in the opposite reductive labels: they were the 'tyrants and Tories'.

Whilst Rodkey was an American who subscribed to Whiggish historical ideas that were also prevalent in the United States, the English nationalist element in Whiggish history gathered momentum as the twentieth century brought war: historians looked back to and revered leaders perceived as active, confrontational and patriotic. This excluded Aberdeen and fused with continuing liberal sympathies to elevate Palmerston, often at Aberdeen's expense. Some of those who had presided over the peace processes at the end of the first and second World Wars began turning to history to offer precedent and justification for the enlightened liberalism with which they believed they were concluding treaties, and for which they had an inherent taste. This created a romantic narrative of nineteenth century foreign policy in which the dominance of liberalism was overstated and endorsed on nationalist terms, whilst the ascendancy of liberal ideas was treated as inevitable.

The work of Harold Temperley – student of Lord Acton, who was a friend of and sympathiser with Liberal politician Lord Granville – is a good example of this phenomenon. In his seminal study of the Near East, he wrote that Palmerston's

²¹ F. Stanley Rodkey, 'Lord Palmerston and the Rejuvenation of Turkey, 1830-41', *The Journal of Modern History*, i, 1929, pp. 570-593; 'Lord Palmerston and the Rejuvenation of Turkey: Part II, 1839-41', *The Journal of Modern History*, ii, 1930, pp. 193-225; 'The Attempts of Briggs and Company to Guide British Policy in the Levant in the Interest of Mehmet Ali Pasha, 1821-41', *The Journal of Modern History*, v, 1933, pp. 324-351.

²² For detail on the Mehmet Ali crises see, for example, A. Macfie, *The Eastern Question 1774-1923* (London, 2nd edition, 1996), pp. 20-26; M. Anderson, *The Eastern Question 1774-1923: A Study in International Relations* (London, 1966), pp. 53-109.

policy exhibited a ‘stiff upper lip’ and that through him the British ‘lion roared’.²³ Aberdeen and his Conservative contemporaries, meanwhile, were described as ‘struggling to swallow constitutionalism’ in the 1830s and 1840s.²⁴ At once, they were anachronistic and reactionary in their doubts about what Temperley described as an inevitable and universally desirable concept: the liberal spread of constitutionalism. His student and former underling at the War Office during World War I, Charles Webster, continued with this theme in 1951, writing that Palmerston’s role in the ‘British Liberal Movement’ was so great that ‘any criticism of him is one of the whole method by which Western civilisation spread over the world’.²⁵ With AJP Taylor’s 1954 masterpiece *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe* concentrating on the mechanics of confrontation between the great powers, the heavyweights of historical endeavour were building up a narrative of history into which the Conservatives did not fit.²⁶

The middle decades of the twentieth century saw a wave of liberally inclined authors whose studies perpetuated ideas of Conservative irrelevance and made debatable assertions about Aberdeen’s personality, which distracted from analysis of Conservative policy. Another of Charles Webster’s notable works looked at Aberdeen’s ambassadorship to Austria during the Napoleonic wars.²⁷ Webster concluded that Aberdeen was ‘too young for his job’ and given that the operation was ‘a delicate one [...] in the hands of men like Aberdeen [...] it could hardly fail to bring confusion and uncertainty.’²⁸ The idea that Aberdeen was ‘too young’ is belied by consideration that this was an era in which Lord Liverpool became Prime

²³ H. Temperley, *England and the Near East: The Crimea* (London, 1936), p. 109; p. 92.

²⁴ Temperley, ‘British Foreign Policy towards Parliamentary Rule and Constitutionalism in Turkey (1830-1914)’, *The Cambridge Historical Journal*, iv, 1933, p. 157.

²⁵ Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston*, ii, p. 785.

²⁶ A. J. P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe 1848-1918* (London, 1954) (Taylor was not involved in either peace process). The concept of the Whig Interpretation of History is only a broad framework in which to consider the work of these historians and convenient shorthand for liberal favour in this period. For exploration of its difficulties, other influences on liberal favour, and the idiosyncrasies of the historians mentioned, see A. Wilson and T. Ashplant, ‘Whig History and Present-Centred History’, *The Historical Journal*, xxxi, 1998, pp. 1-16; M. Bentley, *Modernising England’s Past: English Historiography in the Age of Modernism 1870-1970* (Cambridge, 2005); J. Fair, *Harold Temperley: A Scholar and Romantic in the Public Realm* (London, 1922); P. Reynolds and E. Hughes, *The Historian as Diplomat: Charles Kingsley Webster and the United Nations 1939-1946* (London, 1976); K. Burk, *Troublemaker: The Life and History of AJP Taylor* (London, 2000).

²⁷ C. Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Castlereagh 1812-1815: Britain and the Reconstruction of Europe* (London, 1931).

²⁸ *Ibid*, ps. 47 and 152.

Minister in 1812 when only a few years older than Aberdeen was upon taking his ambassadorship. Harold Nicolson nonetheless continued the themes of Webster's work and asserted that Aberdeen's 'ignorance of continental conditions' engendered further muddle.²⁹ Nicolson was from a similarly Whiggish background, including a university education in the liberal environment of Oxford's Balliol College and spells working at the Foreign Office during the governments of both Herbert Asquith and David Lloyd George.

Henry Kissinger in 1957 continued criticism of Aberdeen's role during his embassy, branding him a 'gullible' politician whose political naivety imperilled Britain's continental interests.³⁰ As Kissinger ignored the complex situation within which Aberdeen was working, the context in which he was writing seemed to explain his critique. Kissinger published his work at a time when the Cold War was heating up, and he subsequently regarded Aberdeen's openness with the continental powers as leaving hostages to fortune. Elsewhere Kissinger wrote that 'no power can stake its survival entirely on the good faith of another; this would be an abdication of the responsibility of statesmanship.'³¹ This was how he looked upon Aberdeen's diplomatic mission.

There were early historians with a direct interest in nineteenth-century Conservatism, but these authors mostly confined their attention to Benjamin Disraeli and the Prime Ministers under whom Aberdeen served: the Duke of Wellington and Robert Peel. Wellington's biographers paid little attention to Aberdeen, perhaps necessarily in covering a momentous career in which Aberdeen played only a small part. It remains that there was nothing said about the role or ideas of the Foreign Secretary.³² More recent biographers have also ignored Aberdeen, even those that discuss foreign policy in detail.³³

²⁹ H. Nicolson, *The Congress of Vienna: A Study in Allied Unity 1812-1822* (London, 1946), p. 57.

³⁰ H. Kissinger, *A World Restored: The Politics of Conservatism in a Revolutionary Era: A detailed study of diplomacy and political manoeuvre 1812-22 with particular reference to Metternich and Castlereagh* (London, 1957), p. 96.

³¹ H. Kissinger, 'The Congress of Vienna: A Reappraisal', *World Politics*, viii, 1956, p. 264.

³² H. Maxwell, *The Life of Wellington: The Restoration of the Martial Power of Great Britain* (London, 1899); J. Fortescue, *Wellington* (London, 1925); P. Guedalla, *The Duke* (London, 1931).

³³ L. Cooper, *The Age of Wellington* (London, 1964); N. Thompson, *Wellington after Waterloo* (London, 1986); C. Hibbert, *Wellington: A Personal History* (London, 1997); R. Holmes, *Wellington: The Iron Duke* (London, 2003).

Peel cast something of a shadow over Aberdeen in the early historiography, as biographers queued up to dissect the life of that controversial and divisive Prime Minister.³⁴ Most concentrated on domestic issues but those who looked at foreign policy simply ignored Aberdeen's role within it. In 1928, Anna Ramsay was the only historian to acknowledge Aberdeen and this in a rather disparaging fashion: 'He had a great ideal, that of international peace: but he was not a strong man. Left alone, he had not the resolution to steer the country through dangerous waters.'³⁵ The charge that Aberdeen was well-meaning, but lacking in enthusiasm, would be repeated by his own biographers later in the twentieth-century. The idea that Peel was to Aberdeen a Victorian *paterfamilias*, keeping an eye on his less able colleague and intervening to toughen his policy and stiffen his resolve, persisted in future works using Peel's political life as the thread of their analysis.³⁶

In 1986, Norman Gash noted that Peel and Aberdeen exhibited 'differences of emphasis rather than objective' but concluded that the Prime Minister exercised 'almost excessive influence' over his Foreign Secretary.³⁷ Donald Read wrote that 'Peel saw to it that British policy was quietly purposeful' and Terry Jenkins argued that Peel needed to make Aberdeen's policy more 'robust'.³⁸ In 2007, Douglas Hurd, despite identifying the strong 'trust' between the two men, asserted that Peel had to 'keep a close watch' on Aberdeen. Hurd also suggested that he lacked both 'the necessary harsh grasp of the reality of politics' and 'backbone' and expressed an almost mock-sympathy for 'poor Lord Aberdeen'.³⁹ By contrast, Eric Evans noted that to Aberdeen, Peel was 'happier to delegate responsibility than in any other aspect of government.'⁴⁰ The brevity of Evans' analysis, however, did little to illuminate Aberdeen's role in the Conservative government.

³⁴ T. Doubleday, *The Political Life of the Right Honourable Sir Robert Peel*, ii (London, 1856); J. McCarthy, *Sir Robert Peel* (London, 1891); J. Thursfield, *Peel* (London, 1911); A. Ramsay, *Sir Robert Peel* (London, 1928); G. Kitson Clark, *Peel* (London, 1936).

³⁵ Ramsay, *Peel*, p. 253.

³⁶ Crosby, *Sir Robert Peel's Administration 1841-1846*; N. Gash, *Sir Robert Peel: The Life of Sir Robert Peel after 1830* (London, 2nd edition, 1986); D. Read, *Peel and the Victorians* (Oxford, 1987); Adelman, *Peel and the Conservative Party 1830-1850*; T. Jenkins, *Sir Robert Peel* (London, 1999); D. Hurd, *Robert Peel* (London, 2007).

³⁷ Gash, *Peel*, p. 516; p. 497.

³⁸ Read, *Peel*, p. 150; Jenkins, *Peel*, p. 99.

³⁹ Hurd, *Peel*, p. 273; p. 283; p. 286.

⁴⁰ E. Evans, *Sir Robert Peel: Statesmanship, Power and Party* (London, 1991), p. 49.

There were some early works that swam against this tide and took a direct look at Aberdeen's implementation of Conservative policy. Thomas MacKnight's *Thirty Years of Foreign Policy* in 1855 was the first such work and it provided an early defence of the policies of Aberdeen and Palmerston in the years leading up to the Crimean war.⁴¹ MacKnight's was a rather glossy account of Aberdeen that defended his policy without any substantial analysis of its origins, but it offered observations with which most have differed. It was argued that 'while Lord Aberdeen was Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, the Government was not influenced by that preposterous love of peace at any price with which this minister has been reproached.'⁴² Building on this point, the assumption that Aberdeen and Palmerston were polar opposites was questioned.⁴³ The argument that Aberdeen and Palmerston's objectives were in some ways the same is important to bear in mind given the subsequent historiographical polarisation of the two ministers' politics. The prevailing idea of Palmerston as the great liberal patriot and Aberdeen as the arch-reactionary Tory had at least one early dissident.

There followed a brief and previously unknown journal article in *Leisure Hour* three years after Aberdeen's death, which argued that he was unjustly made scapegoat for the horror of the Crimean War.⁴⁴ The author's assertion that 'I do not meddle with politics in these personal recollections' underlined the limitations of an article that already suffered from its brevity and publication in an obscure journal with a low circulation.⁴⁵ The claim that 'history will do [Aberdeen] justice' also proved to be rather overoptimistic.⁴⁶

Aberdeen's first significant biography was written thirty years (and four major Palmerston biographies) later by Arthur Gordon, his son and Private Secretary in the 1850s.⁴⁷ Aware that his filial relationship to Aberdeen was a

⁴¹ T. MacKnight, *Thirty Years of Foreign Policy: A History of the Secretaryships of the Earl of Aberdeen and Viscount Palmerston* (London, 1855).

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 336-7.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 350.

⁴⁴ Anonymous, 'Men I have known: The Earl of Aberdeen', *Leisure Hour*, xii, 1863, pp. 548-550. Although the author was anonymous, it is likely to have been a family member due to the nature of the journal.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 548.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ A. Gordon, *The Earl of Aberdeen* (London, 1893).

double-edged sword (familial connections can offer closer insights, but these can be distorted by affection), Gordon nonetheless raised some important issues. He argued that Aberdeen exercised a degree of influence over Wellington, albeit a small one: 'I doubt whether their intercourse in politics much altered [Wellington's] opinions, it certainly restrained their expression.'⁴⁸ Further to this, it was speculated that Aberdeen's influence encouraged Wellington to recognise the French Revolution of July 1830 that brought the Orleans Monarchy to power.⁴⁹ That Aberdeen had any influence on the Duke was a noteworthy observation, but one weakened by a lack of evidence.

With regard to the Anglo-French *entente* of 1841-1846, Gordon noted that cross-Channel relations were hindered by the problem of diplomats 'who evaded their orders' and highlighted the personal nature of the arrangement between Aberdeen and his French counterpart François Guizot.⁵⁰ A lack of critical analysis nonetheless undermined the value of Gordon's work – relations between Britain and France were far from 'perfect' – as did, by editorial admission, a lack of access to private correspondence.⁵¹ This had much to do with Gordon's political patron Gladstone who, as a practising Liberal politician, wanted to keep embarrassing evidence of his early opposition to parliamentary reform out of the spotlight.

When further private correspondence between Aberdeen and Princess Lieven appeared in the 1923 biography written by Lady Frances Balfour, it was in places simply inserted into re-issued sections of Gordon's text. Balfour's account was disorganised and offered few narrative additions to Gordon's biography, in what amounted to a confused and perfunctory work.⁵² The hurried efforts of an author in urgent need of a financial boost following the death of her husband did little to increase understanding of Aberdeen and Conservative policy. Indeed, to read the relationship that Lord Aberdeen built up between Britain and France as an

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 154; p. vii.

⁵² F. Balfour, *The Life of George, Fourth Earl of Aberdeen*, in 2 volumes (London, 1923). This correspondence has since been published in full in E. Jones Parry, *The Correspondence of Lord Aberdeen and Princess Lieven, 1832-54*, in 2 volumes (London, 1938-9).

'alliance' was clearly a misunderstanding and is representative of the flaws in Balfour's analysis.⁵³

There were some notable early twentieth-century non-biographical works also to examine Aberdeen's policy, including Major John Hall's on the Orleans Monarchy and J. R. Baldwin's article on the Tahiti affair (in which France annexed that island despite a tradition of British influence).⁵⁴ Baldwin added to Gordon's identification of intransigent diplomats by noting that George Pritchard, British consul in Tahiti, 'read between the lines of his dispatches and kept secret those which restrained him.'⁵⁵ On the impact of the Tahitian crisis on Anglo-French relations, Baldwin echoed existing criticism: 'peace was obtained, but the *entente*, never very strong, was badly shaken'.⁵⁶ Hall revisited MacKnight's idea that 'Aberdeen was in substantial agreement with Palmerston' on many points but, as with Baldwin, Aberdeen was not the primary focus of his study and this resulted in little addition to existing material on Conservative foreign policy.

In the 1930s, E. Jones Parry reviewed the relationship between Aberdeen and Guizot and, although not wholly dismissive of the former, came to some damning conclusions.⁵⁷ The Anglo-French *entente*, contested Jones Parry, was a 'failure...there never existed an *entente cordiale* between the two peoples', adding that 'rose-tinted optimism [led] to woeful indecision'.⁵⁸ This verdict, overlooking or dissenting from Gordon's observation that the *entente* was only intended to be a personal arrangement, was maintained by others for some time. Jones Parry also wrote the only major English work on the disputed succession to the throne of Spain during Aberdeen's tenure.⁵⁹ No-one has yet challenged his conclusion that Aberdeen's failure to resolve or at least attempt to resolve the succession crisis represented 'a failure to face responsibilities'.⁶⁰ Jones Parry's work is a valuable

⁵³ Balfour, *Aberdeen*, ii, p. 108.

⁵⁴ J. Hall, *England and the Orleans Monarchy* (London, 1912); J. Baldwin, 'England and the French Seizure of the Society Islands', *The Journal of Modern History*, x, 1938, pp. 212-231.

⁵⁵ Baldwin, 'The Society Islands', p. 229.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

⁵⁷ E. Jones Parry, 'A Review of the Relations between Guizot and Lord Aberdeen, 1840-1852', *History*, xxiii, 1938, pp. 25-36.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30; p. 32.

⁵⁹ E. Jones Parry, *The Spanish Marriages 1841-1846: A Study of the Influence of Dynastic Ambition upon Foreign Policy* (London, 1936).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

resource for the student of this area of history but, as will be considered in Chapter Four, its conclusions about Conservative policy in Spain were made on the basis of a number of questionable assumptions.

By the middle of the twentieth-century, then, there had been no significant analysis of Conservative foreign policy in the 1840s, while Aberdeen was still yet to be the subject of a substantial biography. Neither had he been examined in the context of a thorough study of his private and political papers, whilst his adversaries and detractors had benefited from having the 'first word'. The mid-twentieth century ushered in a period of increased interest in Anglo-American relations and diplomatic history in general: these trends, the former developing because of events in the Second World War and the onset of the Cold War, combined to stimulate an increased interest from which the history of Lord Aberdeen's American policy between 1841 and 1846 received indirect benefit. The earlier literature was largely American in origin, however, so a focus on American considerations prevented thorough examination of Aberdeen and British Conservative foreign policy.

The two major works to emerge on Anglo-American relations were H. C. Allen's *Great Britain and the United States* and volume four of Winston Churchill's *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples*.⁶¹ Both portrayed the nineteenth-century as a period of inevitable and inexorable assimilation of English and American values that ultimately led to what became known as the 'special relationship'. Allen wrote that 'this ripening of friendship [...] appears in the growing similarity of political ideals and practices which accompanied the development of democracy in both countries'.⁶² Churchill saw that 'the nineteenth century was a period of purposeful, progressive, enlightened, tolerant civilisation. The stir in the world arising from the French Revolution, added to the Industrial Revolution unleashed by the steam-engine and many key inventions, led inexorably to the democratic age.'⁶³ Such teleological accounts have found some modern adherents, but the most recent

⁶¹ H. Allen, *Great Britain and the United States: A History of Anglo-American Relations (1783-1952)* (New York, 1955); W. Churchill, *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, iv: The Great Democracies (London, 1958).

⁶² Allen, *Great Britain and the United States*, p. 27.

⁶³ Churchill, *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, iv, p. vii.

studies have argued that rapprochement was far from inevitable or smooth.⁶⁴ The nuances of international relations and the understanding of the role of politicians such as Aberdeen in Anglo-American relations are obscured when history is painted with such broad brushstrokes.

There were earlier works that concentrated on the specific issues affecting the Peel government, such as that on the Northeastern Boundary dispute, over which, in 1842, Aberdeen sent Lord Ashburton to negotiate with American representative Daniel Webster and thereby determine the dividing line between Maine and New Brunswick (and, in doing so, to protect local British interests). This work had, however, been mostly confined to journals. Ephraim Douglass Adams noted that the resulting treaty, which Palmerston branded the 'Ashburton capitulation', came to be known throughout much of America as the 'Webster capitulation', which suggested that it was a fair settlement for both parties.⁶⁵ This observation proposed that Aberdeen's instructions were not as excessively conciliatory as was traditionally thought.

Thomas Le Duc argued that Britain's only real interest in the area was defence of the Canadas: the squabbles over land of negligible practical utility were superfluous.⁶⁶ William Lucey held the opinion that by 1942, 'nearly every angle of the dispute has been discussed by partisans and scholars, so that today little remains to be said about it'.⁶⁷ Those contributing to the *New England Quarterly* who continue to investigate the minutiae of the disputes into the twenty-first century do not seem to think so.⁶⁸ By the end of the 1940s, there had still been no

⁶⁴ R. Stuart, *United States Expansionism and British North America, 1775-1871* (London, 1988), p. 80; D. Campbell, *Unlikely Allies: Britain, America and the Victorian Origins of the Special Relationship* (London, 2007).

⁶⁵ E. Douglass Adams, 'Lord Ashburton and the Treaty of Washington', *The American Historical Review*, xvii, 1912, pp. 764-782.

⁶⁶ T. Le Duc, 'The Maine Frontier and the Northeastern Boundary Controversy', *The American Historical Review*, liii, 1947, p. 32.

⁶⁷ W. Lucey, 'Some Correspondence of the Maine Commissioners regarding the Webster-Ashburton Treaty', *The New England Quarterly*, xv, 1942, p. 333.

⁶⁸ F. Carroll, 'The Passionate Canadians: the Historical Debate about the Eastern Canadian-American Boundary', *The New England Quarterly*, lxx, 1997, pp. 83-101; 'Kings and Crises: Arbitrating the Canadian-American Boundary Dispute and the Belgian Crisis of 1830-1831', *The New England Quarterly*, lxxiii, 2000, pp. 179-210; J. Dunbabin, 'The 1831 Dutch Arbitration of the Canadian-American Boundary Dispute: Another View', *The New England Quarterly*, lxxv, 2002, pp. 622-646.

substantial overview or analysis regarding the British side of negotiations and, more specifically, Aberdeen's policy.

Early work on the Northwestern Boundary dispute, where the geographical limitations of the state of Oregon came under scrutiny, especially after President James Polk was elected, also made some progress. In the twentieth-century, Robert Schuyler looked at Polk's role in the crisis.⁶⁹ Frederick Merk published a series of informative articles in the 1920s and 1930s.⁷⁰ He raised important issues such as the way in which Aberdeen used *The Times* to leak information and influence negotiations; an idea contrary to the narrative of Aberdonian naivety and simplicity appearing elsewhere in the historiography.⁷¹ Merk did, however, hold the opinion that Aberdeen had a 'dread of war' that resulted in 'surrender' on the part of the British.⁷² In arguing this point, Merk avoided the narrow self-justification and romanticism that permeated many other earlier American works, which combined with religious interpretations of Manifest Destiny to produce a distorted view of the past. If the historian believes that 'as the history of nations runs...our record of expansion is one singularly free from violence and fraud', they are unlikely to produce accurate accounts of American or British policy in this period.⁷³

Beginning in the 1950s, Wilbur Devereux Jones published research that recalibrated the historiographical view of Lord Aberdeen's American policy.⁷⁴ The idea that lessons might be learned to strengthen the relationship with America in the age of Soviet rivalry coincided with this renewed interest in Aberdeen's

⁶⁹ R. Schuyler, 'Polk and the Oregon Compromise of 1846', *The Political Science Quarterly*, xxvi, 1911, pp. 443-461.

⁷⁰ F. Merk, 'The Oregon Pioneers and the Boundary', *The American Historical Review*, xxix, 1924, pp. 681-699; 'British Party Politics and the Oregon Treaty', *The American Historical Review*, xxxvii, 1932, pp. 653-677; 'The British Corn Crisis of 1845-46 and the Oregon Treaty', *Agricultural History*, viii, 1934; 'British Government Propaganda and the Oregon Treaty', *The American Historical Review*, xl, 1934, pp. 38-62.

⁷¹ Merk, 'British Propaganda'.

⁷² Merk, 'British Party Politics', p. 661; p. 653.

⁷³ R. McNutt McElroy, *The Winning of the Far West: A History of the Regaining of Texas, of the Mexican War, and the Oregon Question, and of the Successive Additions to the Territory of the United States, within the Continent of America 1829-1867* (London, 1914), p. v.

⁷⁴ W. Devereux Jones, 'Lord Ashburton and the Maine Boundary Negotiations', *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, xl, 1953, pp. 477-490; 'The Influence of Slavery on the Webster-Ashburton Negotiations', *The Journal of Southern History*, xxii, 1956, pp. 48-58; *Lord Aberdeen and the Americas* (Georgia, 1958); *The American Problem in British Diplomacy 1841-1861* (London, 1974).

methods. Devereux Jones re-examined the circumstances of the Webster-Ashburton Treaty, suggesting that the Duke of Wellington's hard line approach over the issue created many of his difficulties and resulted in contradictory instructions to Ashburton for which Aberdeen's vacillation had previously been blamed.⁷⁵ It was also noted that in 1842 it was 'practically impossible' to resolve every issue on the table due to the scope and complexity of the problems that Palmerston had left unresolved.⁷⁶ Indeed, Palmerston's criticisms of the treaty and of Aberdeen had long masked his own lack of progress in American affairs.

Devereux Jones also challenged the idea that the *entente* was a failure, suggesting that even if attempts to cooperate with France over various affairs proved abortive, the fact that efforts were made at all signalled the value of the Anglo-French arrangement.⁷⁷ A 'lack of planning' was, nonetheless, often blamed for British failure to seize the initiative in negotiations.⁷⁸ Extensive coverage was also given to Aberdeen's role in the La Plata conflict between Buenos Aires and Montevideo, where it had not been before.⁷⁹ Devereux Jones's 1974 work built on that of 1958 and emphasised the underlying importance of American trade to the British (and vice versa); a phenomenon elsewhere labelled the 'Atlantic economy'.⁸⁰ Devereux Jones made a career out of expanding the understanding of unpopular or unfamiliar British political figures.⁸¹ As regards Aberdeen, this task was performed well. Nonetheless, limited consideration of the impact of American politics on British policy, and only infrequent references to France and British politics, left much room for further study.

In the 1960s, the work of Kenneth Bourne and Frederick Merk added to the weight of material on Aberdeen and Anglo-American relations, but without adding

⁷⁵ Devereux Jones, 'Maine Boundary Negotiations', p. 479. See also H. Jones, *To the Webster-Ashburton Treaty: A Study in Anglo-American Relations, 1783-1843* (North Carolina, 1977).

⁷⁶ Devereux Jones, 'The Influence of Slavery', p. 53. See also H. Soulsby (ed.), *The Right of Search and the Slave Trade in Anglo-American Relations 1814-1862* (Baltimore, 1933).

⁷⁷ For background see D. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation: Texas, Oregon, and the Mexican War* (Missouri, 1973); N. Tutorow, *Texan Annexation and the Mexican War* (London, 1978).

⁷⁸ Devereux Jones, *Aberdeen and the Americas*, p. 24.

⁷⁹ See also H. Ferns, *Britain and Argentina in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1960).

⁸⁰ Devereux Jones, *The American Problem*.

⁸¹ See also Devereux Jones, *Lord Derby and Victorian Conservatism* (Georgia, 1956); *'Prosperity Robinson': The Life of Viscount Goderich, 1782-1859* (New York, 1967).

to the diversity of opinion.⁸² Bourne was critical of Aberdeen's 'ham-fisted diplomacy' and the 'missed opportunity' to take California when it was offered by Mexico in return for support against impending American encroachment upon Texas and the looming threat of war.⁸³ Perhaps his focus upon imperial defence and research in predominantly military archives predisposed Bourne to endorse active and enthusiastic military policies, therefore pitting him against Aberdeen's desire for consensus. That his book ends in 1908, the date when British strategic planning for war with America was terminated, appears to add weight to this suggestion. That Bourne lived through the Second World War and wrote during the Cold War might also explain his being more sympathetic to such proactive strategic considerations. Either way, Aberdeen was given little agency in policy making and Conservative policy was dismissed as a series of unthinking and incoherent measures. Merk's latest work was essentially a collection of previous articles, although a new conclusion stressed that both governments desired an equitable solution to the Oregon boundary dispute but that this was made difficult by excited opposition on both sides of the Atlantic. If accepted, this idea that Aberdeen's pursuit of a diplomatic solution was reciprocated by the American government would seem to justify his policy, although one relies on inference to draw this conclusion.⁸⁴

The study of Conservative policy regarding France and Europe also made some headway in post-war decades: with the work of Andrew Cunningham, Douglas Johnson, Roger Bullen and Lawrence Jennings, Palmerston's historiographical hegemony was challenged and the Conservatives began to attract more balanced analysis.⁸⁵ Cunningham and Bullen argued that Palmerston's policy between 1830 and 1841, and from 1846 onwards, was in some ways

⁸² K. Bourne, *The Balance of Power in North America 1815-1908* (London, 1967); F. Merk, *The Oregon Question* (Harvard, 1967).

⁸³ Bourne, *North America 1815-1908*, p. 123; p. 150.

⁸⁴ Merk, *The Oregon Question*, pp. 395-418.

⁸⁵ A. Cunningham, 'Peel, Aberdeen and the *entente cordiale*', *The Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, xxx, 1957, pp. 189-206; D. Johnson, *Guizot: Aspects of French Political History 1787-1874* (London, 1963); R. Bullen, 'Anglo-French Rivalry and Spanish Politics, 1846-1848', *The English Historical Review*, lxxxix, 1974, pp. 25-47; *Palmerston, Guizot and the Collapse of the Entente Cordiale* (London, 1974); L. Jennings, 'France, Great Britain and the Repression of the Slave Trade, 1841-45', *French Historical Studies*, x, 1977, pp. 101-125.

counterproductive to British interests, the former citing the ‘pyrotechnics of Palmerston’ as casting a shadow over Aberdeen’s tenure and restricting his options.⁸⁶ Bullen argued that Palmerston exhibited a ‘total lack of understanding’ of the intricacies of the Spanish Marriage Question.⁸⁷ Both, however, portrayed an *entente* with France that crumbled and fell towards the end of Aberdeen’s tenure over the question of Spanish succession, with Cunningham describing it as ‘that ulcer of the *entente*’.⁸⁸

Johnson compared the criticisms of Aberdeen being ‘un-English’ to those of Guizot, who received Genevan training and was Protestant, being ‘un-French’. Both were internationalists, he argued, trying to pursue a peaceful policy against a hostile political backdrop, which was in no small way exacerbated by Palmerston’s penchant for ‘needlessly offending France’.⁸⁹ Johnson’s work remained primarily concerned with France, as did that of Jennings, whose work on the slave trade was rich in detail but, necessarily, limited in analysis of Aberdeen’s policy.

General foreign policy surveys of this period, however, perpetuated orthodox views of Aberdonian policy that had been in place since the nineteenth-century. Donald Southgate, later a biographer of Palmerston, wrote of ‘arrogant insularity’ that Tories ‘could appreciate’ and in 1970 Kenneth Bourne continued criticisms developed in earlier works, although proposing that Aberdeen showed a ‘more realistic’ attitude than Palmerston in his reading of the danger that France posed.⁹⁰ Paul Hayes delivered the greatest criticism in his influential work of 1975.⁹¹ Aberdeen was labelled an ‘undiscriminating appeaser’ who in 1828 brought ‘ignorance, stupidity and muddle’ to the Foreign Office and warranted little greater intellectual credit than his much ridiculed predecessor, Lord Dudley.⁹² Hayes also argued that ‘it was under Aberdeen that the fatal policy of blind British support for

⁸⁶ Cunningham, ‘The *entente cordiale*’, p. 190.

⁸⁷ Bullen, ‘Spanish Politics, 1846-1848’, p. 34.

⁸⁸ Cunningham, ‘The *entente cordiale*’, p. 204.

⁸⁹ Johnson, *Guizot*, p. 287.

⁹⁰ D. Southgate, ‘The Most English Minister...’: *The Policies and Politics of Palmerston* (London, 1966); Southgate, *The Passing of the Whigs 1832-1886* (London, 1962), p. 275; Bourne, *The Foreign Policy of Victorian England* (Oxford, 1970), p. 59, see also Bourne, *North America 1815-1908*.

⁹¹ P. Hayes, *The Nineteenth Century 1814-80* (London, 1975).

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 75; p. 162.

the Turks was given official approval. It was a legacy which was to encumber diplomats and politicians for half a century.⁹³

The Major Biographies: Iremonger and Chamberlain

The first substantial biography of Lord Aberdeen was authored by Lucille Iremonger in 1978 – a full one hundred and eighteen years after his death – and the second and more comprehensive followed in 1983, written by Muriel Chamberlain.⁹⁴ It was with these works that the historiographical direction began to shift. The length and detail of the studies, and the fact that they were undertaken at all, was due in part to the emergence in the 1970s and 1980s of the mature reflections of those who had first studied amid the renewal of interest in diplomatic history in the 1960s. The British Empire and all that it stood for had faded and, in doing so, its gradual dissolution complicated perceptions of British identity. The financial fallout and physical devastation of the Second World War had ushered in a period of decreased nationalism and increased attempts at international cooperation, the number of which rose as the economic decay of the late 1960s led to further recalibration of Britain's persona on the international stage. The lineage of Whig historians had also been diluted and liberal politics were no longer in vogue. Aberdeen's restrained internationalist Conservatism generated greater interest in this political climate.

Iremonger's work was the first to consult papers at Haddo House and this research helped to yield some revised conclusions. Rather than accepting the Tahiti affair as one in which Aberdeen sacrificed honour for peace, Iremonger argued that the nationalistic fervour on both sides of the Channel escalated out of 'the melodrama and posturings of self-important individuals' who created a quarrel of 'ridiculous' disproportion to reality.⁹⁵ Of Tahiti and other crises, it was added that Aberdeen approached the *entente* 'without sentimentality...with no illusions about

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁹⁴ L. Iremonger, *Lord Aberdeen: A Biography of the fourth Earl of Aberdeen, K. G., K. T., Prime Minister 1852-1855* (London, 1978); Chamberlain, *Lord Aberdeen: A Political Biography* (London, 1983).

⁹⁵ Iremonger, *Aberdeen*, p. 145; p. 144.

the French.⁹⁶ This idea went some way to dispelling the idea of ‘rose-tinted optimism’ put forward by historians such as Jones Parry but Iremonger concluded that Aberdeen’s conciliatory methods were transparent and that the Conservatives conceded too much as a result.⁹⁷ These methods were seen to originate partly in a lack of political enthusiasm, the genesis of which was traced to the death of Aberdeen’s beloved wife Catherine in 1812: Iremonger wrote that Aberdeen was ‘haunted’ forever thereafter.⁹⁸ His supposed fear of war – he was described as ‘tender as a girl to human suffering’ – was also seen as a weakness on which others preyed.⁹⁹ These considerations led Iremonger to the conclusion of the earlier historiography: Aberdeen was the ‘complete antithesis’ of Palmerston.¹⁰⁰

Chamberlain’s biography, despite tangible sympathy for her subject, was in places more critical than that of Iremonger. Chamberlain also portrayed Aberdeen as having a lack of political enthusiasm that impacted on his policy.¹⁰¹ In a much more detailed section on America, it was contested that the attention Aberdeen paid to strategic concerns was negligible, particularly during the Ashburton-Webster negotiations.¹⁰² In the dispute over the Oregon border it was claimed that Aberdeen ‘sacrificed so much’.¹⁰³ Regarding Anglo-French relations, Chamberlain suggested Aberdeen’s Greek policy was flawed (although not to the extent that the *entente* collapsed there, as David McLean has argued).¹⁰⁴

More favourable analysis was delivered in coverage of the Tahiti affair, where Chamberlain suggested that Aberdeen and Guizot suppressed and edited inflammatory material so as not to aggravate popular and parliamentary disquiet, thus indicating the value of their relationship.¹⁰⁵ Regarding the Anglo-French *entente* more generally, Chamberlain echoed the conclusion of Iremonger that relations took the form of a ‘*modus vivendi*’ rather than an *entente*, adding that ‘as

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

¹⁰¹ Chamberlain, *Aberdeen*, p. 208.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 321-322.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

¹⁰⁴ D. McLean, ‘The Greek Revolution and the Anglo-French *entente* 1843-4’, *The English Historical Review*, xcvi, 1981, pp. 117-129.

¹⁰⁵ Chamberlain, *Aberdeen*, p. 367.

such [the relationship] had considerable success.’¹⁰⁶ As in her other works on British foreign policy, this was a case of damning Aberdeen with faint praise: Chamberlain considered that Aberdeen’s interpretation of relations with France originated in wishful thinking and represented aspiration rather than reality.¹⁰⁷ Chamberlain concluded that it was a ‘real tragedy’ that Aberdeen ‘became convinced that his destiny lay in foreign affairs’, adding that he ‘was often at his weakest in the confrontational atmosphere of foreign policy’: he was, as suggested earlier in the historiography, portrayed as well-meaning but out of his depth.¹⁰⁸

In recent years, Aberdeen has received less attention. The publications of Bridge and Bullen and that edited by T. G. Otte touched on his policy but, by editorial admission, it received little coverage.¹⁰⁹ David Brown has looked at Anglo-French relations and considered foreign policy in a domestic political context, but his work was necessarily concerned with Palmerston and the period after Aberdeen’s second tenure.¹¹⁰ His recent biography of Palmerston mentions Aberdeen at various points but, naturally, the Conservative party is not his central concern.¹¹¹

So it is that Aberdeen’s reputation and that of Conservative foreign policy in the 1840s currently stands upon the work of Iremonger and Chamberlain: the discussion of his foreign policy has essentially fallen silent for the past three decades. Whilst historians continue to be attracted to the study of Peel and a hectic domestic agenda that culminated with the repeal of the Corn Laws, the foreign policy of his government remains an unfashionable topic of study. Restrained and prudent Conservatives have generally been unfashionable topics of study. In previous pages we considered the emergent historiographical interest in traditionally neglected Conservatives, but this renewed interest in Conservatism has not yet yielded any published research on Aberdeen. Aberdeen’s views on

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 387.

¹⁰⁷ Chamberlain, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of Palmerston* (London, 1980), esp. p. 54; ‘Pax Britannica?’ *British Foreign Policy 1789-1914* (London, 1988), esp. p. 89.

¹⁰⁸ Chamberlain, *Aberdeen*, p. 532.

¹⁰⁹ F. Bridge and R. Bullen, *The Great Powers and the European States System 1814-1914* (London, 2nd edition, 2005); T. G. Otte (ed.), *The Makers of British Foreign Policy* (London, 2002).

¹¹⁰ Brown, ‘Palmerston and Anglo-French Relations, 1846-1865’, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, xvii, 2006. See also *Palmerston and the Politics of Foreign Policy 1846-55*.

¹¹¹ Brown, *Palmerston* (2010).

European constitutionalism were examined in Edward McNeilly's PhD thesis on the Conservatives and France, 1827-1846, but the majority of the thesis is concerned with Peel.¹¹² Whilst there is evidence of continuing interest in and re-examination of nineteenth-century Conservatism, Aberdeen's foreign policy remains on the periphery.¹¹³

A New Study

This thesis seeks to address the lack of research by focusing on the specific period of Aberdeen's second tenure as Foreign Secretary. His foreign policy in the Wellington administration will not be examined in detail (although not ignored), because the domineering style of a Prime Minister at the height of his political power limited Aberdeen's influence on policy making. There is little reason to dissent from Philip Guedalla's suggestion that Aberdeen 'worked under his [Wellington's] direction.'¹¹⁴ Even Aberdeen's most sympathetic biographer concluded that Aberdeen exercised little influence on foreign policy under Wellington.¹¹⁵ Without his having a free hand in policy construction, it is difficult to assess Aberdeen's opinions and legacy in this period. In any case, much valuable research has been undertaken on the foreign policy of the Wellington government; the conflict between the Ottoman Empire and Greece, for example, has attracted significant scholarly attention.¹¹⁶

The government of 1852-1855 might be thought to provide the historian with a greater opportunity to study Aberdeen, and this holds true in some respects. As Prime Minister Aberdeen revealed a reforming streak that far surpassed his earlier career, and his being leader of the government provides obvious opportunities for study.¹¹⁷ Such circumstances provide for an interesting case study

¹¹² McNeilly, 'The Conservatives and France, 1827-1846'.

¹¹³ Gaunt, *Sir Robert Peel*.

¹¹⁴ Guedalla, *The Duke*, p. 375.

¹¹⁵ F. Bamford and the Duke of Wellington (ed.), *The Journal of Mrs Arbuthnot 1820-1832* (London, 1950), p. 163: 19 February 1828; Gordon, *Aberdeen*, p. 75.

¹¹⁶ See, for example, Anderson, *The Eastern Question*; G. Clayton, *Britain and the Eastern Question* (London, 1971); MacFie, *The Eastern Question*.

¹¹⁷ For the seminal work on Aberdeen's government, see J. Conacher, *The Aberdeen Coalition 1852-1855: A Study in Mid-Nineteenth Century Party Politics* (Cambridge, 1968). For detail on the Crimean

of coalition government, but there existed a maelstrom of competing approaches and individual agendas out of which it is difficult to extract a clear view of Aberdeen's policy. Foreign affairs engendered particular divisions in the government and Aberdeen's own opinions were often obscured as a result of his quest to reconcile the competing viewpoints of his colleagues with placatory sentiment. Alienating any of the political 'heavyweights' in the coalition might instigate a disastrous chain reaction. A re-examination of Aberdeen's role in foreign affairs in this period would require its own separate study, beyond the scope of this one.

The present study will focus upon Aberdeen's foreign policy in the Peel government because this enables, first, a reassessment of the internal dynamics of Conservative leadership, in light of the challenge Gaunt has posed to the historiographical assumption that Peel's was an autocratic leadership style by which his colleagues were directed and controlled.¹¹⁸ The historiographical consensus still rests on the assumption that Peel exercised an almost paternal influence over his Foreign Secretary. It is the contention of this study that Peel was in fact content to leave Aberdeen to proceed with the running of foreign affairs, therefore enabling Peel's energies to be concentrated on dealing with the domestic agenda. The conduct of foreign policy was thus critical to Peel's government, though Paul Adelman has argued that for Aberdeen's foreign policy to have had 'little impact...on the Conservative Party', that policy must have been insignificant.¹¹⁹ This thesis proposes something different. The distraction and expense of international conflict would have placed huge pressure on an administration trying to recover from recession whilst addressing the need for social change and improvement: keeping foreign policy quiet in a volatile age was a difficult yet essential objective to achieve. Foreign and domestic policy were inextricably connected in the objectives of the Peel government.

This study of Conservative foreign policy will thus be conducted in the context of the Peel government's domestic objectives. In so doing, it will develop a

War see, for example, D. Goldfrank, *The Origins of the Crimean War* (London, 1994); A. Troubetzkoy, *A Brief History of the Crimean War* (London, 2006).

¹¹⁸ Gaunt, *Sir Robert Peel*, p. 4.

¹¹⁹ Adelman, *Peel and the Conservative Party*, p. 26.

theme explored by both Brown and Hicks in their work on the mid-nineteenth century, in which domestic and foreign policy are treated as a unified whole. Chamberlain and Iremonger's biographies by no means ignored the world in which Aberdeen was operating, but foreign policy and domestic policy tended to be treated separately. David Brown's work has reconsidered Palmerstonism in the context of domestic politics and in that of his popular support.¹²⁰ Despite works that have assimilated domestic concerns into analysis of foreign policy, such accounts have not considered the foreign policy of the Peel government.¹²¹ The cradle-to-the-grave approach of Chamberlain and Iremonger certainly has its place, but it provided for a predominantly narrative approach in which the Conservatives' *modus operandi* was often lost. An appreciation of how Aberdeen balanced Conservative domestic considerations with his own approach to foreign policy, and with the international political climate, is crucial to understanding his policy and its place in nineteenth-century Conservatism.

The overall nature of Conservative foreign policy in this era also needs reinvestigating. Recent studies of the mechanics and nature of Conservative foreign policy later in the nineteenth-century have suggested the existence of a consistent set of objectives and principles, albeit delivered with the inevitable variations of different individuals. Whereas pre-Disraelian Conservative foreign policy used to be presented as a series of *ad hoc* measures with their ideological roots in isolationism, the work of those such as Angus Hawkins and the Norwich School has shown that the mid-nineteenth century Conservatism of the Derbys was in fact founded upon a rational set of principles and objectives (which will be considered in further detail in Chapter Two). This study will examine whether their observations might also apply to the foreign policy of the Peel government and, in doing so, will explore the possibility of a broader Conservative consensus on the making of foreign policy, which connected with domestic goals in a coherent and consistent manner.

Such an approach will help to avoid considering Conservative policy on Palmerstonian terms, a phenomenon that has affected previous accounts of

¹²⁰ Brown, *Palmerston 1846-1855; Palmerston: A Biography*.

¹²¹ Hicks, *Peace, War and Party Politics*.

Aberdeen's policy-making. A tendency to overlook the financial and international consequences of Palmerston's policy of confrontation – not least the deterioration of Anglo-French and Anglo-American relations, the commencement of wars with China and Afghanistan, and the contribution to a massive excess of expenditure over revenue – hinders understanding of the pressures on Aberdeen's policy and Peel's government.¹²²

A portrayal of Aberdeen and Palmerston as absolute opposites would be misleading, however, for despite their different methods and world views, an underlying level of consensus on certain issues between 1841 and 1846 is clearly identifiable. In the 1840s both Aberdeen and Palmerston advocated the maintenance of the integrity of the Ottoman Empire, partly because both pursued a balance of power, to which the stability of south-eastern Europe contributed.¹²³ They agreed on other matters too. For example, when French agents seized Tahiti in defiance of existing British influence, Aberdeen and Palmerston both thought that French annexation could not be opposed on legal grounds and because the region was strategically indefensible.¹²⁴

There were wider themes in British foreign policy upon which the two men concurred. These included the necessity of maintaining British pre-eminence; the balance of power served this and other British interests. This is perhaps unremarkable; most British politicians believed the same.

One might nevertheless draw parallels between Palmerston's famous speech regarding the 'eternal and perpetual' interests of British foreign policy to an oration of Aberdeen's, made at the beginning of his spell as Prime Minister in the 1850s coalition government:

The truth is, that for the last thirty years the principles of the foreign policy of the country have never varied. There may have been differences in the execution, according to the different hands entrusted with the direction of

¹²² For details of this spending deficit, see Joseph Hume, House of Commons, Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3rd series [hereafter Hansard. All Hansard references are to the 3rd series unless otherwise stated], lxvi, 24 February 1843, col. 1278.

¹²³ See chapter 5.

¹²⁴ See chapter 3.

that policy: but the foundation of the foreign policy of this country has been, I repeat, for the last thirty years the same.¹²⁵

Whilst there were undoubtedly elements of continuity in British policy, a degree of disingenuousness may nonetheless be perceived in the two men's pronouncements. In both 1848 and 1852, they were speaking during politically tumultuous times, in which it served their interests to highlight (and, indeed, exaggerate) areas of concord with their peers, and to gloss over the differences. In Aberdeen's case, besides needing to unite previous holders of the highest offices in the land in what appeared to be a fragile coalition, and to accommodate their personal and political differences, he also sought to undermine the suspicion that surrounded his ability to work with Palmerston. It is hardly surprising that he made such a statement in December 1852, and one needs to be cautious about accepting it at face value. A healthy dose of scepticism about the professed level of consensus seems wise.

The evidence points to variations between Aberdeen and Palmerston that underline their political differences, which were frequently on display. On a basic level, there were regular divergences of opinion such as that concerning the issue of the Spanish succession in the 1840s.¹²⁶ Often, policies on which Aberdeen and Palmerston ostensibly agreed were also often reached by different intellectual pathways and pursued with different ends in mind. Their support of the integrity of the Ottoman Empire, for example, demonstrated the differing political colours and objectives of their foreign policies. Aberdeen's and Palmerston's proposals for the terms on which Ottoman integrity should be maintained were vastly different – Aberdeen did not share the idea that Turkey might be reconstructed on British liberal foundations – but they both agreed on the immediate necessity of Turkish dominion. The methods of the two men were also utterly different, with Aberdeen preferring candid and personal diplomatic intercourse with his European

¹²⁵ Aberdeen, House of Lords, Hansard, cxxiii, 27 December 1852, col. 1724; Palmerston, House of Commons, Hansard, xcvi, 1 March 1848, cols. 122-3. The continuities in foreign policy have been linked to aristocratic priorities in N. Gash, *Aristocracy and the People: Britain, 1815-1865* (London, 1979).

¹²⁶ See chapter 3.

colleagues, and Palmerston preferring to browbeat and bluff his way to the attainment of political objectives.

One final aspect that drew the different strands of government together in the Peel government – and in others – was trade. The importance of trade to the Peel government has been touched upon by others, but beyond the function of supplying the British economy with money that was desperately needed in 1840s, trade also performed a wider geopolitical function for Aberdeen.¹²⁷ He saw trading preponderance as the principal means by which to preserve Britain's international pre-eminence and power, valuing it above territorial aggrandisement and the idea that interventionism was the best way to pursue British interests.

This thesis will follow the way in which commercial concerns influenced foreign policy during the Peel government, often driving responses to particular events, as happened over the collapse of the Mavrocordato ministry in Greece and in relation to French encroachment on Tahiti.¹²⁸ Aberdeen saw that where British trade flourished, so too did British influence, whilst trading agreements with other countries encouraged international stability and helped to preserve the balance of power. This was a view that was supported by the Board of Trade, with Gladstone exhibiting particular enthusiasm.¹²⁹

Over the course of the Peel government the debate over free trade in the domestic and international arenas gathered momentum, and its relation to Aberdeen's foreign policy and his conceptualisation of the international function of trade helps to define the world view that drove his policy. Aberdeen's was not the view of Radicals such as Richard Cobden who, in the 1840s at least, envisaged a tide of free trade and democratisation sweeping away international rivalries and leaving a lasting legacy of peace and cooperation. Anthony Howe has commented on the extent of this theory: 'Pressing his vision to its utopian or quasi-anarchist limits, Cobden foresaw a Europe without states, not so much a federation, as a Europe of municipalities within an international division of labour. In this vision, the

¹²⁷ Devereux Jones has looked at the issue of trade in *The American Problem*.

¹²⁸ See chapter 3. Robert Stewart has also noted the pursuit of commercial assimilation in other areas, such as in interaction with Prussia, Portugal and Brazil: See R. Stewart, *The Politics of Protection: Lord Derby and the Protectionist Party 1841-1852* (Cambridge, 1971), p. 34.

¹²⁹ See F. Hyde, *Mr. Gladstone at the Board of Trade* (London, 1934).

democracy that would liberate the peoples of Europe was integrally linked to free trade.¹³⁰

Neither was Aberdeen's view of international commerce that of Palmerston, whose views lay well to the political right of Cobden's, but were still located to the left of Aberdeen's. The explanation for this lies in the motives with which Palmerston approached the extension of Britain's commercial interests. The principal motive was, of course, to make Britain more prosperous and powerful. Behind this basic stimulus lay the belief that it was part of Britain's international role to liberalise and therefore civilise the world, with trade forming part of Britain's mission alongside the promotion and encouragement of liberal constitutional values. Palmerston's commitment to the spread of liberal values has been questioned on the grounds that it was an artifice constructed for domestic consumption, but whilst he would have relished domestic approval, his approach to Turkey (and other diplomatic affairs) suggested his commitment was genuine.¹³¹

Aberdeen saw fruitful trading relationships as a means by which to establish and maintain pacific international relations, but did not share the desire to liberalise more generally. The examination of Anglo-Ottoman affairs provides an opportunity to contrast Aberdonian and Palmerstonian policy in this context, although the difference is made clear in additional theatres such as Spain.¹³²

Aberdeen's position on the free trade issue, meanwhile, demonstrated that whilst his conceptualisation of the international role of commerce was neither Cobdenite nor Palmerstonian, neither could it be associated with those elements of the Conservative Party that lay farthest to the right. Protectionists believed that trade could be safely and beneficially conducted within the British Empire, free from the dangers of international economic interdependence, which a war could all too easily expose. Aberdeen thought that free trade and the Empire were compatible in a way that, for different reasons, Radicals and Protectionists did not. He also regarded any measure that reduced the chance of a war happening in the first place as a cause worth pursuing, and in the 1840s he came to see international

¹³⁰ Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England*, p. 71.

¹³¹ See B. Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People? England 1783-1846* (Oxford, 2006), p. 561.

¹³² See chapters 5 and 4.

free trade as such a measure. It was a diplomatic tool to be used alongside others in the maintenance of a European status quo that benefited Britain. A cautious approach to affairs in Spain, for example, was in part justified on the grounds that an increasing degree of commercial reciprocity might help Spain to see itself in an international context, rather than maintaining the inward focus that inevitably results from civil conflict. In such calmer circumstances were lasting solutions to Anglo-Spanish problems thought to be found, rather than in the midst of Spanish upheaval.

Before turning to specific foreign policy cases, it remains to attempt to recreate the intellectual and contextual matrices of Aberdonian Conservatism. This will both address a gap in the historiography and assess the idiosyncratic intellectual backdrop against which Aberdeen's policy must be viewed. His individual outlook and the influences upon it are crucial to understanding a policy that has hitherto been dismissed. In this manner we can dispense with the Palmerstonian and liberal contexts of previous studies and build upon the efforts of Aberdeen's biographers. In order to achieve this objective, an assessment of 'Aberdeen and His World' will attempt to reconstruct the Foreign Secretary's 'mental map', and place it within the context of Conservative objectives between 1841 and 1846.

Having considered that broader background, there follows a re-examination of Aberdeen's engagement with Europe. Anglo-French relations formed the cornerstone of Conservative foreign policy as they did for any government of that era, with Napoleonic expansionism still fresh in the collective memory. The historiography currently portrays Anglo-French relations in this period as either an alliance, an all-encompassing *entente* or as thinly veiled hostility, but the evidence points to an alternative conclusion. The civil strife in Spain, given France's penchant for intervening there, was of central importance in the geopolitics of Western Europe. Spanish affairs will, therefore, be considered in a separate chapter. Here too, traditional historiographical preoccupations are ripe for challenge. Rather than directing all attention to Aberdeen's supposed hypocrisy in policy-making, Conservative policy will be considered in light of its objectives.

Anglo-Austrian relations were largely uncontroversial, and require comment only in relation to certain areas of policy, but Anglo-Russian engagement warrants closer investigation. It is an aspect of the 1840s that has been neglected by historians, yet episodes such as the civil discontent in Serbia shed light on the Conservative approach to the East and to foreign policy in general. In a broader sense, an understanding of Conservative policy towards Russia in the 1840s affords a further resource to those concerned with Britain's policy during the Crimean war.

Although America was not yet a great power it was very much in the ascendant and a number of inherited disputes threatened Aberdeen's peaceable objectives; failure to keep Anglo-American relations quiescent could impact on European affairs, particularly if America and France found reason to resurrect the coalition of 1812. Relations with America will therefore be considered in the final chapters. Aberdeen's early views on the American people and nation were uncompromising: he wrote that '[America] is certainly in her childhood, but she has nothing of infancy but its forwardness, and instead of strength and vigour of youth she has nothing but its insolence and ignorance', later adding that Americans were 'peevish children.'¹³³ By the 1840s condescension had given way to considered policy, and the manner in which Aberdeen dealt with boundary disputes between America and British Canada captured the essence of Aberdonian policy-making and of the Conservative government.

From this study emerges an account of Aberdonian Conservatism which suggests alternative conclusions on the foreign policy of the Peel government. Rooting foreign policy firmly in the context of its international objectives, and how these related to the domestic priorities of the government, paints a different picture from that offered in previous studies. Aberdeen appears as a much more rational politician with a clear set of objectives (albeit whilst maintaining flexibility in the methods used to achieve them) than the well-meaning but naïve minister of historiographical tradition. A solid relationship with Peel points to a consensus in the Conservative leadership, and we find that the Peel government's foreign policy

¹³³ Aberdeen to Augustus Foster, 4 March and 24 September 1805, V. Foster (ed.), *The Two Duchesses: Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire and Elizabeth Duchess of Devonshire* (London, 1898), ps. 209 and 241.

has much in common with the pre-Disraelian tradition identified by authors such as Hicks and Hawkins. This era of nineteenth-century Conservatism thus becomes one in which a competent Foreign Secretary worked within the governmental and wider political parameters of his party to achieve his objectives. The ubiquity and influence of Palmerston are plainly discernible in mid-nineteenth century history, but Aberdeen exemplified an alternative, Conservative approach to foreign policy.

Chapter Two: Aberdeen and his World

Lord Aberdeen's life prior to the inception of the Peel government is not an area of complete historiographical darkness. Biographies and diplomatic histories have looked at Aberdeen's ambassadorship during the Napoleonic wars and his tenure as Foreign Secretary in the Wellington government of 1828-30.¹³⁴ Narrative details of Aberdeen's earlier political engagements and his formative years are also documented in such studies, but there has as yet been no developed attempt to try and piece together the intellectual impulses behind Aberdeen's policies. Part of this endeavour must inevitably look at the man, but we must also consider the world in which Aberdeen was operating. In doing so, we can better understand the man charged with delivering Conservative foreign policy and, therefore, the foreign policy itself.

Trying to understand a politician's thinking is an inexact science and presents no small amount of methodological difficulty but, with care, one can glean an overall sense of the workings of political minds. As T. G. Otte remarked in his recent study of the 'Foreign Office mind', 'by its very nature, the mind is an elusive phenomenon. For the historian there is no corpse upon which a scholarly post-mortem can be performed. But there are traces and footprints, sometimes even only the merest whiff of suggestion.'¹³⁵ Jeremy Black, in his study of British foreign policy in the late eighteenth century, considered the additional difficulties of relating personal observations to wider domestic and international concerns: 'It is not easy to offer a coherent account of foreign policy that relates domestic circumstances to diplomatic developments, in part because of lacunae and ambiguities in the sources, and also because there was no neat pattern of influences and policies.'¹³⁶

¹³⁴ See, for example, A. Gordon, *The Earl of Aberdeen* (London, 1893), pp. 20-65 and 76-102; L. Iremonger, *Lord Aberdeen: A Biography of the Fourth Earl of Aberdeen, K. G., K. T., Prime Minister 1852-1855* (London, 1978), pp. 46-94 and 111-123; M. Chamberlain, *Lord Aberdeen: A Political Biography* (London, 1983), pp. 105-171 and 193-250.

¹³⁵ T. G. Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind: The Making of British Foreign Policy, 1865-1914* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 5.

¹³⁶ J. Black, *British Foreign Policy in an Age of Revolutions, 1783-1793* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 9.

The endeavour to recreate Aberdeen's political outlook is also affected by a number of individual circumstances that make him a difficult politician to analyse. In the public sphere, Aberdeen was an infrequent and reserved speaker in the House of Lords for whom detailed statements of policy intention were rare, perhaps inevitably for a pragmatic politician without a doctrinaire philosophy. A general disinclination to engage with the political world beyond Westminster removes a further potential source of information that studies of figures such as Disraeli and Gladstone have been able to utilise: their need to engage with an expanding electorate also encouraged greater engagement with the public later in the nineteenth-century. Disraeli's speeches at Crystal Palace and the Free Trade Hall in Manchester in 1872 helped to convey his message of 'One Nation' Conservatism to the public and to posterity, whilst Gladstone's Midlothian campaign later that decade articulated his ideas on foreign policy to a wider audience. Aberdeen eschewed such populist measures in favour of sober political engagement with his peers.

In the private sphere, Aberdeen presents similar challenges. He did not keep a diary with the exception of a short period during his travels: there is no treasure trove comparable to the Derby diaries, which illuminated the Conservative politics of the 1850s onwards.¹³⁷ Aberdeen also declined to write the grand historical works penned by those such as Churchill, which have provided historians with a mine of material from which to draw their conclusions.¹³⁸

Aberdeen's communication with contemporaries also presents problems. His moods could be dark to the extent of apparent neurasthenia and this temperament often resulted in brief and unrevealing exchanges.¹³⁹ This was not helped by the incessant tragedies in Aberdeen's life: his first wife, whom he described as 'the most perfect creature ever formed by the power and wisdom of

¹³⁷ J. Vincent (ed.), *Disraeli, Derby and the Conservative Party: Journals and Memoirs of Edward Henry, Lord Stanley, 1849-1869* (London, 1978); *A Selection from the Diaries of Edward Henry Stanley, Fifteenth Earl of Derby: between September 1869 and March 1878* (London, 1994); *The Diaries of Edward Henry Stanley, Fifteenth Earl of Derby, between 1878 and 1893: A Selection* (Oxford, 2003).

¹³⁸ See, for example, W. Churchill, *The Second World War*, in 6 volumes (London, 1948-54); *A History of the English Speaking Peoples*, in 4 volumes (London, 1956-58).

¹³⁹ See Aberdeen to Harriet Douglas, 25 August 1822 (copy), Aberdeen Papers, Haddo House (*Letters to His Second Wife 1819-1826*).

God', died in 1812 and death also claimed many of his children at a premature age.¹⁴⁰

Aberdeen's apparent detachment might also be partly explained by his scholarly pursuits. These began with the study of Classics and the Renaissance at Cambridge and continued on his tour of Europe in the early 1800s. In 1805 Aberdeen was elected to the Society of Dilettanti, an important group of cultural patrons, and he also became a member of the Society of Antiquaries, for which he was president between 1811 and 1846. Early academic studies that cemented this respected position in the scholarly world included *An Inquiry into the Principles and Beauty in Grecian Architecture* and an introduction to his friend Guy Whittington's *An Historical Survey of the Ecclesiastical Antiquities of France*.¹⁴¹ Aberdeen's scholarly ability to appreciate all sides of an argument could result in circuitous and meandering dispatches and correspondence, which can quite easily confuse by virtue of their labyrinthine logic. One diplomat summarised Aberdeen's inclination to lengthy iterations, adding some further interpretations of their origin:

The note is written in a florid style, full of tiresome repetitions and punctilious verbosity; the work of a diplomatist who, between the necessity of telling the truth and the fear of displeasing, is driven hither and thither, neither able to defend his own cause (a bad enough one) nor venturing to attack the weakness of his adversaries with vigour; who trembles before the slightest criticism and covers over his well-founded fears with trivial compliments.¹⁴²

Despite the varying challenges of trying to construct a picture of Aberdeen and his world, there remain enough 'traces and footprints' and 'whiffs of suggestion' with which to conduct the investigation. They are mainly found in

¹⁴⁰ Aberdeen to Abercorn, 29 December 1813, Aberdeen Papers, British Library (hereafter BL), Additional Manuscripts (hereafter Add. MSS) 43225/56.

¹⁴¹ Lord Aberdeen, *An Inquiry into the Principles and Beauty in Grecian Architecture; with an Historical View of the Rise and Progress of the Art in Greece* (London, 1822); G. Whittington, *An Historical Survey of the Ecclesiastical Antiquities of France; with a View to Illustrate the Rise and Progress of Gothic Architecture in Europe* (London, 2nd edition, 1811). For a complete yet succinct summary of Aberdeen's other academic output, see Chamberlain, 'George Hamilton-Gordon, Fourth Earl of Aberdeen (1784-1860)', *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online* (hereafter ODNB). A more comprehensive account can be found in Chamberlain, *Aberdeen*, pp. 61-78.

¹⁴² Friedrich von Gentz to Prince Metternich, 18 July 1828, R. Metternich (ed.) and A. Napier (trans.), *Memoirs of Prince Metternich 1773-1835*, iv (London, 1881), p. 458.

Aberdeen's private correspondence, a domain in which the restraint and caution he exercised in public were often diluted, and sometimes wholly abandoned. The influences on Aberdeen's development also provide us with clues to the unspoken assumptions with which he approached politics.

The Early Years

William Pitt the Younger was Aberdeen's mentor in early life and a crucial influence.¹⁴³ The relationship between Pitt and Aberdeen was undoubtedly a strong one. Despite many of Pitt's letters to Aberdeen disappearing in the 1860s, the sizeable corpus of Aberdeen's letters to Pitt contains many telling references.¹⁴⁴ Aberdeen's political diary explains the relationship as being 'on terms of the utmost intimacy from my childhood' and it details his intention 'never to renounce the Principles of Mr. Pitt'.¹⁴⁵ It is interesting to note that, as R. W. Liscombe has demonstrated, Aberdeen was the prime mover behind a monument to commemorate Pitt's life, despite not being a member of the parliamentary Pitt Monument Committee.¹⁴⁶

Historians have differed in their conclusions regarding the legacy of Pittite politics.¹⁴⁷ Early criticism of Pitt's handling of the war against Napoleon faded after his death as the 1807 poem 'Elijah's Mantle' ushered in a wave of admiring studies,

¹⁴³ Lord Melville also took the role of mentor when Aberdeen, aged fourteen, selected him and Pitt as guardians, although Melville's influence was largely confined to family matters. Details of his career can be found in J. Lovat-Fraser, *Henry Dundas, Viscount Melville* (Cambridge, 1916); H. Furber, *Henry Dundas, First Viscount Melville 1742-1811* (Oxford, 1931); C. Matheson, *The Life of Henry Dundas, First Viscount Melville 1742-1811* (London, 1933).

¹⁴⁴ Gordon (ed.), *Selections from the Correspondence of the Earl of Aberdeen*, i (proof copy held at Haddo House), p. 3n. Gordon was the trustee of his father's papers and it was thought that the letters were lost during his absence from Britain between 1861 and 1864.

¹⁴⁵ Aberdeen's Political Diary, 25 and 28 January 1806, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43337/2 and 4.

¹⁴⁶ R. Liscombe, 'Canova, Aberdeen and the Pitt Monument', *The Burlington Magazine*, cxix, 1977, p. 700. Other historians have written on Pitt's influence on the wider Conservative Party: see, for example, J. J. Sack, 'The Memory of Burke and the Memory of Pitt: English Conservatism confronts its Past, 1806-1829', *The Historical Journal*, xxx, 1987, pp. 623-640. Works to question Pitt's influence include S. Graubard, 'Castlereagh and the Peace of Europe', *The Journal of British Studies*, iii, 1963, but such studies are in the minority.

¹⁴⁷ Contemporaries and political figures also interpreted Pittite politics in a variety of ways. See M. Ledger-Lomas, 'The Character of Pitt the Younger and Party Politics, 1830-1860', *The Historical Journal*, xlvii, 2004, pp. 641-661.

which continued into the twentieth century.¹⁴⁸ The popular chronicler Arthur Bryant used Pitt's story to provide lessons of strong leadership when Britain was fighting World War Two, whilst Ehrman and Reilly's accounts failed to shed the generally encomiastic nature of contemporary Pitt studies.¹⁴⁹ More recent studies have questioned Pitt's liberal and modernising tendencies on the basis that he was a pragmatic politician focusing on his own times rather than a figure looking to make any grand ideological impact on his party or posterity.¹⁵⁰

From this spread of varying interpretations of Pitt's politics nonetheless emerges a broad consensus on Pittite traits. These include a pragmatic approach to policy-making, a business-like and administrative approach to government, a Tory sense of duty and loyalty to the Crown, and a willingness to work with Europe in order to achieve Britain's foreign objectives.¹⁵¹ Aberdeen was a pragmatic politician who formulated policy according to a given situation rather than on the basis of a rigid value system, and Pitt's approach to politics was a major influence on the way he looked at the world: it was something that Aberdeen himself stressed throughout his life.

Aberdeen's career echoed that of Pitt in its overriding pragmatism and political expediency: both men have frequently been charged with inconsistency.¹⁵² Pitt was not a doctrinaire politician in the way that Tory 'Ultras' and – at the other end of the political spectrum, Radicals – had a tendency to be. He employed a business-like and administrative approach to his government and to his politics, as was perhaps necessitated by his leadership at a time when passions were inflamed by war and when the party structure that emerged in the 1830s and 1840s did not

¹⁴⁸ Anonymous, 'Elijah's Mantle: A Tribute to the Right Honourable Memory of William Pitt' (1807). This poem is often attributed to George Canning. Studies of Pitt include Earl Stanhope, *The Life of the Right Honourable William Pitt*, in 4 volumes (London, 1861-2); Lord Rosebery, *Pitt* (London, 1904); J. Holland Rose, *The Life of William Pitt* (London, 1923), esp. pp. 1-33.

¹⁴⁹ A. Bryant, *The Years of Endurance, 1793-1802* (London, 1942); J. Ehrman, *The Younger Pitt*, in 3 volumes (London, 1969-1996); R. Reilly, *Pitt the Younger 1759-1806* (London, 1978).

¹⁵⁰ J. Mori, *William Pitt and the French Revolution, 1785-1795* (Edinburgh, 1997); E. Evans, *William Pitt the Younger* (London, 1999). The amount of recent studies of Pitt demonstrates the continuing debate about his politics and his legacy: see M. Duffy, *The Younger Pitt* (London, 2000); M. Turner, *Pitt the Younger: A Life* (London, 2003); W. Hague, *William Pitt the Younger* (London, 2004).

¹⁵¹ Stephan Graubard has questioned the extent to which modes of acting identified as Pittite can be seen as part of the legacy of Pitt, positing that they might only demonstrate political expediency and a rational interpretation of the needs of a particular time. See Graubard, 'Castlereagh and the Peace of Europe', p. 86.

¹⁵² Michael Turner considers this phenomenon in the introduction to *Pitt the Younger*, pp. ix-xi.

yet exist. Lord Liverpool would employ a similar strategy during his tenure as Prime Minister. A student of political economy, Liverpool rejected grand ideology in favour of sound economic policy at a time when war with Napoleon demanded this approach: he has been labelled a 'conscientious administrator.'¹⁵³ Peel's government would also be one that sought to balance the books and Aberdeen's role within it would be to make foreign policy successful yet inexpensive: he too would become a sound administrator in this conservative 'Pittite' way.¹⁵⁴

Aberdeen also admired in and acquired from Pitt a Tory sense of duty and loyalty to the Crown and to the nation, which carried quasi-religious overtones by which a sense of personal sacrifice underwrote tenure in public office. As Robin Harris has observed of Pitt, he had 'shown what any Tory, before or later, would recognise as a distinctively Tory sense of duty (as well as an entirely human opportunism) in answering the King's summons to serve. The belief that the King's business must be done, whatever personal or political interest demanded, provided one significant mark of continuity between early and later Tories and, indeed, between both and the Conservatives.'¹⁵⁵ This spirit might be detected in Aberdeen's agreement to lead the coalition government in 1852 when, at sixty-eight years old, his attentions appeared to have been happily concentrated on affairs at Haddo House. Aberdeen had written to Whittington in the wake of Pitt's death:

The country has lost its only support in this dreadful time of disaster; and I have lost the only friend to whom I looked up with unbounded Love and admiration [...] What will become of the country, torn by differing factions. While he lived [...] there was at least one object, to which all eyes were directed, and which might have united all hearts in the time of danger. But

¹⁵³ E. Evans, *Political Parties in Britain 1783-1867* (London, 1985), p. 27.

¹⁵⁴ Peel's approach to finance has been examined in C. Fay, *Great Britain from Adam Smith to the Present Day: An Economic and Social Survey* (London, 5th edition, 1950), pp. 23-43. More recent studies covering the topic include Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?* The idea of the Peel government being composed of sound administrators has been stressed for other politicians such as the Home Secretary James Graham. See A. Donajrodzki, 'Sir James Graham at the Home Office', *The Historical Journal*, xx, 1977, p. 103.

¹⁵⁵ R. Harris, *The Conservatives: A History* (London, 2011), p. 19.

now, it is all void, a blank; on whom can we put our trust? Where can the mind repose with confidence?¹⁵⁶

With some reasonable conjecture it is possible to perceive Aberdeen's belief in the dutiful and unifying spirit of Pitt in his decision to form a coalition government out of factions riven with personal ambition and internecine quarrelling.

On the international scene Pitt exhibited a willingness to work with Europe as a means by which to secure British interests. In his State Paper of 1805 it was outlined that European cooperation represented a more natural and beneficial approach than an incessant state of Great Power intrigue and agitation. This maxim fitted with Aberdeen's perspective on foreign policy, by which cooperation was more likely to protect the balance of power and thereby create the pacific conditions in which British interests could thrive. Influence was measured not in the currency of temporary successes in local disagreements, or maintained by making statements of power through confrontational policies, but was seen in Britain's economic dominance. The best way to preserve British trading preponderance and its concomitant political influence was seen to be maintenance of the international stability by which Britain prospered. Aberdeen wrote to this effect when trying to ease the strained relations caused by the power struggle in Greece in the 1840s: 'the superior probity, enterprise and wealth of British merchants will always ensure the preservation of British influence.'¹⁵⁷

Protection of the balance of power was the preoccupation of almost all British politicians, with the exception of some Radicals, but what marked out Aberdeen's policy as distinctly conservative was the approach by which he sought to protect the balance. Whilst Aberdeen was not averse to limited changes to the Vienna Settlement of 1814-1815 – for example, in 1830 he was content to recognise the Orleanist ascendancy in France in the name of European stability – he was averse to the proselytising liberal mission to model other European states on British constitutional values (Viscount Castlereagh's influence might also be felt

¹⁵⁶ Aberdeen to Whittington, 24 January 1806, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43229/129.

¹⁵⁷ Aberdeen to Edmund Lyons, 11 November 1844, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43137/15.

here, as will be discussed below). This was something that was particularly apparent in his policy regarding the civil difficulty in Spain in the 1840s.

For Aberdeen, Palmerston's apparent courting of revolutionaries in the late 1840s and early 1850s seemed to epitomise the dangers of this liberal approach, both in its threat to the immediate peace and in the sense of the Northern Courts' inevitable suspicion. Whilst Palmerston never lost any sleep over causing discontent amongst Europe's crowned autocrats, Aberdeen regarded any interaction with revolutionaries in Europe as an unnecessary danger to a peace that served Britain's interests. This was a view that he articulated in the debate over the Eastern crisis in 1828: 'the general policy of this country was the same now as it had been for many years past – namely, an earnest desire to preserve peace, not only to England, but to the whole world.'¹⁵⁸

Aberdeen's willingness to engage openly with the great powers in the name of stability, as well as demonstrating a continuation of Pitt's intellectual inheritance, was also rooted in the experiences of his youth. The distaste for revolution, which became clear later in his search for European stability, was apparent – and perhaps acquired – during his travels across Europe at the time of the Napoleonic wars. Experiences of the French revolution and its aftermath elicited different responses from travelling young aristocrats, but the impact on Aberdeen is clear.¹⁵⁹ Arriving in Avignon on 19 December 1806, he recorded in his journal that 'the town was one of the first in France which became the prey of revolutionary principles. The horrors perpetrated here almost are inconceivable.'¹⁶⁰ Experience of revolution so close to home caused palpable alarm.

Besides the human cost of the revolution in France, Aberdeen deplored the wanton physical destruction of the landscape, especially the religious buildings. The ruined palace at Chantilly was described as 'one of the most distressing scenes I have ever witnessed' whilst elsewhere he lamented that 'almost all the churches are mutilated.'¹⁶¹ Aberdeen's scholarly interest in architecture combined with his

¹⁵⁸ Aberdeen, *The House of Lords*, Hansard, xix, 16 July 1828, col. 1729.

¹⁵⁹ See J. Black, *The British Abroad: The Grand Tour in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1992), pp. 306-325.

¹⁶⁰ *The Aberdeen Journal of 1806*, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43336/43.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, Add. MSS 43335/10 and 43336/44.

private faith to fuel his contempt for the material cost of revolutionary zeal: Aberdeen's emotional investment in the affairs of the Church was profound, as many have noted.¹⁶² Casual destruction of the wider material landscape also struck Aberdeen as demonstrating the hypocrisy of those he branded 'Regicidal Freebooters': these were the people who cared not for the principles at stake but focused their attention on the theft and subsequent fire sale of a nation's treasures.¹⁶³

In his horror, Aberdeen echoed Edmund Burke, whose *Reflections on the Revolution in France* was published in 1790. Burke was repulsed by the revolution and concerned that its values might reach English shores: 'The spirit of total, radical innovation; the overthrow of all prescriptive rights; the confiscation of property; destruction of the Church, the nobility, the family, tradition, veneration, the ancestors, the nation – this is the catalogue of all that Burke dreaded in his darkest moments.'¹⁶⁴ Aberdeen's own fear was clear in his later, staunch support for the Vienna Settlement.

It has been argued that the fluid economic gradations between classes in Britain made the chances of revolution in Britain extremely low, which might suggest that the fear of revolution in the wake of 1789 and the Napoleonic wars was rather irrational.¹⁶⁵ Aberdeen's reluctance to countenance any major changes to the status quo remains coherent. Revolutionary ideology posed a transnational challenge through its ingrained universalist rhetoric and, whether Britain was resistant to it or not, other countries' susceptibilities threatened the balance of power. Britain's relative immunity to revolution could also not be taken for granted because, in the words of one study, 'however unique the British constitution, it was

¹⁶² See the preface to Whittington, *An Historical Survey of the Ecclesiastical Antiquities of France*; V. Zienkiewicz, *Lord Aberdeen, the Nuns of Minsk and the Rossian [sic] State Church* (London, 1846); Gordon (ed.), *Selections from the Correspondence of the Earl of Aberdeen*, ix; Chamberlain, *Aberdeen*.

¹⁶³ The Aberdeen Journal of 1806, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43335/10.

¹⁶⁴ C. O'Brien, 'Introduction: 'The Manifesto of a Counter-Revolution'', in E. Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London, Penguin Classics Edition, 2004), p. 10. For a succinct summary of Burke's political philosophy, see G. Butler, *The Tory Tradition: Bolingbroke – Burke – Disraeli – Salisbury* (London, 1914), pp. 30-59.

¹⁶⁵ I. Christie, 'Conservatism and Stability in British Society', in M. Philp (ed.), *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 170-1.

embedded in a larger political, social, and moral order'.¹⁶⁶ Aberdeen regarded that order as held together by resistance to extensive and/or sudden change. Richard Cobden's assertion that he was 'a little too pedantically bent upon keeping things on the Continent as he fixed them at the Congress of Vienna' should, as with other references to Aberdonian reaction, be treated with caution.¹⁶⁷ Many of them say more about their author than Aberdeen and, indeed, many would be considered reactionary by Cobden's Radical standards. Aberdeen was, however, unashamedly 'continental' in his outlook; European co-operation provided a stable framework for geopolitics.

This continental outlook received affirmation during his ambassadorship to Austria later in the Napoleonic wars. The overriding objective of his mission had been to re-establish communication with the armies of Britain's allies at a time when, despite Britain's vast naval importance, involvement in the land war was peripheral. A number of historiographical assumptions have distracted from analysis of Aberdeen's role, chief among which was that an ostensible inability to speak French – the *lingua franca* of nineteenth-century diplomatic intercourse – undermined his ambassadorship and demonstrated an enduring lack of commitment to his political assignments. Depending upon whom one listens to, Aberdeen could either 'not speak French', was 'barely able to speak French', exhibited an 'ignorance of French' or was 'not fully master of the French language'.¹⁶⁸ These conclusions appear to have become part of the historiographical consensus as a result of the contemporary remarks of a German in the Austrian service, whose comments were almost immediately rescinded.¹⁶⁹

Aberdeen's communicative endeavours in fact helped to bring Britain back to the negotiating table in European affairs and in doing so he learned that

¹⁶⁶ D. Fiddler and J. Welsh (ed.), *Empire and Community: Edmund Burke's Writing and Speeches on International Relations* (Oxford, 1999), p. 32.

¹⁶⁷ Richard Cobden to Joseph Sturge, 6 January 1853, A. Howe (ed.), *The Letters of Richard Cobden, ii: 1848-1853* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 459-460.

¹⁶⁸ C. Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Castlereagh 1812-1815: Britain and the Reconstruction of Europe* (London, 1931), p. 151; H. Kissinger, *A World Restored: The Politics of Conservatism in a Revolutionary Era: A detailed study of diplomacy and political manoeuvre 1812-22 with particular reference to Metternich and Castlereagh* (London, 3rd edition, 1973), p. 99; W. Hinde, *Castlereagh* (London, 1981), p. 195; H. Nicolson, *The Congress of Vienna: A Study in Allied Unity 1812-1822* (London, 1946), p. 58.

¹⁶⁹ See Chamberlain, 'Fourth Earl of Aberdeen', *ODNB*.

cooperation with rival powers could be just as productive as confrontation. This outlook would later see him lampooned by liberals as the ‘friend of Emperors’ or the ‘friend of autocracy’ with the implication that abstract ideology drove Aberdeen’s policy. The preparedness to engage with rivals of any political colour seemed rather to have stemmed from the belief that this method engendered the best chance of a peaceful solution, with peace representing Britain’s best interests.¹⁷⁰ Indeed, Aberdeen once compared successful negotiation to the ‘most glorious conquests in the field.’¹⁷¹ More confrontational politicians might argue exactly the same, but with the addendum that threats were a better way to secure peace.

The ambassadorship to Austria also saw Aberdeen become one of only two nineteenth-century Prime Ministers to witness the aftermath of battle (Wellington being the other) when he arrived at Leipzig to the sight of the dead and dying. This probably enhanced an inherently pacific streak that reinforced Aberdeen’s commitment to continental peace, although Webster seems to have been short of evidence for his rather bold claim that ‘the ride across the Leipzig battlefield, while the screams of the wounded lying amidst the masses of dead fell unheeded on the cavalcade, made an indelible impression on the sensitive nature of the young envoy and affected all his future life.’¹⁷²

Aberdeen certainly sought peace wherever possible but if British interests dictated that wars must be fought or should be threatened, pacific inclinations were placed to one side. During the Napoleonic wars Aberdeen wanted vigorous prosecution of the war in order to support his moves for an equitable peace.¹⁷³ This could be seen in the personal authorisation to provide Dutch resistance to French encroachment with twenty-five thousand pounds worth of arms in November 1813.¹⁷⁴ Aberdeen also showed himself prepared to threaten war during the Peel government when he felt that diplomacy needed a boost of momentum: war was to be avoided wherever possible, but remained a strategic

¹⁷⁰ Aberdeen, *The House of Lords, Hansard*, xix, 16 July 1828, col. 1729.

¹⁷¹ Aberdeen, *The House of Lords, Hansard*, 2nd series, xviii, 12 February 1811, col. 1152.

¹⁷² Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Castlereagh*, p. 168.

¹⁷³ See also Gordon, *Aberdeen*, pp. 46-7.

¹⁷⁴ Chamberlain, *Aberdeen*, p. 156.

option as the last resort in a breakdown of diplomacy, and it needed to be prosecuted with commitment when undertaken.

The continental outlook with which Aberdeen emerged from his early life was reinforced by Viscount Castlereagh, Britain's Foreign Secretary from 1812 to 1822, and Aberdeen's friend and superior at the Foreign Office in the Napoleonic Years. John Derry wrote of Castlereagh that he 'was convinced [...] that Britain was inevitably involved in European questions and that it was better for her to play her part in preventing war than in desperately searching for an ally once war had broken out.'¹⁷⁵ Although historians have questioned Aberdeen's respect for Castlereagh – Henry Kissinger described Aberdeen as exhibiting 'condescension' towards the Foreign Secretary and Wendy Hinde has concurred with this viewpoint – Chamberlain's more extensive research resulted in a different conclusion: 'some historians have been scandalised by his tendency to discuss matters on equal terms with Castlereagh and even at times to lecture his chief, but these were in fact the terms which they were on.'¹⁷⁶ The esteem in which Aberdeen held Castlereagh was made clear in his correspondence and he wrote after the latter's death that '[Castlereagh's] coolness and self-possession were most remarkable.'¹⁷⁷

Aberdeen and Castlereagh did not, however, emerge from the Napoleonic wars as conservatives in the mould of those of continental Europe. The Congress system that developed after the Vienna Settlement prompted the Northern Courts to view the resolution of all European problems, even domestic issues, as subject to the discussions of the Great Powers. Aberdeen and British conservatives in general regarded a nation's internal problems as their own responsibility unless these problems threatened to assume international significance and so threaten the balance of power as determined at Vienna. Limited change was acceptable but the unpredictability of upheaval was not, a view which could lead to sympathy with the autocrats' sentiments, if not their methods. In a rare explicit statement of his political outlook, after the meeting of the Emperors of Russia and Austria and the

¹⁷⁵ J. Derry, *Politics in the Age of Fox, Pitt and Liverpool: Continuity and Transformation* (London, 1990), p. 169.

¹⁷⁶ Kissinger, *A World Restored*, p. 100; Hinde, *Castlereagh*, p. 196; Chamberlain, *Aberdeen*, p. 118.

¹⁷⁷ See, for example, Aberdeen to Abercorn, 29 January and 6 March 1814, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43225/62 and 71; Aberdeen to Harriet Douglas, 17 August 1822 (copy), Aberdeen Papers, Haddo House (*Letters to His Second Wife*).

Crown Prince of Prussia in 1833, Aberdeen wrote to his continental confidante Princess Lieven regarding British and French involvement in Spain:

The meeting of the Emperors gave me more satisfaction than any publick [sic] event which has recently taken place, because it held out the prospect of arresting the progress of revolution in Europe; and by establishing a perfectly good understanding between the two Princes, gave each of them additional means of preserving the general peace and safety. It is on the cordial and intimate union of the Northern Powers that the chance is afforded of preserving the tranquillity and happiness of Europe against the disorganizing and revolutionary policy of the present Governments of England and France.¹⁷⁸

Aberdeen did not want British interests to suffer at the expense of France (intriguing in Spain at that time) or, for that matter, Spain, but saw a different way of pursuing British ends than diving into Spanish affairs. Conservatives thought that the balance of power would be best kept in place by internalising Spanish unrest and the threat of revolution. Britain's Whig government, however, saw the conflict as an opportunity to back the Spanish liberals and spread British values in so doing, while the Northern Courts saw an opportunity to crush the forces of Spanish liberalism. Aberdeen regarded either course as dangerous to European stability – the umbrella under which wider British interests were assumed to shelter – and inherently counterproductive in the sense that the Spanish people would be unlikely to accept any governmental changes that were the result of foreign interference.

Although Aberdeen expressed satisfaction at the Northern Courts' hostility to revolution, he did not think that external forces should interfere in Spain's domestic concerns in order to remove the cause of discontent at its source: great powers could do more harm than good by interference, and had no right to intervene. He wanted to 'arrest the progress of revolution' on the international scene because it was a dangerous and ill-conceived *method* of bringing about change, which was different from many continental conservatives' desires to put a

¹⁷⁸ Aberdeen to Princess Lieven, 8 November 1833, Gordon (ed.), *Selections from the Correspondence of the Earl of Aberdeen*, iii, p. 6.

halt to progress *itself*. This viewpoint seemed further to demonstrate the intellectual legacy of Castlereagh, who articulated the concept in his State Paper of 5 May 1820, in relation to an earlier incident in Spain. Russia, Austria and Prussia had formed a 'Holy Alliance' in the wake of Napoleon's defeat, which developed into a force for the suppression of not just revolution, but also democracy and secularism. Castlereagh outlined the reluctance to join the Holy Alliance in its conception of the Great Powers as a European quasi-police force:

Would it be wise to give advice, wholly unasked, which, is very little likely to contain any suggestion for the salutary modification of the Constitution of 1812 other than such as will readily occur to those publick Men within the Country who have good intentions, and whose influence and means of effectuating an amelioration of the Constitution are likely to be weakened rather than strengthened by an interference from abroad? [...] It is not meant that in particular and definite Cases, the Alliance may not (and especially when invited to do so by the Parties interested) advantageously interpose, with due Caution, in matters lying beyond the Boundaries of their immediate and particular Connection; but what is intended to be combated as forming any part of their Duty as Allies, is the Notion, but too perceptibly prevalent, that whenever any great Political Event shall occur, as in Spain, pregnant perhaps with future Danger, it is to be regarded almost as a matter of course, that it belongs to the Allies to charge themselves collectively with the Responsibility of exercising some Jurisdiction concerning such possible eventual Danger.¹⁷⁹

If conservatives like Castlereagh and Aberdeen were suspicious of the 'Alliance' aspect of the Northern powers' union, equal suspicion was reserved for its 'Holy' commitments. The Holy Alliance still believed its monarchs to be divinely ordained, and it pursued antidemocratic policies in accordance with this tenet. Aberdeen's religiosity – private, introspective and tending to Low Church doctrine – did not lend itself to the proselytising mentality of European conservatives.

¹⁷⁹ There are several sources that cite Castlereagh's State Paper. See, for example, H. Temperley and L. Penson (eds.), *Foundations of British Foreign Policy from Pitt (1792) to Salisbury (1902): Documents, Old and New/ Selected and Edited, with Historical Introductions* (Cambridge, 1938), pp. 48-63.

In the public sphere Aberdeen was a rational and pragmatic man who regretted his lack of a 'lively faith', despite some historians' assertions that religion was significant in Aberdeen's political outlook.¹⁸⁰ Whilst religious inclinations would never lead to the kind of pious politics associated with those such as Gladstone, however, one might make a connection between Aberdeen's Presbyterianism and his international outlook: intellectual investment in the rigid institutional organisation of the Presbyterian Church may have reinforced the notion that large, unifying power structures were a means by which to pursue one's objectives. The balance of power as set out at Vienna was one such structure to which this observation seems to apply.

The only circumstance in which Aberdeen's religious persuasions made any definite and significant impact on his policy was in dealings with the Islamic Ottomans and in the formation of policy towards the East. He once reflected on the performance of the young actor William Beatty by declaring him 'the greatest impostor since the days of Mohammed'.¹⁸¹ Aberdeen saw confirmation of his religious contempt for Islam in his practical experience and, while Foreign Secretary under Wellington, Aberdeen declared of the Ottoman Empire: 'I have seen and know the effect of the barbarous rule existing there and nobody can be more alive to the horrors with which it abounds.'¹⁸²

In such views Aberdeen was very much a man of his times. Early nineteenth-century opinions of the East fused religious and social prejudices and crossed party lines, as was indicated by Palmerston's observation in 1829:

I should not be sorry some day or other to see the Turk kicked out of Europe, & compelled to go and sit cross-legged, smoke his pipe, chew his opium, & cut off heads on the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus; we want civilisation, activity, trade, & business in Europe, & your Mustaphas have no idea of any traffic beyond rhubarb, figs & red slippers; what energy can be expected from a

¹⁸⁰ Chamberlain, 'Fourth Earl of Aberdeen', *ODNB*; W. Devereux Jones, *Lord Aberdeen and the Americas* (Georgia, 1958).

¹⁸¹ Aberdeen to Augustus Foster, 24 September 1805, V. Foster (ed.), *The Two Duchesses: Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire and Elizabeth Duchess of Devonshire* (London, 1898), p. 241.

¹⁸² Aberdeen, *The House of Lords*, Hansard, xxii, 11 February 1830, col. 415.

nation who have no heels to their shoes and pass their whole lives slip shod?¹⁸³

What differentiated Aberdeen and Palmerston in relation to the Islamic Ottomans was the way in which they chose to act on their views, as was made clear in the 1840s.¹⁸⁴

Despite Britain's lack of affinity with the ideology and religious zeal of continental conservatism, Aberdeen was nonetheless prepared to work with the Northern powers if it suited British interests. His approaches to Austria during the Napoleonic ambassadorship provided a clear example of this, although historians have suggested other reasons for Aberdeen's willingness to deal with the Austrian leader, Prince Klemens Wenzel von Metternich. The main historiographical case is that Aberdeen's eagerness to strike up a relationship left him susceptible to the flattery of a wily politician, which echoed historians' assertions about his relationship with Guizot in the 1840s. Aberdeen was thought 'gullible' and 'vulnerable to the arts of flattery which the Austrian Chancellor could use with such lethal effect.'¹⁸⁵

Aberdeen's approaches to Metternich, however, derived from the logical recognition that Austria was the most realistic power through which Britain could regain an influence in the mainland diplomacy of the Napoleonic wars: Britain had hitherto been on the periphery of negotiations between the powers fighting Bonaparte. Whilst Metternich needed to be treated with caution, Russia and Prussia seemed far less reliable. They both had disincentives to conclude peace swiftly: protracting the conflict could offer Prussia territorial gains at French expense; Russia could pursue influence in Europe as it marched westward towards France. Tsar Alexander also dreamed of a triumphal scenario in Paris where he would be fêted as the deliverer of Europe. Metternich was suspicious of Russian

¹⁸³ Palmerston to Edward Littleton, 16 September 1829, K. Bourne (ed.), *The Letters of the Third Viscount Palmerston to Laurence and Elizabeth Sullivan, 1804-1863* (London, 1979), p. 304.

¹⁸⁴ See chapter 5.

¹⁸⁵ Kissinger, *A World Restored*, p. 96; Hinde, *Castlereagh*, p. 194. Webster argued that 'so great was Aberdeen's trust in Metternich that he presumed to lecture Castlereagh on his insular suspicions'; Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Castlereagh*, pp. 173-4. Nicolson argued that Aberdeen 'fell an immediate victim to [Metternich's] abundant charm'; Nicolson, *The Congress of Vienna*, p. 58.

intentions and potential aggrandisement, whilst Prussian advances would provide immediate danger on his doorstep. Austria, furthermore, always felt an overriding wariness about encouraging nationalism, given that the Habsburg Empire was built on enforced multinationalism and cosmopolitanism. Metternich often found British demands irritating and he was no Anglophile, but with more reason to work with Britain than Prussia or Russia, during the Napoleonic era Britain was the least of three evils for Austria, and *vice versa*.

Aberdeen's views on working with Austria were shaped by a rational interpretation of national interests and he was developing a conceptualisation of European politics based on cooperation and transparency that would carry through into later years. Historians have suggested that this philosophy bred a weakness at the negotiating table, where British interests were deemed to suffer in the name of blinkered Europhilia, although John Bew has noted that Aberdeen had 'some success in laying the groundwork for a more constructive relationship between Castlereagh and Metternich.'¹⁸⁶ There remain, however, those with such a low opinion of Aberdeen's diplomacy that even these advances were attributed to luck.¹⁸⁷

Aberdeen's willingness to work with Russia has also aroused the suspicion of historians, not least with regard to his later career when perceived Russophilia was seen to contribute to Britain's muddled Crimean policy. Whilst Aberdeen needed to be extremely cautious with Alexander's Russia in the Napoleonic wars – few tsars have demonstrated a more potent mix of ambition and unpredictability – there were intelligible reasons for working with the Russia of Alexander's younger brother, Nicholas I.¹⁸⁸ Nicholas was a staunch supporter of established regimes and whilst this could result in the brutal suppression of revolutions such as that in Poland in 1830, it provided a change from Alexander, who could switch from reactionary militarism to ardent liberalism in an instant. Miroslav Šedivý has shown how Nicholas was prepared to pursue a policy of 'give and take' with Austria to this

¹⁸⁶ J. Bew, *Castlereagh: Enlightenment, War and Tyranny* (London, 2011), p. 322.

¹⁸⁷ P. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics 1763-1848* (Oxford, 1994), p. 475.

¹⁸⁸ For background to the rule of Alexander I see, for example, J. Westwood, *Endurance and Endeavour: Russian History 1812-2001* (Oxford, 5th edition, 2002), pp. 1-31.

end (although naturally preferring to take). He also took such a line with Britain, which will be explored in Chapter Five.¹⁸⁹

Aberdeen summarised his views of Nicholas and Russia, in the wake of his Crimean leadership, with reference to the Ottoman Empire, which Britain sought to protect, but many perceived Russia to have tried to conquer and dismantle with its Crimean policy. Some in Britain were calling for total victory over Russia and a reorganisation of the balance of power in the East, but Aberdeen thought this would undermine the principle of stability that Britain was fighting the Crimean war to protect:

I have never been an admirer of the Russian government, or its policy; and although the Emperor Nicholas was personally very gracious to me of late years, I believe that he thought me an enemy at heart; as indeed from former experience he had some right to do. At the same time, should our press prove triumphant, and Russia, according to their own phrase, be “finally crushed”, I think it would be the greatest possible misfortune for Europe; for I believe that England and France, closely united, would then commit more injustice in one year than might be expected from Russia in twenty.¹⁹⁰

Aberdeen was prepared to work with Russia, as Austria, because doing so was a vehicle by which to pursue British interests, not because of an abstract and unthinking belief in the ideology of reaction (many liberals also advocated cooperation with Russia). Such an analysis lay at the root of Anglo-Russian intercourse over the Ottoman Empire in 1844. The Ottoman Empire stabilised a region in which its dissolution would create a competing mass of nationalist sentiments and Great Power ambition, and Russia wanted Ottoman power maintained, albeit it weak and subservient, to avoid such a vacuum of power. Britain also sought the protection of Ottoman territorial integrity: important trade routes to India passed through Turkey. Aberdeen suggested that following the popular calls to bring down the Russian regime would destroy the balance of power

¹⁸⁹ M. Šedivý, ‘From Hostility to Cooperation? Austria, Russia and the Danubian Principalities 1829-40’, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, lxxxix, 2011, pp. 630-661.

¹⁹⁰ Aberdeen to Sidney Herbert, 18 November 1855, Gordon (ed.), *Selections from the Correspondence of the Earl of Aberdeen*, xii, p. 125.

as set out at Vienna, engendering an ugly scramble for European ascendancy, particularly given the presence of what was perceived as irrational nationalism in contemporary British and French politics.

Aberdeen's fear about the 'crushing' of Russia underlines his view of that country as an essential player in the maintenance of the European balance of power. As with his approach to Metternich, a willingness to work with Nicholas did not presuppose anything other than a pragmatic assessment of the best way to pursue British interests. He maintained a vigilance and wariness of the Russian leadership throughout and after his time in office that belied accusations of Russophilia, noting after Alexander II's accession that 'The Emperor has contrived to make it generally believed that he is pacifically disposed. This may be the case, and I do not wish to express any positive distrust, but I only say that this man is unfathomable, and that no one knows his real views and intentions. He confides in none.'¹⁹¹

Aberdeen also showed a willingness to work with France throughout his career that, both intrinsically and as a policy traditionally associated with liberalism, belies the connection of Aberdonian policy with unthinking reaction. He was nonetheless as far from an unquestioning Francophile as he was a blinkered Russophile. Aberdeen viewed the French Revolution as symptomatic of Gallic flaws, finding it 'incredible that the national vanity of the Frenchman should have been so far overcome' as to countenance such idealistically motivated violence.¹⁹² He had previously noted that there was 'a kind of national vanity so peculiar to a Frenchman' and remarked that 'we must take care to distinguish properly, between national vanity, and national pride; the one springs from a kind of selfishness in the individual, and is consequently despicable, the other has nothing of self in it, but is a pure patriotic feeling and in consequence highly creditable.'¹⁹³

These views of the French ensured that whilst Aberdeen was working with France during his career, an underlying watchfulness insured the policy of openness with which Aberdeen pursued British interests. This could be seen in Wellington's

¹⁹¹ Aberdeen to William Gladstone, 16 January 1856, *Ibid*, p. 150.

¹⁹² The Aberdeen Journal of 1806, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43336/44.

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, Add. MS 43335/23-4.

government when French occupation of Algiers elicited a casual public response from Aberdeen, but encouraged the Foreign Secretary to initiate close surveillance, given that the French ‘could not fail to exercise great influence over the commerce and the maritime interests of the Mediterranean powers’ if their perceived vanity engendered expansion in the Barbary states.¹⁹⁴ The 1850s saw Aberdeen lock horns with Louis Napoleon, and ongoing suspicion of France seemed to manifest itself in a hesitancy to cooperate over the Eastern crisis. Matters were not helped by Aberdeen’s personal dislike of the new Bonaparte emperor, whom he regarded as a dangerous militaristic usurper.

Aberdeen was prepared to work with all the Great Powers on essentially the same terms regardless of their ideological underpinnings. His foreign politics were nevertheless unmistakably conservative in that only minor changes to the balance of power were considered. Geoffrey Hicks described the politics of the Derby family in a way that also captures the broad nature of Aberdonian Conservatism:

The foreign policy [...] was neither Palmerstonian, Disraelian, nor that of the radical ‘Troublemakers’ examined by A. J. P. Taylor [...] Put very simply, it regarded interventionism with distaste, favoured working with the other powers whatever their systems of government, opted for negotiation over confrontation on almost all occasions and presumed only minimal alteration of the status quo was necessary. It constituted an important phase in a longer tradition of Conservative foreign policy.¹⁹⁵

Aberdeen’s place in this longer tradition of Conservative foreign policy can be identified partly in terms of what his conservatism was not. Liberal governments of the era came to be associated with swashbuckling foreign politics and the tendency to accumulate debt with expensive domestic initiatives. Anthony Seldon has suggested that Conservative governments are often elected on the basis of

¹⁹⁴ See J. Swain, ‘The Occupation of Algiers in 1830: A Study in Anglo-French Diplomacy’, *Political Science Quarterly*, xlviii, 1933, pp. 359-366.

¹⁹⁵ G. Hicks (ed.), *Conservatism and British Foreign Policy, 1820-1920: The Derbys and their World* (London, 2011), pp. 13-14.

being 'safer' than whatever else might be on offer.¹⁹⁶ This certainly seemed to apply to Peel's government of the 1840s and, thus, to Aberdeen. He was indeed to become a 'safe' Conservative – in the sense of being non-interventionist and prudent – but one with a pragmatic approach to the political world, adaptable to the circumstances in which he found himself. In 1841-6 Whig profligacy necessitated a more conservative approach to life at the Foreign Office – the Whigs had built up the national debt to almost a billion pounds – whilst in the 1850s, like Peel, he called himself a Liberal Conservative, on the grounds of being the Prime Minister of a government that was installed with a mandate for extensive domestic reform. William Brock in his seminal work on Lord Liverpool wrote that the subject of his study 'attempted to consider each question on its merits, and the result was that he was neither "liberal" nor "ultra", but remained in an intermediary position.'¹⁹⁷ This flexibility would also come to define Aberdeen's politics: he could be liberal almost to the point of Radicalism in domestic politics whilst his core conservatism usually prevailed abroad.

The middle ground that Brock identified between being liberal or Ultra can be described as the 'middle way' of Conservatism. Blake portrayed Liverpool as representing a 'middle of the road' Conservatism, whilst John Charmley has traced its existence through Peel and beyond.¹⁹⁸ Aberdeen's politics in the Peel government and later can be identified with the precepts of this moderate variety of Conservatism. Aberdeen's was not the Toryism of the eighteenth-century and before in which the Crown, the established Church and the constitution were unalterably sacrosanct and mild modifications to law were considered tantamount to treason.¹⁹⁹ This older brand of Toryism persisted in some circles and was personified, argue his biographers, in the form of John Wilson Croker, a friend of Aberdeen's, whose articles in the *Quarterly Review* and elsewhere captured the

¹⁹⁶ See A. Seldon (ed.), *How Tory Governments Fall: The Tory Party in Power since 1783* (London, 1996).

¹⁹⁷ W. Brock, *Lord Liverpool and Liberal Toryism 1820 to 1827* (Cambridge, 2nd edition, 1967), p. 34.

¹⁹⁸ R. Blake, *The Conservative Party from Peel to Major* (London, 1997), p. 7; J. Charmley, *A History of Conservative Politics since 1830* (London, 2nd edition, 2008), pp. 1-15.

¹⁹⁹ For the history of early Toryism see K. Feiling, *The History of the Tory Party 1640-1714* (Oxford, 1924) and *The Second Tory Party, 1714-1832* (London, 1938).

Ultras' concerns.²⁰⁰ One of Croker's biographers suggested that his interpretation of the term 'conservative' was 'an all-or-nothing solidarity characterized by a system under siege', whilst another noted that he thought any change to the electoral system would bring a collapse of the propertied social order on which Britain's prosperity was deemed to rest.²⁰¹

Aberdeen generally steered clear of this type of Conservatism in favour of the 'middle way'. This outlook maintained the support of tradition and English exceptionalism inherent in Toryism but without the inflexibility of old Tory loyalties. John Ramsden has identified the existence of the 'middle way' in the decades before Burke's *Reflections* was published, but Burke's work remains the seminal articulation of this school of thought.²⁰² Aberdeen's views were unmistakably conservative but should not be placed too far to the political right. Burke wrote in his *Reflections* that 'a State without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation' and this is a sentiment that one can apply to Aberdonian policy.²⁰³ Aberdeen would at various points in his career support Catholic Emancipation and voting reform at home: the state was regarded as an organic entity that must evolve in order to survive and thrive.²⁰⁴ As head of a Conservative government, Peel's willingness to embark on a programme of wide-reaching reforms suggested that he shared this conceptualisation of the state, which made for a productive working relationship between Aberdeen and the Prime Minister in the 1840s.

The same views applied to Aberdeen's construction of foreign policy. The Vienna settlement was regarded as a safeguard of the balance of power; a glue to hold Europe together in a period when nationalism and liberal movements

²⁰⁰ See M. Brightfield, *John Wilson Croker* (California, 1940); W. Thomas, *The Quarrel of Macaulay and Croker: Politics and History in the Age of Reform* (Oxford, 2000); R. Portsmouth, *John Wilson Croker: Irish Ideas and the Invention of Modern Conservatism 1800-1835* (Dublin, 2010).

²⁰¹ Thomas, *The Quarrel of Macaulay and Croker*, p. 55; Portsmouth, *John Wilson Croker*, p. 246.

²⁰² J. Ramsden, *An Appetite for Power: A History of the Conservative Party since 1830* (London, 1998), p. 23; Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Burke himself had formulated similar ideas before *Reflections* but they did not appear in such a clear style: see A. Goodrich, *Debating England's Aristocracy in the 1790s: Pamphlets and Political Ideas* (Woodbridge, 2005), pp. 29-55.

²⁰³ Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 106.

²⁰⁴ It is possible that Aberdeen inherited his stance on Catholic Emancipation from Pitt, whose strong feelings on the issue were thought to have caused his resignation in 1801. See C. Fedorak, 'Catholic Emancipation and the Resignation of William Pitt in 1801', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal concerned with British Studies*, xxiv, 1992, pp. 49-64.

threatened unpredictable consequences, but minor changes were not excluded if they were seen to suit Britain and Europe. Aberdeen was one of the first politicians to advocate recognition of the July Revolution of 1830 in France, in which Charles X and the Bourbons were overthrown in favour of Louis Philippe and the Orleans line. It was not change that worried Aberdeen, but its extent. The first French Revolution evoked fear because its goal was the total overhaul of global politics, insofar as there was a shared and consistent objective. The 1830 revolution, on the other hand, sought to replace one monarchical House with the second in the state and could therefore be interpreted as a relatively 'safe' revolution which, by pacifying the French populace, arguably stood a greater chance of maintaining continental stability.

Whilst recognition of the 1830 Revolution did represent a departure from Aberdeen's traditional insistence on adherence to the Vienna settlement, consciousness of his conservative, Pittite inheritance stayed with Aberdeen throughout his career and helped to inform overall policy construction. Writing to James Graham in 1852, when he and many of Aberdeen's former Peelite colleagues had shifted their political allegiance closer to liberalism, Aberdeen wrote to protest at the possibility of a Radical-leaning government led by John Russell:

I am not desirous [...] of seeing him at the head of a Whig-Radical Government. I hope I am not deficient in liberal views whether at home or abroad, but I cannot altogether renounce my Conservative character [...] I am thoroughly convinced of the necessity of a Government of progress, and am prepared to advance more rapidly than probably was ever contemplated by Peel himself. But this progress must be Conservative in principle [...] I was bred at the feet of Gamaliel, and must always regard Mr. Pitt as the first of statesmen.²⁰⁵

Despite looking to lead a reforming ministry containing several liberal politicians, Aberdeen still could not break away from the conservatism to which he was attached, and which his hero Pitt exuded.

²⁰⁵ Aberdeen to Graham, 27 September 1852, C. Parker (ed.), *The Life and Letters of Sir James Graham 1792-1861*, ii (London, 1907), p. 179.

Aberdeen came into the 1840s with, and in that decade retained, a pragmatic political approach. It helped to deliver a pacific foreign policy, designed in part to contribute to the inexpensive government that Conservative objectives required, and conservative taxpayers in Britain preferred. This produced a largely reactive policy, although not one entirely lacking in independent initiatives. Although maintaining a flexible outlook and steering clear of decisions made on the grounds of abstract ideology, Aberdeen nonetheless saw the world through the prism of his own experiences and assumptions. His *mentalité* included an open and cooperative approach to Europe that led him to utilise his contacts such as Guizot, Metternich and the Lievens. In this we might detect the influence of Pitt and Castlereagh, although Aberdeen never inherited the latter's taste for congresses, preferring bilateral diplomacy as a means of circumventing national suspicions and rivalry.

These elements in his *mentalité*, together with a suspicion of interventionism, a tight (but not rigid) adherence to the balance of power, and a willingness to work with powers of all political colours, suited Aberdeen to his role in Peel's government, and provided a level of continuity with the Derbyite Conservatism to follow. This approach to foreign policy remained a point of connection between most Conservatives in the mid-nineteenth century, despite the divisive domestic issue of protectionism. Indeed, relative harmony on the topic of foreign policy was often utilised as a cause around which to rally and attempt to reunite the party after the abolition of the Corn Laws caused it to split.²⁰⁶

The problem this brand of Conservatism created for Aberdeen was the same as most other Conservatives before Benjamin Disraeli's campaigns of the 1870s: a lack of populism. This difficulty derived for the most part from the majority of Conservatives' view that engaging with public opinion, or trying to win the favour of the world beyond Westminster, was somewhat debasing and improper. There were notable pre-Disraelian exceptions, not least George Canning, but most Conservatives 'affected to despise public opinion', and many, including Aberdeen,

²⁰⁶ See A. Brettle, 'The Enduring Importance of Foreign Policy Dominance in Mid-Nineteenth Century Politics', in W. Mulligan and B. Simms, *The Primacy of Foreign Policy in British History, 1660-2000: How Strategic Concerns Shaped Modern Britain* (London, 2010), p. 161.

genuinely did.²⁰⁷ It was seen to represent the crude and ill-informed voice of people who felt primal patriotic impulses but could not appreciate the intricacies or, often, the basics of policy. Thomas MacKnight echoed such views when he explored the rationale behind Aberdeen's position: 'To be popular with the politicians of taverns and vestries has never been the ambition of this statesman. He has disdained to flatter the national pride; he has never ministered to the vanity at the expense of the interests of Englishmen [...] He has the proud consciousness of [...] never having stooped to buy popularity at the price of his self-respect.'²⁰⁸

Evidence of Aberdeen's distaste for public opinion is not hard to find: writing in 1853 with the Crimean War looming, Aberdeen remarked of the danger that support from the Russophobe public might heap on British policy by pushing it towards war: 'In a case of this kind I dread popular support. On some occasion, when the Athenian assembly vehemently applauded Alcibiades, he asked if he had said anything particularly foolish!'²⁰⁹ Aberdeen's position was that chasing public favour could be a dangerous game. Failure to engage with it at all, however, created its own problems, especially in the eyes of posterity.

Palmerston once told Aberdeen that 'there are sometimes occasions in public affairs when the opinions and wishes of the great bulk of the nation are strongly directed to some particular object, and on such occasions it may be wise and even necessary for men in public life to surrender their own opinions as contrary to the public wish, and to yield in some degree at least to a current which they are unable to stem.'²¹⁰ It is unlikely Aberdeen would ever have heeded this advice, and it was an approach that would cause Palmerston problems in his career, but Aberdeen's failure at least to make the public familiar with his position or to explain his actions allowed others to garner support for their policies at his expense. A. P. Donajgrodzki has pointed out that failure to engage with conservative support beyond Westminster was a common problem for members of

²⁰⁷ Canning was Foreign Secretary twice (1807-1809 and 1822-1827) and briefly Prime Minister (April-August 1827); Brock, *Lord Liverpool and Liverpool Toryism*, p. 44.

²⁰⁸ T. MacKnight, *Thirty Years of Foreign Policy: A History of the Secretaryships of the Earl of Aberdeen and Viscount Palmerston* (London, 1855), p. 359.

²⁰⁹ Aberdeen to Palmerston, 4 July 1853, Broadlands Papers, University of Southampton Library (hereafter USL), GC/AB/293.

²¹⁰ Palmerston to Aberdeen, 10 December 1853, Broadlands Papers, USL, GC/AB/321.

Peel's government.²¹¹ Engagement with the public was something that Aberdeen's hero Pitt was able to use to establish a mandate for his policies, but it was one Pittite trait that Aberdeen would not emulate.

Liberal means might also be used in foreign policy, but to conservative ends: Aberdeen was prepared to recognise revolution in France in 1830 in the name of stability, and he based his foreign policy in the 1840s around France – which was traditionally a Whig focus – in order to control its ambition and to protect the Vienna settlement. In the 1850s, however, he resisted the clamour for a war by which British liberals wished to teach Russia a lesson as much as to preserve the Ottoman Empire. Aberdeen's willingness to work with different powers, depending on how British interests were deemed to be best served, demonstrated an enduring pragmatism and 'continental' outlook, which was directed towards peace and its concomitant benefit, the preservation and expansion of British mercantile dominance. In this approach we can detect the influences of Castlereagh and Pitt and an inbuilt humanitarian desire for peace – but not an unqualified pacifism – that derived partly from his early experiences of war in Napoleonic Europe. It was with this mindset that, in 1841, Aberdeen returned for his second tenure at the Foreign Office.

Aberdeen in the Peel Administration

The conciliatory policy of openness and transparency Aberdeen adopted in this period, and his readiness to make concessions in the name of peace, are seen by many as weak methods when compared to the perceived strength and masculinity of Palmerstonian conduct. Given that Britain led the world in naval capability, and financed its power with trade across its vast Empire and beyond, Conservative policy might indeed appear to have been anachronistic and retrogressive. But Conservative policy should not be considered on these Palmerstonian terms, for they create an artificial framework for debate. The objectives of Peel's government and the role of foreign policy in achieving them

²¹¹ Donajgrodzki, 'Sir James Graham at the Home Office', p. 98; Turner, *Pitt the Younger*, pp. 282-3.

predetermined an approach to policy that was deliberately different from that of Palmerston.

Foreign affairs were conducted with the security of domestic objectives firmly in mind: Peel's primary concern was to deal with widespread social deprivation. In 1841, wages were at their lowest level since 1815 and one in sixteen people received poor relief, whilst levels of unemployment and poor working conditions needed addressing.²¹² This would cost money, of course, which was in short supply. Peel inherited a massive excess of expenditure over revenue owing both to a recession and the spending habits of the previous government, the profligacy of which was indicated by the ailing condition of many of its members' personal estates. Britain would still be 787 million pounds in debt in 1845, whilst expensive wars in China and Afghanistan added to the blend of fiscal and social pressure.²¹³ In the early stages of the Peel government, Aberdeen wrote of these considerations, noting that frugality was unlikely to win the Conservatives many friends:

The difficulties of the Government will arise from domestick [sic] causes. The enormous deficiency, equal to the whole revenue of many states, must be filled up. This is the only pledge that Peel has given – he is bound, by some means or other, to equalize the revenue and the expenditure. Any attempt to do this, and to abandon the disgraceful practice of the last four or five years, will be attached with the utmost difficulty, and will at once unite all the Whigs against us.²¹⁴

Palmerston's international legacy created further problems for Peel's priority of making England 'a cheap country for living'.²¹⁵ Although Palmerston prevented France from seizing the initiative and dictating affairs in the Eastern Crisis of 1839-41, the tactless language used towards a nation that had until

²¹² See Adelman, *Peel and the Conservative Party*, p. 26.

²¹³ Peel to the Duke of Wellington, 9 August 1845; C. Parker, *Sir Robert Peel*, iii (London, 1899), p. 209.

²¹⁴ Aberdeen to Princess Lieven, 21 December 1841, E. Jones Parry (ed.), *The Correspondence of Lord Aberdeen and Princess Lieven 1832-54*, i (London, 1938), p. 190.

²¹⁵ Exact date of quote not given but noted as 'summer 1842' in Adelman, *Peel and the Conservative Party*, p. 35.

recently been an ally caused Anglo-French relations to disintegrate.²¹⁶ Several points of difference with the United States were also left unresolved and, although his remark had been taken out of context, the Americans thought Palmerston had called their flag a 'piece of bunting' in negotiations over the slave trade.²¹⁷ French and American antipathy raised the prospect of another coalition against Britain at a time when it could ill-afford a major war, let alone one against two enemies.

All of this meant that for strategic, but especially for economic reasons, foreign policy was, and had to be, the typical Conservative policy discussed above. In short, this was a policy that focused upon consolidation and the protection of power. Any risk of war with France and/or the United States could not be afforded with operational capacity reduced by wars in the East, and given the necessity for capital to be freed for social regeneration and to reduce the national debt. Peel had long since thought that the best way to deal with the 'natural jealousies and antipathies between England and France' was to initiate a 'cordial and good understanding' across the English Channel and this became more important than ever upon assuming office.²¹⁸ It was a tactic deployed in diplomatic intercourse with other countries, because international entanglements might derail the whole purpose of Conservative government. Foreign affairs were to be kept peaceful to prevent this from happening.

The avoidance of conflict would allow the Conservatives to pursue another means of restoring Britain's financial health: the generation of wealth by the creation of new markets and the development of existing ones. The importance of trade and commerce can be seen in the conduct of foreign policy throughout the Peel government. Aberdeen's pacific response to France's annexation of Tahiti was dependent on French assurances of uninterrupted mercantile intercourse, whilst the economic benefits that came with acquisition of the Sandwich Islands were seen to offset any temporary disruptions in Tahiti. The settlement of disputes with

²¹⁶ See, for example, M. Anderson, *The Eastern Question: A Study in International Relations 1774-1923* (London, 1966), pp. 88-109; A. Macfie, *The Eastern Question 1774-1923* (London, 2nd edition, 1996), pp. 20-26.

²¹⁷ See Chamberlain, *Lord Aberdeen*, p. 314.

²¹⁸ Peel to Aberdeen, 6 August 1840, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43061/244. Peel in the House of Commons, 26 January 1841, in W. Haly (ed.), *The Opinions of Sir Robert Peel, Expressed in Parliament and in Public* (London, 1843), p. 238.

America also enabled trade to flourish in the newly stabilised border regions, particularly in the Maine-New Brunswick area, where improvements in the timber trade showed the benefits of peace. The balance-book approach to foreign policy came naturally to Aberdeen who had already shown aptitude in restoring the Haddo Estate to financial health after it had been bequeathed to him by his grandfather, the third Earl, in a state of disrepair.

The pursuit of financial restraint resulted in an open and pacific policy that has been condemned by history for a perceived lack of backbone and a vulnerability to international manipulation, but this is a verdict conspicuous by its rarity in the political world of the 1840s. The diarist Charles Greville, a shrewd if not always disinterested observer, noted that Palmerston's professed derision 'all falls dead and flat, and nobody takes the slightest interest in his orations' as the result of a 'revival of Conservative influence' that Peel's government engendered.²¹⁹ There was vocal support for Conservative foreign policy: it abounded from *The Times* newspaper (although even *The Times* abandoned the government over the Tahiti crisis in 1844). The paper's editor John Delane was a close friend of Aberdeen, but this did not subvert editorial neutrality, for Delane was also a close friend of Palmerston.²²⁰ Conservative policy seemed to access a certain Victorian sensibility, a restraint that existed alongside Palmerstonism and Cobdenite Radicalism. To exploit such a sensibility was inherently difficult, however, because it was by its nature unexcitable. Failure to capture the public imagination, and failure to attempt to do so, created problems in Aberdeen's future political life and affected his historiographical reputation.

It is important to reconsider perceptions of Lord Aberdeen's personality, because they have also had an impact on the historiography: perceived personal traits of weakness, subservience and invertebracy are transposed on to

²¹⁹ C. Greville, *The Greville Memoirs*, ii: 1837-1852 (London, 1885), p. 292: 21 August 1845. Greville, *The Greville Memoirs: A Journal of the Reigns of King George IV, King William IV and Queen Victoria* (London, 1903), p. 21: 11 July 1841 (this quote predates Peel's government but corresponds with Greville's conclusions about how conservative influence increased with the success of the Conservative governmental policy).

²²⁰ See A. Dasent, *John Thaddeus Delane: Editor of 'The Times': His Life and Correspondence*, in 2 volumes (London, 1908). Indeed, Palmerston once asked Delane to be his Foreign Secretary: see T. Coates, *Delane's War: How front-line reports from the Crimean War brought down the British Government* (London, 2009), p. 242.

Conservative policy. This is perhaps inevitable when a policy becomes personally identified with an individual. There are, however, cases when particular incidents in politicians' lives have influenced their historical reputation, which in turn colours interpretations of their whole career. Winston Churchill's ambivalent political record was for a long time lost in the shadow of his success at war, for example, until studies such as that of John Charmley in the second half of the twentieth century.²²¹ Conversely, being made scapegoat for military failures in the Crimea has coloured a character portrait of Aberdeen by which judgments of failure and weakness have been applied further back in his career. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the work of Kingsley Martin, who deemed Aberdeen's supposed Crimean shortcomings as proof of a 'pathetic' political record.²²²

A few observations on Aberdeen's character must therefore be made before re-examining his foreign policy towards France 1841-6: orthodox views have affected and, perhaps, predetermined judgments on policy. A common charge levelled at Aberdeen is that of lacking political enthusiasm, which results in the view that British interests were not pursued as vigorously as they might have been, or that they were abandoned altogether. Norman Gash blamed 'an absence of zeal and ambition' for political impotence.²²³ The idea that Aberdeen saw out his tenure by sufferance and with a lack of political interest is not entirely without foundation. Numerous references can be made that appear to support the theory, such as this from Aberdeen's letter to Lord Beauvale upon taking Office: 'When you say that I am at last in the Foreign Office it would appear that I had long struggled to arrive here, but this I believe you may yourself know is very far from the case'.²²⁴ When he offered his resignation at the height of the defence debate later in his tenure, furthermore, Aberdeen bemoaned that 'office is irksome to me'.²²⁵

Properly contextualising these and other similar comments produces a different conclusion: Aberdeen was one of many who expressed a gentlemanly

²²¹ J. Charmley, *Churchill, The End of Glory: A Political Biography* (London, 1993). See also R. R. James, *Churchill: A Study in Failure* (London, 1970).

²²² K. Martin, *The Triumph of Lord Palmerston* (London, 1963), esp. p. 26.

²²³ N. Gash, *Sir Robert Peel: The Life of Sir Robert Peel after 1830* (London, 2nd edition, 1986), p. 496. For similar sentiment, see Hayes, *The Nineteenth Century*, p. 96.

²²⁴ Aberdeen to Beauvale, 5 October 1841 (copy), Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43238/24.

²²⁵ Aberdeen to Peel, 18 September 1845, Peel Papers, BL, Add. MS 40455/159.

reluctance at the rigours of government, and these were the typical refrains of gentlemen in public office. His Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, Henry Unwin Addington, requested that Aberdeen should ‘take me on trial’ for worry that the ‘labours of Office’ were too great.²²⁶ Peel, in letters to his wife Julia, wrote that ‘my confinement [in Westminster]’ is ‘still more *irksome*’ and that life in the Commons was ‘far too much [...] for any human strength’.²²⁷ Only three months into the Conservative government, Peel wrote that ‘I cannot tell you how lonely this is. I have sat down after dinner of late and written my letters till twelve, but I do not much like writing, and still less reading the detestable scrawls that are addressed to me.’²²⁸

Neither were such expressions mere requirements of polite discourse, because the pressures of foreign affairs also sent men to their graves. In an era when the workload of the Foreign Secretary was practically the entire workload generated for London by foreign affairs, the suicide of Viscount Castlereagh and early death of Canning were unlikely to have been coincidental. Expressions of reluctance upon taking office were not so much a sign of weakness as of legitimate awareness of its difficulties. Such iterations must also be considered as part of the nineteenth-century’s culture of politeness and humility, whereby gracious acceptance of honours and the employment of a respectfully submissive form of language in correspondence determined a reluctant and humble tone. Appearing overeager was considered to be unseemly.

Aberdeen’s complaints about workload were almost always clarified with a statement of his enthusiasm about the actual conduct of foreign policy: the workload was oppressive but he invested all his effort in it. When Aberdeen wrote to his continental confidante Princess Lieven upon taking office, he wrote of his ‘utmost reluctance’ at becoming Foreign Secretary, but insisted that ‘we have more to fear from a bad harvest than from all the thunders of most formidable

²²⁶ Addington to Aberdeen, 16 January 1842, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43238/319.

²²⁷ Peel to Julia Peel, Good Friday 1843, in George Peel (ed.), *The Private Letters of Sir Robert Peel* (London, 1920), p. 227 (italics not in original text). Peel to Julia Peel, 8 August 1843, in *ibid.* p. 240.

²²⁸ Peel to Julia Peel, 14 December 1841, *ibid.*, p. 80.

opposition'.²²⁹ Upon leaving office, relief at the release from its 'torments' was transcended by regret at leaving 'the management of great affairs, and the transaction of business with those whom I personally like and esteem'. Above all, Aberdeen regretted 'the interruption of that policy'.²³⁰ These were not the thoughts of an uninterested pacifist and his colleagues agreed with this analysis: one wrote that, when out of office, Aberdeen 'attaches primary importance to our Foreign Relations'.²³¹

Aberdeen's perceived lack of care for politics has contributed to versions of his life that see him as either arrogant and aloof, timid and cowering, or as a hybrid of these characteristics, which might be described as awkward pretension. These traits have also coloured perceptions of Aberdonian policy. Edward Jones Parry saw that an 'excessive confidence' led to 'a tendency to underestimate the difficulties of the European situation'.²³² Douglas Hurd argued that a 'genuine reluctance in office' evidenced that Aberdeen 'lacked the necessary harsh grasp of the reality of politics'.²³³ Muriel Chamberlain argued that challenges to his high-held views could result in 'unpleasantly sarcastic' retorts in the House of Lords, concluding that Aberdeen 'was often at his weakest in the confrontational atmosphere of foreign policy'.²³⁴ Depending on whose version of events one listens to, these traits were influenced by perceived Scottish dourness, by a life beset by personal tragedy, by a naïve and anachronistic religious-moral pacifism, or any combination of the three. The effects of these personality traits are much overstated.

Aberdeen did not demonstrate these traits in his relationship with Peel, with whom he shared a strong and focused political partnership. They had worked well together before when Aberdeen was Colonial Secretary during Peel's 'hundred days', yet it has been suggested that, between 1841 and 1846, his political naivety and incapability created extra work for Peel and that his supposedly staunch Toryism contrasted with Peel's more liberal inclinations, proving obstructive to

²²⁹ Aberdeen to Princess Lieven, 7 September 1841, Jones Parry (ed.), *The Correspondence of Lord Aberdeen and Princess Lieven*, i, pp. 177-8.

²³⁰ Aberdeen to Princess Lieven, 26 June 1846, *ibid* p. 258.

²³¹ Graham to Peel, 7 April 1850, The Peel Papers, BL, Add. MS 40452/438.

²³² Jones Parry, *The Spanish Marriages*, pp. 5-6.

²³³ D. Hurd, *Robert Peel* (London, 2007), p. 273.

²³⁴ Chamberlain, *Aberdeen*, p. 7; p. 532.

Peel's policy. The very nature and object of Peel's government suggested that this was not the case for Aberdeen. From a combination of preoccupation with domestic affairs and trust in his Foreign Secretary, Peel left the final foreign policy decisions to Aberdeen, offering his opinions only in the context of debate. There are numerous points at which Peel's deference to his Foreign Secretary's judgment is clear, none more so than in the Tahiti crisis where Aberdeen carried his policy despite standing almost alone in his approach. Towards the end of the Peel government, Charles Greville summarised this symbiotic and mutually respectful relationship as follows: '[Peel]'s forte is not in dealing with foreign affairs, with which it seems that it is dangerous for anybody to meddle who is not in the trade. The division of labour seems as essential in politics as in matters of commerce and industry.'²³⁵ That Peel rarely mentioned foreign affairs in his Cabinet reports to the Crown indicated the success of this arrangement – his attentions were focused elsewhere – and of Aberdeen's conduct within it.²³⁶

The staff at the Foreign Office provided the necessary support for the Foreign Secretary. Aberdeen selected both the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Charles Canning, Viscount Kilbrahan (1841-1845) and the Permanent Under-Secretary Henry Unwin Addington (1842-1854).²³⁷ Addington was a committed Party loyalist, whilst Canning had been elected as Conservative MP for Warwick in 1836 (he later became the governor-general of India in 1856). The role of the wider Foreign Office in the 1840s was largely administrative, and Addington and Canning's Conservative loyalties ensured that there would be no subversive mutterings from below.²³⁸ Donald Cameron Watt and Zara Steiner have shown how an expanded Foreign Office had, by the twentieth-century, resulted in the increasing influence of a greater network of individuals and institutions.²³⁹ During Aberdeen's second tenure as Foreign Secretary, however, foreign policy direction was very much his own, especially given the relationship with Peel.

²³⁵ Greville, *Memoirs* (1885), pp. 376-77: 18 March 1846.

²³⁶ A selection of these reports can be found in the microfilm *Cabinet Reports by Prime Ministers to the Crown, 1837-1867*, i, 1978 (viewed at UEA Library).

²³⁷ Addington replaced John Backhouse (1817-1842).

²³⁸ See R. Jones, *The Nineteenth-Century Foreign Office: An Administrative History* (London, 1971).

²³⁹ D. Watt, *Personalities and Policies: Studies in the Formulation of British Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1965); Z. Steiner, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy, 1898-1914* (London, 1969).

Aberdeen had not exercised the same freedom or influence in the Duke of Wellington's government by virtue of his deference and the Duke's domineering style, both largely the result of Wellington's enormous influence at that time. Wellington was part of the Peel government but Aberdeen no longer felt compelled to defer to his opinion. This was, of course, partly due to the fact that the Duke was no longer his Prime Minister; Wellington was from autumn 1842 Commander-in-Chief of the army after Lord Hill retired. That he had also initially been appointed to the Cabinet in September 1841 as a minister without portfolio demonstrated the regard in which he was still held. It has been argued that this regard was such that Aberdeen allowed the Duke to dictate policy, particularly in the argument over levels of defensive fortification 1844-5.²⁴⁰ This view must be challenged. In Peel's own words, despite respect for Wellington's opinions, the Duke 'refrains from meddling with matters with which he has no concern, and over which he has no control.'²⁴¹ When the Duke did intervene, as in the defence debate, it was the Aberdonian policy of moderate fortifications that prevailed over Wellington's desire for extended measures.

Freed from the dominance of Wellington, and considered separately from the stain of the Crimean War and the distorting lens of Palmerston's liberal John Bullism, Aberdeen's policy can be seen to have delivered Conservative governmental objectives and maintained Britain's international position. Although an age of austerity and initial international discord rendered concessions a necessary requirement for peace and improved relations, economic influence could be nurtured and honour could still be upheld. Friendly diplomacy, if used carefully and with a readiness to recourse to the latter option if the former failed, could be just as powerful as gunboat diplomacy. This would be clear in the principal areas of Aberdeen's stewardship: in relations with France, Russia, and the United States.

²⁴⁰ Read, *Peel and the Victorians*, p. 153.

²⁴¹ Peel, *The House of Commons, Hansard*, lxx, 4 July 1843, col. 614.

Chapter Three: Anglo-French Relations

The Conservatives' greatest foreign policy challenge was to keep relations with France quiescent, to which end the Anglo-French *entente* was created. The nature of this arrangement needs to be re-examined in the context of Conservative governmental objectives. Kenneth Bourne regarded the *entente* as a 'hopeless dream' because Aberdeen had failed to create the binding agreement achieved by Palmerston's Quadruple Alliance of 1834.²⁴² This had been directed against the Holy Alliance, however, with whom relations were now on a better footing and, besides, the fallout from the Eastern Crisis made any sort of official alliance with France all but impossible had Aberdeen wanted it, which he did not. Aberdeen privately declared that 'I have never been a lover of what was called the French Alliance, which always appeared to me to be an offensive display of exclusive connection' (his friendships with Metternich and the Tsar of Russia were likely to have reinforced this view).²⁴³ The result was a much looser yet equally binding arrangement that historians have interpreted as 'fragile' and a 'failure' for its perceived weakness.²⁴⁴ Some accounts of the period go further and suggest outright hostility between the two nations.²⁴⁵

Aberdeen's *entente* was not constructed with a common enemy in mind, as Palmerston's had been directed against the Holy Alliance and as that in the first decade of the twentieth-century would be formed to counter German expansionism. Aberdeen's *entente* was supposed to contain an escalating state of tension with an erstwhile ally, without being directed at a third party. This necessitated a more pragmatic approach with limited expectations because the threat of a third party could not be used to keep Britain and France together. The cordial understanding between Aberdeen and Guizot, therefore, involved mutual acceptance that, despite inevitable disagreements between their respective

²⁴² K. Bourne, *The Foreign Policy of Victorian England 1830-1902* (Oxford, 1970), p. 55.

²⁴³ Aberdeen to Princess Lieven, 7 September 1841, Jones Parry (ed.), *The Correspondence of Lord Aberdeen and Princess Lieven 1832-1854*, i (London, 1938) p. 177.

²⁴⁴ For examples of where the *entente* has been deemed 'fragile', see N. Gash, *Sir Robert Peel: The Life of Sir Robert Peel after 1830* (London, 2nd edition, 1986), p. 507; C. Bartlett, *Great Britain and Sea Power 1815-1853* (Oxford, 1963), p. 151. Jones Parry considered the *entente* a 'failure' in 'A Review of the Relations between Guizot and Lord Aberdeen, 1840-52', *History*, xxiii, 1938, p. 30.

²⁴⁵ C. Bastide, 'The Anglo-French Entente under Louis Philippe', *Economica*, xix, 1927, p. 93.

governments, or, indeed, between themselves, war must not result. The *entente* was designed to be pragmatic and realistic in reflection of Aberdeen's style, and was never intended as a rosy all-encompassing amalgamation of policy or outlook. It was a business-like arrangement and nothing more.

Aberdeen spoke of the *entente* in the House of Lords, February 1844: 'This good understanding was not founded upon any specific agreement or alliance, but upon a belief that the essential interests of the two countries are involved, and it depends upon a mutual trust in the honour and integrity of the two governments of England and France.'²⁴⁶ The point of foundation to which he referred was a grand meeting of the British and French Courts and leading politicians at the Chateau d'Eu near Normandy in September 1843. It was the first time a British monarch had set foot on French soil since Henry VIII at the Field of the Cloth of Gold in 1520. The return visit by Louis Philippe in 1844 would be the first time a French monarch set foot on British soil since Jean II was taken prisoner after the Battle of Poitiers in 1356.

Shortly after this visit the term '*entente cordiale*' entered usage. Queen Victoria spoke of the results of the meeting at the opening of Parliament the following year, referring to 'my friendly relations with the King of the French, and the good understanding happily established between my government and that of His Majesty.'²⁴⁷ This comment, being made in the public domain, omitted the underlying suspicion and wariness with which the British Court still viewed France after the meeting at Eu. When the Duc de Bordeaux visited England the following month, for example, Prince Albert captured the monarchy's views when, in private, he declared the *entente* 'a got-up thing for various political intrigues.'²⁴⁸

These suspicions were shared by Aberdeen, who only ever proclaimed the *entente* to be a beacon of cross-Channel brotherhood in the public domain, where the sentiment was intended for Gallic consumption. In private his desire for consensus with the French was expressed alongside wariness and backed up by

²⁴⁶ Aberdeen, House of Lords, Hansard, lxxii, 12 February 1844, col. 511.

²⁴⁷ Queen Victoria, House of Lords, Hansard, lxxii, 1 February 1844, cols. 1-2.

²⁴⁸ Prince Albert to Peel, 21 October 1843, A. Benson and Viscount Esher (eds.), *The Letters of Queen Victoria: A Selection from Her Majesty's Correspondence between the Years 1837 and 1867*, i (London, 1908). See also Queen Victoria to the King of the Belgians, 16 September and 13, 17 and 21 October 1843, *ibid*; Queen Victoria to Aberdeen, 9 October 1843, *ibid*.

contingency planning. Over Morocco, for example, Aberdeen sent warships to Gibraltar in case the faith he had publicly invested in France proved to be misguided. In Morocco, during the Oregon crisis with the United States, and elsewhere, he showed himself prepared to use force if British interests, especially trade and/or honour, appeared threatened.²⁴⁹

In fact, Aberdeen knew that an *entente* between the mutually suspicious and sometimes hostile governments of England and France was impracticable, so the 'mutual trust' of which he spoke in parliament referred to that between himself and François Pierre Guillaume Guizot, the French foreign minister between 1840 and 1848. The two scholars shared a long history of friendly political and social intercourse and each showered the other with praise at Eu. Aberdeen wrote of the visit being most 'favourably received' whilst Guizot wrote to Aberdeen, '*Vous et moi, nous sommes bien necessaires l'un à autre; sans vous je puis empêcher du mal; ce n'est qu'avec vous que je puis faire du bien.*'²⁵⁰

There were other similarities that helped to engender a close and productive relationship. Aberdeen's private tragedies were mirrored in the life of Guizot, who by age thirty-three had lost two wives, Pauline de Meulan and Élise Dillon. Guizot was regarded in France as oversensitive for his public mourning of Meulan, as Aberdeen had been when his first wife died. Whilst there was a popular perception of Aberdeen being 'un-English', the French populace largely thought of Guizot as 'un-French' for his policy of cooperation with England.²⁵¹ Indeed, in earlier life the French minister was lambasted by his friends for being 'too German'

²⁴⁹ The term 'honour' was often used by Aberdeen and his contemporaries. It is a troublesome concept to which a precise definition is difficult to ascribe, given that its definition varied depending upon the situation and by whom it was used. In Aberdeen's case it is nonetheless possible to offer a broad explanation of what protecting 'honour' entailed: ensuring the maintenance or advancement of British interests – especially trade – and ensuring other powers did not take advantage of his conciliatory policy to further their own ends at British expense. Britain might not want to bully, but neither could it be bullied without its future negotiating position being weakened.

²⁵⁰ Aberdeen to Peel, 3 September 1843, C. Parker (ed.), *Sir Robert Peel*, ii (London, 1899), p. 393. Guizot to Aberdeen, precise date unknown, R. Bullen, *Palmerston, Guizot and the Collapse of the Entente Cordiale* (London, 1974), p. 37 (taken from an unpublished thesis: M. Chamberlain, 'The Character of the Foreign Policy of Lord Aberdeen' (Oxford, PhD, 1960)). Translation (exact translations are difficult in some cases due to the differing structure and word usage in nineteenth century French. Translations are, therefore, provided with the disclaimer of being approximate): 'You and I, we are essential for one another, without you I cannot prevent the bad, it is only with you that I can do good.'

²⁵¹ D. Johnson, *Guizot: Aspects of French Political History 1787-1874* (London, 1963).

as a result of his fascination with German literature.²⁵² Aberdeen's philosophy in foreign policy was shared by Guizot. Both men's predecessors had whipped up popular feeling to garner support for their nationalist Eastern policies and this confrontational atmosphere lingered on alongside traditional rivalry. That Aberdeen's and Guizot's methods of dealing with this atmosphere were regarded by their respective publics as being too desirous of pleasing the other suggests that the *entente* was relatively balanced.

Aberdeen could afford to place his *entente* and the success of his policy towards France partially in the trust of Guizot because circumstances in France gave him some leeway to do so. The continuation of Louis Philippe's reign depended upon keeping the domestic forces of revived expansionist nationalism and restrained conservative consolidation in equilibrium, which on the international scene meant that the *entente* had to remain in operation. Expansionist nationalism required the destabilisation of established regimes but it did not make sense to encourage this phenomenon too keenly, as to do so would undermine Louis Philippe's endorsement of legitimacy, which was essential to the credibility and survival of the still young Orleanist monarchy in that most unstable of countries.²⁵³ This dynamic was one of the reasons why the King replaced Adolphe Thiers at the height of the second Mehmet Ali crisis, but reduced the popular outcry against Thiers' removal by carrying it out whilst the French public were distracted by the royal assassination attempt of Marius Darmès. France could not afford to be seen as too confrontational in an international context without risking isolation but, domestically, accusations of subservience to foreign powers would also be damaging.

Conversely, if nationalist impulses were ignored, the Orleanists would be vulnerable: French ambition would occasionally require some concession to ease the build-up of nationalist pressure. Aberdeen summarised Louis Philippe's position as follows: 'The vigorous hand and sagacious mind of the present sovereign of France have undoubtedly hitherto controlled and kept under the competing

²⁵² M. O'Connor, *The Historical Thought of François Guizot* (Washington, 1955), p. 3.

²⁵³ For further detail on the Orleans monarchy see, for example, M. Price, *The Perilous Crown: France between Revolutions 1814-1848* (London, 2007); W. Fortescue, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in France, 1815-1852* (Oxford, 1988).

passions of his own subjects.'²⁵⁴ This was an opinion shared by Henry Wellesley, first Baron Cowley (British ambassador to France from 1841 to 1846) and Peel. Competing French domestic interests provided something of a safety net for Aberdeen's faith in Guizot, who would likely go the same way as Thiers if he tried to upset the balance. Aware of this possibility and of electoral danger for Guizot, Aberdeen held talks with likely successors Molé and Thiers to insure against his fall.²⁵⁵

One cannot always place trust in the logical transaction of international affairs, however, and the check that Louis Philippe placed on Guizot's actions was in turn supported by a privately expressed watchfulness that Aberdeen communicated to his French counterpart. Writing to the indiscreet Princess Lieven, whom Aberdeen knew was sharing her bed and her secrets with Guizot, he wrote of that minister that 'even of him, we cannot feel perfectly certain.'²⁵⁶ Additional warning was given of the danger of France's 'most offensive and insolent pretensions.'²⁵⁷ He knew these remarks would reach their target via the Princess, and they were honest expressions of his private sentiments. To Peel, Aberdeen doubted that Guizot was 'consistent with the pacific policy that he professes'.²⁵⁸ Aberdeen's public professions of goodwill and trust should not be taken as evidence of a blinkered policy of conciliation. Wary remarks were sometimes made on the international stage, which reminded Guizot that the well of personal faith could quickly be emptied.

It remains that Aberdeen might be seen to have relied too heavily on his personal contact with Guizot and that this would create difficulty for their successors, who would not be included in this personal arrangement. Lucille Iremonger certainly held this view.²⁵⁹ The argument gains particular momentum with reference to Guizot's conclusion of the Spanish marriages question soon after Aberdeen had left office, in ostensible breach of the personal guarantee made

²⁵⁴ Aberdeen to Cowley, 21 July 1843 (copy), Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43163/96.

²⁵⁵ Greville, *The Greville Memoirs*, ii: 1837-1852 (London, 1885), p. 252: 8 September 1844.

²⁵⁶ Aberdeen to Princess Lieven, 21 December 1841, Jones Parry (ed.), *The Correspondence of Lord Aberdeen and Princess Lieven*, i, p. 190.

²⁵⁷ Aberdeen to Princess Lieven, 27 December 1842, *ibid*, p. 211.

²⁵⁸ Aberdeen to Peel, 16 October 1845, Peel Papers, BL, Add. MS 40455/215.

²⁵⁹ L. Iremonger, *Lord Aberdeen: A Biography of the Fourth Earl of Aberdeen*, K. G., K. T., *Prime Minister 1852-1855* (London, 1978), p. 164.

between the two men.²⁶⁰ In the climate of heightened and almost universal hostility that developed after tension in the East, however, it is hard to see what arrangement could have made between England and France after 1841, other than a personal *entente*. Even Lady Palmerston, one of Aberdeen's chief critics, suggested that Guizot was essential to the hopes of cross-Channel and European peace, as wider cooperation was impossible.²⁶¹ Henry Bulwer, with whom Aberdeen would later clash over the Spanish Marriages issue, wrote from Paris that the relationship between Aberdeen and Guizot 'would re-establish the moral influence of France on the continent, an influence compromised by perpetual changes of late years': the personal *entente* was to be a source of consistency and stability in a turbulent political climate.²⁶²

Aside from the intricacies of the Spanish marriages issue, to which this study will return, even Palmerston took a similar view of Anglo-French relations:

I think it of the utmost importance for the interests of England and France that the men who govern each country should be well disposed towards the other. Each of the two countries has of course its own interests, and its own line of policy, and it must sometimes happen that the views of the two governments will diverge; but it is very desirable that when this happens the conflict of national interests should have its severity mitigated by the personal good will of the two governments.²⁶³

Palmerston continued the letter with numerous references to 'Thiers and I', which indicated that his vision of intergovernmental cooperation was also one in which Anglo-French accord was garnered by a personal duopoly. Writing in 1844 at the height of the Tahiti crisis, Palmerston hypothesised about replacing Aberdeen, but the leadership style that he advocated was exactly the same as that of his rival. Both he and Aberdeen recognised that a personal *entente* was the most

²⁶⁰ See chapter 5.

²⁶¹ Lady Palmerston to Princess Lieven, 25 March 1843, Lord Sudley (trans. and ed.), *The Lieven-Palmerston Correspondence 1828-1856* (London, 1943), p. 243-244.

²⁶² Bulwer to Aberdeen, 10 September 1841, A. Gordon (ed.), *Selections from the Correspondence of the Earl of Aberdeen*, v: 1841-1843 (London, 1888), p. 6.

²⁶³ Palmerston to Sir John Easthope, 21 November 1844, Palmerston Papers, BL, Add. MS 86842 (not foliated).

appropriate form for a relationship between Britain and France, although Palmerston's dealings with his French counterpart were unlikely to have been based upon the candid and balanced terms Aberdeen and Guizot practised.

The main tests of Anglo-French relations came in Spain, Greece, Tahiti and Morocco, and over a pamphlet written by Louis Philippe's son, the Prince de Joinville, which catalysed the debate on the state of British defensive fortifications. The possibility of a customs union between France and Belgium caused some additional consternation early in the government as concern spread that Franco-Belgian economic ties might be followed by political assimilation.²⁶⁴ Little effort was required to pour cold water on this possibility.²⁶⁵ Diplomacy relating to the slave trade also generated a degree of friction although this has been dealt with thoroughly in the extant historiography.²⁶⁶

The issue of the Spanish marriages ran throughout the Peel government and has attracted the greatest volume of claims that the *entente* was, in David Brown's recent assessment, 'a notion, a myth', that underlined weak Conservative foreign policy under Aberdeen.²⁶⁷ Muriel Chamberlain dealt with the issue in a chapter entitled 'The Collapse of the *Entente*'.²⁶⁸ Given that the issue has not been dealt with in depth since the study of Jones Parry in 1936 and that it was the most complicated and important area of Anglo-French contention, it will be addressed in a separate chapter. By consideration of Aberdeen's *entente* in the contexts outlined above, this chapter will question orthodox views that it 'collapsed' in

²⁶⁴ See Aberdeen to the King of the Belgians, 21 October 1842, Gordon (ed.), *Correspondence of the Earl of Aberdeen*, v, p. 424; Aberdeen to Stuart de Rothesay, 24 December 1842, The National Archives (hereafter TNA), FO 65/279/52.

²⁶⁵ Peel to Aberdeen, 16 November 1842, *Correspondence of the Earl of Aberdeen*, v, p. 445.

²⁶⁶ For a succinct but clear account of proceedings, see L. Jennings, 'France, Great Britain, and the Repression of the Slave Trade, 1841-45', *French Historical Studies*, x, 1977, pp. 101-125. See also A. Lambert, 'Slavery, Free Trade and Naval Strategy, 1840-1860', in K. Hamilton and P. Salmon (eds.), *Slavery, Diplomacy and Empire: Britain and the Suppression of the Slave Trade, 1807-1975* (Brighton, 2009). Aberdeen's position on slavery will be considered in relation to Anglo-American affairs in chapter 6.

²⁶⁷ D. Brown, 'Palmerston and Anglo-French Relations, 1846-1865', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, xvii, 2006, p. 677.

²⁶⁸ M. Chamberlain, *Lord Aberdeen: A Political Biography* (London, 1983), pp. 379-389.

Greece, was 'never strong' in Tahiti and obtained terminal damage in the fallout from the Moroccan episode.²⁶⁹

Greek affairs had long been a source of tension between the great powers and they continued to be so during Peel's government. King Otho's reign over Greece had by 1841 led to widespread discontent among his people, who were demanding a constitution to rein in the excesses of his absolute rule. Domestic interest in the nature of government in Greece was matched by that of Britain, France and Russia, who were the guarantors of Otho's monarchy. Each power wanted to ensure that their fiscal investment was rewarded with the security of their interests in the region.²⁷⁰

Aberdeen's approach to Greek affairs in his second tenure showed little sign of being in favour of either the Greek cause or their Ottoman overlords.²⁷¹ Greek expansionism threatened the stability of the Ottoman Empire, which Aberdeen disliked for its Islamism, perceived barbarity towards its constituent peoples, and political lethargy, but regarded as essential for holding together an unstable region in which there were no other stable alternatives. The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire would create a morass of competing local and great power interests that would threaten British India and almost certainly bring war. The best option for Britain and European stability, although not beneficial to romantic liberal aspirations for the emerging Greek constitutional project (and leading to the disfavour of Whiggish history), was to maintain the status quo. Aberdeen accordingly instructed Rear-Admiral Sir Edmund Lyons, Britain's minister at Athens (1835-1849): 'Any indication [...] of an intention to interfere in the affairs of the Turkish Empire [...] would at once be firmly and peremptorily repressed.'²⁷²

²⁶⁹ McLean, 'The Greek Revolution', p. 117; J. Baldwin, 'England and the French Seizure of the Society Islands', *The Journal of Modern History*, x, 1938, p. 231; C. Hamilton, 'The Diplomatic and Naval Effects of the Prince de Joinville's *Note sur l'état des forces navales de la France* of 1844', *The Historical Journal*, xxxii, 1989, p. 681.

²⁷⁰ This thesis returns to the Anglo-Russian dynamic of Greek affairs in chapter 5.

²⁷¹ For detailed background on events in Greece during Aberdeen's tenure, see B. Jelavich, *Russia and the Greek Revolution of 1843* (Munich, 1966); B. Photos, *The Greek Constitutional Revolution of 1843* (Chicago, 1971).

²⁷² This quote is taken from Aberdeen to Lyons, 20 October 1843, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43135/288), but is representative of opinions expressed throughout government. See also Aberdeen to Lyons, 30 November 1841, BL, Add. MS 43135/45.

At the outset of the Peel government, there existed relative Anglo-French harmony over Greece. Aberdeen wrote to Lyons that ‘we desire to establish no British influence’ at French expense, whilst Guizot recalled that he saw Aberdeen as ‘a perfect intelligence with whom it appeared to me, from day to day, more necessary and more practicable’ to cooperate, adding that we ‘should put an end to those blind jealousies, those puerile rivalries, those contests on the most trifling points, and all that tumult below which falsifies and paralyses sound policy above.’²⁷³

The threat to this accord escalated when King Otho’s absolutism collapsed in September 1843 and negotiations over the organisation of constitutional monarchy began. Britain and France had, with Russia, been the sponsors of the new Greek state in 1830 and were therefore central to negotiations. When there emerged ‘English’, ‘French’ and ‘Russian’ parties in Greek politics, led respectively by Alexander Mavrocordato, Jean Coletti and General Metaxa, old Anglo-French antipathies rose to the surface in pursuit of influence, and seemingly undermined Aberdeen’s optimistic proclamation that ‘I hope the Greek affair will turn out well, of which there is every appearance at present.’²⁷⁴ David McLean, who published a detailed article on Greek affairs, suggested that cooperation ended and the *entente* collapsed.²⁷⁵ Close analysis suggests otherwise.

The main problem for Anglo-French relations was the dynamic of the relationship between Lyons and the French minister in Athens, Théobald Piscatory. The tensions between them led to volatile Anglo-French relations in Greece itself, but Aberdeen’s method of dealing with Lyons helped the broader *entente* to function. Palmerston had set the tone for popular perceptions of Lyons’ clashes with Piscatory in his letter to John Easthope late in 1841, which was a line the *Morning Chronicle* followed thereafter: ‘while I was in office, I always found Sir Edmund Lyons borne out in his opinions and suspicions by facts; and however fair the language of the French Gov[ernment]t always was, about Greek affairs, their

²⁷³ Aberdeen to Lyons, 25 November 1843, McLean, ‘The Greek Revolution’, p. 118. F. Guizot, *Memoirs of a Minister of State, from the Year 1840* (London, 1864), pp. 259, 264.

²⁷⁴ Aberdeen to Peel, 4 October 1843, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43063/5.

²⁷⁵ McLean, ‘The Greek Revolution’, p. 117.

agents in Greece, whoever they were...went on intriguing all the same.'²⁷⁶ Of Piscatory this was true, but it was also true of Lyons. Upon Aberdeen's taking office, Prussia and Austria had requested Lyons' removal, which France and Russia said they would see 'with pleasure'.²⁷⁷ Aberdeen would not countenance such a move, presumably because it would suggest Britain's future pliability. Besides, a strong local advocate of British influence could be an asset.

There was nonetheless substance to international grievances. Lyons was a man of Palmerstonian composition and allegiance, who had commanded a frigate in support of the Greeks in the war of independence and captained the *Madagascar* when it carried King Otho to his throne in 1833. His experience combined with a fiery and proud personality to make him highly sensitive to challenges to his perceived influence and to the perceived popular will of the Greeks as to who should lead them. A strong local advocate of British influence of this kind could inspire, rather than deter, foreign ambition.

Of this the Conservatives were well aware and Aberdeen repeatedly warned against interference in Greek politics. In response to foreign overtures for Lyons' dismissal he stressed that this would not happen but wrote to Lyons that 'I am sure you will see the necessity of great caution and circumspection in your conduct' and later reiterated that 'whatever may be the faults of Otho or his Government, you are at Athens as the Minister of a friendly state [...] you ought to do your best to prove this.'²⁷⁸ Repeated warnings were received from Aberdeen and from Stratford Canning in Constantinople that cautioned against fomenting trouble in Greece, when Hellenic discontent was already being directed against Turkey, where stability was essential to British interests.²⁷⁹

Aberdeen dealt with Lyons by maintaining these private warnings alongside confidential expressions of his attitude to France. As early as January 1842, Aberdeen wrote to Lyons: 'such is their inveterate trickery, that we must always keep a sharp eye upon them; but it is just possible that they may be sincere in their

²⁷⁶ Palmerston to Easthope, 7 December 1841, Palmerston Papers, BL, Add. MS 86842 (not foliated).

²⁷⁷ Aberdeen to Lyons, 30 November 1841 (copy), Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43135/43.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁹ See, for example, Aberdeen to Lyons, 15 January 1842, TNA, FO 32/113/3; Stratford to Lyons, 7 February 1842 and 19 April 1843, Lyons Papers, West Sussex Record Office (hereafter WSRO), LE 65/F/1 and 21. For the importance of the Ottoman Empire see chapter 5.

professions; and I should be unwilling to believe that M. Guizot is decidedly the reverse.²⁸⁰ Aberdeen was aware of French intrigue and that Lyons had a watchful role to play, but the crux of British policy was that relative influence in Greece *did not really matter* if Britain's geopolitical interest in stable Greco-Ottoman borders and relations was maintained, and if British trade continued uninterrupted, as Aberdeen explained:

I care very little for what is called French influence in Greece. It may be personally annoying to you to see a French Minister leave you in the background, but these are trifles and depend upon it, England is certain always to have influence enough in that country, without mixing ourselves up with the wretched squabbles which occupy the Court and People of Athens.²⁸¹

Aware that serious intrigue could well destabilise Greece to such an extent that British interests would come under threat, Aberdeen made careful use of Lyons' raw patriotism in the international arena. Whilst extolling the virtues of the *entente* with genuine intent, Aberdeen ensured that France thought Lyons had full British support, writing to Cowley of the 'approval of Her Majesty's Government for the whole of Sir Edmund Lyons' proceedings since the Revolution.'²⁸² Lyons also received praise in official diplomatic intercourse (as opposed to the private letters that would not be published in the diplomatic 'blue books'): 'Her Majesty's Government have highly approved of your own conduct throughout the whole of the trying circumstances in which you have been placed since the outbreak of the popular feeling [...] I have great pleasure in here conveying to you the expression of their satisfaction.'²⁸³ This approach ensured that Guizot was aware that British belief in the *entente* did not give him a free hand, while allowing Aberdeen to try and restrain both French ambition and Lyons' interference.

Aberdeen's job became rather more difficult when Mavrocordato came to power in April 1844, although this was not initially a problem. To begin with,

²⁸⁰ Aberdeen to Lyons, 15 January 1842 (copy), Aberdeen Papers, BL, MS 43135/75.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

²⁸² Aberdeen to Cowley, 23 April 1844, TNA, FO 27/689/81.

²⁸³ Aberdeen to Lyons, 17 April 1844, TNA, FO 32/126/32.

matters seemed to improve. Lyons reported that Mavrocordato, despite leading the 'English' party, had acted in concert with Piscatory to try and persuade Coletti into a power sharing arrangement.²⁸⁴ Optimistically, he added that Piscatory 'has proved that his Government desires not exclusive influence, or the advancement of this or that Partisan, but that it seeks only the welfare of the community at large and the consolidation of the Constitutional Monarchy.'²⁸⁵ This corresponded with Guizot's earlier insistence that Piscatory '*persistez à subordonner les intérêts de rivalité à l'intérêt d'entente*' and seemed to verify his later claim that France's only object in Greece was stability.²⁸⁶

Problems began when Coletti began conspiring with Metaxa to bring about Mavrocordato's overthrow, a plan that Lyons identified late in May. He spoke of Coletti conducting himself in 'the most violent manner' but clarified that Aberdeen 'may rest assured that there shall be no bounds to my endeavours to preserve a cordial understanding with [Piscatory]'.²⁸⁷ The situation began to change late in July with Piscatory now seemingly complicit in Coletti's plan. Lyons fumed that 'Frenchmen have more vanity and less moral courage', adding that 'I did not conceal my opinion', and wrote of being 'shocked' when Piscatory sent Coletti to King Otho in his official carriage upon his assumption of power in August.²⁸⁸ Evidence of the *entente* seemed thin and even the sympathetic Muriel Chamberlain suggests that it had long since broken down in Greece.²⁸⁹

Despite passions running high on the ground, however, the *entente* remained in operation and secured British objectives without sacrificing honour: the only damage done was that to Lyons' pride. He took umbrage at Aberdeen having visited Piscatory's country house during the crisis, and may well have made a connection between this visit and Aberdeen's conclusion that 'I do not think [Piscatory] guilty', especially given Aberdeen's dismissive admonition of Lyons'

²⁸⁴ Lyons to Aberdeen, 10 April 1844, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43136/141.

²⁸⁵ Lyons to Aberdeen, 20 April 1844, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43136/161.

²⁸⁶ Guizot to Aberdeen, 19 December 1843, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43134/24. Guizot, *Memoirs of a Minister of State*, pp. 258-264. Translation: 'Continue to place the interests of the *entente* above those of rivalry.'

²⁸⁷ Lyons to Aberdeen, 31 May and 20 July 1844, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43136/200 and 220.

²⁸⁸ Lyons to Aberdeen, 31 July 1844 and 21 August 1844 (copy), Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43136/229 and 242.

²⁸⁹ Chamberlain, *Aberdeen*, p. 359.

activities: 'you will give your advice whenever it is asked, and then only.'²⁹⁰ As far as immediate Greek affairs were concerned, however, Piscatory's possible involvement in events (the veracity of which is difficult to determine from the available sources) was not important, as Aberdeen had often outlined. The Foreign Secretary recognised that Mavrocordato had been an unwilling leader and he communicated this to Lyons.²⁹¹ Indeed, Mavrocordato said as much himself, and had looked to Coletti then Metaxa to reduce his responsibilities.²⁹²

Mavrocordato's reluctance to lead Greece suggested that the strong-willed Coletti represented the most stable option at that time, especially given the influence that the leader of the 'Russian' party General Metaxa held in that government. Despite Russian championship of Orthodox Christendom, coreligionist sympathies did not supersede geopolitical practicalities, which for now meant the maintenance of the weak and pliable yet relatively stable Ottoman state on Russia's southwestern border. The Russian response to the French-sponsored Mehmet Ali's encroachments on Ottoman territory had given a clear indication of its likely response to a French-sponsored Greece: Ottoman territorial integrity, if not full political autonomy, was to be protected. Metaxa, therefore, provided something of a guarantee against potential Greek nationalist expansionism.

The subsequent power struggle in Greek politics and the oppressive measures employed by Coletti to hold on to his position by summer 1845 caused Lyons to report that 'anarchy is making fearful progress' and to question the safety of British citizens in Greece.²⁹³ Peel lamented Guizot's 'self-laudation for the ascendancy of French influence' and was angered that, in diplomatic intercourse

²⁹⁰ Lyons to Aberdeen, 9 and 16 October 1844 (copies), Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43136/288 and 292.

²⁹¹ Aberdeen to Lyons, 11 November 1844, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43137/15. Other similar sentiments were sent to Lyons: see, for example, Backhouse to Lyons, 13 May 1841, The Lyons Papers, WSRO, LE 85/J (not foliated).

²⁹² See, for example, Mavrocordato to Guizot, 30 April 1844, McLean, 'The Greek Revolution', p. 124: '*J'ai vu le moment ou une victime nécessaire pour le pays*'. Translation: 'I saw the time when a victim was necessary for the state.' Lyons dismissed Piscatory's claim that Mavrocordato had consulted Metaxa about a power sharing arrangement, but given that he had already consulted Coletti to the same intended end, there is little reason to doubt that claim: there was no dishonour in accepting the French view. See Lyons to Aberdeen, 21 August 1844 (copy), Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43136/242.

²⁹³ Lyons to Aberdeen, 22 June 1845, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43137/165.

with Austria, Louis Philippe had apparently disclaimed Anglo-French cooperation.²⁹⁴ Nevertheless, the Conservative leadership remained united. Aberdeen 'began to feel powerless to control such a situation indefinitely' but both he and Peel recognised that reports from Lyons were increasingly unreliable, whilst Guizot and Louis Philippe could *say* what they wished as long as they *acted* in accordance with the *entente*.²⁹⁵ Guizot had stretched the spirit of the *entente* with a tactless speech, which was made to court the viciously Anglophobe French Chambers, but this was a rare break from moderation at a time of electoral necessity.

Coletti was in fact revealing himself to be an uncompromising and tyrannical patriot who needed no encouragement from Piscatory or Guizot. While Guizot might claim involvement for electoral benefit, he remained genuinely fearful of expansionist nationalism. In a speech outlining this fear and his belief in the protection of the balance of power – '*cette question se pose dans le monde entier*' – the historian should find meaning and significance, for his belief in international cooperation and stability was propounded before, during and after his political life in a plethora of historical works.²⁹⁶ Aberdeen shared this philosophy and responded to Lyons' panicked letters on the developing problems in Greece as follows:

I will take good care that justice shall be done to British subjects wherever their rights or interests are concerned. I defy [the French] to destroy, or to weaken the only influence which is worth possessing. Whether you possess the ear of the Minister, or not, is a matter of very little importance, but the superior probity, enterprise and wealth of British merchants will always ensure the preservation of British influence.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁴ Peel to Aberdeen, 18 August 1845, Peel Papers, BL, Add. MS 40455/96. Peel to Aberdeen, 31 August 1845, Parker (ed.), *Peel*, ii, p. 399.

²⁹⁵ Aberdeen to Peel, 30 August 1845, A. Cunningham, 'Peel, Aberdeen, and the *entente cordiale*', *The Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, xxx, 1957, p. 201. Peel to Aberdeen, 17 July 1845 and Aberdeen to Peel 17 July 1845, Peel Papers, BL, Add. MS 40455/67 and 65.

²⁹⁶ Johnson, *Guizot*, p. 292 (the speech was made on 21 January 1843 but captured opinions expressed throughout Guizot's political and literary life). Translation: 'this question is asked/arises throughout the entire world' (i.e. the balance of power is an important consideration worldwide).

²⁹⁷ Aberdeen to Lyons, 11 November 1844, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43137/15.

Aberdeen did not believe that Guizot was involved in Greek affairs – conduct elsewhere seemed to validate this view – and retained the opinion that other countries' affairs were their own concern so long as British objectives were secure. Influence would be a costly commodity and troublesome to manage or measure the support for in the cauldron of Greek politics, something with which Palmerston seemed to agree: 'in time of peace, we can look for no political influence except that which is beneficial to those over whom it is exerted.'²⁹⁸

The above extended extract nonetheless revealed a marked difference between Aberdeen and Palmerston's approaches to foreign policy. Because of Britain's economic superiority, Aberdeen did not think that it needed to throw its weight around and was thus content to remain detached from local squabbles. Palmerston was more inclined to see foreign policy as a means by which to extend British influence by diminishing that of another power, or by which to boost perceptions of British power by the vociferous defence of national values and national pride. Earlier generations of historians might have been content to suggest that Palmerston and Aberdeen were different because the former employed what was deemed a masculine approach, whilst Aberdeen's passivity was portrayed as effete.²⁹⁹ This conclusion was, of course, simplistic, and does little to illuminate the reasoning behind either man's policy making. The difference between Aberdeen and Palmerston was much more subtle. It was based around their rational, yet divergent interpretations of how best to ensure Britain's international supremacy.

Despite Greece's geopolitical importance, events in Tahiti excited English and French popular patriotism far more, because it was annexed by French Admiral Dupetit Thouars on 1 November 1843. Many historians have used the annexation of an island with a history of British missionary influence to prove the weakness or non-existence of the *entente*, Guizot's sleight of hand, Aberdeen's subservience and, therefore, the weakness of Conservative foreign policy.³⁰⁰ Seemingly at odds with Palmerston, public opinion, and the British press, Aberdeen cuts an isolated figure in the historiography by virtue of his apparent inertia during the Tahitian

²⁹⁸ Palmerston, House of Commons, Hansard, lxxxii, 1 August 1845, col. 1329.

²⁹⁹ See, for example, H. Temperley, *England and the Near East: The Crimea* (London, 1936).

³⁰⁰ See, for example, Bartlett, *Great Britain and Sea Power 1815-1853*, p. 151; Baldwin, 'England and the Society Islands', p. 231.

crisis, especially given his concurrent tolerance of Gallic encroachment upon Morocco. The Press was especially scathing of this policy. The *Morning Chronicle* summarised Aberdeen's Tahitian policy as follows: 'As for us Englishmen, if its infantine simplicity and absurdity did not force us to laugh, it would certainly make us weep with humiliation and shame.'³⁰¹ Palmerston wrote to the *Morning Chronicle's* editor in the aftermath of the crisis, claiming that 'Guizot knew what sort of men the Cabinet were but he misjudged the British nation.'³⁰²

Palmerston's public criticism of the Conservatives' tolerance of the French annexation centred around the accusations of a lack of interest in foreign affairs, fear of intervention, and truckling to France: 'Let them do as they will, and act as they please, indifferent to things going on abroad – let them condemn as they would what they called a "meddling policy" and allow foreign nations to do what they pleased.'³⁰³ This line of argument was politically and electorally useful, creating an artificial difference with Aberdeen that could be used to court popular patriotism and attempt to bring down Peel's government. In office, Palmerston's own policy had been rather less robust than his rhetoric might have suggested. French agents had attempted to annex Tahiti during Palmerston's tenure at the Foreign Office, but British Consul George Pritchard's letters pleading for help had received short shrift from Palmerston: 'the Government of this country would not have any right to give or to withhold their sanction to the residence of the subjects of any other nation in territories which do not appertain to Great Britain.'³⁰⁴

Beyond this basic legal assessment, Palmerston outlined strategic opposition to the protection of Tahiti: 'considering the great extent of the present dominions of the British Crown in the Southern Ocean [...] it would be impossible for her to fulfil [...] any defensive obligations.'³⁰⁵ That Palmerston left Pritchard to

³⁰¹ *The Morning Chronicle*, 24 October 1842.

³⁰² Palmerston to Easthope, 15 January 1845, Palmerston Papers, BL, Add. MS 86842 (not foliated).

³⁰³ Palmerston, House of Commons, Hansard, lxxvi, 22 July 1844, col. 1245.

³⁰⁴ Palmerston to Pritchard, 19 July 1837, House of Commons Parliamentary Papers Online (hereafter HCPP), Command Papers; Accounts and Papers (as are all future references), 'Correspondence relating to the Proceedings of the French at Tahiti' (1843), volume lxi, paper 473/document 5.

³⁰⁵ Palmerston to Pritchard, 9 September 1839, HCPP, 'Correspondence relating to the Proceedings of the French at Tahiti' (1843), lxi, 473/7.

pay off French menaces out of his own pocket suggests a pragmatism not dissimilar to Aberdeen's.

Historians have also pointed to the Tahitian crisis as either proof of a continuing paternalism in Peel's relationship with Aberdeen or as the opening of a divide between the two, which further undermined the Foreign Secretary's position.³⁰⁶ Peel's description of the annexation of Tahiti as a 'gross outrage' is often used as evidence of the distance between Peel and an excessively tolerant Aberdeen.³⁰⁷ Greville reproduced the phrase in his own analysis of affairs, as have many historians.³⁰⁸ In the same speech in which Peel spoke of a 'gross outrage', however, he echoed Aberdeen's temperate observation that the protectorate over Tahiti had been declared without French governmental backing.³⁰⁹ He had also previously stated that Pritchard had aggravated and exaggerated Tahitian disquiet by acting above beyond his authority: Peel's was not a position of knee-jerk indignation at French proceedings.³¹⁰ Peel might use a more forthright language and tone in the public domain – he needed to satisfy the more hostile House of Commons, just as Palmerston did – but this did not represent a breach of his relationship with Aberdeen.

Peel was nevertheless concerned. In August 1844, in the context of Pritchard's treatment and Guizot's evasiveness, Peel contrasted the two nations' positions: 'what would the French Ministry and the French Press, and the French public have thought of such a proceeding on our part?'³¹¹ Guizot's intimation that he was having difficulty persuading the French Chambers to accept the idea of reparations prompted Peel to write that 'I do not attach the slightest weight to his word', which added resonance to his earlier comment that '[Guizot] has himself alone to blame for what has occurred.'³¹² Aberdeen's language was more

³⁰⁶ See, for example, D. Hurd, *Robert Peel*, p. 283; Bourne, *The Foreign Policy of Victorian England*, p. 48.

³⁰⁷ Peel, House of Commons, Hansard, lxxvi, 31 July 1844, col. 1575.

³⁰⁸ Greville, *Memoirs*, ii (1885), p. 253: 8 September 1844; T. Crosby, *Sir Robert Peel's Administration* (London, 1976), p. 109; Brown, *Palmerston*, p. 270; Bourne, *The Foreign Policy of Victorian England*, ps. 54 and 48.

³⁰⁹ Peel, House of Commons, Hansard, lxxvi, 31 July 1844, col. 1575.

³¹⁰ *Ibid*, lxxi, 10 August 1843, col. 492.

³¹¹ Peel to Aberdeen, 12 August 1844, Peel Papers, BL, Add. MS 40454/206.

³¹² *Ibid*; Peel to Aberdeen, 25 February 1844, Peel Papers, BL, Add. MS 40454/137.

measured: upon receiving a note from Guizot about French intentions in Tahiti, Aberdeen wrote to Peel that 'we must wait to see what Guizot will *really* venture to do.'³¹³ Both retained suspicions of French action but Aberdeen kept expressions of this out of the public domain in order to encourage enthusiasm for the *entente*. Peel, of course, as his August letter had suggested, had to take greater account of public opinion.

Aberdeen's discretion should not be confused with passivity or a lack of interest, as it is clear from analysis of his policy and of the *entente*, when this analysis is conducted without reference to a mythical tension between Peel and Aberdeen, or to Palmerston's framing of the debate. A basic consideration has been lost in layers of historiographical criticism: Conservative policy in Tahiti helped to avoid a war for which sections of the public clamoured, but circumstances rendered ridiculous. Aberdeen had no legal basis on which to oppose a peaceful missionary presence on the island. In office, Palmerston had been no more supportive of Pritchard or Tahitian Queen Pomare than was Aberdeen. He had twice refused Pomare's requests for official protectorship from Catholic missions on legal grounds, and confirmed his position by ignoring those of Pritchard's letters that complained of new missions.³¹⁴ When Pritchard complained of Catholic France's possible annexation of the island, in letters noted above, Palmerston told him that Britain could make no objection. Aberdeen took the same line when Dupetit Thouars turned the hypothetical problem into reality, and Peel ultimately agreed with his Foreign Secretary's position: the Tahiti crisis was not worth war.

It is thought by those historians who determine the French annexation of Tahiti (and Aberdeen's tolerance of it) a 'gross outrage' that much of the ground for objection to it involves the mistreatment of Pritchard. The imprisonment of a British Consul for resistance to the French annexation was indeed a significant breach of international protocol and it was accompanied by an impetuous statement from Dupetit Thouars on 3 March 1844, reproduced in Pritchard's memoirs:

³¹³ Aberdeen to Peel, 20 August 1844, Peel Papers, BL, Add. MS 40454/218 (italics not in original text).

³¹⁴ C. Haldane, *Tempest over Tahiti* (London, 1963), p. 71.

A French sentinel was attacked on the night of 2nd March. In reprisal I have caused to be seized one Pritchard, the only daily mover and instigator of the disturbance of the natives. His property shall be answerable for all damages occasioned to our Establishments by the insurgents, and if French blood is spilt, every drop shall fall back on his head.³¹⁵

The French refused to apologise for Pritchard's imprisonment, although they later did so for his ill-treatment whilst in prison, and Guizot argued that the French would have been justified in arresting Pritchard as soon as Dupetit Thouars had declared the protectorate in August 1843, because he refused to give up his consulship.³¹⁶ This was clearly disingenuous, as Guizot knew that Pritchard could not give up his post without ministerial sanction, which would take months to arrive.³¹⁷

Aberdeen shared the public's distaste for Pritchard's treatment: 'it is impossible that H. M. Gov[ernmen]t should concur in the justice of the French Admiral's proceedings.'³¹⁸ It was true that the French annexation had taken place by means of transparent intriguing. The foundations for the annexation had been laid during Pritchard and Pomare's absence from the island in September 1842, presumably to circumvent protest, when a declaration of desire for French protection was signed by Pomare's chiefs. French historians have described the declaration as evidence of a deep Tahitian desire to be rid of Pritchard, but this is doubtful: Charlotte Haldane has shown how it was clear that the French wrote the document and made the Tahitians sign it.³¹⁹

Nevertheless, Pritchard's own role and behaviour were ambiguous, as Aberdeen recognised. He wrote of 'accusations made against the conduct of Mr. Pritchard, which in all probability, are for the most part, true enough; but which are certainly very insufficiently supported by anything like proof.'³²⁰ Aberdeen did not have any concrete evidence of Pritchard's conspiring against the French

³¹⁵ Pritchard, *Queen Pomare and Her Country*, p. 66.

³¹⁶ Cowley to Aberdeen, 28 August 1844, TNA, FO 519/57/432.

³¹⁷ Cowley to Aberdeen, 2 August 1844, TNA, FO 519/57/390.

³¹⁸ Aberdeen to Cowley, 25 August 1843 (copy), Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43163/112.

³¹⁹ Haldane, *Tempest over Tahiti*, pp. 109-123.

³²⁰ Aberdeen to Peel, 1 September 1844, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43064/1. See also Aberdeen to Peel, 25 February 1844, Peel Papers, BL, Add. MS 40454/139.

protectorate, but there were several reasons to suspect it. Pritchard was undoubtedly a committed missionary and his religious commitment should not be underestimated at a time when many were disappearing on a cannibalistic island but he had, nonetheless, been in Tahiti for over a decade and gained power that he was unwilling to give up without a fight. He rejected initial Catholic missions in part because of reluctance to share his power and because his commercial interests on the island had allowed him to set up a palatial residence on a hill overlooking the capital Papeete. His refusal to give up these missionary and commercial interests when he assumed the British Consulship caused tensions among Tahitians and missionaries of all religious colours.³²¹ Paul de Deckker suggested it was a resulting increase in Pritchard's ego that caused him to fall out with those such as French agent Moerenhout, who had once considered Pritchard such a close friend that he left much of his estate to him in his will.³²²

Guizot and Dupetit Thouars meanwhile suggested that Pritchard was acting against the will of Protestant missionaries whom he claimed to be defending, who were committed only to religious endeavour, in order to protect his own interests.³²³ Many British residents certainly expressed satisfaction at French conduct and tolerance, as did British agents in letters to the Foreign Secretary.³²⁴ Pritchard's account of the crisis was solipsistic and made little mention of the will of the people.³²⁵ In his literary works, long personal association with Queen Pomare seemed to fuse with a forceful religiosity and local passion to transform Pomare into an almost Christ-like figure, betrayed by those close to her and losing power for the sins of British indifference. In these publications, Pritchard also freely admitted to intriguing against the French, which confirmed Aberdeen's suspicions

³²¹ See, for example, a letter from David Darling in Haldane, *Tempest over Tahiti*, p. 67.

³²² P. de Deckker, 'Introduction', in G. Pritchard, *The Aggressions of the French at Tahiti and other Islands in the Pacific* (Oxford, 1983).

³²³ Guizot to Comte de Jarnac, 29 August 1844, HCPP, 'Correspondence relating to the removal of Mr. Pritchard from Tahiti' (1845), lii, 603/1 (incl. 1); Thouars' Declaration to Queen Pomare, 9 September 1842, HCPP, 'Tahiti Correspondence' (1843), 473/8 (incl. 3).

³²⁴ British Residents to Thouars, September 1842, HCPP, 'Correspondence relative to the Society Islands (in continuation of the Papers laid before Parliament in August, 1843)' (1844), li, 529/7 (incl. 2). For letters to Aberdeen see, for example, Consul Wilson to Aberdeen, 26 September 1842, HCPP, 'Tahiti Correspondence' (1843), lxi, 473/8.

³²⁵ Pritchard, *Queen Pomare and Her Country*. Such an approach was also conveyed in official correspondence: see, for example, Pritchard to Rear-Admiral Sir George Seymour, 4 June 1845, TNA, FO 534/6/12.

during the crisis that his instructions to 'observe and report' had not been heeded.³²⁶

Pritchard's justification for his actions, that the march of events greatly outpaced the speed of communication with Britain, does little to extricate him from the charge of making life difficult for his government. The first reason for this is that the authority by which he claimed to be acting was the content of previous dispatches. Aberdeen identified the problem with this argument early in the crisis: 'you appear to have altogether misinterpreted those passages in the letters of Mr. Canning and Lord Palmerston': they did not advocate hostility.³²⁷ Besides, Pritchard knew that at the height of the crisis, he had been instructed to move to the Friendly Islands.³²⁸ These instructions were ignored, as others had been. Aberdeen had not sacrificed national honour in the name of peace in the case of Pritchard, for he could not have been imprisoned on Tahiti if he had been in the Friendly Islands as instructed by Aberdeen. His imprisonment seemed justified even if the treatment he received at the hands of local agents did not. It remains that annexation of an island with a history of British influence could be seen as contrary to the spirit of the *entente*, but Guizot denied central French involvement in Dupetit Thouars' mission and spoke of 'undeniable proofs of the spirit of moderation and strict justice'.³²⁹ Aberdeen's acceptance of this line of argument seemed something of a joke to many, but there is little reason to doubt Guizot's version of events.

In the early stages of government Guizot did little in response to news of French manoeuvres in Tahiti, probably in the hope that the affair would blow over. Approving of agents' intrigue would arouse the wrath of Britain whereas disavowing it would arouse the wrath of domestic opposition: doing nothing was a sensible policy for Guizot. When news reached England and France of the annexation of Tahiti, even Aberdeen had his doubts about the *entente*, but Guizot soon dispelled them. On receipt of the news, Aberdeen noted that 'should the French Government confirm this last act of the Admiral, it may be a question of

³²⁶ Pritchard, *Queen Pomare and Her Country*; Aberdeen to Pritchard, 12 July 1843, HCPP, 'Society Islands Correspondence', li, 529/4.

³²⁷ Aberdeen to Pritchard, 25 September 1843, HCPP, 'Society Islands Correspondence' (1844), li, 529/9.

³²⁸ Aberdeen to Cowley, 6 September 1844, HCPP, 'Tahiti Correspondence' (1845), lii, 603/1.

³²⁹ Guizot to Jarnac, 29 August 1844, HCPP, 'Tahiti Correspondence' (1845), lii, 603/1 (incl. 1).

how far it will be possible to continue our relations of confidence. For although I am convinced that Guizot is perfectly innocent of the act itself, his subsequent acquiescence will make it very difficult to trust him on anything.³³⁰ Aberdeen need not have worried, for a public disavowal of the Admiral's action followed so that on 1 March 1844, Aberdeen could tell the Lords of this 'entirely spontaneous and voluntary act': not a 'single line' of encouragement to make a disavowal had been penned.³³¹

It would, of course, be easy to make a proclamation of disavowal with one's fingers crossed, to depressurise the situation without losing any of its benefits, but Guizot's subsequent actions suggested that he was acting within the spirit of the *entente* and that Dupetit Thouars had placed him in an uncomfortable situation. In the first instance, by August 1844 Guizot had persuaded the French Cabinet to acquiesce in Britain's request for a formal apology for the way in which Pritchard had been treated, and to provide reparations as a demonstration of good will.³³² This was a genuine show of commitment to the *entente* at a time when Guizot's majority in government was decreasing in inverse proportion to nationalist sentiment, with French newspapers branding those seen to be truckling to Britain as *Pritchardistes*.³³³

The greatest display of Conservative unity and Anglo-French accord came at the end of December 1844 when the correspondence relating to annexation became available. Far from being outraged at his Foreign Secretary's policy, Peel agreed to Aberdeen's request that the relevant papers should be edited before being shown to Parliament, to avoid those showing local French transgressions falling into the hands of the opposition: Aberdeen was encouraged to offer 'the Parliamentary Tahiti Case – the producible controversy.'³³⁴ This process was reciprocated in France, where the worst of Pritchard's excesses were kept out of the spotlight, including recent refusals of Dupetit Thouars' reasonable offers of

³³⁰ Aberdeen to Peel, 25 February 1844, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43063/237.

³³¹ Aberdeen, House of Lords, Hansard, lxxiii, 1 March 1844, col. 435.

³³² Cowley to Aberdeen, 28 August 1844, TNA, FO 519/57/432.

³³³ Haldane, *Tempest over Tahiti*, p. 157.

³³⁴ Peel to Aberdeen, 17 December 1844, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43064/120.

indemnity.³³⁵ The *entente* had been designed such that inevitable disagreements and rivalry should, with the exercise of friendly caution and cooperation between Aberdeen and Guizot, not result in war. This was achieved in the South Pacific.

Britain had beaten France to Australia and New Zealand in 1840 and French protectorship of Tahiti seemed a small price to pay in the name of the *entente*. Throughout the crisis Aberdeen had stressed to France via his dispatches to Cowley that Tahiti would not be the beginning of further territorial gains in the South Pacific: he made it clear that French advances on the Wallis Islands, the Navigator Islands and the Sandwich Islands would be met with force and he threatened to send warships to Tahiti if events there did not end satisfactorily for Britain.³³⁶ In return for his stance on Tahiti, Aberdeen expected and obtained French public recognition of the mistreatment of Pritchard despite private frustrations with that Consul. Aberdeen similarly never publicly disavowed Lyons in Greece; France should not think itself in a position strong enough to intrigue without reprisal. It was also expected that British mercantile and military endeavour on Tahiti should continue unchecked, albeit if a different flag waved over the port. There were no reports of any interruptions.

Throughout the crisis, Aberdeen's attentions had been focused on the Sandwich Islands, which he deemed of greater strategic importance.³³⁷ They were positioned almost equidistant between the British New World and British Canada, which made them a convenient trading post and broke up a lengthy sea crossing. Even the usually critical Ellenborough recognised this strategic utility: 'the finest position in the Pacific is that of the Sandwich Islands.'³³⁸ Aberdeen secured a guarantee from America and France that the Sandwich Islands would be left to British administrative control – they were developed for British mercantile interest throughout his tenure – and so they insured against escalation of the Tahiti crisis and provided greater advantage for the future.³³⁹

³³⁵ See Seymour to Aberdeen, 10 September 1845, TNA, FO 534/6/1.

³³⁶ Aberdeen to Cowley, 17 December 1844 (copy), Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43163/286; Chamberlain, *Aberdeen*, p. 365.

³³⁷ See, for example, Aberdeen to Cowley, 23 July 1844, TNA, FO 27/690/205; Aberdeen to Cowley, 30 September 1844 (copy), Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43163/259.

³³⁸ Ellenborough to Aberdeen, 7 May 1846, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43198/37.

³³⁹ Aberdeen to Cowley, 21 July 1843 (copy), Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43163/96.

If France had fully colonised Tahiti and allowed Britain to gain the Sandwich Islands then Britain would still have made a net gain, but as the Tahiti affair turned out peaceably and without compromising local British interests, British international trade and influence in the South Pacific made significant advances under the Conservatives. France also kept its word and returned general Tahitian government to Pomare as Britain would eventually return general government of the Sandwich Islands to its tribal chief. As Aberdeen had predicted early during the crisis, therefore, French conduct was 'in accordance with that pursued by the British Gov[ernment].'³⁴⁰ While the French were allowed gains in the name of the *entente*, Britain got the better deal without losing men or money on the machinery and consequences of conflict. As the Conservative Cabinet eventually agreed, it would have been 'preposterous and absurd' to consider war.³⁴¹

The popular furore created by the Tahiti crisis was nonetheless exacerbated by simultaneous developments in Morocco. The year in which Peel's reform programme was unfolding saw the greatest public opposition to Aberdeen's foreign policy. With perceived intrigue in Spain, French influence already established in neighbouring Algeria, assumed French conspiring in Greece, and apparent French involvement in the competition between the Druzes and the Maronites in Lebanon, French encroachment on Morocco gave ready ammunition to those who claimed that France was attempting to make the Mediterranean Sea a 'French lake'. Such an ambition was presumed on both sides of the Channel. Hippolyte Lamarche's pamphlet of 1846 reflected on a campaign against 'the disgraceful treaties of 1815' in an attempt to ascertain 'the first political and naval rank in the Mediterranean.'³⁴² The *Liverpool Mercury* confirmed the sense of popular patriotic fear: France, it argued, aimed 'to exclude from the whole northern coast of Africa British commerce and shipping.'³⁴³

Problems came to a head in the summer of 1844 because the French colonial leader in Algeria, General Bugeaud, prompted Guizot to issue an ultimatum

³⁴⁰ Aberdeen to Cowley, 23 August 1843 (copy), Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43163/241.

³⁴¹ Greville, *Memoirs*, ii (1885), p. 253: 8 September 1844.

³⁴² H. Lamarche, 'Algeria; its Influence on the Destinies of France and of Europe' (1846), in *French Pamphlets on the Naval Forces of France 1844-1846* (London, 1848), pp. 60, 51.

³⁴³ *The Liverpool Mercury*, 26 July 1844.

to the Alaouite Moroccan Emperor Mawlay Abd al-Rahman to withdraw from the border with Algeria, where it was thought that Morocco was assisting Algerian rebel leader Abd-El-Kader to resist French rule.³⁴⁴ To British irritation, the French thought Britain was encouraging Moroccan intransigence. Aberdeen remained detached because he recognised that the position of the Emperor was 'hazardous'. Swift withdrawal would create rebellion among his subjects, but leaving troops on the border, quite possibly a defensive policy designed to guard against Algerian ambition, caused understandable consternation in French Algeria.³⁴⁵ When France bombarded Tangiers on 6 August during Edward Drummond Hay's talks with the Moroccans, in ostensible breach of assurances Guizot gave to Aberdeen, many, including the Home Secretary James Graham, lost faith in the *entente*.³⁴⁶ Even Cowley wrote from France: 'What with Tahiti and Morocco, it must be confessed that the "entente cordiale" between the two countries is in some danger.'³⁴⁷ Historians such as Norman Gash have since concluded that, especially considered alongside the crisis in Tahiti, Morocco laid bare the failures of the Anglo-French arrangement.³⁴⁸

Aberdeen regarded contemporary media criticism as largely responsible for popular patriotic indignation at French actions, expressing frustration at its 'violence and arrogance.'³⁴⁹ Whilst this was a simplistic analysis of his detractors' concerns, the Press did whip up the opposition with a number of misleading articles. Chief among them was a focus upon Palmerston's references to a speech Aberdeen made in 1830 during his first tenure as Foreign Secretary, in which Aberdeen was alleged to have said that he had no objections to French colonial rule in Algeria. As Aberdeen wrote to Cowley, 'I never said that I had no objections to the establishment of the French in Algiers, just that I had no observations to make'.

³⁴⁴ For more information on the local aspects of the conflict, see V. Clayton, *The Phantom Caravan or Abd El Kader, Emir of Algeria (1808-1883)* (New York, 1975), pp. 208-216; J. Kiser, *Commander of the Faithful: The Life and Times of Emir Abd El Kader* (Cambridge, 2008).

³⁴⁵ Aberdeen to Cowley, 14 and 19 June 1844 (copies), Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43163/168 and 179. See also Aberdeen to Drummond Hay, 15 June 1844, TNA, FO 99/13/8.

³⁴⁶ See C. Hamilton, 'The Diplomatic and Naval Effects of the Prince de Joinville's *Note sur l'état des forces navales de la France* of 1844', *The Historical Journal*, xxxii, 1989, p. 681.

³⁴⁷ Cowley to Aberdeen, 26 August 1844, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43130/134.

³⁴⁸ Gash, *Peel* (1986), p. 507.

³⁴⁹ Aberdeen to John Croker, 28 August 1844, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43196/121.

This was something Peel also stressed in Parliament: French expansion was to be regretted, but could not always be prevented.³⁵⁰ Palmerston did not challenge Gallic development in Algeria between 1830 and 1841 for the same reason, and continuing pragmatism determined that Aberdeen 'had no more intention of disturbing the French in Algiers than our predecessors in office had.'³⁵¹ This did not mean that, as Palmerston suggested, Aberdeen had any plans of allowing France to usurp British influence in Morocco.³⁵²

Despite public professions of warmth and other efforts to help Guizot present his policy in a favourable light to his critics, Aberdeen made clear the permissible limits of French engagement in Morocco.³⁵³ He wrote that occupation of Tangiers 'could not be tolerated' under any circumstances and added that actual occupation of any part of Morocco 'would not be viewed other than in a very serious light by Great Britain, and could scarcely fail to lead to evils of great magnitude.'³⁵⁴ When Aberdeen's usually delicate style of writing is considered, it is clear that this meant war: this was confirmed by the subsequent arrival of warships to the Gibraltar garrison, to intervene if France breached its commitments.³⁵⁵

With regard to French ships bombarding Tangiers on 6 August, historians have been quick to dismiss the *entente* via the argument that Guizot had broken assurances made to Britain.³⁵⁶ There are a number of problems with this argument. France had not broken any assurances made to Britain: the bombardment of Tangiers was a final act and not a prelude to military takeover. It worked within the limits set down by Aberdeen and squared with the assurances that Guizot made: France never ruled out action against Morocco but always disclaimed interest in

³⁵⁰ Aberdeen to Cowley, 28 January 1842 (copy), Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43163/13; Peel, House of Commons, Hansard, lxxv, 13 June 1844, cols. 677-8.

³⁵¹ Aberdeen to Cowley, 11 March 1842, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43129/66.

³⁵² Palmerston, House of Commons, Hansard, lxxvi, 22 July 1844, cols. 1240-6.

³⁵³ Aberdeen to Cowley, 5 July 1844, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43130/76.

³⁵⁴ Aberdeen to Peel, 19 August 1844, Peel Papers, BL, Add. MS 40454/216 (the letter covered previous observations and reiterated that they were repeated to Jarnac); Aberdeen to Cowley, 23 August 1844 (copy), Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43163/241 (this letter also covered previous observations and carried an express warning that it be shown to Guizot).

³⁵⁵ See Aberdeen to Drummond Hay, 2 July 1844, TNA, FO 99/13/19.

³⁵⁶ See, for example, Bullen, *Palmerston, Guizot and the Collapse of the Entente Cordiale*, p. 39; Hamilton, 'The Prince de Joinville's Note'.

Moroccan territory.³⁵⁷ The bombardment, furthermore, made little impact. A moderate peace treaty was concluded just a month later and British interest in Morocco and access to the Mediterranean remained unaffected, as it had been throughout the affair. Similar disagreements between the two North African states continued after this treaty and, as they escaped the interest of the British and French Press, they made no popular impact as well as no actual impact on the ground.³⁵⁸

It remains that the bombardment appeared against the spirit of the *entente*, even if it did not contradict Aberdeen's terms of engagement, and the spirit of an unrecorded verbal arrangement is necessary to demonstrate its very existence. That the bombardment took place when the Sultan was away at Marrakesh, with echoes of encroachment on Tahiti during Queen Pomare's absence, did not seem to suggest the transparency that the *entente* demanded, especially given that the French ships continued on to bombard Mogador, which was a crucial artery for British trade in the region.

The important background to the crisis, which is overlooked by the historiography, is that Morocco *was* actively intriguing against French Algeria. John Drummond Hay (succeeding his father after the bombardment of Tangiers) noted that the Sultan caught a member of his Makhzan, the Chief Uzir Sir Mohammed Ben Dris, contacting the rebel Abd-El-Kader: to ensure that this did not happen again, the Sultan removed his errant minion's tongue.³⁵⁹ The problem, however, ran deeper than this. When Moroccan sources are consulted, such as the work of Khalid Ben-Srhir (whose PhD involved extensive research in the archives of the Makhzan), it becomes apparent that such actions on the Sultan's behalf were misleading: he too was involved in assisting the Algerian rebels.³⁶⁰ French action was clearly not as unprovoked and unreasonable as might first be thought. As John Drummond Hay recorded, 'The foolish language of a British officer high in rank, on the other side of the water, declaring that England would never allow a gun to be

³⁵⁷ Aberdeen to Cowley, 2 July 1844, TNA, FO 27/690/186.

³⁵⁸ See Aberdeen to Cowley, 10 October 1845 (copy), Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43163/146.

³⁵⁹ J. Drummond Hay, *A Memoir of Sir John Drummond Hay: Sometime Minister at the Court of Morocco based on his Journals and Correspondence* (London, 1896), p. 72.

³⁶⁰ K. Ben-Srhir, *Britain and Morocco during the Embassy of John Drummond Hay, 1845-1886* (New York, 2005), p. 20.

fired at a Moorish port, roused the worst feelings towards us throughout the French squadron'.³⁶¹ That France responded within agreed Anglo-French parameters of action further suggested that the spirit of the *entente* lived on: disagreements would break out but war must not.

What seemed to contradict the spirit of the *entente*, however, was the timing of the bombardment, which came during the talks between Edward Drummond Hay and the Makhzan.³⁶² John Drummond Hay reflected on this the next month: 'Although [the French] say the Sultan is faithless, they never gave time to test whether he would be so or not, after having pledged himself to a British agent to act with good faith [...] French supremacy is aimed at, throughout the Eastern and Western Barbary, and an arrangement with a British agent militates against that supremacy.'³⁶³

Aberdeen recognised that talks had actually been going on for some months and that French patience was wearing thin with a Sultan who appeared to be stalling negotiations in order to continue intriguing. Edward Drummond Hay, with the benefit of years of dealing with the Makhzan that his son did not have, reflected on his efforts to rally the Sultan: 'It would take a volume – not small – to relate the bother and the tricks and bad faith with which I have had to contend – and as to going *fast*, as Mr. Bulwer has everlastingly urged, who among mortal men can make Moors go fast, nay, nor hardly move at all – in the straight path of honour and sound policy?'³⁶⁴ Beyond the Orientalist overtones of Drummond Hay senior's frustration lay the considered reasons for French actions and Aberdeen's response. The Sultan was playing for time and, simultaneously, domestic pressure on Guizot was escalating. France hoped that a few shells would remind the Makhzan of the need to draw back from Algeria, which they did (at least temporarily), whilst Aberdeen concurred because the Sultan had been causing international embarrassment by virtue of connections with Abd-El-Kader, from whom the Conservative government was trying to distance itself.

³⁶¹ John Drummond Hay to Stratford Canning, 12 September 1844, Hay, *Memoirs*, p. 69. Drummond Hay did not give the name of the officer.

³⁶² For detail see Aberdeen to Wellington, 30 August 1844, Wellington Papers, USL, WP2/123/22.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁴ Edward Drummond Hay (journal entry), 26 July 1844, Hay, *Memoirs*, p. 67.

The question of whether or not France conducted its Moroccan expedition in the spirit of the *entente* raises one more issue: that concerning the Prince de Joinville's control of the operation. Joinville, Louis Philippe's third son, who had with some ceremony repatriated the body of Napoleon in 1840, had in 1844 written a pamphlet entitled *Note sur l'état des forces navales de la France*. This had compared the states of the British and French navies and hypothesised about the possibility of an invasion of England. Historians who consider the *entente* fragile or non-existent at the time of the Tahiti crisis point to the French selection of Joinville in support of their views. The Duke of Wellington reflected that it was 'not possible to conduct things worse.'³⁶⁵

The circumstances of Joinville's selection for the Moroccan expedition do not suggest the significance attributed to it by Wellington and the historiography. Aberdeen's tolerance of the move was understandable. French plans in Morocco were, as discussed above, extremely limited. Whilst French papers beat the nationalist drum and Guizot might have done more to dampen the noise, he sought to defuse domestic nationalist opposition without damaging the *entente*. Placing Joinville at the head of a showy expedition to Morocco presented the Orleanist regime in a positive domestic light, particularly as it built upon the public approval of the Prince's marriage to the Duchess Francisca of Braganza in 1843. The mission also helped to distract Anglophobes who were attacking Louis Philippe and Guizot's policy towards Britain, without redirecting overall French policy against Britain.

Meanwhile, Guizot and Louis Philippe took great pains to distance themselves from Joinville's pamphlet. Guizot told Cowley that he had written it independently and that 'no one had any idea he was going to publish it', continuing that it was the 'production of a young officer anxious for the efficiency of the service to which he belonged' and that Joinville had 'no desire to interrupt the good understanding now established between the two countries.'³⁶⁶ These sentiments were echoed by Louis Philippe in correspondence and at a meeting with Cowley at the Chateau de Nemilly.³⁶⁷ It is interesting that those historians who have focused

³⁶⁵ Wellington to Aberdeen, 30 August 1844, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43060/122.

³⁶⁶ Cowley to Aberdeen, 27 May 1844, TNA, FO 519/56/267.

³⁶⁷ Cowley to Aberdeen, 1 June 1844, TNA, FO 519/56/280.

upon the French government, and investigated its politics to a greater extent, regard its surprise and embarrassment at Joinville's pamphlet as genuine.³⁶⁸

On the face of it, one might consider Aberdeen's lack of response to Joinville's selection unwise, regardless of French responses to the pamphlet. Privately, he considered that the selection of Joinville might have been 'calculated to produce so much mischief'.³⁶⁹ The pamphlet had mentioned Malta and Gibraltar as hypothetical strategic targets, adding to concern that France aimed to make the Mediterranean a 'French lake', and other portions of it were phrased with an utter lack of tact. For example: 'Who can for one moment doubt, but that with a fleet of well-organized steamers, we should not be able to inflict upon our enemies on the sea coast, losses and sufferings unknown to a nation that has never felt what miseries war brings with it; and these sufferings will entail a misfortune upon her, that of having lost her confidence.'³⁷⁰ This section seemed rather to undermine Joinville's opening assurance that 'if I speak of war with England, as of any other power, it will not be through a spirit of animosity'.

To read the pamphlet as a whole, however, is to be struck by its overall Anglophile tone. Repeated references are made to what were seen as the admirable qualities of the English national character, and the pamphlet sought only to use Britain as an example to which France could aspire, rather than as a target to be challenged. Joinville wrote that 'I am not one of those who, in the illusion of national self-love, think us able to contend equally with the power of Great Britain.'³⁷¹

Aberdeen thought the pamphlet confirmed 'the wretched state of the French Steam Navy', that 'the inferiority of French steamers is notorious' and it seemed sensible to view it as unthreatening.³⁷² Joinville summed up his work by stating that 'I have been obliged to expose the secret of our weakness compared to the greatness of British power.'³⁷³ France's weakness had been Joinville's point,

³⁶⁸ See, for example, Hall, *The Orleans Monarchy*, pp. 356-360.

³⁶⁹ Aberdeen to Cowley, 14 June 1844, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43130/61.

³⁷⁰ Prince de Joinville, *The Condition of the French and English Navy (translated from the French)* (London, 1844), p. 8; p. 7.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*

³⁷² Aberdeen to Peel, 18 September 1845, Peel Papers, BL, Add. MS 40455/159.

³⁷³ Joinville, *The Condition of the French and English Navy*, p. 24.

together with the need for unostentatious and non-confrontational improvements. Queen Victoria, to whom Joinville was personally known, agreed with Aberdeen's response to the pamphlet: 'it is not intentionally written to offend England, and on the contrary frankly proves us to be immensely superior to the French Navy in every way.'³⁷⁴ The Moroccan episode was not an intrinsic threat to the *entente* and neither did the Prince de Joinville's pamphlet make it one: indeed, the French Chambers attacked Joinville for the subservient content of the pamphlet. It would have been illogical for Britain to derail Conservative objectives by risking war for a matter that, if anything, actually increased Britain's international reputation by reiteration of its naval superiority.

Britain's defences were nonetheless in need of updating and the pamphlet produced panic in Wellington, that *bona fide* but blinkered believer in the ubiquity and inevitability of conflict. In response to his concerns, Peel warned Wellington about 'the effect which too sudden and marked and extensive preparations might have upon the dispositions towards us of Powers whose hostility is most to be apprehended', which elicited the improbable response that Britain's defences were 'barely sufficient for the performance of peace duties': Wellington also spoke of our 'undefended state'.³⁷⁵ These sentiments were echoed by other old military campaigners such as Sir Charles Napier and, of course, Palmerston, with an eye to party politics.³⁷⁶

Like Peel, Aberdeen was not opposed to moderate defensive expansion – Britain needed comprehensive protection – but he argued for a sense of proportion. He spoke out against some plainly ridiculous figures being bandied around by those whom he deemed to overestimate the threat, in the parliament of a country almost a billion pounds in debt and trying to fund a programme of domestic reform. This was different from opposing *any* increase in defence

³⁷⁴ Queen Victoria to Aberdeen, 29 May 1844, Benson and Esher (ed.), *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, i, p. 12.

³⁷⁵ Peel to Wellington, 26 December 1844, Parker (ed.), *Peel*, ii, p. 197; Wellington to Peel, 27 December 1844 and 7 January 1845, *ibid*, pp. 199, 397.

³⁷⁶ See *ibid*, p. 211. For Palmerston also see the later speech: Palmerston, House of Commons, Hansard, lxxxii, July 1845, cols. 1223-1233.

expenditure, which is a charge that historians such as Roger Bullen have levelled at Aberdeen.³⁷⁷

Palmerston seized on Aberdeen's sentiments as proof of pandering to France at the expense of national security and argued that readiness for war did not presuppose desire for war. Nor, he maintained, would being prepared for war suggest to the international community that Britain was warmongering. These arguments were perfectly logical, but Aberdeen had never suggested otherwise: he wanted improvements to be made, but not radical measures taken on what he regarded as a wave of misguided panic. Another artificial difference was created regarding levels of commitment to British interests by misrepresentation of Aberdeen's approach.³⁷⁸ In a letter to Peel concerning Wellington's flustered correspondence, Aberdeen argued that 'an extensive plan of military defence' would 'virtually stultify our whole policy' when 'there is every policy that peace will not be endangered.'³⁷⁹ Sweeping change was unnecessary given British naval superiority and would probably induce the phenomenon that they were designed to prevent: significant French naval expansion and the potential for conflict. It would become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Of accompanying peaceful relations with vast defensive fortifications, Aberdeen wrote that 'such a course of conduct has a direct tendency to produce the very evil which it is intended to avert.'³⁸⁰ Britain, Aberdeen argued, was ready for potential war without an overhaul of defences on the scale that Wellington thought necessary. He insisted that this might undermine the pacific course of 'the most influential men in France' and provoke greater levels of Gallic naval development.³⁸¹

By the autumn of 1845, Aberdeen was still struggling to convince colleagues of the wisdom of his viewpoint – this might have been why he was not informed of a meeting about defence on 5 September – and he offered his resignation in a

³⁷⁷ Bullen, *Palmerston, Guizot and the Collapse of the Entente Cordiale*, p. 40: 'Aberdeen opposed increased defence expenditure, claiming that it would make his task of preserving good relations with France all the more difficult.'

³⁷⁸ A speech in the summer of 1844 captured Palmerston's line thereafter: Palmerston, House of Commons, Hansard, lxxvi, 22 July 1844, col. 1246.

³⁷⁹ Aberdeen to Peel, 31 December 1844, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43064/144.

³⁸⁰ Aberdeen to Peel, 18 September 1845, Peel Papers, BL, Add. MS 40455/159.

³⁸¹ Aberdeen to Peel, 31 December 1844, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43064/144.

letter to Peel on 18 September 1845.³⁸² It could be argued in continuation of the argument that Aberdeen had never wanted the Foreign Office, that he offered his resignation because he was tired of office and uncommitted to his post. At face value, there is much to suggest this: Aberdeen wrote in 1842 that ‘my sensations are still those of a gentleman walking about with his head under water...business cannot be satisfactorily done, if done at all in such a condition’, and in his resignation offer he wrote that ‘office is irksome to me.’³⁸³ This study has noted, however, that Aberdeen’s comments about the toils of office require contextualisation. Palmerston had used a similar analogy when promoted to high office in 1830 and he certainly did not lack enthusiasm.

Closer inspection of this resignation offer shows that the motivation for writing it stemmed from a party consideration: Conservative unity. Referring to Wellington, about whose views Aberdeen had written a fiery letter to Peel on New Year’s Eve 1844,³⁸⁴ the Foreign Secretary lamented that ‘I cannot but foresee the probability of a great difference of opinion’, adding that ‘everything is looked at in such a different point of view.’³⁸⁵ He regarded the opposition led by Wellington as ‘painful’ and thought it best to leave office and avoid a possible division of Conservatism as well as to preserve his ‘honour’ and ‘conscience’.³⁸⁶ Further division in the Conservative ranks would have been particularly damaging at the time when the party was already tearing itself apart over the Corn Laws. It was only at the very end of the letter that Aberdeen talked of office being ‘irksome’. Aberdeen was not using disagreement with Wellington as an excuse to jump ship: the difference of opinion with Wellington was tangible. Besides, Aberdeen went on to tackle subsequent crises in Oregon and Spain with enthusiasm, something he had indicated to American colleagues just days before his resignation offer that he intended to do.³⁸⁷

³⁸² Peel to Wellington, 5 September 1845, Wellington Papers, USL, WP2/132/44: Peel, Graham, Secretary at War Sidney Herbert and First Lord of the Admiralty the Earl of Haddington met at Peel’s Drayton estate; Aberdeen to Peel, 18 September 1845, Peel Papers, BL, Add. MS 40455/159.

³⁸³ Aberdeen to Peel, 29 September 1842, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43062/89.

³⁸⁴ Aberdeen to Peel, 31 December 1844, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43064/144.

³⁸⁵ Aberdeen to Peel, 18 September 1845, Peel Papers, BL, Add. MS 40455/159.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁷ McLane to Buchanan, 18 September 1845, W. Manning (ed.), *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States: Canadian Relations 1784-1860*, iii: 1836-1848 (Washington, 1943), p. 978.

Peel refused Aberdeen's resignation on the grounds that it would be 'irreparable'.³⁸⁸ This was doubtless in part necessary in order to appear united before France and the opposition, who would perceive the 'true' reason for a resignation dressed up to disguise Conservative division.³⁸⁹ Peel's respect for Aberdeen was also evident in his refusal, however, which highlighted the personal as well as the necessary political bond between the two men. Aberdeen would have been well aware of this, of course. It is quite probable that the resignation was in large part a tactical device and that, when writing the letter and concluding it by saying that he would act 'in whatever manner your deliberate judgement shall decide', he was simply trying to reinforce his position in the defence debate.³⁹⁰ He knew that his resignation could not be accepted without imperilling the Conservative government at an hour of heightening domestic challenge.

Either way, a programme of what Norman Gash called 'selective and unostentatious' armament was undertaken, despite the hotly contested argument that defence concerns had generated in the aftermath of Joinville's pamphlet.³⁹¹ Whilst this programme cannot be attributed solely to Aberdeen's role in the debate – decision making on defence budgets was and remains a complex process – that a more extensive programme was not enacted did vindicate the Foreign Secretary's position. When the patriotic storm resulting from Joinville's pamphlet and the fallout from Anglo-French clashes in 1844 had subsided, Aberdeen's stance of careful consolidation was adopted. It was also telling that when the domestic crisis ensued later in 1845, the defence debate disappeared from the political agenda without trace: it was clearly not as urgent or as large a problem as was suggested by some, when it no longer served a political purpose for both sides.

By the end of 1845, then, Aberdeen had navigated Britain through a number of Anglo-French crises without recourse to war. The status quo continued in Greece (albeit on unavoidably shaky foundations), the Tahitian crisis ended in strategic gain and mercantile expansion in the South Pacific despite the popular patriotic clamour for war, and clashes between Morocco and Algeria were localised

³⁸⁸ Peel to Aberdeen, 20 September 1845, Parker (ed.), *Peel*, ii, p. 403.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁰ Aberdeen to Peel, 18 September 1845, Peel Papers, BL, Add. MS 40455/159.

³⁹¹ Gash, *Peel* (1986), p. 524.

where they might have mutated into international conflict. The *entente* with France, when considered within its aspirational limits, remained intact and further cross-Channel visits had taken place in 1844 and 1845, with the French Court visiting Britain and the British Court returning to France. Aberdeen maintained British international standing by making concessions, but setting the limits of action that France would not be permitted to breach. Intransigent diplomats, who tended not to share in the vision of Anglo-French accord, were dealt with by a combination of cautionary private letters and praise in public correspondence with France. This ensured that the excesses of local British enthusiasm could be curbed, whilst France was not made aware of Aberdeen's irritation with his diplomats: France should not think it had too much room for manoeuvre.

Beyond orthodox views of Aberdeen as, at best, well-meaning but naïve and, at worst, witless, aloof and incompetent, stands a capable politician who was not afraid to consider war as a strategic option, but nonetheless took pride in his peaceful international consolidation, as he explained to the Lords in April 1845:

I am accustomed almost daily to see myself characterised as pusillanimous, cowardly, mean, dastardly, truckling, and base [...] I feel perfectly certain that these vituperative terms are to be translated as applicable to conduct consistent with justice, reason, moderation, and with common sense [...] I am positively satisfied when I see such observations.³⁹²

There are historians who considered that such expressions of ostensible loftiness and idealism demonstrated that 'the virtues which [Aberdeen] possessed were ill-suited to the needs of the age'; where these needs were thought to involve conflict rather than consensus, Palmerston's virtues were seen as better suited.³⁹³ Whilst Aberdeen was more reserved than Palmerston, it is misleading to paint a comparative portrait of the two ministers in chiaroscuro, as has traditionally been the case. Political posturing concealed a degree of consensus, whether this concerned specific policies or overall ideas on how to approach Anglo-French

³⁹² Aberdeen, House of Lords, Hansard, lxxix, 4 April 1845, col. 123.

³⁹³ Hayes, *The Nineteenth Century*, p. 96.

relations. At least for this period, Palmerston's criticisms made little impact, whilst Hansard records that Aberdeen's speech in April 1845 (quoted above) earned him a standing ovation.³⁹⁴

³⁹⁴ House of Lords, Hansard, lxxix, 4 April 1845, col. 123.

Chapter Four: Anglo-French Relations in Spain

The busiest theatre of Anglo-French engagement was Spain, where governmental strife and complications over the royal succession threatened to drag Britain and France into conflict. Spain had long been in decline as an international power by the 1840s. Its military and naval might had fallen alongside that of its empire and, whilst civil strife continued to drag Spain further towards global insignificance, there was little chance of a resurgence of fortunes. There was nonetheless a concern among contemporaries that 'if Spain could recover her naval and colonial power she, with the cooperation of France, could begin to challenge the Atlantic supremacy of Great Britain.'³⁹⁵ A potential alliance between France and Spain had long been a source of anxiety for Britain. The War of the Spanish Succession in the early eighteenth century culminated in the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), which outlawed the union of the Spanish and French Crowns. By its terms, Philip V of Spain, Louis XIV's grandson, renounced the right to the throne of France whilst the French Princes, the Dukes of Berry and Orleans, renounced their right to the Spanish throne for themselves and their successors.

The fear of French influence in Spain persisted and, in 1834, Palmerston concluded the Quadruple Alliance with France and the constitutional elements in Spain and Portugal. Battles for power between the constitutional parties and their rivals, the absolutists Don Carlos in Spain and Dom Miguel in Portugal, prompted Palmerston to conclude an alliance of liberal forces and, in doing so, to prevent unilateral French intervention in the Iberian Peninsula.³⁹⁶ He embellished his achievement in the language of benevolent liberalism, in which the alliance could be branded as a counterweight to the autocratic bloc of the Northern Courts, but restriction of the French army was paramount: its march into Spain in 1823 could not be repeated.³⁹⁷ Any French intervention on the continent was viewed with

³⁹⁵ R. Bullen, 'The Great Powers and the Iberian Peninsula, 1815-48', in A. Sked (ed.), *Europe's Balance of Power 1815-1848* (London, 1979), p. 61.

³⁹⁶ See K. Bourne, *Palmerston: The Early Years 1784-1841* (London, 1982), pp. 404-407; D. Brown, *Palmerston: A Biography* (London, 2010), pp. 181-182.

³⁹⁷ Details of the earlier French intervention can be found in, for example, M. Chamberlain, 'Pax Britannica'? *British Foreign Policy 1789-1914* (London, 1988), pp. 62-65.

increased suspicion given French desires to escape (or at least circumvent) the constraints imposed by the Congress of Vienna.

History has accepted that, during Aberdeen's tenure, Spanish affairs were symptomatic of how France was 'constantly making' attempts 'to obtain a preponderating influence in European affairs.'³⁹⁸ Such conclusions were encouraged by the presence of Maria Cristina (Spain's Regent Queen 1833-1840) in France. Cristina had been exiled but was looking for an opportunity to return to Spain and to a position of influence: her daughter Isabella was queen, but would not be declared of age to reign independently until 1844. If France could gain Cristina's favour, then it would be likely to gain influence in Spanish affairs should she return. The most controversial issue for Anglo-French relations, however, was that of the 'Spanish marriages', which various historians have touched upon, although none have covered proceedings with the detail of Jones Parry's study in 1936.³⁹⁹ The marriage issue concerned the unresolved betrothal of Queen Isabella and that of her sister, the Infanta Louisa Fernanda, but other events took centre-stage before the Spanish marriages affair gathered pace in the later years of the Conservative government.

When the Conservatives took office, France was by some observers thought to be helping to undermine and overthrow General Baldomero Espartero's *Progressista* government, which was seen as the 'English' and 'liberal' option in Spanish affairs. Aberdeen's reluctance to interfere in the affairs of Spanish government was reported as demonstrating his incapability to engage with 'that great struggle between the partisans of freedom and those of absolute government, which has convulsed all countries as well as Spain.'⁴⁰⁰ The Conservatives, however, did not construe foreign affairs in bipolar terms, and Aberdeen remained consistently detached throughout Espartero's governmental difficulties and those of his successors. The narrative of a liberal struggle did little to elicit sympathy from Aberdeen, who wrote that 'Spain independent, powerful and friendly has always been with me the grand desideratum in Europe for the

³⁹⁸ H. Lytton Bulwer, *The Life of Henry John Temple, Viscount Palmerston*, iii (London, 1874), p. 223.

³⁹⁹ E. Jones Parry, *The Spanish Marriages 1841-1846: A Study of the Influence of Dynastic Ambition upon Foreign Policy* (London, 1936).

⁴⁰⁰ *The Morning Chronicle*, 14 October 1841.

interests of England.’⁴⁰¹ Peel concurred that ‘this or that’ party was unimportant compared with the ‘general policy’ outlined by Aberdeen.⁴⁰²

One of the features of this general policy, by which the Conservatives were not prepared to intervene on Espartero’s behalf, was a continuing preoccupation with trade. It mattered little to them who was governing Spain, so long as there was no interruption to the incoming revenue from Anglo-Spanish mercantile intercourse. If Spanish domestic circumstances produced an adverse effect on trade, then the Conservatives would take action. Aberdeen had done just this in one of his first dispatches to Arthur Aston, the British ambassador to Spain (1840-1843), when it appeared that civil strife had caused mercantile disruption. Aberdeen pressed for the immediate payment of money owed to British bondholders in Spain, despite claiming that ‘it is with much reluctance that H[er] M[ajesty]’s Gov[ernmen]t is compelled to use the language of remonstrance in their first communication with the Gov[ernmen]t of Spain’.⁴⁰³

Aberdeen also had a longer term vision of Anglo-Spanish trade in which Spain would, with time, come to see the benefits of recent commercial activity and would thereby become amenable to future extensions of mercantile cooperation.⁴⁰⁴ In later years he also became convinced that the free trade movement would encourage greater cooperation between nations: this was especially true of Spain, which was for much of the 1840s focused on internal issues. Aberdeen wrote to Henry Lytton Bulwer (Britain’s minister-plenipotentiary to Spain, 1843-8) on the topic, hoping that the expansion of free trade would unite Spain in an appreciation of the commercial benefits brought by this emerging international economic system, thus transcending the inward focus precipitated by civil divisions.⁴⁰⁵ It was thought that increasing levels of international economic integration would provide an upturn in fortunes for Spain and, therefore, encourage internal stability. Aberdeen in 1844 stressed that it was a British priority

⁴⁰¹ Aberdeen to Arthur Aston, 23 December 1841, Jones Parry, *The Spanish Marriages*, p. 25.

⁴⁰² Peel to Aberdeen, 9 November 1841, Peel Papers, BL, Add. MS 40453/45-6.

⁴⁰³ Aberdeen to Aston, 9 September 1841, TNA, FO 72/571/3.

⁴⁰⁴ Aberdeen to Peel, 19 September 1842, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43062/83.

⁴⁰⁵ Aberdeen to Bulwer, 31 January 1846, Bulwer Papers, Norfolk Record Office (hereafter NRO), BUL 1/24/27a.

to 'develop the great national resources of that country, and to extend her prosperity and secure her happiness.'⁴⁰⁶

These trade considerations dovetailed with the Conservatives' inherent rejection of the idea that the promotion of liberal governments was, in itself, a national interest. Whereas those such as Palmerston were prepared to champion liberal and constitutional regimes on the basis that they mirrored British values and, therefore, were better partners with whom to do business, the Conservatives took a more detached view of the international scene.⁴⁰⁷ Aberdeen was happy to deal with governments of any political colour on equal terms.⁴⁰⁸ His position on the Espartero government's political affiliations was quite clear: he 'did not care a sixpence for their liberalism. They may be as radical as they please.'⁴⁰⁹

There were other reasons for pursuing a watchful and distant policy. Spanish government in the 1840s was changing hands with great frequency and heated internecine rivalry suggested that any immediate answer to the Spanish question would be both violent and temporary. These two adjectives did not appeal to Aberdeen and did not suit Conservative government objectives. Intervention in the name of liberalism would in any case be less than straightforward: there was no way to determine between a 'liberal' or an 'illiberal' cause, because government was divided between the Court, the politicians and the army, all of which contained a multitude of factions and personal agendas.⁴¹⁰ The Palmerstonian idea that the Espartero government was a 'liberal' and therefore a 'British' cause was a connection the Conservatives viewed as intrinsically questionable, which only served to increase their reluctance to intervene in Spain.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁶ Aberdeen, House of Lords, Hansard, lxxii, 12 February 1844, col. 511.

⁴⁰⁷ This dynamic has been considered in a comparison of the politics of the fourteenth Earl of Derby with those of Lord Granville. See G. Hicks, *Peace, War and Party Politics: The Conservatives and Europe, 1846-59* (Manchester, 2007), pp. 73-4.

⁴⁰⁸ Islamic governments were a different matter: see chapter 5.

⁴⁰⁹ Aberdeen to Aston, 18 November 1841, Jones Parry, *The Spanish Marriages*, p. 25.

⁴¹⁰ For details on the nature of the Espartero government, see C. Marichal, *Spain 1834-1844: A New Society* (London, 1977). For details on all Spanish governments in Aberdeen's tenure, see E. Christiansen, *The Origins of Military Power in Spain 1800-1854* (Oxford, 1967); R. Carr, *Spain 1808-1975* (London, 2nd edition, 1982); J. Cruz, 'Notability and Revolution: Social Origins of the Political Elite in Liberal Spain, 1800 to 1853', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, xxxvi, 1994.

⁴¹¹ Palmerston, House of Commons, Hansard, lxi, 4 March 1842, col. 62.

The Spanish regime was unstable. Its vulnerability was indicated by – among other things – its heavy repression of the Press, and Espartero’s brutal response to reports of insurrection in Barcelona in the summer of 1843. The Spanish leader launched a vast shelling campaign in a region that local newspapers of all political allegiances had reported as being peaceful.⁴¹² Many of the government forces defected thereafter; Lord Cowley later wrote that the conduct of Espartero’s men in Barcelona was symptomatic of the ‘intrigues and conspiracies which have at length brought about his downfall.’⁴¹³ Wading into a multipolar conflict did not seem sensible and Aberdeen sought to use diplomatic manoeuvring to keep affairs calm, believing that problems could be resolved in the longer term.

Despite these considerations, Palmerston expressed suspicion that the Conservative policy of detachment might derive more from indecision, weakness, and fear of the French, rather than a rational assessment of the best way to pursue British interests, noting that ‘Aberdeen and some of his colleagues are greatly afraid of France, and I should be inclined to doubt their firmness on trying occasions.’⁴¹⁴ Palmerston was certain of French involvement in rebellions against the Espartero government: ‘there can be no reasonable doubt of the fact, and our friend Guizot must be as deep in it as his Royal Master.’⁴¹⁵ Diarist Charles Greville shared this judgment, suggesting that ‘everyone’ suspected France of intriguing in Spain, as did contemporary newspapers such as the *Morning Post*: ‘Not one of [France’s] communications is placed any confidence in [sic].’⁴¹⁶

If France could secure influence in Spain by helping to install a pro-French government in place of the relatively pro-English Espartero, this would send out a message about British pliability to other European powers, who might be encouraged to pursue their own designs at British expense. The *Morning Chronicle*

⁴¹² See, for example, *The Gibraltar Chronicle*, 19 June 1843, TNA, FO 355/6i (not foliated).

⁴¹³ F. Wellesley (ed.), *The Diary and Correspondence of Henry Wellesley, First Lord Cowley 1790-1846* (London, 1930), p. 240: 1843. The precise date is not given but the context shows that it is later than the Barcelona insurrection.

⁴¹⁴ Palmerston to Easthope, 7 December 1841, Palmerston Papers, BL, Add. MS 86842 (not foliated).

⁴¹⁵ Palmerston to Easthope, 17 October 1841, Palmerston Papers, BL, Add. MS 86842 (not foliated).

⁴¹⁶ C. Greville, *The Greville Memoirs: A Journal of the Reigns of King George IV, King William IV and Queen Victoria* (London, 1903), p. 51: 8 November 1841 (see also Greville, *The Greville Memoirs*, ii: (London, 1885), p. 50: 8 November 1841); *The Morning Post*, 22 September 1841.

suggested that the French demonstrated a national vendetta against the Espartero government and considered it hypocritical:

An attempt to restore [the previous] Government by arms in Spain, is precisely as if one of the family of Charles X hoisted his standard in France, declared the acts of the Chambers null, and threatened every Frenchman with death who did not submit. This is precisely what MARIA CHRISTINA has done; this is precisely what the French Court and its organs approve.⁴¹⁷

Peel was certainly wary of French intentions and made his thoughts on France clear. He was concerned that ‘the language of the [French Assembly’s Journal des] Debats is decidedly in favour of adopting the policy of Louis XIV with regard to Spain’ – domination and/or absorption – and thought that the dispatches of the Comte de Jarnac (French *chargé d’affaires* in London) indicated ‘the intentions of the French’ to be ‘gradual encroachment.’⁴¹⁸ He warned against France’s ‘underhand – but scarcely covert’ policy that aimed to ‘foment trouble in Spain.’⁴¹⁹

Many historians, not least the Prime Minister’s biographers, have stated that Peel’s suspicions were required to alert Aberdeen to French activity in Spain (and elsewhere), but the evidence suggests otherwise.⁴²⁰ From the beginning of Aberdeen’s tenure, he had few illusions about French ambitions, outlining to Queen Victoria how French desires to gain influence in Spain ‘would probably be connected with practical assistance of some kind’.⁴²¹ His policy of cooperation with France neither stemmed from – nor required – blindness to French designs.

There was no doubt that some elements of French society wanted to overthrow Espartero and replace him with Isabella’s mother Cristina and a

⁴¹⁷ *The Morning Chronicle*, 14 October 1841.

⁴¹⁸ Peel to Aberdeen, 17 and 13 October 1841, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43061/289 and 287.

⁴¹⁹ Peel to Aberdeen, 9 November 1841, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43061/327.

⁴²⁰ See, for example, A. Ramsay, *Sir Robert Peel* (London, 1928), p. 253; G. Kitson Clark, *Peel* (London, 1936), p. 102; T. Jenkins, *Sir Robert Peel* (London, 1999), p. 98-9; D. Hurd, *Robert Peel* (London, 2007), p. 274.

⁴²¹ Aberdeen to Queen Victoria, 16 October 1841, A. Benson and Viscount Esher (ed.), *The Letters of Queen Victoria: A Selection from Her Majesty’s Correspondence between the Years 1837 and 1867*, I (London, 1908), p. 347.

Francophile Court, and that some Frenchmen worked towards that goal. Their hopes of Louis Philippe's support were encouraged by the fact that Cristina had struck up an intimate friendship with the King whilst living in a house on the Rue de Courcelles in Paris. The tone of Palmerston's Eastern policy, and of the humiliation that went with it, had inflamed French feeling in very recent memory; for some, Spain represented an opportunity for revenge. As Cowley noted, however, interventionism was by no means a national creed: France was far from united in its thoughts on Spain. The ambassador reported that the French journals were 'almost at open War upon the question of the Regency.'⁴²²

Aberdeen's policy towards France in Spain hinged, as elsewhere, on the ability of his relationship with Guizot to help defuse Anglo-French incidents. With regard to French conspiracies against Espartero, and despite the views of some newspapers and most historians, this policy appeared to work, because of Guizot's similar outlook.⁴²³ Guizot's memoirs recalled a period of promise for relations in Spain. He lamented that England had in the 1840s been fixated by the past and the tradition of rivalry in the region and he advocated non-intervention, pointing to numerous examples when French attempts to gain influence in Spain had only resulted in difficulties.⁴²⁴ Intervention, in his view, was only likely to increase local rivalry by reinforcing the beliefs and belligerence of those with international backing.⁴²⁵ The publication of such sentiments might be deemed by some as an attempt by Guizot to whitewash his historical reputation, but they nonetheless squared with his earlier works and the majority of his actions in government.

Aberdeen again used correspondence with Princess Lieven to communicate to her lover Guizot that Britain was monitoring French activity, in order to ensure the French minister remained loyal to the *entente* and avoided overt interference in Spanish affairs.⁴²⁶ France would not be allowed to compromise British 'honour and interest', which in Spain essentially meant no major upset to the balance of power

⁴²² Cowley to Aberdeen, 22 July 1842, TNA, FO 519/50/245.

⁴²³ See, for example, *The Bury and Norwich Post*, 27 October 1841.

⁴²⁴ F. Guizot, *Memoirs of a Minister of State, from the Year 1840* (London, 1864), p. 295; Guizot, *The Last Days of the Reign of Louis Philippe* (London, 1867), pp. 96-97.

⁴²⁵ Guizot, *Memoirs of a Minister of State*, p. 308.

⁴²⁶ See, for example, Aberdeen to Princess Lieven, 21 December 1841 and 27 December 1842, Jones Parry (ed.), *The Correspondence of Lord Aberdeen and Princess Lieven 1832-54*, I (London, 1938), pp. 190, 211.

or to the development of Anglo-Spanish trade, which Aberdeen had sought to protect and extend by arguing for reduced tariffs within his first months in office.⁴²⁷ French citizens could not be prevented from lending themselves to the anti-*Progressista* cause, but the French government was not to connive at a pro-French administration that threatened British interests. That Aberdeen regarded Guizot's denials of complicity as carrying 'every appearance of sincerity', was a viewpoint that appeared to be validated by the French minister's repeated rebuttals of open requests from the French ambassador to Spain, Narcisse-Achille de Salvandy, to send money and troops in the cause of Cristina.⁴²⁸

Guizot performed the function for Anglo-French relations that suited Conservative objectives. He was by no means a paragon of altruistic Anglophilia but in Spain, as elsewhere, he was prepared to blunt the excesses of French nationalist designs in the name of a peaceful cohabitation of Western Europe. Specific early instances of this included when a plan emerged in the autumn of 1841 for Cristina to travel from Paris to the border with Spain where she could be ready to take advantage of any decline in Espartero's position. As Aston reported, it was Guizot that rejected this idea because of the impact it might have on Spain and would have on international perceptions of France.⁴²⁹ The French government could have employed more subtle means of supporting the anti-*Progressista* forces, but there were tangible attempts to exclude outright support, and the government that succeeded Espartero's was anything but pro-French.

When it came, the overthrow of Espartero in 1843 seemed the product of Spanish domestic discontent, rather than a triumph of French intervention. Aberdeen was convinced that outside influences had consistently been exaggerated:

If the overthrow of the Regent was contrived in Paris, his elevation was said to be contrived in London [...] I am satisfied that the English Government had nothing to do with the elevation of Espartero any more than the French

⁴²⁷ Aberdeen to Aston, 14 December 1841, HCPP, 'Correspondence respecting Commercial Privileges in Spain' (1845), li, 652/3.

⁴²⁸ Aberdeen to Queen Victoria, 10 October 1841, Benson and Esher (ed.), *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, I, p. 347; Guizot, *Memoirs of a Minister of State*, pp. 325-6.

⁴²⁹ Aston to Aberdeen, 17 September 1841, TNA, FO 72/578/224.

Government had with his overthrow [...] In the course of six weeks there was not a single village in Spain which did not rise in opposition to the Regent [...] If this were produced by a few thousand francs and a few French intriguers, it was ridiculous to suppose that all this could have been done [...]⁴³⁰

Limited French involvement was not ruled out, but Aberdeen did not think it on a level inconsistent with that attributed to England during Espartero's ascendancy in 1840, if it had any impact at all. A Conservative consensus backed this position and Peel made a notable speech on the matter, responding to Palmerston's claims that France had intrigued against a stable British ally:

If [Espartero] had had that hold in Spain which the noble Lord seemed to think he had, how does the noble Lord account for it, that in the case of a person of his high military distinction, who had shown great valour and sincere desire to promote the interests of the country in which he exercised power – how does the noble Lord account for it that no effort whatever was made in any part of Spain to rescue Espartero from the fate with which he was threatened, and which ultimately befell him? And would the noble Lord have counselled active interference on the part of this country, for the purpose of maintaining in authority any personage in whose behalf so little public sympathy appeared to exist?⁴³¹

Aberdeen's views were identical to those of his leader. He often spoke of the importance of Spanish independence of action in its own affairs, because any changes made on the back of foreign interference were unlikely to be accepted by the Spanish population.⁴³² In 1844, Aberdeen declared that 'if there is anything more strongly marked than the determination of the Spanish people, it is their spirit of resistance to foreign influence; and, though they may for a time submit, there is no doubt that they will rise against it, and resist it, and that it will ultimately be completely destroyed.'⁴³³ Yet at times, diplomatic counsel was offered to the

⁴³⁰ Aberdeen, House of Lords, Hansard, lxxii, 12 February 1844, cols. 509-510.

⁴³¹ Peel, House of Commons, Hansard, lxxvi, 7 August 1844, col. 1881.

⁴³² This position mirrored that of Guizot: see Guizot, *Memoirs of a Minister of State*, p. 308.

⁴³³ Aberdeen, House of Lords, Hansard, lxxii, 12 February 1844, col. 511.

Cortes in dealing with rebellions or, later, the marriage question. Aberdeen regarded this as divisible from unwelcome and/or imposed interference, and part of the natural intercourse between nations. Responding to news of anti-government disturbances in the north of Spain in the autumn of 1841, Aberdeen wrote to Aston: 'Although without any intelligence from you, and without accurate information from any quarter, it is the opinion of Her Majesty's Gov[ernmen]t that we ought not to hesitate a moment in offering that countenance and support which are due to the Gov[ernmen]t of a friendly State; and which may be most valuable in a season of danger and uncertainty.'⁴³⁴

Aberdeen saw his offer of friendly counsel as compatible with Spanish independence of action and we have discussed how he would not have offered any physical assistance to Espartero. By stressing the importance of Spain being left to make its decisions independently, Aberdeen did not mean that the Cortes should function in diplomatic isolation, just that decisions should not be forced upon them: diplomatic consultation on political matters was considered standard procedure. This was a line of logic that was employed elsewhere and even if one considers it inconsistent and/or hypocritical, as the historiography has suggested, this hardly mattered if Conservative objectives were being delivered.⁴³⁵

Some Conservatives, such as the Colonial Secretary Lord Stanley, were more inclined to view Espartero as the best option for securing the future stability of Spain, but agreed with the government's policy that it would be futile to interfere and maintain a leader for whom there was so little domestic support in Spain. Stanley spoke to this end in July 1843, echoing Aberdeen's view that diplomatic counsel was compatible with Spanish independence:

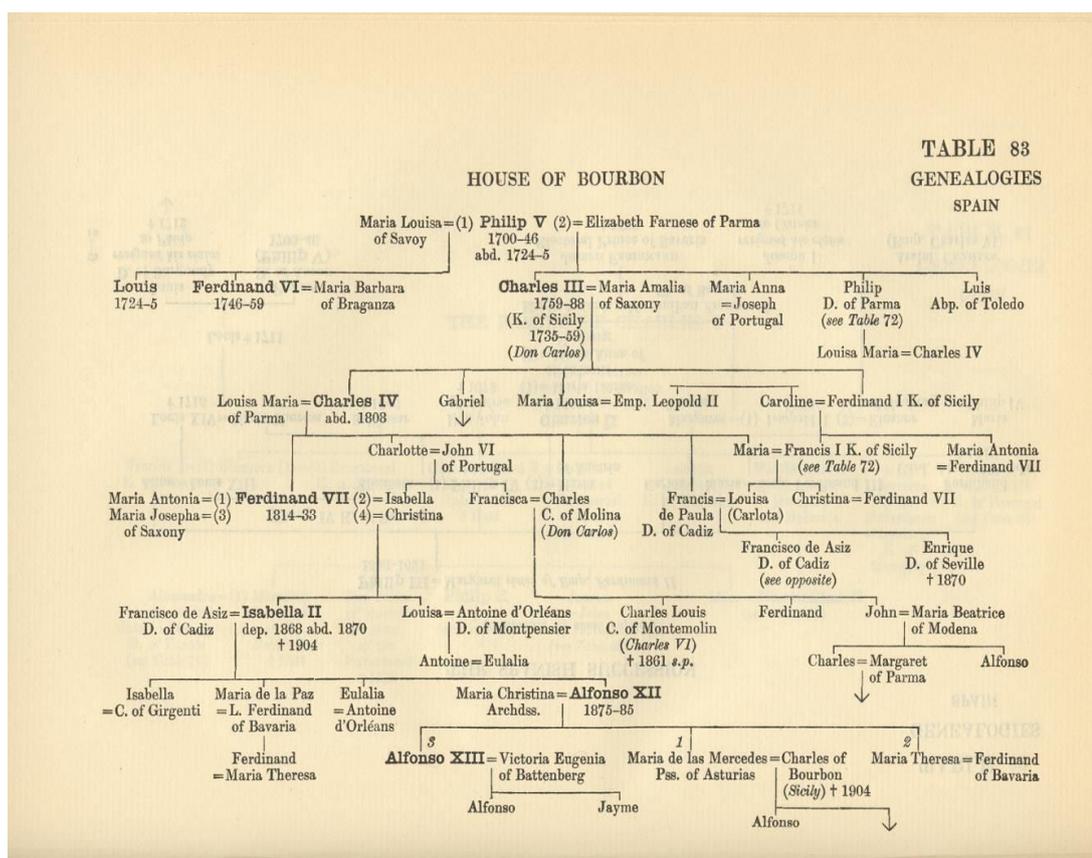
I speak of the affairs of Spain with great pain, because I believe, that in the maintenance of the administration of Espartero there was the best chance of a steady government, and of the returning tranquillity and improving prosperity of that magnificent country [...] But can [Palmerston] assert, that so far as was consistent with the interests of a friendly country, every support – every moral

⁴³⁴ Aberdeen to Aston, 16 October 1841, TNA, FO 72/571/11.

⁴³⁵ See M. Chamberlain, *Lord Aberdeen: A Political Biography* (London, 1983), pp. 379-389; Jones Parry, *The Spanish Marriages*.

support which the Court of England could give to the Government of Spain, has not been fairly, frankly, and freely given? [...] A Government upheld by a foreign force can hardly be said to be independent.⁴³⁶

By the time of Espartero's overthrow, the question of who would marry Queen Isabella and her younger sister the Infanta Louisa Fernanda had assumed greater significance. Isabella was to enter her teenage years in October 1843 and this, combined with the change of government in Spain, placed the issue of her betrothal at the forefront of Spanish politics. The marriage issue was controversial because of the great powers' vested interests in the potential consorts for the two sisters. If a groom with connections to a great power could be married to the Infanta, then influence in Spain could be gained if Isabella failed to produce an heir. The hand of Isabella was, naturally, a still greater prize. The genealogy of the Spanish House of Bourbon can be seen in the table below.⁴³⁷



⁴³⁶ Stanley, House of Commons, Hansard, lxx, 28 July 1843, cols. 1480-1.

⁴³⁷ See A. Ward, G. Prothero and S. Leathes (eds.), *The Cambridge Modern History*, xiii: Genealogical Tables and Lists and General Index (Cambridge, 1911), table 83. References to other tables are not relevant to this study and may be ignored by the reader.

Almost every eligible bachelor in Europe was at some stage touted as a potential consort for Isabella, but there was only ever a handful of likely candidates. On the periphery of this group were, firstly, the sons of Louis Philippe, and, secondly, Carlos Luis, the Comte de Montemolin, Isabella's cousin. If a son of Louis Philippe could secure Isabella's hand then this would, obviously, give France influence in Spanish affairs. This would have been an explosive combination, however, given that it might potentially have breached the Treaty of Utrecht by uniting the French and Spanish Crowns in a future generation. Such a union was never seriously entertained in France because despite gaining Spain as an ally, it would, in Britain, lose a far more powerful friend, and thus place France in isolation among Europe's great powers.

Such a union might well have brought war with Britain; but it would almost certainly have brought war with one or more of the Northern Courts. Not only would autocratic Europe have been affronted by the apparent French expansion that they had long been trying to prevent, but in Montemolin they had a candidate through which their own objectives might be pursued in Spain, whom they did not want to be excluded in the interest of a French prince. Montemolin was the son of the exiled Don Carlos, Ferdinand VII's younger brother, who had been excluded from the Spanish throne by the abandonment of Salic law and Isabella's succession. Don Carlos' autocratic sympathies were part of the reason for both his own exclusion from Spanish rule and for the favour of the Northern Courts towards the candidature of his son. Montemolin's candidature was unpopular in the vast majority of Spain, however, as its success would require a reversion to the Carlist influence that the reign of Isabella was supposed to exclude.

Spain was not likely to select either Montemolin or a French prince for Isabella, because both would involve subservience to a foreign power, and because of the inflammatory effects on domestic and international relations. This left among the remaining candidates Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg, who was seen as the 'English' candidate due to his familial connections. Leopold was the first cousin of both Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, whilst the King of Belgium, a close British ally, was Prince Leopold's paternal and Queen Victoria's maternal uncle. Leopold's candidature was not barred by any international treaty, nor likely to provoke the

extent of Spanish opposition that would be engendered by the success of Montemolin, but it was nonetheless unappealing to France and the Northern Courts.

There remained three principal candidates of the Bourbon House, apart from Montemolin. From the Neapolitan branch of the family, Isabella's uncle, Don Francis, Comte de Trapani, was one. Two of the queen's cousins were also potential suitors: Don Francisco d'Asis Maria, the Duke of Cadiz, and Don Enrique, the Duke of Seville. The latter two candidatures were of central importance, and intimately bound up with the negotiations Aberdeen had to conduct.

Conservative policy towards France over the marriage issue was informed by the same principles as broader Spanish policy. Aberdeen hoped that the development of Anglo-Spanish trade and, in later years, the perceived benefits of free trade, would engender Spanish prosperity and stability. It was in a future of calmer times that Spanish determination of an equitable solution to the marriage question was thought to be most likely: Aberdeen wrote in 1845 that 'many things may happen in Spain in the course of a few years to affect this question in a manner not now apparent.'⁴³⁸ In the meantime, Aberdeen thought that Britain should maintain a position of 'apparent indifference' in order not to needlessly arouse the indignation of other great powers, and therefore to avoid the entrenchment of prevailing attitudes of national self-interest.⁴³⁹

Aberdeen was well aware that other powers did not share his conception of the marriages question, and that they were likely to intrigue for the betrothal of Isabella to the candidate that best represented their interests. This can be seen in earlier diplomatic exchanges with Austria, in which Metternich had been dragging his feet over official recognition of Isabella's legitimacy as queen. Aberdeen saw that Austria was delaying recognition in order to extract a price: Montemolin's marriage to Isabella, which, if concluded, would lead to the reintroduction of Carlist influence in Spain. Recognition would then be gladly given, as Austria would not have to contrive Don Carlos' coronation in order to see autocratic rule on the

⁴³⁸ Aberdeen to Peel, 8 September 1845, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43064/321.

⁴³⁹ Aberdeen to Queen Victoria, 18 May 1846, A. Gordon (ed.), *Selections from the Correspondence of the Earl of Aberdeen*, vii(a): 1845-1848 (London, 1888), p. 211.

Iberian Peninsula. The Foreign Secretary wrote that 'it is clear that Metternich has held a double language on the affair of the Spanish recognition [...] He will wait for another crisis, which in fact he is himself instrumental in producing.'⁴⁴⁰

Jones Parry thought that Metternich had gained a diplomatic victory by using Montemolin's candidature to divide Britain and France, in that Metternich had been making overtures to France on this and other diplomatic projects without consulting Britain.⁴⁴¹ Given the historical tradition of portraying Aberdeen as in awe of his Austrian counterpart, which is based on their diplomatic intercourse during the Napoleonic wars, and considering the historiographical portrayal of Anglo-French relations deteriorating in Spain, one might indeed assume the success of Metternich's policy.⁴⁴² But, whilst there were understandable differences in the British and French opinions of Isabella and the Infanta's potential consorts, the greatest rivalry concerning Spanish affairs was between the supporters of Montemolin and those in France who supported the candidatures of Louis Philippe's sons. This aspect of the marriage issue involved the conflict between autocratic and liberal ideology, in which the Conservatives were not interested. It did, however, present an opportunity for Aberdeen, which he exploited in a more subtle manner than Jones Parry appreciated.

Aberdeen's policy towards Austria was based upon the assumption that Austria would not countenance the candidature of a French prince, and this allowed him to play France against Austria.⁴⁴³ He used correspondence with Robert Gordon, Britain's representative in Austria (and Aberdeen's son) to give inflated estimations of the Anglo-French relationship so that Metternich would promote Montemolin ever more enthusiastically.⁴⁴⁴ France could be relied upon to object to any candidate associated with Don Carlos, a candidature which would bring

⁴⁴⁰ Aberdeen to Gordon, 24 February 1842, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43211i/65.

⁴⁴¹ Jones Parry, *The Spanish Marriages*, pp. 62-3.

⁴⁴² See, for example, H. Nicolson, *The Congress of Vienna: A Study in Allied Unity 1812-1822* (London, 1946), pp. 57-61; H. Kissinger, *A World Restored: The Politics of Conservatism in a Revolutionary Era: A detailed study of diplomacy and political manoeuvre 1812-22 with particular reference to Metternich and Castlereagh* (London, 3rd edition, 1973), pp. 96-101; P. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics 1763-1848* (Oxford, 1994), p. 475.

⁴⁴³ See, for example, Aberdeen to Gordon, 16 October 1843, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43211ii/342.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Austrian influence closer to France's border. France and Austria were thus, at this stage, left to cancel out each other's more selfish designs.⁴⁴⁵ Spanish opinion, directed away from Montemolin or a French prince by strong external opposition, could be gently steered towards a more neutral candidate with less threat to the balance of power.

The Conservatives' policy of considered distance from Spanish affairs, and Aberdeen's idea that appearing uninterested in the issue helped to prevent the escalation of diplomatic conflict, was seemingly undermined by the agreement that he made with Guizot at the Chateau d'Eu in September 1843. There, Britain and France agreed to support only the candidature of Spanish Bourbons for the Queen's hand, thus excluding Louis Philippe's progeny, but including Montemolin (whose failure could safely be presumed). This also excluded Britain from actively supporting Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg. With the 'liberal' Espartero consigned to history and the path ostensibly cleared for France to influence the Spanish Bourbon candidates, without fear of a British campaign in support of a Saxe-Coburg candidature, Aberdeen might be seen to have acquiesced in a campaign of French intrigue to exclude first a 'liberal' government, then 'British' marriage interests.

Discussion of the issue of the marriages at Eu, however, was based on a genuine Anglo-French desire to implement the values of the *entente*, not on persistent French intrigue or *ad hoc* British measures to promote peace at the expense of national interests.⁴⁴⁶ The agreement at Eu sought to promote by friendly counsel the prospects of those candidatures which would be less inflammatory to international relations. Given that there was no implication of physical interference, no binding effect on Spanish decision, and that the general consensus in Spain was for a Spanish Bourbon, the gentleman's agreement did not seem controversial.

Aberdeen's approach to the marriages question was based upon a rational appreciation of British interests, even though the agreement was expressed with

⁴⁴⁵ Guizot's indignation at the Montemolin candidature can be seen in his recollection of diplomatic conversation with Austria in September 1843. See Guizot, *The Last Days*, p. 172.

⁴⁴⁶ This has been argued in Jones Parry, *The Spanish Marriages*, p. 86: 'In the last resort European peace claimed [Aberdeen's] loyalty before national interests.'

the expansive hyperbole that might be expected of a grand state occasion. Guizot recalled his concord with Aberdeen:

We parted with great satisfaction at having thus mutually opened our minds, and with a feeling of most amicable confidence. We do not always consider the extent to which the greatest and most difficult affairs of nations would be simplified if the men who direct them would know and esteem each other enough to rely on the truth of their respective words, and on the conformity of their acts with their declarations.⁴⁴⁷

Charles Greville thought French satisfaction showed that Aberdeen had been 'cajoled and deceived' into supporting a Spanish Bourbon at the expense of British interest.⁴⁴⁸ Douglas Johnson saw the formation of the *entente* at Eu as the beginning of real trouble in Spain and Jones Parry considered it the point at which France gave itself a licence to intrigue in Spain without fear of reprisal.⁴⁴⁹ Cowley's report that the agreement at Eu elicited a nationalist pamphlet calling for action in Spain seems to confirm these assertions.⁴⁵⁰

Britain had in fact gained a cheap victory in Spanish affairs. Interest in the marriage issue was only that neither a French prince nor Montemolin should secure the hand of Isabella, nor the Infanta's hand before Isabella had children (this is discussed below).⁴⁵¹ There were benefits and drawbacks to the other candidates, but there were only serious international problems with French or Carlist influence. Aberdeen privately expressed his opinion that the main Spanish Bourbon candidates (the Duke of Seville, the Duke of Cadiz and the Comte de Trapani) represented the middle ground in Spanish affairs; a son of the exiled Don Carlos

⁴⁴⁷ Guizot, *The Last Days*, p. 132.

⁴⁴⁸ Greville, *Memoirs* (1885), p. 201: 19 September 1843 and Greville, *Memoirs* (1903), p. 205: 19 September 1843.

⁴⁴⁹ D. Johnson, *Guizot: Aspects of French History 1787-1874* (London, 1963), p. 303; Jones Parry, *The Spanish Marriages*, p. 116.

⁴⁵⁰ Cowley to Aberdeen, 6 September 1843, TNA, FO 72/628/176. The pamphlet included the line, 'I tell [Britain] that in all History there is not to be found a Government so detestable as yours!'

⁴⁵¹ Aberdeen to Queen Victoria, 27 September 1842; Benson and Esher (ed.), *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, I, p. 433.

would be as dangerous for Spain as a French prince would be for European stability.⁴⁵²

The main Spanish Bourbon candidates were, therefore, the best option for maintaining the balance of power and Guizot, beneath the pomp and ceremony of Eu, was a pragmatist seeking stability for France. Although he found the Conservatives' strong discouragement of a French prince to be a departure from their professed interest in Spanish independence of action, he recognised British concerns and measured his policy accordingly.⁴⁵³ Guizot wrote to Count Bresson, French Ambassador to Madrid: 'A cordial understanding is not, I know, a matter to be easily carried out on all points at all times. It is, however, the essential fact of the general situation, and I rely on you to maintain it above the local difficulties which weigh heavily on you.'⁴⁵⁴ Aberdeen accepted Louis Philippe's similar sentiments and of Guizot wrote that 'I think he fully understands our views and interests', but the Foreign Secretary remained watchful.⁴⁵⁵ In the same letter in which Aberdeen welcomed French diplomatic moves, he stressed the need to remain cautious and suspicious: the *entente* was not a licence for French freedom of action.⁴⁵⁶

The Conservatives' focus on the main Spanish Bourbon candidates seemed sensible, despite the problems that they appeared to present for Spain. The Duke of Seville's difficulties included his mother Carlotta, whose loathing of her sister Cristina blocked Seville's marriage to his cousin Isabella. Seville was also pro-*Progressista* whereas Cristina belonged to the rival *Moderado* party. These obstacles were not insurmountable, however, particularly as death removed one: Carlotta expired on 29 January 1844. The vain Seville might also be persuaded to switch allegiances in exchange for increased power.

Seville's brother Cadiz has been described as a 'cretin', impotent, homosexual, or any combination of the three, depending on whose version of

⁴⁵² Aberdeen to Queen Victoria, 15 August 1843; *ibid*, p. 488.

⁴⁵³ Guizot, *The Last Days*, pp. 122-3.

⁴⁵⁴ Guizot to Bresson, 17 February 1844; Guizot, *The Last Days*, pp. 147-8.

⁴⁵⁵ Aberdeen to Peel, 6 September 1843, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43062/401.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid*.

events one listens to.⁴⁵⁷ Either way, his credentials as a royal consort were open to doubt and historians have echoed contemporary concerns. Aberdeen's endeavours to 'do all in my power to prepare the way' for Cadiz to marry Isabella, believing this to be 'more popular than any other' marriage proposal in Spain seem, therefore, to demonstrate a lack of awareness of, and commitment to, Spanish interest, which was still seen as important in making a selection that would last.⁴⁵⁸ Matters were not, however, that straightforward.

It was the British minister in Spain, Aston, who had branded Cadiz a cretin, but he changed his mind after further meetings with Cadiz, and his successor Bulwer regarded Cadiz as 'amiable in manners and not deficient in observation and intelligence'.⁴⁵⁹ Rumours of Cadiz's impotence appear to have been just that, only surfacing in the summer of 1846, when the source was the disgruntled French ambassador, Count Bresson, who had hoped for a more 'French' candidate for Isabella's hand.⁴⁶⁰ There also appears to be little evidence to substantiate the rumour that the Duke was homosexual, despite Muriel Chamberlain's recycling of it.⁴⁶¹ Had this been true, his sexuality would in any case have been no bar to fathering children. Perhaps he was bisexual, but it hardly mattered: Cadiz later accumulated a brood of twelve.⁴⁶²

Aberdeen's permissiveness of French attempts to promote the candidature of the Neapolitan Count Trapani has also elicited charges of submission to France.⁴⁶³ Jones Parry suggested that Guizot ignored the *entente* in an attempt to create a league of Bourbon states as France could, by support of Trapani, use the Count's influence in Naples both to challenge Austrian influence in the Italian states and to score a diplomatic victory over Austria by defeating her ambitions in Spain.⁴⁶⁴ This was all rather fanciful: had Trapani gained Isabella's hand, it would

⁴⁵⁷ Aston to Cowley, 27 June 1843, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43129/151.

⁴⁵⁸ Aberdeen to Bulwer, 18 January 1844, Bulwer Papers, NRO, BUL 1/24/3; Aberdeen to Gordon, 20 February 1844, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43211ii/ 399.

⁴⁵⁹ Aberdeen to Bulwer, 18 January 1844, Bulwer Papers, NRO, BUL 1/24/3; Bulwer to Aberdeen, 7 January 1844, Bulwer Papers, NRO, BUL 1/21/7.

⁴⁶⁰ See Hall, *England and the Orleans Monarchy*, p. 387; Jones Parry, *The Spanish Marriages*, pp. 305-6; E. Holt, *The Carlist Wars in Spain* (London, 1967), p. 208.

⁴⁶¹ Chamberlain, *Aberdeen*, p. 387.

⁴⁶² For greater detail on this point, see Price, *The Perilous Crown*, p. 318.

⁴⁶³ Jones Parry, *The Spanish Marriages*, pp. 161, 194.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 203, 215.

have been unlikely to engender any change in Italy: it was not Trapani who was the King of Naples. The impact of the marriage would be very limited outside Spain.

Muriel Chamberlain suggested that the agreement at Eu appeared hypocritical, given Aberdeen's stress on Spanish independence.⁴⁶⁵ Jones Parry also pointed out that Aberdeen had once described French insistence on a Bourbon candidate as 'a most arrogant and unwarrantable dictation [...] calculated by its insolence to provoke the most determined opposition.'⁴⁶⁶ The agreement made at Eu was not a decision on behalf of Spain, however: Aberdeen wrote that 'we agreed to support the pretensions of some descendant of Philip V to such an extent as may be consistent with the active independence of Spain.'⁴⁶⁷ Aberdeen's agreement at Eu had changed nothing except, morally, binding Guizot not to promote the candidature of a son of Louis Philippe, and binding Aberdeen not to promote the candidature of Prince Leopold.

Historiographical preoccupations such as Aberdeen's perceived hypocrisy, besides being questionable in substance, have obscured the key point in Spain. Left unattended, Spanish affairs threatened to drag the Great Powers into a morass of competing claims and to endanger international relations, but Aberdeen's primary concern was that the problem of the marriages went away, if not for the longer term, then at least for a while. The issue was not that important for Britain. As the Conservative MP Lord John Manners noted in the House of Commons, it was 'a subject in which many of its Members took little interest'.⁴⁶⁸ Britain's European interests would, of course, be damaged if a French Prince or Montemolin secured Isabella's hand, but such a combination was highly unlikely anyway. Aberdeen thought the problem would be better resolved at a time when Spanish civil divisions were repaired or at least eased and, as long as France was not seen to be overtly intriguing in Spain, he was content to let the situation drift. This raised problems that will be dealt with below, but it remained as the logic behind the Conservatives' policy and helped to defuse the situation. With more pressing

⁴⁶⁵ M. Chamberlain, *Pax Britannica*, pp. 40-41.

⁴⁶⁶ Aberdeen to Aston, 23 September 1842; Jones Parry, *The Spanish Marriages*, p. 57.

⁴⁶⁷ Aberdeen to Gordon, 16 October 1843, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43211ii/342.

⁴⁶⁸ Manners, House of Commons, Hansard, lxxiii, 27 February 1844, col. 335.

domestic and foreign objectives to pursue, the government could do without distraction in Spain.

The agreement at Eu was the logical outcome of such a policy. It is telling that Henry Bulwer, who had by now replaced Aston as British Minister in Madrid, and became one of Aberdeen's harshest critics in later life, supported the encouragement of Spanish Bourbon pretensions in the wake of the meeting.⁴⁶⁹ Bulwer would contend in his memoirs that the agreement restricted Spanish choice: he wrote of 'the monstrous pretension of confining [Isabella's] choice to a member of the Bourbon family.'⁴⁷⁰ This is a sentiment on which current historiographical consensus rests, but it conveniently ignored Bulwer's original support for Aberdeen's policy. Bulwer wrote in January 1844: 'If we are ever to see tranquillity permanently established in [Spain], it will only be attained by a reference to permanent principles, founded on the National character – which though apparently lost in party squabbles and petty intrigues, always ultimately dominates – and not on the mere passions and policy of the hour.'⁴⁷¹ Bulwer had shared Aberdeen's longer-term perspective then, but he later argued that the Bourbons were 'singularly ill-adapted for securing the happiness of Queen Isabella' and incapable of 'contenting the pride and advancing the interests of the Spanish nation.'⁴⁷² In the months after the meeting at Eu, however, his correspondence reveals a support for Aberdeen's policy that his memoirs omitted: Bulwer had 'no objection' to a Bourbon candidature.⁴⁷³

A focus on the long-term perspective at Eu, and the consequent delay in a resolution, was not only supported in Britain. It was also useful to the Queen Dowager in Spain, whose role in Spanish stability was vital. Cristina held grievances against all of the candidates. Her apparently changeable position on the marriage question displayed shrewd judgment regarding her own political influence: the

⁴⁶⁹ Chamberlain, *Aberdeen*, p. 383.

⁴⁷⁰ Bulwer, *The Life of Henry John Temple*, iii, p. 211.

⁴⁷¹ Bulwer to Aberdeen, 21 January 1844, Bulwer Papers, NRO, BUL 1/21/18c.

⁴⁷² Bulwer, *The Life of Henry John Temple*, iii, p. 212.

⁴⁷³ Bulwer to Aberdeen, 21 January 1844, Bulwer Papers, NRO, BUL 1/21/18a. See also Bulwer to Aberdeen, 7 January 1844, Bulwer Papers, NRO, BUL 1/21/7.

prolonging of the marriage issue retained her position of power.⁴⁷⁴ This is another aspect misjudged by Jones Parry, who thought that Cristina would, through ‘the foibles and inconsistencies of her sex’, support whichever candidate had been suggested to her by an adviser.⁴⁷⁵ This assessment owed more to Jones Parry’s prejudices than serious historical analysis.

Events gathered pace late in 1845 when Aberdeen and Guizot met once more at the Chateau d’Eu to discuss affairs including Spain, which resulted in Aberdeen approving what has been deemed a controversial agreement. Aberdeen wrote to Peel: ‘With respect to the Infanta [Guizot and Louis Philippe] both declared in the most positive manner, that until [Isabella] was married and had children, they should consider the Infanta precisely as her sister, and that any marriage with a French Prince would be entirely out of the question.’⁴⁷⁶ The marriage of the Infanta had developed into the more significant question as she got older, because inbreeding within the Spanish Royal family had afflicted Isabella with physical weakness. Ichthyosis and obesity also combined to create doubt about the willingness of potential consorts to consummate a marriage with her.

Aberdeen and Guizot’s agreement was a response to the potential for a double marriage for the sisters. The possibility of a childless marriage for Isabella raised the prospect of France securing longer term influence in the affairs of Spain by marrying a French Prince to the Infanta, which was not disallowed by any existing agreement. Delaying the marriage of the Infanta allowed time for reconsideration of any difficulties that might arise from a childless marriage or Isabella’s early death. Peel thought that problems remained: ‘suppose the Queen to die after the birth of one child [...] [or] suppose them to be idiots’, which was not unlikely in the context of Spanish monarchical history.⁴⁷⁷ He added that ‘a contract

⁴⁷⁴ In recent British historiography, there has been a reconsideration of the role of aristocratic women, both independently and in relation to the careers of their husbands. An English-language assessment of Queen Cristina would be a welcome addition to work such as: K. Reynolds, *Aristocratic Women and Political Society in Victorian Britain* (Oxford, 1998); K. Gleadle and S. Richardson, *Women in British Politics, 1760-1860: The Power of the Petticoat* (London, 2000); E. Chalus, *Elite Women in English Political Life c. 1754-1790* (Oxford, 2005); J. Davey, ‘Crossing the Floor: Mary Derby, the Fifteenth Earl and the Liberals, 1878-1882’, in G. Hicks (ed.), *Conservatism and British Foreign Policy, 1820-1920: The Derbys and Their World* (London, 2011), pp. 169-188.

⁴⁷⁵ Jones Parry, *The Spanish Marriages*, p. 171.

⁴⁷⁶ Aberdeen to Peel, 8 September 1845, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43064/322.

⁴⁷⁷ Peel to Aberdeen, 8 September 1845, Peel Papers, BL, Add. MS 40455/148.

of marriage or a conditional promise of marriage is a transaction of a very peculiar nature indeed.⁴⁷⁸ This doubt about Aberdeen's policy seems to support arguments made elsewhere that divisions were growing within Conservative ranks.⁴⁷⁹

Aberdeen was aware of the implications of the agreement but was more concerned that the brakes had once more been applied on the topic after rumours of a proposed double marriage had emerged from Spain. The Foreign Secretary wanted to suppress the issue once more; the rumours came at a time of continuing governmental strife in Spain, while Britain's conversion to free trade was at an advanced stage, with all its attendant political difficulties. Governmental changes in Spain would imperil and undermine any attempt at an agreement, and in the Peelite analysis, Britain's eventual adoption of free trade would help to stabilise European affairs. Peel registered queries with Aberdeen's policy to make sure the Foreign Secretary had considered its implications: he saw no reason to try and alter it or block it. The Prime Minister intervened only to ensure that the agreement remained confidential: he denied Aberdeen's wish to make it public in order to insure against French countermovement.

Despite claims to the contrary, the 1845 agreement remained consistent with Aberdeen's insistence on Spanish freedom of choice.⁴⁸⁰ Spain was still free to choose Isabella's consort, whilst Isabella's marriage and reproductive success did not force the Infanta into a union with a son of Louis Philippe, it only reintroduced members of French royalty as potential candidates in a later, contingent situation. Aberdeen's discussion of Prince Leopold's candidature in the wake of this agreement has given rise to accusations of continuing inconsistency and hypocrisy, but no agreement had outlawed a Saxe-Coburg marriage.⁴⁸¹ Aberdeen avoided promotion of the Prince's candidature and Guizot recognised that London might well favour a Saxe-Coburg. Guizot knew, however, that the strength of the *entente* meant that Britain would not actively support one.⁴⁸²

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁹ Bullen, *Palmerston, Guizot and the Collapse of the Entente Cordiale*, p. 41.

⁴⁸⁰ Chamberlain, *Aberdeen*, p. 384; J. Hall, *England and the Orleans Monarchy* (London, 1912), p. 347; Jones Parry, *The Spanish Marriages*, p. 332.

⁴⁸¹ Chamberlain, *Aberdeen*, p. 384.

⁴⁸² Guizot, *The Last Days*, p. 121.

Particular problems now arose with Britain's over-active minister in Spain, Sir Henry Bulwer. The Conservatives' policy required Bulwer to keep wider British objectives in mind amidst the signs of local intrigue. The Conservatives still wanted to appear uninterested in the marriage question by offering only detached friendly counsel, in order that the issue could be better resolved in the future. Although this approach offered others the freedom of manoeuvre, the policy was deemed to be safeguarded by both the *entente* and the general Spanish preference for Isabella to marry a Spanish Bourbon. Those such as Jones Parry have disagreed: Bulwer, they argue, was placed in an impossible position whereby he was faced with evidence of French intrigue in the marriage question but requested not to act against it, with France trampling over his personal and British national prestige.⁴⁸³ The Conservatives' policy, however, was deployed with a wider perspective than Jones Parry allowed for, and it did not concern itself with the temporary prize of prestige.

Bulwer was unconvinced by Conservative policy. As 1846 progressed, he grew ever more frustrated with Aberdeen and with France:

England would support Spain in an independent choice, but it did not clearly say so, and I knew Lord Aberdeen would not like me to say so. On the other hand, to leave it to be understood that the Spanish Government had no resource but to submit to the hard fate that the pride and family interest of a neighbouring potentate prepared for her, would expose me equally to censure. The affair was more complicated by Queen Christina's selection of a Coburg Prince.⁴⁸⁴

Bulwer's annoyance with Aberdeen derived from his view that a truly independent decision for Spain would involve its selection of the Prince of Saxe-Coburg for Isabella's hand, and Bulwer's conviction of Cristina's approval grew with time. His frustration at being forced to watch France conspire against this gained the sympathy of Jones Parry and others who accepted that France was engaged in

⁴⁸³ Jones Parry, *The Spanish Marriages*, p. 289.

⁴⁸⁴ Bulwer, *The Life of Henry John Temple*, iii, p. 221-2.

pressuring Spain, and who regarded Aberdeen's policy as contradictory and exhibiting a dangerous inertia.⁴⁸⁵

Saxe-Coburg's candidature, however, was far from straightforward, as Aberdeen recognised; international circumstances were more complex than Bulwer allowed for. The fact that Leopold's brother Ferdinand was the King of Portugal gave the French understandable concern about the increasing influence of a rival Royal House on its doorstep: Aberdeen wrote that '[the marriage] may be popular in Spain; but I do not believe that Louis Philippe would approve of it', adding that it was 'objectionable' on other grounds.⁴⁸⁶ Aberdeen did not rule out the Prince of Saxe-Coburg's candidature, but tried to steer Bulwer away from supporting it. Neither could it be established that Leopold was Spain's preferred candidate. With Spanish governmental strife continuing apace, there was not an eligible bachelor in Europe without support from one quarter or another.

Bulwer could not tolerate his instructions to monitor and report on affairs in Spain, preferring a more proactive policy in defence of British interests, and in 1846 he delivered a letter from Queen Cristina to the Duke of Saxe-Coburg requesting Leopold's hand for Isabella. The plan involved a reconstitution of the Spanish Ministry and working behind the scenes in order to bypass the rest of Europe. Keen to maintain a degree of openness and embarrassed by his minister's actions Aberdeen, with the support of the British Court, reported Bulwer's actions to Guizot and disavowed them, lest the desired consequences of the plot should come to pass. Bulwer recalled this series of events:

I am bound to say, since it subsequently added to Lord Palmerston's difficulties, that Lord Aberdeen's complaisance at this juncture, though dictated, no doubt, by the most honourable motives, had a mischievous effect on future transactions; for it was pleaded subsequently by King Louis Philippe as a reason for declaring that we had bound ourselves to support the Bourbon alliance; whilst it persuaded the Spanish Government and Court that no solid

⁴⁸⁵ Jones Parry, *The Spanish Marriages*, p. 289.

⁴⁸⁶ Aberdeen to Bulwer, 25 October 1845, Bulwer Papers, NRO, BUL 1/14/23a.

reliance could be placed upon any assertions we made as to our perfect independence on the subject.⁴⁸⁷

Aberdeen's stance on Bulwer's actions was dictated by a wish to maintain the *entente* and, in doing so, to avoid catalysing conflict in Spain. Leopold might well be the candidate Spain ended up choosing and it would be an acceptable choice for Britain, but Aberdeen regarded British support of the Prince's candidature as inflammatory and counterproductive, as he explained to the Queen: 'It is very possible that the marriage with Prince Leopold may really be the best solution of the question, but Lord Aberdeen is convinced that this alliance could only be rendered at all acceptable to France by the apparent indifference of Great Britain.'⁴⁸⁸

Guizot might claim that Bulwer's actions did not worry him, and he might continue to profess that the conclusion of the marriage should be left to time, but it was no coincidence that his protestations against increased intervention in the Spanish succession became equivocal after Bulwer's intrigue.⁴⁸⁹ Indeed, the source of Guizot's declining patience in Spain might be deduced from his memoirs: 'Sir Henry Bulwer had not simply given his approbation to a step of the Spanish government to propose at Lisbon the marriage of Queen Isabella with Prince Leopold of Coburg; he had known and directed this step in all its details and at every advance.'⁴⁹⁰

Perhaps Guizot exaggerated the importance of Bulwer's actions in order to justify a greater level of action in Spain. Bulwer had long warned of increased French intrigue in the succession issue: in October 1845 he wrote to Aberdeen, 'it is difficult not to suppose that something clandestine is going on which at the favourable moment is to be declared.'⁴⁹¹ By May 1846 Bulwer wrote to Aberdeen of increasing frustration with French campaigning against Leopold: 'Now I very

⁴⁸⁷ Bulwer, *The Life of Henry John Temple*, iii, pp. 226-7; Jones Parry, *The Spanish Marriages*, pp. 280-1.

⁴⁸⁸ Aberdeen to Queen Victoria, 18 May 1846, Gordon (ed.), *Selections from the Correspondence of the Earl of Aberdeen*, vii(a), p. 211.

⁴⁸⁹ Guizot, *The Last Days*, pp. 236-7; Cowley to Aberdeen, 6 April 1846, TNA, FO 519/63/6.

⁴⁹⁰ Guizot, *The Last Days*, pp. 236-7.

⁴⁹¹ Bulwer to Aberdeen, 30 October 1845, Bulwer Papers, NRO, BUL 1/26/12a.

much fear, my dear Lord Aberdeen, that I have said so much already on this selection that I shall weary you by returning to the question. But I persuade myself that I cannot yet have expressed myself clearly with respect to it, because I think that if I had I should have carried conviction to your mind.⁴⁹² It was more than likely that his French counterpart Bresson was intriguing and helping to draw Bulwer into a rivalry that was far more toxic than that between Lyons and Piscatory, or Pritchard and D'Aubigny, which was something Aberdeen recognised.⁴⁹³ He had earlier warned Bulwer that 'I cannot help but fearing that you have permitted yourself imperceptibly to be influenced [...] by a feeling of personal resentment.'⁴⁹⁴ Aberdeen nevertheless thought that the French Minister had crossed the line in his encouragement of a marriage of either Cadiz or Trapani with Isabella and the Duc de Montpensier with the Infanta.

But French intrigues and ambitions did not alter the fundamentals of Aberdeen's policy. The Foreign Secretary thought that any local French schemes would come to nothing as long as Guizot remained in power; their personal friendship and the spirit of the *entente* would provide insurance against excitable ministers. Aberdeen also intimated that war would result from any serious French retraction from its agreements with Britain; as in Morocco, the Foreign Secretary did not place blind faith in the *entente*.⁴⁹⁵

It could nonetheless be argued that Aberdeen was storing up problems for his successor by failing to suggest a positive solution to the question of the Spanish marriages. The Foreign Secretary was relying upon a connection with Guizot that the Frenchman was thought by some to honour only while awaiting the opportunity to pursue French influence when the Conservative government fell. But Aberdeen believed that a pragmatic policy in Spain provided the best option for Britain: it also accorded with the traditional Conservative reluctance to act in foreign affairs that were not deemed immediately threatening. The Foreign Secretary's reactive stance conflicted with Bulwer's declining patience with France, but this did not alter

⁴⁹² Bulwer to Aberdeen, 19 May 1846, Bulwer Papers, NRO, BUL 1/26/28a.

⁴⁹³ Wellesley (ed.), *The Diary and Correspondence of Lord Cowley*, p. 259: 16 April 1844.

⁴⁹⁴ Aberdeen to Bulwer, 28 May 1846, Bulwer Papers, NRO, BUL 1/24/33a.

⁴⁹⁵ Aberdeen to the Duke of Sotomayer, 22 June 1846, HCPP, 'Correspondence relating to the Marriages of the Queen and the Infanta of Spain' (1847), lxix, 758/8 (incl. 1).

Aberdeen's conviction that the marriage project was better completed in a time of peace and prosperity than in one of conflict and discontent.

As regards the personal nature of the *entente* with Guizot, the spirit of the *entente* could have continued into the tenure of his successor and cooperation need not have ended in Spain, but Palmerston's conduct gave Guizot little hope to expect the sort of relationship he had shared with Aberdeen. Palmerston had spent Aberdeen's years in office attacking both the Foreign Secretary and all things French and despite his belated tour of France, intended to assuage French fears of his intentions, the damage had already been done.⁴⁹⁶ It must also be remembered that the personal nature of Aberdeen's *entente* had in part been necessitated by the cross-Channel hostility to which the tone of Palmerston's Eastern policy had contributed. Aberdeen was in an unenviable position: he would be condemned for failure to obtain a binding agreement (which he did not want anyway), although this was unobtainable because of the state of Anglo-French relations bequeathed him by the very people who condemned him.

Historians have regarded the fall of the Conservative government as the point at which Guizot began to intrigue openly for a conclusion of marriages between Cadiz and Isabella, and the Duc de Montpensier and the Infanta, which was what ultimately transpired in 1846. Lucille Iremonger argued that Guizot was unconcerned about his agreement with Aberdeen and continued to pursue his ends but, now, to do this publicly.⁴⁹⁷ Roger Bullen suggested much the same: 'Guizot thought that Palmerston should show him a free hand as Aberdeen had done.'⁴⁹⁸ Guizot had begun to drop hints to Bresson about the possibility of increased action throughout 1846, but Palmerston's accession was a watershed moment. Guizot's reaction to it, in a letter to Bresson, was telling:

I will not be the person to hand Spain over to Lord Palmerston. You will, undoubtedly, make use of his accession to office, to act on Queen Christina and her husband [...] I have this advantage over Lord Palmerston, that if any

⁴⁹⁶ For an account of the cool reception of Palmerston's visit to France, see Guizot, *The Last Days*, pp. 254-6.

⁴⁹⁷ Iremonger, *Aberdeen*, p. 155.

⁴⁹⁸ Bullen, *Palmerston, Guizot, and the Collapse of the Entente Cordiale*, p. 336.

coldness or difficulty occurred between us and London, it would be to him and not me that the fault would be universally imputed in France and England. I have told this to myself within the last three months.⁴⁹⁹

Guizot had clearly been contemplating the opportunity to act, but pressing ahead with the candidatures of Cadiz and Montpensier was prompted by the return of Palmerston, and all the fear that he excited in France. Fear of Palmerston's approach might be exaggerated as a reason for French action, but the incoming Foreign Secretary had created an aura for himself that encouraged this. Palmerston's courting of public opinion and beating of the patriotic drum worked wonders for his domestic popularity but, in an international context, the tendency to accompany astute diplomatic manoeuvring with an offensive tone could prove damaging: he was now reaping the harvest of the seeds sown in the Ottoman Empire and on the opposition benches.

Guizot's reaction to Palmerston is, however, often used to underline the weakness of Aberdeen's *entente*, that Guizot was absolved from commitments to Britain once Aberdeen departed. Recently, Laurence Guymer has supported this criticism with the suggestion that Aberdeen placed too much value in the cultivation of close personal relationships and allowed British interests to suffer as a result.⁵⁰⁰ Aberdeen was aware of the imperfections in the nature of his relationship with Guizot and discussed these in a letter to Peel, responding to the Prime Minister's claim that Guizot had abandoned the *entente* as soon as he could – namely, when Palmerston returned to the Foreign Office:

You say that if suspicions existed, explanations ought to have been demanded, and this was precisely such a case as might prove the value of the *entente*. This is unquestionably true; but I fear that the *entente* was always in some measure personal, and that little of this confidential communication was to be expected between men who mutually disliked and distrusted each other.⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁹ Guizot to Bresson, 5 July 1846, Guizot, *The Last Days*, pp. 260-1.

⁵⁰⁰ L. Guymer, 'The Wedding Planners: Lord Aberdeen, Henry Bulwer, and the Spanish Marriages, 1841-1846', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, xxi, 2010, p. 569.

⁵⁰¹ Aberdeen to Peel, 1 December 1846, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43065/251.

The fact that Guizot felt obliged to Aberdeen because of their personal relationship showed the strength of an *entente* that was formed when circumstances had seemed to make anything officially binding impossible. Besides, Palmerston's succession provided an opportunity to change French impressions by his words and actions – Guizot's decision to conclude the marriage combination France desired was not set in stone – but, instead, he confirmed France's fears. Palmerston's naming of Leopold as a possible candidate for the hand of Isabella in a dispatch to Bulwer soon after taking office did not on its own represent a huge departure from previous practice, although Aberdeen had been more restrained in discussion of Leopold's candidature, but the context of the dispatch did.⁵⁰² Despite declaring hope 'that the choice may fall upon the one who may be most likely to secure the happiness of the Queen, and to promote the welfare of the Spanish nation', Palmerston seemed to imply that alternative candidatures to that of Leopold would help engender 'grinding tyranny'.⁵⁰³ The inference of physical intervention and Palmerston's latter claim to see Leopold's success 'with pleasure' merged with his attacks on Aberdeen's Anglo-French policy to convey an impression of hostility to existing agreements.⁵⁰⁴

One of these agreements was a memorandum Guizot sent to Aberdeen in February stating that if he felt Leopold's succession to be imminent, Guizot would press on with his own marriage designs.⁵⁰⁵ Muriel Chamberlain captured the conclusions of history when she wrote that it was 'absurd' for Guizot to claim – after Palmerston's dispatch – that Leopold's succession was imminent, particularly with regard to his February memorandum that Aberdeen had never officially acknowledged. The claim elsewhere that the naming of Leopold represented an 'absolute change of policy' was clearly ridiculous.⁵⁰⁶ It nonetheless remains that Palmerston ignored early warnings from Cowley about the perils of suggesting

⁵⁰² Palmerston to Bulwer, 19 July 1846, HCPP, 'Spanish Correspondence' (1847), lxi, 758/14.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁵ Chamberlain, *Aberdeen*, p. 383; Guizot, *The Last Days*, pp. 228-231.

⁵⁰⁶ Jarnac to Aberdeen, 6 September 1846, Gordon (ed.), *Selections from the Correspondence of the Earl of Aberdeen*, vii(a), p. 323.

Leopold, and this meant that the French interpreted Palmerston's words through the prism of confrontation that he had created.⁵⁰⁷

Even without any memorandum it would have seemed sensible for Palmerston to establish diplomatic intercourse with Paris before showing a controversial dispatch to Jarnac, for this course of action hardly equated to the transparency of action that Aberdeen had employed in direct contact with Guizot, which Palmerston professed to want to continue. All it did was fuel the fires of French agitation and even Palmerston's admirer Bulwer recorded that he 'could not understand why' Palmerston had shown Jarnac the dispatch.⁵⁰⁸

Historians tend to conclude that Palmerston's actions derived from the mess in which Aberdeen left Spanish affairs. Roger Bullen suggested that Aberdeen misinformed the incoming Foreign Secretary and, by failing to provide full information on the existing state of affairs, handed Palmerston an impossible task.⁵⁰⁹ Trying to press ahead with some sort of positive policy was deemed sensible in this context.⁵¹⁰ But cooperation with France had not ended and it seems illogical to charge Aberdeen with the consequences of his successor's actions. When Palmerston took office, Prince Albert recorded that despite Palmerston's attacks '[Aberdeen] means now to show Palmerston the contrast by declaring his readiness to assist him in every way he can by his advice' on the matter; Aberdeen asserted that 'he had explained the situation fully.'⁵¹¹

It is unlikely that Aberdeen would have said anything different, but there is a significant corpus of evidence to suggest that his protestations were genuine. The Broadlands Papers contain a number of letters from Aberdeen that demonstrate the importance he invested in ensuring that Palmerston was fully informed about all aspects of British foreign policy. One offered intelligence on a mission in Japan because Aberdeen feared that the British agent involved 'may not have written as

⁵⁰⁷ Chamberlain, *Aberdeen*, p. 385; Cowley to Palmerston, 13 July 1846, HCPP, 'Spanish Correspondence' (1847), lxi, 758/9.

⁵⁰⁸ Bulwer, *The Life of Henry John Temple*, iii, p. 228.

⁵⁰⁹ Bullen, *Palmerston, Guizot, and the Collapse of the Entente Cordiale*, p. 59.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 91.

⁵¹¹ Prince Albert Memorandum of 6 July 1846, Benson and Esher (ed.), *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, i, p. 86; Chamberlain, *Aberdeen*, p. 386.

fully in his public [sic] dispatches'.⁵¹² Another offered Palmerston a number of private letters relating to Anglo-American affairs that Aberdeen felt crucial to continuing cooperation.⁵¹³ The later transfer of power during the Crimean war also saw Aberdeen credited for 'generosity and magnanimity' with Palmerston thanking him for 'your handsome conduct, and for your friendly and energetic exertions' and referring to enduring 'assistance'.⁵¹⁴

Charles Greville offered more evidence of such assistance, recording part of a conversation between Aberdeen and Palmerston in 1846:

Lord Aberdeen: "When I came into office five years ago, you wanted to come back again and turn me out, and you accordingly attacked me in every way you could, as you had a perfect right to do. I do not want to turn you out [...] and I am therefore come to tell you that I am ready to give you every information that may be of use to you, and every assistance I can. I have been so long in office that there are many matters of interest, on which it may be of great use to you to receive information from me; and if you will ask me any questions, I will tell you all I can that you may desire to know, and everything that occurs to me."⁵¹⁵

Bullen argued that the private and direct nature of communication between Aberdeen and Guizot complicated matters still further, by sending the records of policies into private collections.⁵¹⁶ Yet, in addition to the above evidence, Vernon Puryear has shown that Aberdeen was as forthcoming with private correspondence relating to Russian affairs as he was with those relating to Anglo-French relations.⁵¹⁷ Aberdeen gave his successor everything that was felt necessary to serve British interests – including private documents. It is highly unlikely that Palmerston was unfamiliar with the state of the Spanish marriages issue. But if it is nonetheless accepted that Aberdeen did not provide Palmerston with the necessary information

⁵¹² Aberdeen to Palmerston, 25 August 1846, The Broadlands Papers, USL, GC/AB/286.

⁵¹³ Aberdeen to Palmerston, 27 October 1846, *Ibid*, GC/AB/287.

⁵¹⁴ Aberdeen to Lady Haddo, 7 February 1855, Gordon (ed.), *Selections from the Correspondence of the Earl of Aberdeen*, xii: 1855-60, pp. 29-30; Palmerston to Aberdeen, 12 February 1855, *Ibid*, p. 40.

⁵¹⁵ Entry from 14 July 1846, quoted in Brown, *Palmerston*, p. 278.

⁵¹⁶ Bullen, *Palmerston, Guizot, and the Collapse of the Entente Cordiale*, pp. 69-71.

⁵¹⁷ V. Puryear, *England, Russia, and the Straits Question 1844-1856* (California, 1931), pp. 144-5.

or that he had left Spanish affairs in a mess, then it seems strange that Palmerston acted against the clear advice he was given by Cowley, and did not try to establish the facts by correspondence with Guizot. It seems far more probable that Palmerston was well-informed but proceeded with affairs in his own idiosyncratic way.

The double marriage of Isabella to Cadiz and the Infanta to the Duke of Montpensier was concluded early in September 1846. Guizot's account of the move being solely a Spanish venture was disingenuous, but there was little to support some of the Francophobic responses, which suggested that Spain found the marriage abhorrent and that France was revealing its real intentions, having long left Britain in the dark.⁵¹⁸ Bulwer's dispatches, based on a combination of information and 'conjecture', captured the essence of disgruntled contemporaries' concerns.⁵¹⁹ The Spanish people were thought to be against the marriage: 'the masses look upon the event that has taken place as a sort of betrayal of the Queen's and the Nation's interests.'⁵²⁰ The press was thought to be against the marriage: Bulwer referenced several papers' hostility, including *El Tiempo*, *El Expectador*, *El Eco del Comercio* and *El Español*.⁵²¹ The Spanish government was also thought to be united in feeling that they had been forced into the marriage combination by the French. In summary:

At midnight was consummated this important act, consigning a young Queen of sixteen for the rest of her life to a husband by whom, it was said but a month ago, that she was not likely to have children, and marrying the Royal Sister, in better health and with fairer prospects, to the son of the Monarch of [France], which has so long domineered over [Spain].⁵²²

But all of this ignored political realities and exaggerated Spanish hostility. The Spanish people had lined the streets of Madrid to celebrate the royal wedding of their own free will. No section of the Press had anything to gain by supporting

⁵¹⁸ Guizot, *The Last Days*, pp. 291-8.

⁵¹⁹ Bulwer to Palmerston, 2 September 1846, TNA, FO 72/699/100.

⁵²⁰ Bulwer to Palmerston, 8 September 1846, TNA, FO 72/699/106.

⁵²¹ Bulwer to Palmerston, 11 September 1846, TNA, FO 72/699/108.

⁵²² Bulwer to Palmerston, 2 September 1846, TNA, FO 72/699/100.

the marriage: *Progressista* papers attacked the *Moderado* marriage solution to achieve editorial capital and *Moderado* papers were never going to support any marriage combination that diluted the power of *Moderado* ministers by stabilising the royal family. Bulwer's claims about the Spanish government's unity against the marriage seemed inconsistent with his earlier protestations about its divisions.⁵²³

Aberdeen was unhappy with Guizot's conclusion of the double marriage after the agreement to marry only Isabella, but this was for the breach of faith rather than the nature of the marriage agreement. He wrote to Peel late in September 1846 that there was nothing

so very objectionable in Louis Philippe desiring to make such a match – The Infanta is very rich, and I believe attractive in person; and I am convinced that the King does not at all desire her accession either to the throne of Spain or France, but merely looks to her as an eligible wife for his son. I should not be disposed to resent the marriage, especially with the conditions to which the French Government will undoubtedly agree; but I confess that I cannot so easily get over the breach of engagement to me.⁵²⁴

With Palmerston looming, French action might be argued to have been surprisingly moderate. Cadiz had long been considered by Britain as an acceptable consort for Isabella and, despite Bulwer changing his opinion of that Duke when Palmerston returned to office – 'a certain ridicule which attaches to his squeaking voice and insignificant manner is by no means favourable' – Bulwer had supported Aberdeen in his opinions before Palmerston's ascendancy raised the possibility of Britain pursuing a more confrontational line in support of Leopold.⁵²⁵ The marriage of Montpensier to the Infanta was not in the spirit of agreements with Britain, but Palmerston's language had already undermined these. The marriage at best represented a limited coup for the French and it did not break the Treaty of Utrecht, as Aberdeen stressed: the crowns of France and Spain remained very much

⁵²³ See, for example, Bulwer to Aberdeen, 28 February 1846, TNA, FO 72/696/27.

⁵²⁴ Aberdeen to Peel, 30 September 1846, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43065/223.

⁵²⁵ Bulwer to Palmerston, 16 July 1846, TNA, FO 72/698/90.

separate.⁵²⁶ As France well knew, Britain would never allow anything like the union of the French and Spanish crowns, and nor would the Northern Courts.

Traditional views of Aberdeen's Spanish policy must, therefore, be recalibrated. A coherent strategy to prevent any major upset to the balance of power and thereby protect Anglo-Spanish trade was employed from the first days in office, when correspondence showed a focus on mercantile enterprise. The Conservative government was a business-like institution seeking to reverse the tide of domestic social degeneration and escalating debt and whilst prosperous trade helped the balance sheet, conflict did not. A watchful policy in Spain also squared with the Conservative Party's distaste for what they deemed reckless interventionism on the part of Palmerston and the preceding government.

Scuffles between Espartero's government and regional militias elicited no impulse for intervention, especially given the multitude of factional divisions that, if Aberdeen had been interested in pursuing an ideological foreign policy, ruled out the chance to make any definite distinctions of who deserved his support. France was suspected of involvement in the regional rebellions and it seems certain that some Frenchmen were involved, but Aberdeen's personal *entente* with Guizot helped to ensure that central encouragement was minimal.

Aberdeen employed a consistent approach to the marriage question whereby he maintained a considered distance from which flashpoints could be defused but also from which involvement did not jeopardise an Anglo-French accord that was yielding benefits abroad and at home. British interests could thus be protected without expense and without the potential for a conflict that would draw attentions and energies away from domestic affairs. In the Spanish Marriages question, Aberdeen made agreements with Guizot to promote certain candidates and to account for certain hypothetical eventualities but these were an extension of the desire for openness and Spanish independence rather than proof of inconsistency or hypocrisy (if we accept that either of these historiographical charges actually matter). Aberdeen made these agreements to support solutions that he believed were best for British interests and couched them in language that

⁵²⁶ Aberdeen to Croker, 25 February 1847, Aberdeen Papers, BL Add. MS 73166/85.

made clear that alternative marriage combinations remained open, so long as the Treaty of Utrecht was not contravened.

The lack of French action, despite growing French restlessness over Spanish affairs, paid testament to the effectiveness of a personal *entente* between Aberdeen and Guizot. This relationship might have transferred to Palmerston, had the incoming Foreign Secretary attempted to establish diplomatic intercourse with his French counterparts, rather than continuing in the vein that had made them so suspicious of his intentions in the first place. Guizot might well have been looking for a chance to get revenge on Palmerston for his policy during the Eastern crisis, but that Guizot felt morally bound not to act against Aberdeen showed the success of the *entente* in keeping foreign relations stable. Aberdeen was aware of the difficulties posed by his investment in a personal Anglo-French policy in Spain but, given his brief of pursuing a quiet yet efficient foreign policy in order to allow focus on domestic issues, it is difficult to see what other arrangement the Foreign Secretary could have orchestrated.

Chapter Five: Aberdeen, Russia, and the 'Crazy Machine': The Eastern Question

Whereas Britain's policy in Western Europe revolved around its relationship with France, the primary concern in the East was relations with Russia, especially those aspects that concerned the Ottoman Empire. It has been written that 'Russian foreign policy was at this time chiefly concerned with the fate of the Turkish Empire', a policy preoccupation reflected in the focus of this analysis, which will primarily consider Anglo-Russian relations in the context of the 'Eastern Question'.⁵²⁷ This question – a phrase used as shorthand for the debate over the longevity of the ostensibly ailing Ottoman Empire and its fate upon collapsing – was a problem of enduring importance for British statesmen. The Ottoman Empire straddled land across which lucrative trading routes with British India passed and to have lost access to it would have created enormous strains on mercantile intercourse. Britain would also have been left with a journey around the Cape of Good Hope if it was to avoid a vast land detour to respond to a crisis in its Indian colony (the Suez Canal was not opened until 1869). Fear of a threat to India was in some minds increased by Russian activity in Persia and French sponsorship of the rebellious Egyptian leader Mehmet Ali.⁵²⁸

The fate of the straits connecting the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara and then to the Aegean Sea provided Aberdeen and other British leaders with a further geostrategic consideration during the nineteenth-century. If an unfriendly foreign power were to conquer Constantinople it would gain jurisdiction of the straits and, therefore, control access to the Black Sea. If that power turned out to be Russia, which was the most likely potential usurper, there existed the additional problem that Russia would obtain a route of easy access into the Mediterranean Sea via the Aegean. This would raise a number of obvious concerns if it wished to pursue a confrontational and/or expansionist policy, in an area where Britain already had a potential French threat to consider.

⁵²⁷ W. Parker, *An Historical Geography of Russia* (London, 1968), p. 220.

⁵²⁸ See D. Gillard, *The Struggle for Asia 1828-1914: A Study in British and Russian Imperialism* (London, 1977); C. Ingram, *In Defence of British India: Great Britain in the Middle East, 1775-1842* (London, 1984).

British statesmen took differing approaches to the question of the straits and the Ottoman Empire throughout the nineteenth-century. Palmerston's suspicion of Russia had initially led him to avoid cooperation over the fate of the Ottomans, but by the treaty of Unkiar Skelessi, which was signed between Russia and the Porte on 8 July 1833, it appeared that Russia had gained special privileges that impinged on Ottoman freedom and British interests in the region.⁵²⁹ Deeming Russia to desire the breakup of the Ottoman Empire in order to further its own territorial designs, Palmerston began to pursue the regeneration of the empire as a means by which to repel perceived Russian expansionism, and to protect Britain's mercantile and imperial objectives in so doing. This policy resulted in an Anglo-Ottoman trade treaty in 1838 and there followed the Straits Convention of 13 July 1841, which concluded the latest Russo-Turkish conflict and was thought to reverse Russian maritime advantages that the treaty of Unkiar Skelessi had provided for in the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus.⁵³⁰

Aberdeen's willingness to cooperate with Russia to ensure Ottoman survival endured throughout his career. Aberdeen spoke in the House of Lords on 16 July 1828 of the necessity of Ottoman existence and of belief in Russian subscription to this observation: 'the existence of Turkey as an independent power – as a power of weight, and of considerable influence in the affairs of Europe – was essential to the preservation of that balance, which it had always been the policy of this country to preserve.' He continued that it was 'very fortunate that such views were entertained by the Emperor of Russia.'⁵³¹ The genesis of the Foreign Secretary's views can be found in his conservative predilection for the balance of power as set out at Vienna, and the belief that British interests were to be found within its maintenance: he wrote that whatever tends to 'derange that balance, the re-adjustment of which, after years of blood and toil, the great Powers of Europe happily succeeded in effecting, will of necessity mar the perfection of their work,

⁵²⁹ For detail see, for example, R. Baker, 'Palmerston and the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi', *The English Historical Review*, xliii, 1928.

⁵³⁰ For a summary of international relations at this time see, for example, A. MacFie, *The Eastern Question 1774-1923* (London, 1996), pp. 20-26. For the treaty, see HCPP, 'Convention between Great Britain, Austria, France, Prussia, Russia and Turkey, respecting the Straits of the Dardanelles and of the Bosphorus, signed at London, July 13, 1841' (1842), xlv, 350.

⁵³¹ Aberdeen, The House of Lords, Hansard, xix, 16 June 1828, col. 1728.

and, by giving rise to jealousies and apprehensions, may too probably lead to fresh complications and disasters.⁵³²

What Aberdeen was not prepared to do, in assisting with the preservation of the Ottoman empire, was to embark on sweeping commercial and social reforms of a power that he regarded as ultimately doomed by its own inadequacies. This thesis has noted Aberdeen's hostility to Islam, and this was undoubtedly a factor in his refusal to countenance anything other than limited reforms, a view that placed him in the company of most of the contemporary Conservative Party as well as a significant portion of wider British society.⁵³³

Reluctance to engage in grandiose schemes in the Ottoman Empire also originated in practical observations, which were grafted on to religious and social prejudices. Papers available to the Peel government on the Anglo-Ottoman treaty of 1838 revealed that liberal aspirations for regeneration had met with limited success.⁵³⁴ Reports from Britain's consulates around the Ottoman Empire showed that despite economic success stories such as in the Dardanelles and around Adrianople, Ottoman corruption and poor or non-existent implementation of regulations left areas such as Alexandria, Erzeroum, Damascus and Smyrna still suffering. Promises made to improve areas such as Serbia had also remained unfulfilled since the Treaty of Bucharest in 1812. This inertia did little to persuade those such as Aberdeen that his views of inevitable Ottoman decay were misguided.⁵³⁵

There were those such as Palmerston and Britain's Ambassador to the Porte, Stratford Canning, who regarded Aberdeen's position as self-defeating and contradictory, especially given that they thought limited reforms had yielded success.⁵³⁶ In a letter to Aberdeen in February 1845, Stratford defended his appeals

⁵³² Aberdeen to Prince Lieven, 6 June 1828, A. Gordon (ed.), *Selections from the Correspondence of the Earl of Aberdeen*, i: Affairs of the Levant, 1828-30 (London, 1854), p. xvii.

⁵³³ See, for example, *The Liverpool Mercury*, 24 March 1842.

⁵³⁴ HCPP, 'Correspondence respecting the Operation of the Commercial Treaty with Turkey, of August 16, 1838 (in Continuation of the Papers Presented to Parliament in August, 1841)' (1842), xlv, 418.

⁵³⁵ HCPP, 'Treaties and Hatti-Sheriffs relating to Serbia' (1843), lxi, 464.

⁵³⁶ For Stratford's early activity in the Eastern Question see E. Ingram (ed.), *Anglo-Ottoman Encounters in the Age of Revolution: The Collected Essays of Allan Cunningham*, i (London, 1993), pp. 276-318. For a comprehensive yet quasi-hagiographical account of Stratford and the Eastern

for regeneration of the Ottoman Empire and questioned the inevitability of its decline, even though he shared Aberdeen's prejudices:

Here as elsewhere, there is a tendency, on the whole, towards improvement [...] Could we do less without detriment to our credit and interests, without failing in the great duty inseparably attached to Great Powers? If now we have seemed to do more, has not the exception been amply warranted in each case by the provocation, and generally, I may add, by the success? Do not be apprehensive of my going too far. I know pretty well with whom I have to deal. The Turks are no more to be treated like other people, than other people are to be treated like Turks. With rare exceptions every Turk is more or less a child. It would be difficult to light a cigar with the spark of principle and hono[u]r possessed by the present Governors.⁵³⁷

Aberdeen instructed that reforms were to be made if absolutely necessary to the immediate health of the Ottoman Empire, but he did not accept that Islamic Turkish society could or should be remodelled on the West as Stratford hoped: it was to be accepted that the Ottoman Empire could not be insured in the longer term. Stratford saw that this placed him in the difficult position of striving for the survival of the Ottoman Empire but not being licensed to take any significant measures towards this end. He wrote to Aberdeen in June 1844 with his response to instances of the Turkish authorities torturing Christian subjects:

I am forbidden [...] to "stand forth as the avowed protector of the Christian subjects of the Sultan", and I am to avoid being "considered as the organ through which complaints of hardships or persecution should be conveyed to the knowledge of Porte." At the same time I am authorized by another of your lordship's instructions to offer in such cases to the Turkish Government "the earnest exhortation and advice of Her Majesty's Government founded on the evident interests of the Porte"; and further I presume that wherever the rights

Question, see S. Lane-Poole, *The Life of the Right Honourable Stratford Canning, Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe, from His Memoirs and Private Official Papers*, in 2 volumes (London, 1888).

⁵³⁷ Stratford to Aberdeen, 12 February 1845, Gordon (ed.), *Correspondence of the Earl of Aberdeen*, vi: 1845, p. 60.

or interests of Her Majesty's subjects are immediately concerned, I am at liberty to assume a more decided tone, and, in pleading their cause, to afford any Christian subjects of the Sultan, whose case may be similar, the benefits of my arguments and official representations, as in the recent instance of torture. With these landmarks to guide my course I have endeavoured to befriend the persecuted without committing Her Majesty's Government or causing any inconvenient results which it was the object of your lordship's instructions to avoid.⁵³⁸

Stratford's frustrations with his mission originated in his more liberal views of foreign policy. The Conservatives' reactive policy of 'make do and mend' that Aberdeen instructed him to pursue did not match with his subscription to the proselytising and ostensibly civilising liberal values preached by those such as Palmerston. Aberdeen refused to sanction a mission based on those values because the Turks had a dismal record of implementing changes, and because of the concomitant socio-religious view that the Ottoman Empire would eventually die a natural death. This eventuality would still present its dangers, but not as many as if a combination of great powers was to administer political or military euthanasia to Turkey: a palliative approach to the Ottoman Empire was seen to avoid a premature scramble for its spoils, and to allow time for the European powers to try and make diplomatic preparations for the end.

This approach bore the hallmarks of Conservative policy elsewhere, not least in Spain, where the calls of certain more liberal politicians for intervention on behalf of the ailing Espartero administration received short shrift. Given the Conservatives' domestic preoccupations, it made little sense to them to intervene in the affairs of foreign states when they perceived no immediate threat to the balance of power or to Britain's commercial interests. The Ottomans were not trusted and even if the Russians' moves in the East were ostensibly unthreatening, they were treated with due caution, but the Conservatives were reluctant to rock the boat whilst it continued to sail on waters of relative calm.

⁵³⁸ Stratford to Aberdeen, 1 June 1844, Lane-Poole, *The Life of Stratford Canning*, ii, p. 99.

This was not the bold and decisive policy that the country had grown used to under Palmerston and, indeed, part of the problem for perceptions of Aberdeen's policy lay in Palmerston's conversion in the late 1830s to portraying the Ottoman Empire as a state that could be revived by British liberal principles and reform. This was the result of both a personal conversion in relation to the Ottomans and of strategic considerations, as Turkish regeneration was deemed to provide protection against external encroachment. Palmerston's conversion also allowed him to court a largely Russophobic British public. The idea of protecting British interests by extending liberal benevolence to Turkey struck a chord with contemporaries such as Stratford. The idea also influenced generations of a Whig historiography, which presented Aberdeen's diplomatic manoeuvring with Russia as demonstrative of a willingness to leave British interests at the mercy of the Tsar.⁵³⁹

The Conservatives' palliative approach to the Ottoman Empire brought enduring conflict with Stratford, but it remained the guiding principle for Aberdeen's policy in the East throughout the 1840s and into the future. His objections to perceived Ottoman barbarity would never reach the heights of Gladstone's moralising in the late 1870s, when Disraeli's vociferous support of the Ottomans was decried as a heartless and uncompromising implementation of *realpolitik*, given the Turkish atrocities against their Bulgarian dissentients. In Gladstone's revulsion at Turkish (and Disraelian) behaviour he seemed to lose sight of the geostrategic utility of the Ottoman Empire, something Aberdeen did not. Despite Aberdeen's approach to Turkey being based upon a lack of willingness to engage in rehabilitating reforms, this did not translate into unthinking Turcophobia or a concomitant blindness to British interest.

Similarly, a willingness to work with Russia in the East in the 1840s did not amount to Russophilia. Articles such as that in the *Liverpool Mercury* in March 1842 suggested that Aberdeen was in fact part of a Tory tradition that embraced the crowned autocrats of Europe on ideological grounds but, at least in the case of Aberdeen, this argument does not stand up to scrutiny.⁵⁴⁰ There were practical reasons for Aberdeen to work with Tsar Nicholas, and his willingness to do so was

⁵³⁹ For detail on Whig historiography, see chapter 1.

⁵⁴⁰ *The Liverpool Mercury*, 2 March 1842.

encouraged by his time in the Wellington government of 1828-1830, which had contained others who regarded the Tsar as someone with whom productive diplomacy could take place.⁵⁴¹ At that time, the British ambassador to Russia, Baron Heytesbury, had advised that Nicholas I was someone with whom Britain could work: 'I have seen [Nicholas] not only in his closet when prepared to speak on business, but in those more unguarded moments when doing the honours of his table; and not a word has dropped from him but what was marked by a candour and good-feeling as far removed from the sentiments which some people would attribute to him.'⁵⁴² Heytesbury went so far as to say of Nicholas in the wake of the Treaty of Adrianople, which concluded the Russo-Turkish war of 1828-9: 'as old prejudices are with difficulty and but slowly got rid of [...] a change is already in progress, and we must be prepared, everlong, to see the Emperor of Russia assume the novel character of friend' and 'ally'.⁵⁴³

There is also cause to question the extreme views of Russia held in some liberal circles, views that might lead to reluctance to work with the Tsar. Nicholas was undoubtedly a staunch conservative who could at times treat democratic measures as tantamount to sedition, but he was not an uncompromising and maniacal tyrant.⁵⁴⁴ Bruce Lincoln had this to say of the Tsar's record in government:

One often reads of the intellectual oppression, the tyranny, the arbitrariness which made such a deep impact on the lives of some. This is, perhaps, partly the result of an overemphasis upon the Russian radical movement by both Soviet and Western scholars, for much study has been devoted to Russia's

⁵⁴¹ For background on the career of Tsar Nicholas see, for example, C. de Grunwald and B. Patmore (trans.), *Tsar Nicholas I* (London, 1954); W. Bruce Lincoln, *Nicholas I: Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias* (London, 1978).

⁵⁴² Heytesbury to Aberdeen, 19 August 1828, Gordon (ed.), *Selections from the Correspondence of the Earl of Aberdeen*, i, p. 41.

⁵⁴³ Heytesbury to Aberdeen, 30 September 1829, *ibid*, p. 427.

⁵⁴⁴ For a survey of the cultural background of Russian politics under Nicholas and other leaders see, for example, J. Billington, *The Icon and the Axe: An Interpretive History of Russian Culture* (New York, 1970). For commentary on the intellectual underpinnings of Russian political thought across the nineteenth century and beyond see, for example, L. Schapiro, *Rationalism and Nationalism in Russian Nineteenth-Century Political Thought* (Yale, 1967); M. Raeff, *Russian Intellectual History: An Anthology* (New York, 1966); M. Wren, *The Western Impact upon Tsarist Russia* (Chicago, 1971). For historical analysis of Nicholas' time as tsar, see N. Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia* (Oxford, 5th edition, 1993), pp. 323-340; *Russian Identities: A Historical Survey* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 130-166.

dissident intellectuals during these years, and many of the memoir and diary accounts published and translated into Western languages have been those of intellectuals who suffered intensely under the Nicholas system.⁵⁴⁵

Whilst Nicholas was not an autocrat on the scale of some Russian tsars, he remained a fierce patriot and a difficult statesman to deal with. The Conservatives' willingness to work with Russia did not overlook this consideration and Aberdeen exercised due caution in his dealings with Nicholas. As elsewhere in Europe and in dealings with America, public professions of reciprocal good intention were backed up with continuing private vigilance. This had been the case since Wellington's government when Heytesbury's aforementioned observations elicited a firm response: Nicholas' public message of mutual cooperation was to be insured by probing Russian diplomatists on the realities of Russian cabinet politics. Of public iterations of goodwill, Aberdeen commented that 'tranquilizing and satisfactory as these assurances undoubtedly are, it cannot be denied that they are also vague and uncertain.'⁵⁴⁶ This type of thought process is an obvious necessity for a Foreign Secretary but, given the accusations of unthinking Russophilia that are directed at Aberdeen in later dealings with Russia, his considered and wary approach is worth highlighting.

Nicholas' Russia in the 1840s proved to be a power that the Conservatives could work with, if treated with the caution necessary in Great Power politics. Despite natural competition between the powerful states and differences of emphasis, Britain and Russia's objectives in the East were fundamentally similar. Britain's Conservative government envisaged a period of uncomplicated policy in which disturbances in the Ottoman Empire and elsewhere in Asia were to be defused by diplomatic cooperation rather than political posturing.⁵⁴⁷ Any external interference in Turkey was to be avoided as long as trade remained uninterrupted and the Ottomans fulfilled their commercial obligations. When it looked like this might not be the case, such as in 1844 when stalled negotiations between Turkey

⁵⁴⁵ Bruce Lincoln, *Nicholas I*, p. 151.

⁵⁴⁶ Aberdeen to Heytesbury, 6 August 1829, Gordon (ed.), *Selections from the Correspondence of the Earl of Aberdeen*, i, p. 333.

⁵⁴⁷ Aberdeen to Stratford, 31 July 1844, TNA, FO 181/187/124.

and Russia resulted in disruptions to British trade, Aberdeen stiffened the language of his private correspondence in an attempt to show other powers that open diplomatic cooperation was backed up by firm resolution in defence of British interests.⁵⁴⁸ It was a tactic used in other international engagements in order to circumvent the antagonism engendered by public criticisms.

Russia also wanted the Ottoman Empire to survive because she regarded it as weak and pliable, a situation far more appealing than the alternative power vacuum. Russia preferred to have the relatively stable, predictable and malleable Ottomans as neighbours rather than the host of aggrieved and competing nationalities that would be released by Turkish dissolution. Russia fought the Ottoman Empire on numerous occasions but whilst the peace treaties that followed provided for Russian gains, these did not threaten the fabric of Turkish power: Russia generally showed a degree of restraint commensurate with its geopolitical endorsement of Turkish territorial (if not administrative) integrity. Not all historians agree with this conclusion, but it is significant that the majority of those with access to the Russian archives have supported the idea of Russian restraint, at least in the first half of the nineteenth-century.⁵⁴⁹

Central Asia was one area in which Aberdeen and the Conservative government were able to work with Russia to ensure the Ottoman Empire's stability. The Peel government inherited wars in Afghanistan and China from the Whigs and Aberdeen sought conclusions to them, believing that tranquillity – of which Russia was thought to be 'really desirous' – best for British interests.⁵⁵⁰ In this approach Palmerston saw weakness and naivety: he thought that under Aberdeen, Britain would need

some less timid power who may kindly be disposed to take us under its protection [...] No doubt for valuable consideration we could prevail upon our dear friend the Czar to take us under his wing, and his Conditions would

⁵⁴⁸ Aberdeen to Bloomfield, 26 March 1844, TNA, FO 181/185/13.

⁵⁴⁹ For two contrasting views see, for example, E. Thaden, *Russia since 1801: The Making of a New Society* (London, 1971), pp. 148-164; N. Riasanovsky, 'Nicholas I and the Course of Russian History', in A. Presniakov and J. Zacek (ed. and trans.), *Emperor Nicholas I of Russia: The Apogee of Autocracy 1825-1855* (Florida, 1974), pp. ix-xxxvi.

⁵⁵⁰ Aberdeen to Stuart de Rothesay, 15 February 1842, TNA, FO 65/279/22.

probably be acceptable to many, as he would most likely be satisfied with being allowed to relieve us from the sin of selling opium to the Chinese, and from the crime of attempting to defend our Indian Empire by civilizing Affghanistan [sic].⁵⁵¹

Despite Palmerston's characteristically sardonic criticism, seeking conclusions to the wars seemed sensible. The opium trade in China had been secured by 1842 and in doing so Britain maintained and expanded a lucrative market, even if its moral stock lost value. Similarly in Afghanistan, the war was drawing to a natural close with Britain having found, in a lesson that powers have often since ignored, that objectives were all but impossible to achieve in that most idiosyncratic of countries. The only qualification Aberdeen made to British achievements was that he thought the occupation of Hong Kong should be temporary. As elsewhere, Aberdeen supported the reinforcement and furtherance of trade, but saw new territorial acquisitions as contrary to the Conservative government's consolidationist foreign goals. In this he was not alone. Notable support came from the Colonial Secretary Edward Stanley, who regarded Hong Kong as difficult to defend.⁵⁵²

Aberdeen and the Conservative government were not blind to the commercial advantage that Russia sought in central Asia. This much is indicated by dispatches in which the Foreign Secretary urged vigilance even at times of relative harmony, but he did not attach the menace to Russian mercantile interest that Palmerston and others did.⁵⁵³ Aberdeen was content to allow a system of mutual commercial extension so long as British interests were not directly threatened by Russian activity. When Russia concluded a trade deal with the Khiva in 1844, for example, Aberdeen registered no discontent: it represented no direct threat to either Ottoman stability or British trade. He may also have had in mind Russian efforts to prevent Persia from an outright attack on the Khiva in 1842, which he had

⁵⁵¹ Palmerston to Lansdowne, 4 November 1842, J. Norris, *The First Afghan War 1838-1842* (Cambridge, 1967), p. 432.

⁵⁵² Stanley to Ellenborough, 13 February 1842, Lord Colchester (ed.), *History of the Indian Administration of Lord Ellenborough, in his Correspondence with the Duke of Wellington* (London, 1874), pp. 214-9. Hong Kong then became a British colony under the Treaty of Nanking, 1842.

⁵⁵³ See, for example, Aberdeen to Stuart de Rothesay, 26 December 1843, TNA, FO 65/289/65.

earlier commended as a demonstration of moderation and positive international intent.⁵⁵⁴ It was a policy of 'give and take' in which Russia had overlooked British commercial aggrandisement in Russia's Danubian borderlands in 1842.⁵⁵⁵

There remained those who retained a much more sceptical opinion of Russia's Asian policy and British acquiescence in it, none more so than the *Morning Chronicle*. In an article of 1842 that criticised the Conservatives' historical faith in Russia and mocked Aberdeen's tolerance of Russian policy for conforming to this faith, the newspaper commented on Russian policy towards Persia in the 1830s. This policy was perceived to demonstrate one of the reasons for which Britain should have pursued a more confrontational policy towards Russia in the 1840s. The article refers to *The Times*' commendation of Russian policy and to a particular episode when in 1838 Russia recalled its ambassador to Persia, Count Simonitch, after that ambassador had ostensibly undermined Russia's peaceable intentions by trying to instigate a Russian attack on the city of Herat, which was strategically important to Britain:

The object and the gist of the whole disquisition lies in the assertion that in the affairs of Persia, the Russian cabinet had always acted with invariable probity and amity towards England; that all blame, if any [...] ought to be placed at the door of Count Simonitch, who with this respect acted in direct opposition to his instructions; and lastly, that this double-dealing ambassador has been disavowed and recalled long before his personal policy had failed [...] Now, I shall not stop to animadvert upon the easy and profitable task of disavowals and recallings, after real, but concealed purposes had been detected, and signally foiled. Nor shall I inquire, how did it happen that the Russian cabinet, which uniformly visits with such alacrity and unbending severity any departure from its instructions on the part of its agents, had in this instance sent to Persia, and afterwards maintained there for several years a person known and convicted by his own statements, of harbouring ideas averse to the policy of his government.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵⁴ Aberdeen to Stuart de Rothesay, 26 March 1842, TNA, FO 65/279/39.

⁵⁵⁵ See Puryear, *International Economics and Diplomacy in the Near East 1834-1853* (California, 1969), p. 185.

⁵⁵⁶ *The Morning Chronicle*, 5 April 1842.

Suspensions seemed warranted in this case, but after Palmerston secured the Straits Convention in July 1841 there came a period of increased cooperation that rendered the *Chronicle's* comparisons with the 1830s redundant. Competition would, of course, naturally remain, but Aberdeen's brand of open diplomacy helped to build on Palmerston's achievements. Its success might be measured in such Anglo-Russian ventures as the Convention on Commerce and Navigation, signed on 11 January 1843.⁵⁵⁷ Afghan peace and central Asian cooperation paved the way for this convention, which aimed to bring about 'the reciprocal abolition of the differential and countervailing duties' between the two countries. The Conservatives' Western European method of following conciliatory policy with improvements to commercial relations was being repeated in the East (this approach was also applied in relations with America). During the negotiations for this trade agreement Baron von Brunnow, the Russian representative in London, wrote about the ensuing talks:

This Anglo-Russian mediation, giving to all oriental people an evident proof of the good understanding between the two great powers, will produce, I trust, a very useful impression upon the mind of the Asiatic nations at large, who constantly were speculating upon the supposed jealousy of England and Russia. It is particularly with the intention of counteracting and correcting these mistaken views that both our governments have joined in this mediation, which I had the honour of proposing to Lord Aberdeen's acceptance, and which he most kindly agreed upon.⁵⁵⁸

Such hyperbolic statements did little to assuage the suspicions of those who considered Russian commercial expansion to be aimed at the gradual erosion of Ottoman power rather than demonstrating any level of altruism, particularly because Russian politicians – like British ones – were not united behind the prevailing policy of cooperation.

⁵⁵⁷ See HCPP, 'Treaty of Commerce and Navigation between Her Majesty and the Emperor of All the Russias, signed at St. Petersburg, January 11, 1843' (1843), lxi, 426. This treaty was widely reproduced for the consumption of the public and featured in such publications as Jackson's Oxford Journal, 11 February 1843.

⁵⁵⁸ Brunnow to Ellenborough, 2 January 1843, Norris, *The First Afghan War*, p. 435.

There nonetheless remained reasons for those who wished to pursue a mutually expansive policy to feel justified in their approach. Foremost among these was the philosophy of Russians such as Nesselrode, who saw the future security of Anglo-Russian prosperity in the East in the existence of buffer states.⁵⁵⁹ The traditional competition along 'front lines' of commercial and military conflict was seen to be better replaced by a more fluid system of overlapping interests: Nesselrode applied the buffer state philosophy during Palmerston's tenure at the Foreign Office and in that of Aberdeen. Cases of this policy in action included Russian acquiescence in Britain's entry to Afghanistan in 1838 and its distance from negotiations that concluded the war in 1842.⁵⁶⁰ Russia did not detach itself from interests in the country – trade deals with different Afghan factions continued throughout the British military engagement – but it did not seek to exclude Britain from strategic objectives in Afghanistan, a region of great geopolitical importance between the Russian and Ottoman Empires.

Nesselrode was someone with whom Aberdeen could work. He was fiercely patriotic like the Tsar, and Russian interests would naturally be prioritised, but, as with Aberdeen, there was in Nesselrode a willingness to seek his country's interest through cooperation. He was the son of a Catholic and a Jew and descended from Hanoverians who had settled in Livonia, an area under Russian jurisdiction but with its own entrenched customs and national language. Although this type of complex lineage was not uncommon in the Russian foreign service, it enabled Nesselrode to appreciate the viewpoints of other nationalities and contributed to an internationalist outlook, at least for the duration of the Peel government.⁵⁶¹ In some respects these commonalities mirrored those between Aberdeen and Guizot who, as discussed in previous pages, was by no means the archetypal Frenchman.

Aberdeen nonetheless needed to be careful not to allow Nesselrode's professions of conciliation to distract him from the changeable nature of

⁵⁵⁹ See H. Ingle, *Nesselrode and the Russian Approchement with Britain, 1836-1844* (London, 1976), pp. 57-120.

⁵⁶⁰ Russian willingness to compromise on interests could be seen in other areas such as Moldavia and Wallachia: see M. Sedivý, 'From Hostility to Cooperation? Austria, Russia and the Danubian Principalities 1829-40', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, lxxxix, 2011, pp. 630-661.

⁵⁶¹ For further background see Ingle, *Nesselrode and the Russian Approchement with Britain*, pp. 1-56.

international affairs and the unpredictable march of events: personnel and times change. Alarm bells should therefore have been ringing when the Tsar visited England between 31 May and 9 June 1844, with the intention of discussing the future of the Ottoman Empire. The visit itself went well. The Tsar arrived at the terminus of the South Western Railway at 5.40 pm on Saturday 1 June to be greeted by Prince Albert, and the first of many grand dinners took place that night at Buckingham Palace, where Aberdeen and the other leading lights of the Peel government dined with Queen Victoria's illustrious guest.⁵⁶² Aberdeen wrote that 'the visit of the Emperor was most successful. All ranks were equally charmed with him' and in this sentiment he was joined by all including the host, who wrote that 'a great event and a great compliment his visit certainly is, and the people here are extremely flattered at it.'⁵⁶³

The incident that later overshadowed memories of this otherwise convivial visit was the Tsar's pursuit of an Anglo-Russian contingency alliance in case of Ottoman collapse. This involved the private pursuit of an arrangement whereby Britain and Russia agreed to act in concert if the future of the Ottoman Empire appeared to be threatened. Many commentators – including Baron Stockmar, confidant of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert and present during the Russian visit – thought the alliance was designed to bring the Ottoman edifice down at the same time as erecting a diplomatic wall between Britain and France.⁵⁶⁴ Leopold I of Belgium – Queen Victoria's uncle and cousin by marriage – held the same view: '[The Tsar's] policy is naturally to *separate* as much as possible the two great Western Powers; he is too weak to resist single-handed their dictates in the Oriental question; *but if they act not in concert*, it is evident that *he is the master*; in all this he acts wisely and in conformity with the great interests of his Empire.'⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁶² For further detail about the visit see, for example, *The Morning Chronicle*, 3 June 1844; *The North Wales Chronicle*, 4 June 1844.

⁵⁶³ Aberdeen to Princess Lieven, 25 June 1844, E. Jones Parry (ed.), *The Correspondence of Lord Aberdeen and Princess Lieven, 1832-54*, i (London, 1938), p. 228; Queen Victoria to the King of the Belgians, 4 June 1844, A. Benson and Viscount Esher (ed.), *The Letters of Queen Victoria: A Selection from Her Majesty's Correspondence between the Years 1837 and 1867*, ii (London, 1908), p. 12.

⁵⁶⁴ See Baron Stockmar, *Memoirs of Baron Stockmar*, ii (London, 1872), esp. pp. 106-7. For further background see P. Colson, *Their Ruling Passions* (London, 1949), pp. 11-38; P. Crabitès, *Victoria's Guardian Angel: A Study of Baron Stockmar* (London, 1937), pp. 196-209.

⁵⁶⁵ The King of the Belgians to Queen Victoria, 28 June 1844, Benson and Esher (ed.), *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, ii, p. 19 (italics in the original text).

The Russian project for an alliance excluded France and, coming at a time of apparent Anglo-French discord over the Prince de Joinville's expedition to Morocco and the French annexation of Tahiti, it appeared to demonstrate Russian intentions once again to place France on the periphery of European affairs.

The timing of the Russian visit need not be regarded as overly suspicious because Russia had for some time been making approaches to Britain about the Tsar visiting London. The Tsar made his initial proposals when Aberdeen came into office and repeated them in 1843.⁵⁶⁶ Russian visits to Britain had also been planned in 1844 before the news of the Moroccan and Tahitian incidents had broken but, as had happened previously, Russian domestic difficulties were blamed for abandonment of the plans.⁵⁶⁷ This was an era in which the Court embraced royal visits from all nations: Prussian royalty visited England in 1842 and 1844, whilst French delegations came in 1843 and 1845. Both the Court and the Conservatives showed them the appropriate degree of respect: Russia was not afforded special treatment.⁵⁶⁸ To Princess Lieven, Aberdeen recalled the King of Prussia's visit in 1842:

I passed a great deal of time with the King of Prussia when he was in this country, and perfectly subscribe to the truth of the description you gave me of him before his arrival. Intelligent, high-minded, and sincere. Like all Germans, he is sometimes a little in the clouds; but his projects are generous, and he wishes to do what is right. Our people liked him much, wherever he went; but you know that we are the most king-loving people on the face of the earth, and even if he had deserved it less, he would not have been without the applause of our population.⁵⁶⁹

Each group of visitors was treated with the necessary pleasantries, but more care needed to be paid with the Russians, as any concomitant weakening of the

⁵⁶⁶ Stuart de Rothesay to Aberdeen, 22 November 1841, TNA, FO 65/273/11; Bloomfield to Aberdeen, 12 December 1843, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43144/28.

⁵⁶⁷ See, for example, Bloomfield to Aberdeen, 16 April 1844, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43144/67.

⁵⁶⁸ For the details of Prussia's later visit see, for example, *The Morning Post*, 15 August 1844.

⁵⁶⁹ Aberdeen to Princess Lieven, 22 February 1842, Jones Parry (ed.), *The Correspondence of Lord Aberdeen and Princess Lieven*, i, p. 199.

Anglo-French relationship would affect the overall balance of Great Power relations. Although Russia wished to work with Britain in Europe and in the East, if Britain and France could be divided then Russia would become the dominant force in Europe. Britain's voice carried more weight with France at its side, especially given the traditional links between Russia, Austria and Prussia. Nesselrode's expressions of official support for the existing state of Anglo-French relations, such as that reported by Britain's representative in Russia, John Bloomfield, were equivocal:

[Nesselrode] was supposed not to desire a close connection between Her Majesty's government and that of King Louis Philippe [but] he placed too much value on the preservation of peace not to be well aware of the great advantage which Europe derives from the amicable relations of England and France [...] His Excellency added that the present cordial good understanding between England and the Conservative Powers of Europe acted as a wholesome check upon France.⁵⁷⁰

Whilst lip-service was paid to the prevailing Anglo-French accord, Nesselrode was putting out the diplomatic feelers for closer relations between Britain and Russia, at the expense of those between Britain and France.

Aberdeen was alive to the dangers posed by Russian sleight of hand and his opinions squared with those of the wider Conservative government and Queen Victoria. Whilst respectful views of the Tsar and his imperial station ensured a convivial visit, Britain was insured against Russian wiles by personal suspicions of the Tsar and an appreciation of the constant need to nurture the French relationship. Aberdeen wrote of the Tsar that 'in spite of his commanding appearance, and manner, and power, there is something about him which always inspired me with a sensation of melancholy. I believe it is the expression of his eye, which is very peculiar [...] Our friends at Paris have no reason to regret this visit; for

⁵⁷⁰ Bloomfield to Aberdeen, 26 October 1844, Puryear, *England, Russia, and the Straits Question 1844-1856* (California, 1931), p. 438.

I think we shall all be the better for it.⁵⁷¹ Queen Victoria's sentiments echoed those of her Foreign Secretary:

The expression of the *eyes* is *formidable*. And unlike anything I ever saw before. He gives me and Albert the impression of a man who is *not* happy, and on whom the weight of his immense power and position weighs heavily and painfully; he seldom smiles, and when he does the expression is *not* a happy one [...] If the French are angry at the visit, let their dear King and their Princes come; *they* will be sure of a *truly affectionate* reception on our part. The one which Emperor Nicholas has received is cordial and civil, *mais ne vient pas du coeur*.⁵⁷²

Nesselrode gave Aberdeen a memorandum of the conversations that took place during the Tsar's visit – notably those relating to future cooperation over the fate of the Ottoman Empire if the fall of Turkish power was deemed imminent – and it appeared that Aberdeen's acceptance of the memorandum brought Britain dangerously close to Russia. It seemed to historians such as Puryear and, more recently, Alex Troubetzkoy, that an alliance with the Russians had been agreed. If this was the case then it raised the possibility that Russia might connive at the destruction of the Ottoman Empire and embroil Britain via the agreement, something commentators would later suggest Russia was trying to achieve with its pre-Crimean policy. Puryear went as far as to say that the agreement 'was comprehensive enough to amount to an alliance on a world basis, for England obligated herself in conjunction with Russia and Austria to exclude France in an eventual partition of Turkey, the corollary of which would be cooperation in every other problem.'⁵⁷³

It is worth turning to the memorandum in detail. The opening lines posed few problems:

⁵⁷¹ Aberdeen to Princess Lieven, 25 June 1844, Jones Parry (ed.), *The Correspondence of Lord Aberdeen and Princess Lieven*, i, pp. 228-9.

⁵⁷² Queen Victoria to the King of the Belgians, 4 June 1844, Benson and Esher (ed.), *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, ii, pp. 12-13 (italics in the original text). Translation: 'but it does not come from the heart'.

⁵⁷³ Puryear, *England, Russia, and the Straits Question*, p. 53; A. Troubetzkoy, *A Brief History of the Crimean War* (London, 2006), p. 47.

Russia and England are mutually penetrated with the conviction that it is for their common interest that the Ottoman Porte should maintain itself in the state of independence and of territorial possession which at present constitutes that Empire, as that political combination is the one which is most compatible with the general interest of the maintenance of peace. Being agreed on this principle, Russia and England have an equal interest in uniting their efforts in order to keep up the existence of the Ottoman Empire, and to avert all the dangers which can place in jeopardy its safety. With this object the essential point is to suffer the Porte to live in repose, without needlessly disturbing it by diplomatic bickerings, and without interfering without absolute necessity in its internal affairs.⁵⁷⁴

There followed, however, sections of the document that have aroused suspicion of Russian intentions, including those that stipulated for interference in Ottoman affairs to enforce adherence to treaty obligations and to protect Christian subjects under Islamic dominion. Although Russia's pursuit of these ends was ostensibly innocent in the 1840s (discussion of this observation will follow, in relation to events in Greece and Serbia) Aberdeen's acquiescence to such terms could encumber future British policy towards Russia.

What was more important was that further references were made to the longer-term status of the Ottoman Empire: 'Unforeseen circumstances may hasten its fall, without it being in the power of the friendly Cabinets to prevent it.' Cooperation between Britain, Russia and Austria was then discussed with the addendum that France would be powerless but to assent to the decisions of this triumvirate, given that Russia had preponderance of action on land and Britain at sea.

The agreement made between Aberdeen and the Russians was commensurate with his desire to work with the Russian court in order to control its more ambitious elements – Canning and Palmerston had used this tactic before – but as a believer in the Vienna Settlement he would not have agreed to a binding arrangement of any kind, particularly not one that excluded France, the focus of his

⁵⁷⁴ See HCPP, 'Eastern Papers: Memorandum by Count Nesselrode, 1844' (1854), lxxi, 1737; K. Bourne, *The Foreign Policy of Victorian England 1830-1902* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 258-261.

foreign policy in the Peel government. Whilst it was thought that the Ottoman Empire must inevitably fall apart, Aberdeen did not want to do anything to hasten its demise.

A lack of clarity in communication with Russia was a major contributory factor in Nesselrode's view of the British position. This ambiguity did not mean that Britain had actually agreed to an alliance, but blame must lie at Aberdeen's door for the misunderstanding. He did not, however, abandon British interests in the East by deliberately chipping away at Ottoman power or, for that matter, abandon France. Nesselrode wrote to Aberdeen on 28 December 1844 in words that hinted at an alliance: the Tsar was said to feel 'that [the memorandum] embodies the most exact résumé of his conversations with you and your colleagues, and that the principles which it establishes will be the most certain guide as to the course we are to follow in common in eastern affairs.'⁵⁷⁵ It was Aberdeen's reply that created the confusion:⁵⁷⁶

It gives me much pleasure to find that no differences exist respecting the accuracy of your statement, to which I already had borne my humble testimony. The personal intercourse which I had the pleasure of renewing with yourself in the course of the last year led to the mutual expression of opinions in which I think that we are entirely agreed, and which I hope may be *kept in view* during all our negotiations with the Levant.⁵⁷⁷

Although Aberdeen had not agreed to an alliance, his reply was sufficiently vague to let the Russians think that they had a gentleman's agreement regarding the Ottoman Empire. The Foreign Secretary's response might be argued to have been made on logical grounds. Rejection of a memorandum of warm but non-committal conversations would have caused unnecessary offence to the Russians seeking cooperation with Britain, and given ammunition to those in the Greater

⁵⁷⁵ Nesselrode to Aberdeen, 28 December 1844, Puryear, *England, Russia, and the Straits Question*, p. 443.

⁵⁷⁶ This is the view of most historians. See, for example, M. Anderson, *The Eastern Question 1774-1923: A Study in International Relations* (London, 1966), p. 119.

⁵⁷⁷ Aberdeen to Nesselrode, 21 January 1845, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43144/285 (italics not in original text).

Russia Party seeking aggrandisement at British expense; it would have suggested British willingness to pursue an independent course and given Russia less incentive to maintain its policy of conciliation. It remains that Aberdeen's response left room for Russian misunderstanding, misrepresentation and manipulation.

Aberdeen's oversight contributed to the Great Powers' mutual inability to comprehend each other's policies in the 1850s as the Crimean War drew near. Disagreement broke out in 1851 between France and Russia over the relative influence of their respective Catholic and Orthodox religions in the administration of the Holy Places of Jerusalem. When Russia began looking for allies in the dispute, using article VII of the treaty of Kutchuk Kainardji as justification to protect the Orthodox religion and the Orthodox subjects of the Sultan, the Tsar looked to Austria on the basis of their agreement at Munchengratz in 1833, and to Britain in light of the Nesselrode Memorandum.⁵⁷⁸ Britain, however, did not think Orthodoxy in danger nor deem the Ottoman Empire under threat from the Holy Places dispute, yet the Tsar nonetheless professed surprise and dismay at the lack of British acquiescence in Russian overtures for support. These differing interpretations of existing agreements set into motion a chain of misunderstandings and mutual suspicion that would end in war.

Historians of the Eastern Question have been attracted to the study of Nesselrode's memorandum because of its implications for interpretation of British and Russian policy as the Crimean war broke out, but there were other more pressing eastern issues for Britain to grapple with in the 1840s. The Russian and Ottoman dimensions of Aberdeen's policy towards Greece have been largely overlooked, for example, as historians have concentrated their attentions on the way in which affairs affected the Anglo-French *entente*.⁵⁷⁹ Russia was one of the three guarantors of King Otho's monarchy, so Anglo-Russian diplomatic intercourse on the future of Greece is worthy of attention as both sides campaigned for their interests to be upheld in a region where significant financial investments had been

⁵⁷⁸ For a succinct yet useful account of these events, see MacFie, *The Eastern Question*, pp. 27-33.

⁵⁷⁹ See, for example, D. McLean, 'The Greek Revolution and the Anglo-French *entente* 1843-4', *The English Historical Review*, xcvi, 1981. Notable exceptions to the rule include B. Jelavich, *Russia and the Greek Revolution of 1843* (Munich, 1966). The Anglo-French aspects of the crisis have been discussed in chapter 3.

made. Aberdeen's policy in Greece, apart from demonstrating the characteristics we have discussed in relation to Anglo-French policy, also shows the continuities with earlier Conservative policy, perhaps more clearly than in the case of British policy towards France and America. The intellectual genesis of Aberdeen's policy towards Russia in Greece was located in the old Conservatism of Wellington.

In order to explore Anglo-Russian relations over Greece in the 1840s, it is necessary briefly to turn back to the 1820s, where the roots of that policy lay. As has been noted, in the Wellington government, despite Aberdeen being Foreign Secretary, British foreign policy was directed by the Prime Minister.⁵⁸⁰ The overriding international objective of the Wellington government was to protect the system of Great Power cooperation and stability at a time when this was deemed to be under threat in the East, both from competing international interests and the policies of the previous government.⁵⁸¹ Greece had revolted against Turkish rule in 1821 and ongoing disturbance led to Britain, Russia and France signing the Treaty of London on 6 July 1827. This paved the way for the creation of an independent Greek state under Turkish suzerainty by its provisions for mutual cooperation and the potential imposition of an armistice. Prime Minister George Canning deemed it better to work with Russia in order to try and exert a measure of control over its actions, and he sensed an opportunity to split the Holy Alliance of Russia, Austria and Prussia.

Both Wellington and Aberdeen felt that the Treaty of London committed Britain to a situation in which it had little capacity to intervene or justification in interfering. Aberdeen made various speeches in the House of Lords that might be described as exhibiting lukewarm enthusiasm for the treaty, or even to show hostility to it.⁵⁸² He felt that the outbreak of discontent in Greece trapped Russia and the Ottomans in a morass of increasing mutual public antipathy and, eventually, war, that Great Powers could only exacerbate by intervention, whilst he and Wellington shared in a reactive conceptualisation of international affairs, as

⁵⁸⁰ For one of the earliest and enduring observations of the balance of power between Wellington and Aberdeen, see P. Guedalla, *The Duke* (London, 1931), p. 375.

⁵⁸¹ For support of this argument, see P. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics 1763-1848* (Oxford, 1994), p. 664.

⁵⁸² See, for example, Aberdeen, The House of Lords, Hansard, xxi, 19 June 1829, esp. col. 1800 and xxii, 11 February 1830, esp. col. 412.

evidenced in one of the Duke's letters to his Foreign Secretary: 'I quite agree with you. [Britain] ought never to commit an act of violence or of injustice, excepting in its own defence, and after having exhausted all the other means of obtaining justice for itself. This is not a very popular sentiment in England, but it is not the less the true policy for this country to follow.'⁵⁸³ This was a policy by which Britain was to react to the initiatives of others in order to protect its interests, rather than using proactive and/or confrontational means to bolster the British position.

There are obvious practical limitations in restricting oneself to a detached supervisory role in international affairs, but these multiply if an existing agreement pulls in the opposite direction. This conflict between a preference for reactive policy and existing treaty obligations led Aberdeen into declaring confused and sometimes contradictory policies towards the East, much to the irritation of Stratford Canning.⁵⁸⁴ A lack of coherent policy meant that Britain, to some extent, left itself as a hostage to fortune. This was a charge that Aberdeen faced in his later dealings with Russia – those regarding the Nesselrode memorandum and his policy in the 1850s – and, as discussed earlier, in the crisis over the Spanish marriages in the 1840s. The Treaty of Adrianople concluded the Russo-Turkish war in 1829 with territorial and commercial gains for Russia and this seemed to confirm the dangers of British vacillation.⁵⁸⁵

We have discussed above how Aberdeen thought that Russia wanted to preserve the Ottoman Empire. It was this logic that married with distaste for intervention (learned from those such as Wellington and Castlereagh) to drive Conservative policy towards Russia over Greece in the 1840s. Stratford had long been warning of the danger of trouble in Greece spilling into the Ottoman Empire and other contemporaries and historians have expressed the same concern.⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁸³ Wellington to Aberdeen, 21 October 1828, Gordon (ed.), *Selections from the Correspondence of the Earl of Aberdeen*, i, pp. 83-88.

⁵⁸⁴ This opinion was shared by Stratford's biographers: see, for example, Lane-Poole, *The Life of Stratford Canning*; E. Malcolm-Smith, *The Life of Stratford Canning (Lord Stratford de Redcliffe)* (London, 1933); L. Byrne, *The Great Ambassador* (Ohio, 1964).

⁵⁸⁵ See Anderson, *The Eastern Question*, pp. 72-3.

⁵⁸⁶ See, for example, Stratford to Aberdeen, 7 February 1842 and 19 April 1843, Lyons Papers, WSRO, LE 65/F/1 and 21; H. Lidderdale (ed. and trans.), *The Memoirs of General John Makriyannis 1797-1864* (Oxford, 1966); B. Photos, *The Greek Constitutional Revolution of 1843* (Chicago, 1971).

Aberdeen was seen as risking Ottoman integrity by not taking a more decided stand in the developing crisis.

There were a number of reasons why Aberdeen felt that the Greek situation could be resolved without the need to confront Russia. Russia had always pursued something of a parental policy towards its international coreligionists and when the power struggle began between Greece's political parties, the Tsar requested that King Otho renounce his Catholicism in order to placate his overwhelmingly Orthodox subjects. Aberdeen's reading of this request indicated that he had caught a whiff of the proverbial rodent:

To require that a sincere and conscientious Prince should renounce the Catholic religion would be equivalent to the demand that he should abandon the succession altogether, for it must be presumed that compliance would be found impossible. To say the truth I fear there is too much reason to suspect that this pretension is now put forward by those who are desirous of effecting the overthrow of the existing dynasty.⁵⁸⁷

Russian interest in its coreligionists was not inextricably linked with Great Power politics, however, and there were reasons not to follow the trail of motivation from a Russian wish to see Otho overthrown, to deliberately fomenting trouble in a country bordering the Ottoman Empire, or to the desire to see a pro-Russian monarch installed on the Greek throne. Barbara Jelavich has argued that the Tsar's interest in the Greek Revolution was driven by genuine religious concern, rather than politics. She has also cited various dispatches that demonstrate Russia's irritation that revolution was ruining institutions that the Russian government had invested much effort and finance in creating.⁵⁸⁸ The Russians, like Britain, wanted a peaceable solution to the problem.

Aberdeen's letter nonetheless indicated that he was alive to the possibility that Russian interest in Greece might have arisen from a more geopolitical perspective, whilst sending it to Russia's Ambassador to Britain gave a direct

⁵⁸⁷ Aberdeen to Brunnow, 20 February 1844, Jelavich, *Russia and the Greek Revolution of 1843*, pp. 76-8.

⁵⁸⁸ Jelavich, *Russia and the Greek Revolution of 1843*, pp. 32-34.

reminder that Britain's conciliatory overtures did not presuppose blind faith in Russian activity. Other communications demonstrated this point, such as Aberdeen's letter of October 1843 to the British representative in Greece, in which it was written that Russian moves on Turkey 'would at once be forcibly and peremptorily repressed.'⁵⁸⁹ As in dealings elsewhere, Aberdeen's public professions of good faith were coupled with correspondence that demonstrated British watchfulness and reminded the Russians of where the boundaries of good faith were to be found.

As with affairs in Greece, events in Serbia provided another case where revolution seemed to carry wider significance regarding the fate of the Ottoman Empire, yet it is a theatre of the Eastern Question that has been largely overlooked by historians.⁵⁹⁰ Discontent had been increasing in Serbia since Mihailo Obrenović came to the throne in 1839 when his father Miloš abdicated. Mihailo's perceived inactivity and lack of care ultimately led to a revolution in which he was replaced by Alexander Karageorgević in 1842. There was widespread anger at Russia's attempts to keep the Russophile Obrenović in power, given that the revolution was seen to be aimed at the fulfilment of Ottoman commitments to reform Serbia and, therefore, to *strengthen* the bond between client state and imperial master, which decades of neglect had so damaged.

Russia was widely suspected of seeking to maintain Obrenović's power in order to damage Serbo-Ottoman relations and precipitate a Serbian move for independence at the expense of Ottoman power. Aberdeen's failure to intervene was seen by many to have cost Britain prestige and stability of trade, whilst evidencing Aberdeen's failure to grasp the Russian policy of encroachment all over the Ottoman Empire. Hansard's recording of the Liberal Lord Beaumont's oration is worth quoting at length, given his impassioned articulation of these arguments, and their wider application to Aberdeen's overall approach to the Eastern Question:

⁵⁸⁹ Aberdeen to Lyons, 25 October 1843, TNA, FO 32/119/38.

⁵⁹⁰ For detail on earlier British activity in Serbia see S. Pavlowitch, *Anglo-Russian Rivalry in Serbia 1837-1839: The Mission of Colonel Hodges* (Paris, 1961).

He would not hesitate to declare that the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in this country had permitted a heavy blow to be struck at our political importance, as well as our commercial prosperity in the East, and by so doing had seriously endangered the very existence, as well as independence of the Ottoman Empire, for he must remind their Lordships that in the long series of attempts made by Russia against the Turkish empire, Serbia⁵⁹¹ was but one chapter in the history, one thread in the web, one link in the chain with which that northern invader was seeking to encircle and bind down the Sublime Porte [...] he knew not how to explain the conduct of Russia, unless he compared it to the habits of the spider, which, after having with consummate skill and systematic perseverance spun the foul web in which its victim is destined to entangle itself, retires to its nook, and there with sullen complacency and malignant patience, waits until the expiring victim has completely exhausted itself, and no longer able to attract attention by its struggles; then in silence approaches the entangled wretch, and at leisure devours it, when not a sound of complaint or an effort at resistance can be heard.⁵⁹²

Lord Beaumont's suggestion that Britain's commercial interests were undermined by revolution in Serbia assumed that there were British interests there, but Aberdeen thought it 'a province with which this country had no particular concern'.⁵⁹³ There seems no evidence to suggest any adverse effect on British trade in the region.

Aberdeen's response to Beaumont's thoughts on Russian activity in the region was to criticise the revolution as an opportunistic coup that had been dressed up in the garb of a populist, liberal and democratic movement: 'The noble Lord had distinctly referred to the revolt as an effect resulting from the attempt of a free people to exercise their right to elect their chief; but so far from this being correct, the revolt was the effect of a corrupt bargain with the Pacha of Belgrade,

⁵⁹¹ The contemporary spelling of Serbia as 'Servia' has been replaced with the modern name in order to assist with consistency. This process is repeated in future quotations.

⁵⁹² Lord Beaumont, House of Lords, Hansard, lxxviii, 5 May 1843, cols. 1248-1251.

⁵⁹³ Lord Aberdeen, House of Lords, Hansard, lxxviii, 5 May 1843, col. 1268.

and two or three ambitious Serbian chiefs.⁵⁹⁴ However reasonable his points, Aberdeen's dismissal of the revolutionaries' genuine wish for reforms that the tyrannical Obrenović had failed to deliver, betrayed a lack of understanding of the situation in Serbia. 1842 had marked the thirtieth anniversary of the Treaty of Bucharest, which had made provisions for democratic and social reform in Serbia that had hitherto proven elusive. Karageorgević sought power to press for the reforms for which his people had long campaigned in vain.

Aberdeen's dismissal of widespread Serbian reforms derived from his enduring view that the Ottoman Empire could be patched up but not regenerated. His hostility to the reform movement in Serbia is likely to have been increased by the proclamations of Britain's Consul-General in Belgrade, who saw reform as a gateway to political reconstruction in the Balkans, and whose views were widely publicised in British newspapers:

Never was there such an opportunity for the re-establishment and complete restoration of the empire [...] to reconstruct, if not a positive, at least a negative strength for Turkey [...] Serbia, bound by fresh ties to Turkey, would, by her ascendancy, command the respect of the neighbouring provinces, and would be prompted by her own interests to attach them to their common suzerain. By her moral influence, which extends very far, she would control Bosnia and Bulgaria, setting at the same time as a counterpoise to Greece, by the diversity and conflict of national tendencies.⁵⁹⁵

Despite his Consul-General's encomium, Aberdeen was sceptical. The prospect of political reorganisation on the back of a revolution clashed with both Aberdeen's ingrained political beliefs and his intellectual and practical investment in the existing balance of power. Such messages from Belgrade set the Foreign Secretary's alarm bells ringing and he commented in the House of Lords, with the usual restraint of the gentleman-politician: 'Her Majesty's Government did not entirely approve of the conduct of our Consul-General, it appearing to them that he

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid*, col. 1269.

⁵⁹⁵ See, for example, *The Morning Post*, 15 August 1844.

had gone beyond the province of his duty in pronouncing an opinion upon an internal revolution.⁵⁹⁶

There remains the accusation, as in other theatres of the Eastern Question, that the Conservatives' diplomatic cooperation with Russia blinded Aberdeen to Russian encroachment on the Ottoman Empire. The *Morning Chronicle*, that reliable critic of Conservative policy, offered the following opinions on the source of Russian motivation for its support of Obrenović:

The Czar demands, first, the dismissal of the Patriot leaders and ministers [...] authors of the revolution, and, secondly, the disgrace of Khiamil Pacha, who is known to have countenanced and encouraged the Patriots [...] The Serbian revolution was carried into effect in the teeth of the Russian Consul-General at Belgrade, who exerted every effort to prevent its success, by supporting the deposed prince. The revolution in itself is contrary to the undeviating principles and projects of Russia.⁵⁹⁷

Aberdeen's policy towards Russia and the Ottoman Empire had nonetheless been coherent and typically Conservative throughout the Peel government. It combined the reactive and detached elements of Wellington's Eastern policy with heightened socio-religious distaste for all things Islamic, although dim views of Muslim power were not exclusively Conservative. Aberdeen's views were not simply informed by his party's intellectual inheritance, however, for the Ottomans were troublesome enough to fuel the criticisms of their detractors. Examples of incompetence or conscious obstructionism were not difficult to find: the corruption spawned by the 1838 Anglo-Turkish treaty and Turkey's failure to implement basic reforms in Serbia pointed towards a lack of control and/or care.

Aberdonian policy in this period was also rooted in a geostrategic appreciation of the importance of the Ottoman Empire: Conservative foreign policy in this period was not based on abstract ideology. The Ottoman Empire provided security for British trading routes as well as against potential Russian – or, for that

⁵⁹⁶ Aberdeen, House of Lords, Hansard, lxxviii, 5 May 1843, col. 1268.

⁵⁹⁷ *The Morning Chronicle*, 19 December 1842.

matter, French or Austrian – encroachment. In short, its very existence was a practical reason to support it, for Ottoman endurance helped to maintain the balance of power so cherished by Conservative statesmen. Aberdeen's inherent Conservatism nonetheless prevented him from trying to remodel the Ottoman Empire on British constitutional and liberal values, preferring to plaster over cracks rather than trying to repair them. Palmerston and Stratford thought Aberdeen's refusal to countenance lasting reforms demonstrated a contradictory approach, but Aberdeen regarded the idea of trying to reform an inherently decaying power to be illogical. The Conservative approach was to seek cooperation with other powers in order to try and build up a rapport that might be needed in due course to deal with Ottoman collapse.

It remained of paramount importance to Aberdeen to keep the Ottoman Empire in existence for the duration of his tenure, and he saw it as important for Britain to protect Turkish integrity for many years after. This much is clear from statements made about Russian policy in Greece and Serbia, where the potential for Russian encroachment elicited affirmations of Britain's enduring support for Ottoman safety. This was decades before Disraeli would seize the patriotic mantle for the Conservative Party with his vociferous and confrontational support of the Ottoman Empire, but Aberdeen's was a patriotic and Conservative policy of its time. Private correspondence was used to remind the Russians that public proclamations of good faith were backed up with an underlying watchfulness to ensure that British interests were not compromised.

Chapter Six: Anglo-American Relations

Europe was not the only consideration in the Peel administration's construction of foreign policy. Like other British Foreign Secretaries of the previous decades, Aberdeen needed to have one eye fixed on the former colony that, even in the 1840s, held huge potential as an ally and economic partner, if the natural suspicions and rivalries between the two countries could be successfully negotiated. The Peel administration's handling of affairs was pressurised by tensions that had been allowed to escalate under the previous government. An appreciation of this background is crucial to understanding the context in which Conservative policy was formed, especially as sections of the historiography have offered anachronistic interpretations of this background.

The story of Anglo-American relations was for much of the twentieth-century told as one of an inevitable and inexorable rapprochement between two powers with a common language and common objectives. H. C. Allen's seminal work of 1955 described the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century as witnessing a 'ripening of friendship' that 'appears in the growing similarity of political ideas and practices which accompanied the development of democracy in both countries, but particularly in Great Britain.'⁵⁹⁸ Britain's democratisation was seen to have dissipated national distaste for the American democratic project, whilst Americans regarded the emergence of democratic procedure as diluting the British arrogance they had found so irritating. Conversely, American economic development challenged the haughty view with which many Britons regarded the inhabitants of their former colony: Americans had been portrayed in literature as common, base, and intellectually deficient.⁵⁹⁹

Winston Churchill expanded on Allen's themes of developing friendship in his *History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, in which the steady improvement of Anglo-American relations was related to other historical forces: 'The nineteenth century was a period of purposeful, progressive, enlightened, tolerant civilisation.

⁵⁹⁸ H. Allen, *Great Britain and the United States: A History of Anglo-American Relations (1783-1952)* (New York, 1955), p. 27.

⁵⁹⁹ See, for example, P. Langford, 'Manners and Character in Anglo-American Perceptions, 1750-1850', in F. Leventhal and R. Quinault (ed.), *Anglo-American Attitudes: From Revolution to Partnership* (Sydney, 2000), pp. 76-90.

The stir in the world arising from the French Revolution, added to the Industrial Revolution unleashed by the steam-engine and many key inventions, led inexorably to the democratic age.⁶⁰⁰ Later adherents to this view included Reginald Stuart, who in 1988 wrote that ‘emotional surges, as in the Maine – New Brunswick boundary dispute, the provincial rebellions of 1837, or the Oregon controversy in 1846, could not deflect a strengthening Anglo-American diplomatic accord.’⁶⁰¹

The painting of the history of Anglo-American history with such broad brushstrokes is an approach that has recently been challenged by those such as Duncan Campbell, who argued that the rapprochement between the two countries was by no means inevitable: indeed, they were the ‘Unlikely Allies’ to which the title of his book pertained.⁶⁰² Campbell’s analysis is supported by the sheer weight of transatlantic quarrels. War nearly broke out between the two countries when a dispute over Cuba developed in 1822, which would have been the third major armed conflict between Britain and a nation that had only existed for four decades. Boundary disputes between the American and British territory on the North American continent provided a constant source of disharmony, whilst the issue of slavery saw an enduring clash between British abolitionism and the Americans’ perception of this movement as thinly veiled commercial opportunism.⁶⁰³ British assistance to the Confederacy in the American Civil War caused a serious diplomatic fissure in the 1860s and whilst the Alabama settlement went some way to repairing relations, the alliances of the twentieth-century were still in the distant future.

Allen and Churchill’s works were published in the Eisenhower-Krushchev years of the Cold War, when strong Anglo-American relations were promoted in order to strengthen the democratic powers against the Soviet threat and the emergence of the People’s Republic of China. Allen’s portrayal of Anglo-American

⁶⁰⁰ W. Churchill, *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, iv: The Great Democracies (London, 1958), p. vii.

⁶⁰¹ R. Stuart, *United States Expansionism and British North America, 1775-1871* (London, 1988), p. 80.

⁶⁰² D. Campbell, *Unlikely Allies: Britain, America and the Victorian Origins of the Special Relationship* (London, 2007).

⁶⁰³ For American attitudes to the issue of slavery see, for example, R. Kagan, *Dangerous Nation: America and the World 1600-1898* (London, 2006), pp. 181-223. For an account of cooperative slave initiatives, see C. Bolt, *The Anti-Slavery Movement and Reconstruction: A Study in Anglo-American Cooperation 1833-77* (Oxford, 1969).

history was, by admission, to serve the age in which it was written: 'I have not written this book purely as an academic study: I have written it because I believe in the necessity for cordial Anglo-American relations [...] the future of democracy can only be safe in the hands of an Anglo-American alliance.'⁶⁰⁴ Such sentiments ensured that periods of transatlantic conflict were explained away as teething problems in a teleological historical narrative.

Campbell's account of a relationship that lurched between periods of hostility and times of relative calm is a more appropriate basis from which to understand the nineteenth-century context in which Conservative foreign policy was being made: the inevitability of Anglo-American accord would not have been apparent in the 1840s. The Peel government came to power with Anglo-American relations in a state of disrepair. A series of maritime incidents caused by conflicting views on slave issues raised the political temperature, whilst a succession of other crises had thrown unsettled boundary issues between British Canada and America into sharp focus. Matters were not helped by the American perception, albeit mistaken, that Palmerston had called the American flag a 'piece of bunting'.⁶⁰⁵ Palmerston's first tenure as Foreign Secretary had been one of comparative conciliation with America, dominated by assistance in the resolution of conflicts between America and France, but Aberdeen came to office amid heightened tensions.⁶⁰⁶

The McLeod affair proved particularly inflammatory. Alexander McLeod fought with Britain during the Canadian rebellion of the late 1830s and, in response to American support of the rebels, he helped a loyalist group to set the American *Caroline* ablaze and push it over Niagara Falls in December 1837.⁶⁰⁷ By 1841 McLeod had been arrested and put on trial for the murder of an American, Amos

⁶⁰⁴ Allen, *Great Britain and the United States*, pp. 18-19.

⁶⁰⁵ M. Chamberlain, *Pax Britannica? British Foreign Policy 1789-1914* (London, 1988), p. 75.

⁶⁰⁶ For background to Palmerston's policy in this period, see H. Blumenthal, *France and the United States: Their Diplomatic Relations, 1789-1914* (Massachusetts, 1970), pp. 38-52.

⁶⁰⁷ For further information on the *Caroline* affair, see H. Jones and D. Rakestraw, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny: Anglo-American Relations in the 1840s* (Delaware, 1997), pp. 21-42. Accounts of the McLeod affair can be found in M. Chamberlain, *Lord Aberdeen: A Political Biography* (London, 1983) and W. Devereux Jones, *The American Problem in British Diplomacy, 1841-1861* (London, 1974), pp. 4-7: the most comprehensive account can be found in Jones and Rakestraw, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny*, pp. 43-70.

Durfee, during the attack on the *Caroline*, and Palmerston threatened ‘immediate and frightful’ war if McLeod was executed.⁶⁰⁸ American and British indignation at the other’s stance on this event combined with a host of other festering political sores to create a combustible atmosphere. The *New York Herald* of 19 January 1841 demonstrated this combustibility, with additional reference to Britain’s heavy handed anti-slavery measures: ‘The progress of British aggrandizement in every part of the world, savage and civilized, ought to alarm all independent nations [...] our vessels are seized – our territory held – our waters invaded – our citizens murdered – our property outraged by British agency and British subjects.’⁶⁰⁹

The increasing urgency with which Anglo-American disputes required resolution was fuelled by the rise of the nationalist, religious, and romantic American self-belief in its justification for expansion across the whole North American continent, which became known as ‘Manifest Destiny’. This phenomenon helped to place the lack of agreed borders between Maine and New Brunswick and between Oregon and British Columbia on the political agenda, especially given that British frontier fortifications and manpower were limited.⁶¹⁰ The issue of the borders had remained unresolved since vaguely worded references in the Treaty of Paris of 1783, but momentum was growing as fast as political action was going nowhere.

American Secretary of State Daniel Webster, who would become the lead American negotiator on the Maine-New Brunswick boundary, reflected on the 1830s with sarcasm: ‘Great progress this, surely?’⁶¹¹ Whilst in part trying to defend his own negotiating record in the 1840s, Webster criticised Palmerston’s parting suggestion of a further investigation to be led by scientists selected by the Kings of Prussia, Sardinia and Saxony.⁶¹² To halt the deterioration in Anglo-American relations, a new approach was envisaged: Webster ‘hoped to live long enough to see the north-eastern boundary settled; but that hope was faint, unless he could

⁶⁰⁸ See Jones and Rakestraw, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny*, p. 43.

⁶⁰⁹ *The New York Herald*, 19 January 1841. A fuller section of this article can be found in D. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation: Texas, Oregon, and the Mexican War* (Missouri, 1973), p. 16.

⁶¹⁰ For detail on Britain’s military and naval capabilities in America, see K. Bourne, *The Balance of Power in North America 1815-1908* (London, 1967), pp. 3-119.

⁶¹¹ C. Wiltse and A. Berolzheimer (eds.), *The Papers of Daniel Webster: Speeches and Formal Writings*, ii: 1834-1852 (London, 1988), pp. 364-375.

⁶¹² *Ibid*, p. 380.

rescue the question from the labyrinth of projects and counter-projects, explorations and arbitrations, in which it was involved.’⁶¹³

The accession of the Conservative government with Lord Aberdeen as Foreign Secretary presented both Britain and America with the best chance of a settlement yet. Daniel Webster could use Aberdeen’s public professions of conciliation to sell his own to America and despite all the usual nationalist noises in the newspapers, a more optimistic tone could be detected that indicated the changing mood. The *New York Herald*, in an article entitled ‘Our Relations with England’, now saw that ‘there is no reason to anticipate a period more auspicious for [the boundary dispute’s] equitable and satisfactory adjustment than the present.’⁶¹⁴

Aberdeen had long regarded Britain and America as natural allies and regretted both the historical and immediate hostility between the nations. In 1811 he articulated these sentiments in the House of Lords, expressing ‘regret, that two nations, who ought, from so many interesting circumstances, to be united in friendship, should have spent so much time in discussions on topics which separated their mutual interests and dispositions.’⁶¹⁵ Aberdeen combined this belief in transatlantic kinship with an appreciation of the American mindset. Wilbur Devereux Jones noted how the Foreign Secretary ‘understood perfectly the importance of dispelling the impression of superciliousness which Americans so keenly resented then in British statesmen’, and this was important given previous episodes.⁶¹⁶ Canning’s time at the Foreign Office, for example, had been characterised more by strained relations than cooperation: his more confrontational outlook coincided with the American declaration of the Monroe Doctrine and, in later years, with the barely concealed Anglophobia of John Quincy Adams’ presidency. Conflict peaked with the closure of British West Indian ports to American shipping in July 1826.⁶¹⁷

⁶¹³ *Ibid*, p. 381.

⁶¹⁴ See Peel to Aberdeen, 31 October 1841, incl., Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43061/308.

⁶¹⁵ Aberdeen, House of Lords, Hansard, 2nd series, xviii, 12 February 1811, col. 1152.

⁶¹⁶ Devereux Jones, *‘Prosperity’ Robinson: The Life of Viscount Goderich 1782-1859* (New York, 1967), p. 87.

⁶¹⁷ For background to Canning’s policy in this period, see C. Campbell, *From Revolution to Rapprochement: The United States and Great Britain, 1783-1900* (New York, 1974), pp. 33-48.

Aberdeen's overall approach to America, as to other nations, was rooted in the Peel government's domestic political objectives and in the tradition of a cooperative yet robust Conservative foreign policy. The need for a foreign policy that avoided entanglement and expense in order to channel energies and finance into domestic regeneration dovetailed with Aberdeen's preference for a policy of open conciliation and the maintenance of British influence through mercantile enterprise. This was particularly desired because the breakup of the Spanish Empire in the Americas had been having a destabilising effect on the international balance of power. One of Aberdeen's principal intellectual progenitors, Viscount Castlereagh, had soothed transatlantic relations in the wake of the Napoleonic wars via an economic strategy.⁶¹⁸ A focus on the value of emerging American markets allowed Castlereagh to transcend British irritation at America entering the Napoleonic wars as cobelligerents of France: heightened economic intercourse was seen as the best method of securing British interests and peace. As this chapter will outline, Aberdeen's utilisation of economic relations for political purposes was central to his diplomacy, particularly in the dispute over the border between Maine and New Brunswick.

The extension of an economic and political olive branch held out promise for the resolution of Anglo-American problems, given the Americans' historical tendency to respond to domineering British policies with indignant political recalcitrance. The mandate for this policy of conciliation has been challenged by Muriel Chamberlain, who argued that Aberdeen was 'plainly out of tune with his colleagues' with regard to American affairs, but evidence to the contrary will be examined.⁶¹⁹ An initial barometer of British political opinion was Westminster's rejection of the Duke of Wellington's proposal that Britain should respond to transatlantic difficulties by making large increases in defence spending: the initiation of dialogue was preferred to spiralling preparations for conflict.

In order to further examine Aberdeen's implementation of Conservative policy, this study will examine the boundary disputes between the two countries.

⁶¹⁸ For background to Castlereagh's policy in this period, see J. Derry, *Castlereagh* (London, 1976), pp. 145-232.

⁶¹⁹ Chamberlain, *Aberdeen*, p. 323.

As Duncan Campbell has outlined, they were the most pressing issues.⁶²⁰ The boundary disputes were complex problems and as such will be treated in separate chapters, particularly as the latter dispute featured a number of different personnel, most significantly a new American President with a vastly different approach to the old mother county. Whilst there were other territorial issues, these were peripheral considerations such as the fate of Texas (governance of the Lone Star state was contested between American federalists and separatists, as well as potential Mexican conquerors). As elsewhere, the Conservatives were uninterested in areas in which they did not perceive themselves to have a direct political concern: Aberdeen wrote that in Texas, Britain's 'objects are purely commercial, and she has no thought or intention of seeking to act, directly or indirectly, in a political sense, on the United States through Texas.'⁶²¹ Similarly, American designs on California and its harbours elicited little interest from Aberdeen: Britain already exercised naval supremacy and, given that America sought to obtain California at Mexican expense, this was an area where Britain would not risk unnecessary conflict with both America and Mexico.⁶²²

The only marginal political considerations in Texas involved whether or not slavery was to be allowed, and ensuring that there was no disruption to the vast cotton exports received from the Texans.⁶²³ Britain had tried with France to prevent annexation to the United States but, given that annexation was unlikely to affect these exports, that this was another area where Mexican and American interests clashed and threatened to drag others into war, and that French interest in the issue was equivocal, the project was shelved. One historian has concluded that 'Aberdeen lost interest in mediation and therefore reluctantly accepted the United States' annexation of Texas.'⁶²⁴ This was only half true: Aberdeen had

⁶²⁰ Campbell, *Unlikely Allies*, p. 125.

⁶²¹ Aberdeen to Pakenham, 26 December 1843, *ibid*, p. 127. The best account of British involvement in the Texas affair remains E. Douglass Adams, *British Interests and Activities in Texas 1838-1846* (Massachusetts, 2nd edition, 1963).

⁶²² For a full account of America's acquisition of California, see Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation*, pp. 89-112 and 395-438.

⁶²³ For further information on the Texas affair, see N. Tutorow, *Texas Annexation and the Mexican War* (London, 1978). For support of the view that Aberdeen was primarily interested in Texas as an issue concerning slavery, see Allen, *Great Britain and the United States*, p. 406.

⁶²⁴ T. Leonard, *James K. Polk: A Clear and Unquestionable Destiny* (Oxford, 2008), p. 82.

never, with good reason, been fully interested in the first place. In the Foreign Office to consolidate, he was more concerned with areas in which American expansionism threatened existing British possessions.

The slavery issue provided a source of constant discord. Britain's attempts to put a stop to slavery by maintaining the right of search, which involved boarding suspected slaving ships in order to inspect their papers and cargo, caused consternation among Americans and other powers. The clash of British abolitionism and the slaving interests of America (and other powers) was a vast and international concern that has already attracted numerous studies.⁶²⁵ It was also an area of government policy in which so many politicians were involved that it is hard to measure the nature and impact of Aberdonian endeavour. For this reason, and because the existing historiography of the slavery issue is comprehensive, the issue requires only brief elucidation.

Aberdeen was strongly opposed to what he called 'this detestable traffick in human beings' and his first ever vote in Parliament had been in favour of abolition.⁶²⁶ In the Peel government, Aberdeen was content to corral smaller nations into line with his views and British abolitionism, as was demonstrated when Brazil refused to renew its consent to the right of search in 1844, prompting the instigation of 'Lord Aberdeen's Act', which engendered the unilateral British extension of the right of search to Brazilian ships.⁶²⁷ When it came to the United States or France, the two large powers with which significant slaving disagreements lingered throughout the 1840s, Aberdeen was reluctant to jeopardise wider objectives by pressing for abolition and the right of search that the two nations found so offensive. Rival powers saw in British abolitionism an economic policy designed to undermine the lucrative markets of its competitors, dressed in the garb of humanitarian altruism. Aberdeen recognised that overcoming this opposition was going not going to happen in the shorter term and concentrated on more immediate Conservative objectives. It is hard to see, for example, that anything could have been achieved during the Webster-Ashburton negotiations if the mutual

⁶²⁵ See, for example, P. Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619-1877* (New York, 1993); H. Soulsby, *The Right of Search and the Slave Trade in Anglo-American Relations 1814-1862* (Baltimore, 1933).

⁶²⁶ Aberdeen to Stevenson, 13 October 1841, TNA, FO 84/376.

⁶²⁷ See L. Bethell, *The Abolition of the Brazilian Slave Trade* (Cambridge, 1970).

antipathy caused by competing views on slavery had been allowed to permeate proceedings. The Conservatives' was a pragmatic course with little room for the pursuit of grand causes, however strongly Aberdeen and others felt about slavery.

Aberdeen's approach to the disputed boundaries with America was to get them negotiated as soon as possible, honourably and peaceably. This would dampen the potential for conflict between America and Canada at a time when Britain was already having trouble with the internal stability of its North American dominion.⁶²⁸ Stability would regularise trade and the British willingness to compromise was thought to encourage a spirit where new markets could be opened with both America and Canada (which proved to be the case). These objectives presented a challenge to which Peel responded in October 1841 by flirting with the idea of a separation from Canada, instead of becoming embroiled in its problems:

Above all, if the people [of Canada] are not cordially with us, why should we contract the tremendous obligation of having to defend, *as a point of honour*, their territory against American aggression? [...] if they are not with us, or if they will not cordially support and sustain those measures which we consider necessary for their good government and for the maintenance of a safe connection with them, let us have a friendly separation while there is yet time, rather than recommence a system of bickering and squabbling on petty points, the result of which will be increasing ill humour and alienation on their part, constant encouragement to American sympathisers, and ultimately the necessity of our vindicating British honour, with Canadians feeling adverse to us, the war at the door of the United States, and three or four thousand miles from our shores.⁶²⁹

Peel's frustrations cooled as the magnitude of internal Canadian discontent decreased, however, and the Conservatives supported Aberdeen's intentions of resolving matters by compromise with America rather than rashly cutting ties with

⁶²⁸ For further detail, see Jones and Rakestraw, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny*, pp. 1-70; A. Corey, *The Crisis of 1830-1842 in Canadian-American Relations* (New York, 1941).

⁶²⁹ Peel to Aberdeen, 25 October 1841, C. Parker, *Sir Robert Peel*, iii (London 1899), p. 389.

Canada. Canada remained a valuable asset in an age when the development of South Africa, Australia and New Zealand was in its embryonic stages and, despite the growing recognition of the need for political reform, no serious breach was envisaged in calmer times.⁶³⁰ Peel confirmed to Aberdeen that ‘we must reach a settlement’ of the disturbances on both sides of the boundary.⁶³¹ Whilst using more forthright language in the public domain in comparison with Aberdeen, as he had done in European diplomacy, his epistle of October 1841 further challenges the traditional portrayal of the Peel-Aberdeen relationship. Here was a case where the Prime Minister flirted with a rash course of action that would have undermined British colonial and mercantile interests. This was not the unflinching and dictatorial *paterfamilias* of the historiographical mainstream, intervening to negate the uncertain vacillations of the Foreign Secretary.

Colonial Secretary Lord Stanley shared Peel’s considered views on the necessity of compromise and the overall Conservative balance-book approach to foreign policy: Angus Hawkins argued that, for Stanley, ‘secure profits, not more colonial possessions, were the key to Britain’s international pre-eminence.’⁶³² Stanley supported the search for compromise in America.⁶³³ The Duke of Wellington would always argue for a more confrontational policy than Aberdeen and favoured the use of a show of strength as the initial bargaining tool, but it was this approach that was out of step with Conservative foreign policy in the 1840s, not Aberdeen’s. As in Europe, Peel found himself restraining the old military campaigner who, as a man with infinite public duties, often admitted that he had not read the documents relevant to the opinions he was expressing. Stanley shared his frustration with the Duke’s excitability and his propensity to complicate policy-making.⁶³⁴

⁶³⁰ See F. Haynes, ‘The Reciprocity Treaty with Canada of 1854’, *Publications of the American Economic Association*, vii, 1892, pp. 7-70; E. Porritt, ‘The Reciprocity Agreement and British Colonial Policy’, *The North American Review*, cxci, 1911, pp. 515-522.

⁶³¹ Peel to Aberdeen, 16 May 1842, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43062/48.

⁶³² A. Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister: The Fourteenth Earl of Derby*, i: Ascent, 1799-1851 (Oxford, 2007), p. 229.

⁶³³ *Ibid*, p. 253.

⁶³⁴ See Peel to Stanley, 26 October 1842, Peel Papers, BL, Add. MS 40467/269 and Stanley to Peel, 30 October 1842, Peel Papers, BL, Add. MS 40467/273.

Whilst keeping one eye fixed on wider strategic concerns, Aberdeen and the Conservatives needed to defend local British interests. Within weeks of coming to power, leading Conservatives met to discuss potential plans for war if American demands proved too much.⁶³⁵ As with Aberdeen's European policy, Britain would be transparent with its negotiating position in the hope that this might elicit a reasonable response, but as with French activity in Tahiti and Morocco, this openness did not give the other power the freedom to take advantage and act how it pleased. America was instructed that British conciliation would only stretch so far: peace was desirable, but not at any price.

War was nonetheless thought unlikely. This contrasted with the views of certain historians who believed that war with France and/or America was almost inevitable throughout the period of the Conservative government. These include John Galbraith, who paid particular attention to the Oregon boundary.⁶³⁶ Meanwhile, Jones believed that the letters of certain American senators, claiming that France would stand with the United States in the event of war over the Maine-New Brunswick boundary, provided proof of the likelihood of this possibility.⁶³⁷ Kenneth Bourne also suggested that a third Franco-American coalition could have been initiated against Britain in the 1840s:

In the neutrality of the French [...] few Englishmen had any great [...] faith. With the possible exception of the quarter interlude of 1871-95 they lived for a century in almost constant fear of a repetition of 1778 or 1812, the occasions on which they believed the French had taken advantage of Britain's troubles in America. [...] The British acquiesced all the more readily for fear of complications in Europe. The settlements of 1842, 1846 and 1871 were but further episodes in the same story.⁶³⁸

⁶³⁵ See Chamberlain, *Aberdeen*, p. 312. Peel, Aberdeen, Stanley, Graham and Haddington all attended the meeting on 8 October 1841.

⁶³⁶ J. Galbraith, *The Hudson's Bay Company as an Imperial Factor 1821-1869* (California, 1957), pp. 233-234.

⁶³⁷ W. Devereux Jones, 'Lord Ashburton and the Maine Boundary Negotiations', *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, xl, 1953.

⁶³⁸ Bourne, *The Balance of Power in North America*, pp. 409-410.

This is a tempting theory, but the chance of Britain facing a war with either France or America was small; the chance of France and America entering a war against Britain as cobelligerents was smaller still. France was an ambitious power but Guizot was genuinely supportive of Aberdeen and would have been reluctant to act against his colleague. The *entente* added further moral pressure and, besides, Anglo-French cooperation saved France from the isolation in which it would almost certainly otherwise find itself; there was little likelihood of support from the conservative powers. All France and America had in common during the Ashburton-Webster negotiations was distaste for Britain's approach to slavery, and those who wanted to create a storm from this issue found themselves in the minority: the French were a divided people in the early 1840s. Henry Blumenthal summed up this argument: 'whatever aspirations France had for world leadership, its divided councils caused an indecision that played into the hands of its rivals.'⁶³⁹ France found no common cause at all with America during the Oregon boundary dispute and Guizot expressed many concerns about the problems that war over Oregon would engender.

Unilaterally, America was unlikely to consider war with Britain; it wanted instead to settle its boundaries with Canada and facilitate expansion to the west and south, which it knew it could achieve with relatively little opposition. The presidents with whom Aberdeen dealt also posed little threat of war. John Tyler was preoccupied with domestic politics and consequently sought conciliation on the international stage.⁶⁴⁰ James Polk would play a game of noisy patriotic brinksmanship over the Oregon boundary but this was a bluff that was eventually exposed, as will be considered below. Polk might have joined a war with France against England over the Oregon affair if the French had been interested in starting one, but they were philosophically and practically against this.

French pressure was for a settlement. Guizot reflected on the possibility of war in a letter to the French *chargé d'affaires* in Washington, Alphonse Joseph Yves Pageot: 'we warmly desire that a pacific solution takes place, for it would be doubly

⁶³⁹ H. Blumenthal, *A Reappraisal of Franco-American Relations, 1830-1871* (North Carolina, 1959), p. 42.

⁶⁴⁰ See J. Ashworth, *'Agrarians and Aristocrats': Party Political Ideology in the United States, 1837-1846* (Cambridge, 1983).

regrettable if the peace of the world were threatened by such a matter, and we are in any case firmly decided to keep the most complete neutrality as long as it will be possible for us to do so.’⁶⁴¹ From the rest of the letter French reluctance to fight was clear. Pageot shared these views and demonstrated them in a letter to Guizot: ‘the American democracy is animated by a spirit of usurpation that can endanger the peace of the world.’⁶⁴² The writings of French intellectuals added to a consensus that France saw America as a danger to its interests during Aberdeen’s tenure, rather than a vehicle by which to obtain them at Britain’s expense.⁶⁴³

Aberdeen’s American policy was founded on the need to foster trade through peace and cooperation and to breathe life into Britain’s flagging economy by doing so: it did not derive from concerns about war with France or America. Russia and Austria concentrated on European affairs in this period so Aberdeen was free to pursue a policy born of Conservative objectives and his humanitarian distaste for war without fear of international intervention.

The negotiations over the boundary between Maine and New Brunswick have resulted in a number of charges against Conservative policy. Aberdeen’s instructions have been deemed to be incomplete and confusing; it has been suggested that his selection of Lord Ashburton as British negotiator resulted in greater concessions than might otherwise have been made; and, given that the mission was initially supposed to resolve all outstanding disputes between Britain and America, there has been criticism of the fact that Ashburton solved little more than the boundary issue. These charges are more noticeable in the work of British and Canadian historians than in that of their American counterparts.⁶⁴⁴ But the critical question is whether the treaty actually protected British interests. This consideration has often been lost in a historiography overly concerned with diplomatic minutiae.

⁶⁴¹ Guizot to Pageot, 29 January 1846, G. Vern Blue, ‘France and the Oregon Question, part II’, *The Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society*, xxxiv, 1933, pp. 149-150.

⁶⁴² Pageot to Guizot, 12 June 1845, G. Vern Blue, ‘France and the Oregon Question’, *The Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society*, xxxiv, 1933, p. 55.

⁶⁴³ Intellectuals including Bacourt, Sortiges and Mercier voiced their concern. See Blumenthal, *A Reappraisal of Franco-American Relations*, p. 34.

⁶⁴⁴ See F. Carroll, ‘The Passionate Canadians: the Historical Debate about the Eastern Canadian-American Boundary’, *The New England Quarterly*, lxx, 1997, p. 84.

The debated land and final settlement of the boundary question can be seen in the following map.⁶⁴⁵ The 1831 arbitration referred to is that conducted by the King of Netherlands, whose verdict formed a point of reference throughout negotiations:

⁶⁴⁵ Taken from www.maineencyclopedia.com/webster-ashburton-treaty. This map refers to a number of additional treaty negotiations and potential boundary lines, but the important ones to concentrate upon are the US claim, the British claim, the Dutch arbitrational line, and the eventual border. A map offering a simplified version of the competing claims can be found in J. Pratt, *A History of United States Foreign Policy* (New Jersey, 1955), p. 193.

the St. Lawrence provided a threat to British territory, particularly given the lack of natural obstacles in that area. The Madawaska Settlements in the Aroostook Valley were at the time areas of pine swamp but some, including, occasionally, Ashburton, thought that they might be useful when developed in the future. Local interest in this area was intense, however, something that was typified by the (albeit tragicomic) Aroostook war in the late 1830s.⁶⁴⁶

Aberdeen's initial failure to mention specific strategic concerns to Ashburton has been seen by some as a dereliction of duty that led to confused negotiations, with the Duke of Wellington needing to step in to resolve this.⁶⁴⁷ There is some mileage in the first argument given that Aberdeen could have spent the time he had been in government getting better prepared, especially as there had been an enforced delay whilst waiting for weather conditions to be fit for an Atlantic crossing. Rather than allowing time to further damage the chance of reconciliation when the climate was favourable, however, Ashburton's prompt departure at least ensured that America was shown that Britain's commitments to conflict resolution were real.⁶⁴⁸ Aberdeen intended for Ashburton's precise instructions to catch up with him on their way across the Atlantic and, in the meantime, he sent Ashburton away with several batches of papers so that the full history of the dispute and the present situation would be known.⁶⁴⁹ Aberdeen also gave Ashburton one concrete instruction: the award of the King of the Netherlands was as far as Britain was prepared to be pushed.⁶⁵⁰

Wellington corresponded with Aberdeen on the subject of America in 1841 but only to make general assertions about the need to stand firm: Aberdeen's instructions to Ashburton predated his correspondence with Wellington on the topic of the Netherlands award.⁶⁵¹ It was later in February that Wellington wrote to Aberdeen, with reference to the history of the Netherlands award: 'let it be

⁶⁴⁶ See Jones and Rakestraw, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny*, pp. 8-11.

⁶⁴⁷ Chamberlain, *Aberdeen*, p. 321.

⁶⁴⁸ For support of this argument, see Devereux Jones, 'Lord Ashburton and the Maine Boundary Negotiations', p. 479.

⁶⁴⁹ Aberdeen to Peel, 7 February 1842, Peel Papers, BL, Add. MS 40453/103; Aberdeen to Ashburton, 8 February 1842, TNA, FO/5/378 (not foliated).

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵¹ See, for example, Wellington to Aberdeen, 29 December 1841, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43060/262-3.

understood that the whole of [the territory] is a matter of negotiation, and that we who accepted are no more bound to any part than the United States who rejected the whole.⁶⁵² This elicited a deferential response from Aberdeen but one that did not change the fundamentals of his instructions to Ashburton: the Dutch King's award remained the limit of British conciliation.⁶⁵³ It was also the state of Maine that had rejected the award rather than the United States, which evidenced Wellington's lack of familiarity with the specifics of the dispute.

Where Wellington appeared to have influenced Aberdeen's instructions was in the extent to which the potential British land beyond the Netherlands award should be contested. Aberdeen wrote to the Duke in March 1842:

In consequence of your observations on Lord Ashburton's Instructions, I wrote to him, and in a private letter desired him to suspend all proceedings on the subject of the North East Boundary, until his Instructions should have received the necessary alterations [...] By Lord Ashburton's former Instructions he was authorised to accept the award of the King of the Netherlands, in case of necessity, as his ultimatum. By the present draft he is to make the acquisition from the United States of that portion of territory which is considered essential to us, a *sine qua non*.⁶⁵⁴

Wellington had certainly encouraged Aberdeen to seek the advice of military personnel, namely Sir James Kempt, Sir George Murray and Sir Howard Douglas, but while all agreed on the need for a military road, none could agree on the specifics of its route.⁶⁵⁵ Aberdeen's letter calmed Wellington but effected no real change to policy, as 'that portion of territory which is considered essential to us' remained undefined.

Whilst the lack of precise instructions irritated Ashburton at times, Aberdeen's overall message was clear: the United States must not receive more

⁶⁵² Wellington to Aberdeen, 17 February 1842, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43060/284.

⁶⁵³ Aberdeen to Wellington, 22 March 1842, copy, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43060/305.

⁶⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁵ Sir James Kempt to Aberdeen, 1 March 1842; Sir George Murray to Aberdeen, 6 March 1842; Sir Howard Douglas to Aberdeen, 7 March 1842. All these letters are located in TNA, FO/881/259 ('Correspondence relative to the Special Mission of Lord Ashburton to the United States of America'), pp. 9-14.

land than was awarded by the Dutch King and ‘the most indispensable condition for the security of our North American possessions is to be found in a direct and constant communication between Quebec and the Sea at the Port of Halifax.’⁶⁵⁶ How much land Britain obtained beyond the Netherlands award was left to Lord Ashburton, which has led to Aberdeen being accused of carelessness, but these charges overlook the nature of the dispute and the nature of the mission. Ashburton was sent to engage in personal diplomacy with Daniel Webster in an attempt to overcome the partisan posturing that undermined the conclusions of more traditional arbitrations and negotiations. Personal negotiations – without constant reference to London or overly prescriptive instructions – allowed Ashburton to keep up momentum and to respond with haste to the problems caused by tensions between the federal administration and local politicians. There was also conflict between Maine and Massachusetts politicians, as Massachusetts had retained ownership of some of the land in Maine as part of the terms of Maine’s independence in 1820. This was a complex dispute in which a degree of fluidity in Ashburton’s instructions seemed a sensible way to bring about a settlement.

Flexibility in the negotiations required that Aberdeen chose a man who could be relied upon to invest sufficient effort in securing British interests. Ashburton, married to an American, was a landowner in the region in dispute, and a banker for whom Daniel Webster had worked as a lawyer on some of his American ventures. To some, this suggested a lack of care for British interests.⁶⁵⁷ He viewed the negotiations as ‘tedious’ and frequently expressed annoyance with the mission.⁶⁵⁸ Many historians have criticised an attitude that Ephraim Douglass Adams branded ‘cavalier’.⁶⁵⁹ Jones observed that Palmerston would not have chosen Ashburton: indeed, Palmerston called Ashburton ‘most unfit’ in the House

⁶⁵⁶ Ashburton was ‘very impatient’ for want of precise instructions: Aberdeen to Wellington, 22 May 1842, copy, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43060/317. See also Aberdeen to Ashburton, 31 March 1842, TNA, FO 5/378/6.

⁶⁵⁷ See, e.g., Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation*, p. 14 and M. Baxter, *One and Inseparable: Daniel Webster and the Union* (Harvard, 1984), p. 320.

⁶⁵⁸ Ashburton to Aberdeen, 9 August 1842, TNA, FO 5/380/17.

⁶⁵⁹ E. Douglass Adams, ‘Lord Ashburton and the Treaty of Washington’, *The American Historical Review*, xvii, 1912.

of Commons.⁶⁶⁰ Lord John Russell deemed Ashburton's selection 'unfortunate', given his background and perceived overenthusiasm for making concessions.⁶⁶¹

All of this rather missed the point; of course Aberdeen would not have chosen the kind of negotiator Palmerston or Russell would have chosen, and his selection of Ashburton should not be judged on their terms. In the first place, there were good reasons for circumventing the British minister at Washington, Henry Fox, whose manners made him unpopular with the Americans: Merrill Peterson described Fox as 'a withered, gray [sic], little old man, addicted to opium, overwhelmed with debts, he never entertained and his only amusement was at cards.'⁶⁶² Ashburton's financial stake in the area also ensured that he would want a lasting and peaceful settlement, something that could not be achieved by short-changing Canada.⁶⁶³

Ashburton's selection must also be viewed in the context of the political situation in America, in that his opposite number shared his willingness to compromise. Daniel Webster had lived and worked in England as Ashburton had lived and worked in America and the two friends were based in nearby houses in Washington on Lafayette Square.⁶⁶⁴ Although personal diplomacy aroused national suspicions that one negotiator was influenced by the other, this close contact helped to facilitate a situation in which both men would look for a compromise with which they could be content.⁶⁶⁵ As Ashburton commented, his mental and geographical proximity to Webster helped to overcome the 'delay and difficulties' resulting from 'the present condition of this government' in Maine.⁶⁶⁶ By contrast, friction between Fox and Webster over the belligerency of local

⁶⁶⁰ Devereux Jones, *The American Problem in British Diplomacy*, p. 15; Palmerston, House of Commons, Hansard, lxxvi, 2 February 1843, col. 123.

⁶⁶¹ Russell, House of Commons, Hansard, lxxvi, 2 February 1843, col. 104.

⁶⁶² M. Peterson, *The Great Triumvirate: Webster, Clay and Calhoun* (Oxford, 1987), p. 323.

⁶⁶³ For a history of the Baring bank's involvement in America (Lord Ashburton's untitled name was Alexander Baring), see R. Hidy, *The House of Baring in American Trade and Finance: English Merchant Bankers at Work 1763-1861* (Harvard, 1949).

⁶⁶⁴ See I. Bartlett, *Daniel Webster* (New York, 1978), p. 179.

⁶⁶⁵ See *ibid*, p. 180 for support of this argument with reference to Daniel Webster.

⁶⁶⁶ Ashburton to Aberdeen, 13 July 1842, TNA, FO 5/380/13.

politicians had hitherto proved to be an obstacle to Anglo-American reconciliation.⁶⁶⁷

Circumstances in America vindicated Aberdeen's decision to trust in Ashburton and his personal diplomacy with Webster. As Thomas Le Duc and other historians have argued, interest in the boundary on a local level far outweighed federal interest in specific details.⁶⁶⁸ Webster could thus be relied upon to see the broader picture, as demonstrated in a letter to Ashburton: 'in our conferences on the boundary question, we have both been of the opinion that no advantage would be gained by resorting, at this time, to discussion at length of the grounds on which each party considers its claim of right to rest.'⁶⁶⁹ This was a sentiment he repeated in correspondence with his American colleagues. Webster wrote to Edward Everett (American Ambassador to Britain, 1840-5) comparing Ashburton's circumstances and outlook to his own: Ashburton had 'the advantages of much knowledge and experience in public affairs [...] with a true desire to signalize his mission by assisting to place the peace of the two countries on a permanent basis.'⁶⁷⁰ Although the will to compromise was not universal among Americans, Everett was another member of the political majority who shared this will.⁶⁷¹

The compromise settlement determined by the Washington Treaty of August 1842, as detailed on the above map, protected the interests that Aberdeen had set out to achieve: a mutually acceptable boundary that encouraged economic prosperity by soothing Anglo-American relations in the region and on a wider scale. President Tyler reflected on the 'security afforded to mercantile enterprise' and Aberdeen set out the economic benefits to Britain in the House of Lords.⁶⁷²

⁶⁶⁷ See, for example, Fox to Aberdeen, 1 and 9 October 1842, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43155/81 and 89.

⁶⁶⁸ T. Le Duc, 'The Maine Frontier and the Northeastern Boundary Controversy', *The American Historical Review*, liii, 1947, p. 34.

⁶⁶⁹ Webster to Ashburton, 8 July 1842, W. Manning (ed.), *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States: Canadian Relations 1784-1853* (Washington, 1943), pp. 170-1.

⁶⁷⁰ Webster to Everett, 29 January 1842, *ibid*, p. 168.

⁶⁷¹ G. Gill, 'Edward Everett and the Northeastern Boundary Controversy', *The New England Quarterly*, xlii, 1969, p. 204.

⁶⁷² Tyler speaking to the Senate, 6 December 1842, J. Richardson (ed.), *Messages and Papers of the Presidents 1789-1897*, iv: 1841-1849 (Washington, 1899), p. 195; Aberdeen, House of Lords, Hansard, lxxvii, 7 April 1843, col. 650.

Palmerston branded the treaty as the ‘Ashburton capitulation’ and an article of the same title took Palmerston’s views to a wider audience:

There is not, perhaps, on record, any more miserable specimen of diplomatic address. Often have English negotiators been charged with a degree of inferiority in this respect, but never, I believe, has the world witnessed such a total want of sagacity, firmness, and tact of any kind [...] England’s representative expatiates on the value and necessity of peace, as if war had terrors for England alone.⁶⁷³

Given that many Americans called it the ‘Webster capitulation’, one might conclude that the settlement was in fact fair to both parties.⁶⁷⁴ War for extra land of questionable value seemed an unnecessary undertaking. Indeed, Britain had improved on the arbitral Netherlands line and secured extra land to the west of the mouth of the St. John River, thus affording a measure of added protection to the commercial-military route from Halifax along the course of the St. John.⁶⁷⁵ Palmerston’s objections appeared to be for the purpose of political grandstanding, given that he had written at the time of the Netherlands award commending a ‘liberal compromise’ proposal that did not ‘favour either party’.⁶⁷⁶

Aberdeen suspected that more land could have been obtained with a firmer line but deemed a speedy reconciliation with America more important than territory that he did not equate with British interest.⁶⁷⁷ The satisfaction of the military experts that Canada was sufficiently secure from American attack lent support to this viewpoint, in that speed and conciliation had not come at the expense of strategic objectives: Aberdeen wrote in reflection that ‘according to the military authorities whom we consulted, we have obtained by the treaty all that is

⁶⁷³ *The Morning Chronicle*, 8 October 1842.

⁶⁷⁴ See Douglass Adams, ‘Lord Ashburton and the Treaty of Washington’, pp. 764-782.

⁶⁷⁵ For statistical comparison of the Treaty of Washington with the Netherlands award, see Pratt, *A History of United States Foreign Policy*, p. 193.

⁶⁷⁶ Palmerston to Charles Bagot, 18 January 1831, J. Dunbabin, ‘The 1831 Dutch Arbitration of the Canadian-American Boundary Dispute: Another View’, *The New England Quarterly*, lxxv, 2002, p. 644.

⁶⁷⁷ Aberdeen to John Croker, 9 February 1843, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43196/58.

essential to our security, and with this we ought to be satisfied.’⁶⁷⁸ This approach met with the approval of Peel:

The possession of a few hundred square miles of territory, more or less, was of little importance compared to the adjustment of differences which had now existed for nearly half a century [...] differences which, from their long continuance, and from their peculiar nature, were calculated, unless speedily and definitely adjusted, to leave but little hope that peace could be preserved.⁶⁷⁹

Lord Brougham concurred with Peel and proclaimed, with reference to the boundary, that he was ‘utterly indifferent what direction that line takes, let it go a few miles or leagues to the right hand or to the left hand [...] welcome! Take it all! Give it up! Only give me peace between America and England. But, my Lords, I am not left to that in defending the treaty.’⁶⁸⁰

Many other opposition figures took a rather dimmer view of Aberdeen and the Conservatives’ willingness to compromise. Russell joined Palmerston in denunciation of the treaty by saying that ‘I do not myself see why a little more firmness on the part of Lord Ashburton might not have led to a more advantageous settlement.’⁶⁸¹ Although this might well have been a possibility, opposition criticisms would have carried more weight if the previous government had made tangible progress with the dispute. Lord Stanley argued this point in the House of Commons and added to the Conservative consensus on the issue: ‘Was it not notorious that the late Government had for a long time been engaged in negotiations with the Government of the United States upon all the questions comprehended in the Ashburton Treaty? How was it, then, if the matter were so easy that they had not obtained a better treaty?’⁶⁸²

The only thing to have changed about the Webster-Ashburton negotiations since their outset was a controversy over maps. Various maps of the disputed

⁶⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁹ Peel, House of Commons, Hansard, lxvi, 2 February 1843, col. 86.

⁶⁸⁰ Lord Brougham, House of Lords, Hansard, lxvi, 2 February 1843, col. 34.

⁶⁸¹ Russell, House of Commons, Hansard, lxvi, 2 February 1843, col. 104.

⁶⁸² Stanley, House of Commons, Hansard, lxvi, 2 February 1843, col. 121.

territory had been produced during and after the Treaty of Paris with proposed boundary lines suggesting the extreme American claim, the extreme British claim, and just about every other possibility in between. Ashburton reflected on the discovery that American historian Jared Sparkes had provided Webster with a map supporting the entire British claim: 'I should certainly, if I had known the secret earlier, have made my stand on the upper St. John and probably at the Madawaska Settlements.'⁶⁸³ This led to the criticisms of Palmerston and Russell and has led historians such as Howard Jones and Donald Rakestraw to conclude that 'if Ashburton had learned of the maps supporting the entire British claim, he could not have given in without betraying his own people.'⁶⁸⁴

The argument over different maps was in fact redundant. Historians such as Samuel Flagg Bemis have concentrated on analyses of individual maps, but such analysis misses the bigger picture: competing claims and counterclaims constituted one of the main reasons why the issue had hitherto remained unresolved.⁶⁸⁵ Aberdeen's approach of setting a minimum claim with flexibility beyond it helped to transcend this problem, especially given that there were just as many maps confirming the extreme American claim as confirmed the British: one of these maps, known to Aberdeen and his predecessor Palmerston, lay concealed in the British Museum.⁶⁸⁶

Both Aberdeen and Webster were aware of maps supporting the claim of the other. This was one of the reasons why the historian can appreciate the genuine nature of the spirit of conciliation and compromise between the British and American federal representatives. Although Aberdeen received opposition criticism for this, Webster was actually impeached for his role in negotiations, with multiple suspicions of his having suppressed maps supporting the American claims and using

⁶⁸³ Ashburton to Aberdeen, 9 August 1842, R. Ferrell, *Foundations of American Diplomacy, 1775-1872* (New York, 1968), p. 195. For detail on Jared Sparkes' discovery of the map, see Gill, 'Edward Everett and the Northeastern Boundary Controversy', p. 205.

⁶⁸⁴ Jones and Rakestraw, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny*, p. 132.

⁶⁸⁵ See S. Flagg Bemis, *A Diplomatic History of the United States* (London, 5th edition, 1965), pp. 263-264.

⁶⁸⁶ See Ferrell, *Foundations of American Diplomacy*, p. 198 and Gill, 'Edward Everett and the Northeastern Boundary Controversy', pp. 212-213.

maps supporting the British claims, along with bribery, to placate local officials.⁶⁸⁷ The impeachment failed but, despite its party political background, it went to show the extent of contempt in which sections of America held Webster for his compromise with Britain. This further detracts from the proposition that Aberdeen and Ashburton had been cajoled by America.

Aberdeen has faced further criticism over the negotiations in 1842 for failing to resolve other outstanding issues with America, including disputes over slavery and the boundary between Oregon and British Columbia. He had initially hoped to solve these problems, but it soon emerged that an all-encompassing resolution to Anglo-American issues was too problematic. The *Creole* affair added heat to the traditional disputes over the extent to which Britain was allowed to police slaving and proved an obstacle to an agreement that was already highly improbable, given the antipathy to which the slave debate gave rise.⁶⁸⁸ The *Creole* was an American brig that had been engaging in the legal slave trade along America's Atlantic coast when the slaves on board mutinied and steered into Nassau in the British Bahamas. Here they were granted manumission, much to America's chagrin.

Failure to resolve disagreement over the legality of British action and to reach a wider agreement on slaving prompted criticism from opposition MPs. Charles Napier spoke of 'ignominious' failure and Palmerston also attacked Aberdeen and the government.⁶⁸⁹ Peel considered in the House of Commons why Palmerston had not raised the slave issue until after the Ashburton-Webster treaty had been concluded, perceiving his rival's rhetoric to have masked a lack of progress in the cause of abolitionism: 'he was aware, that all would have felt it to be an unseemly thing in him, who had been the cause of this interruption in the progress of humanity.'⁶⁹⁰ Palmerston had hardly been the sole cause of Anglo-American discord on slavery, but his bold criticisms of American slave policy had not

⁶⁸⁷ For details see Pakenham to Aberdeen, 28 April 1846, TNA, FO 5/448/47 and Pakenham to Aberdeen, 13 June 1846, TNA, FO 5/449/75.

⁶⁸⁸ For discussion of contemporary slave issues, see Soulsby, *The Right of Search and the Slave Trade in Anglo-American Relations 1814-1862*; L. Jennings, 'France, Great Britain, and the Suppression of the Slave Trade, 1841-45', *French Historical Studies*, x, 1977; Jones and Rakestraw, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny*, pp. 71-96.

⁶⁸⁹ Charles Napier, House of Commons, Hansard, lxvi, 2 February 1843, col. 113.

⁶⁹⁰ Peel, House of Commons, 21 March 1843, R. Peel, *The Speeches of the Late Right Honourable Sir Robert Peel, delivered in the House of Commons*, iv (London, 1853), p. 215.

helped and they provided the rocks on which his criticisms of Aberdeen foundered: Palmerston had played his part in creating a highly charged atmosphere.

One historian has observed that it would have been 'practically impossible' for Aberdeen to have resolved slave disputes with America at this time.⁶⁹¹ Indeed, unlike the boundary question, slavery was a broader international issue and, given that it affected international law and other slaving nations, Aberdeen's favoured method of personal diplomacy could not be employed. The resolution of the *Creole* affair itself would have suggested that Britain was able to be browbeaten, given that the indignation and hostility of the Americans was so entrenched. Aberdeen could not afford to respond to such agitation in the name of better relations: part of the Washington treaty introduced measures for the mutual extradition of criminals, under which Webster wanted those involved in mutiny and revolt to be included.⁶⁹² This held obvious implications for the slaves and British officials in Nassau and would have created a storm in Britain.

Aberdeen was as firm on this as he had been flexible over the boundary negotiations. He instructed Ashburton that the extradition agreement must not include those involved in the *Creole* affair and, after the signing of the treaty, wrote to Peel asserting that Webster's protests on the issue of slavery could 'scarcely be expected to lead to any practical result.'⁶⁹³ Given that slave issues had actually been the foremost priority for Webster, their exclusion from the final treaty demonstrated both Aberdeen's refusal to abandon issues he knew would be inflammatory at home, and Webster's willingness to compromise.⁶⁹⁴ One American commentator expressed frustration at this situation: 'the mission took the character of beneficent [sic], in professing to come to settle all questions between the two governments; but ended in only settling such as suited Great Britain, and in the way that suited her.'⁶⁹⁵

⁶⁹¹ Devereux Jones, 'The Influence of Slavery on the Webster-Ashburton Negotiations', p. 53.

⁶⁹² For an account of the developments in the extradition negotiations, see Corey, *The Crisis of 1830-1842 in Canadian-American Relations*, pp. 169-179.

⁶⁹³ Aberdeen to Peel, 25 August 1842, Peel Papers, BL, Add. MS 40453/165.

⁶⁹⁴ See Webster to Everett, 20 November 1841, Manning (ed.), *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States*, pp. 156-7.

⁶⁹⁵ T. Benton, *Thirty Years' View; or, A History of the Working of the American Government for Thirty Years, from 1820 to 1850*, ii (New York, 1856), p. 421

The other boundary issue between the United States and British North America was that which concerned contested territory in Oregon. Negotiations in the northwest proved still more controversial than those in the northeast, with both Britain and America at times threatening war if their demands were not met. The Oregon negotiations provide a case study through which to analyse Conservative policy when it was made in a more hostile environment than had prevailed elsewhere.

Chapter Seven: Anglo-American Relations: The Oregon Question

British interests in the Oregon dispute, as elsewhere, involved the protection of British trade, the security of existing British possessions, and the maintenance of British honour. Aberdeen set about achieving these ends with his usual approach of personal diplomacy and professing genuine conciliation, but with the readiness to use force if this openness was abused. This chapter will examine these methods and consider his handling of Richard Pakenham, British Minister in Washington from 1844, which has coloured interpretations of Aberdeen's overall policy. Aberdeen's policy in the final months of negotiations requires particular consideration, because it shows how the Foreign Secretary applied his methods in order to reach a settlement with America. The extent to which the final settlement protected British interests is usually lost in the largely narrative historiography. Here, press, popular and political reactions to his policy will be considered to examine Aberdeen's wider mandate.

Britain's failure to resolve the Oregon boundary during the Ashburton-Webster negotiations provoked criticism. The Marquess of Clanricarde expressed concern for the longevity of peace as long as questions remained unsettled and the Marquess of Lansdowne spoke in the House of Lords about his unease: he deplored 'that anything should have been left unsettled' and exhorted the government: 'before the wax bearing the impress of their seal to the treaty had become cold, before the breath, even of the negotiators had ceased its utterance, they had to turn from the frontier of New Brunswick to the Oregon.'⁶⁹⁶ Historians such as Charles Sellers have reiterated claims that this proved the effeminacy of Aberdeen's policy, calling Aberdeen 'lady-like', as did elements of the press: Aberdeen might have solved the Oregon boundary if he had approached the negotiations in Washington more 'manfully', as an article in the *Manchester Times* asserted.⁶⁹⁷ For contemporaries, men that were perceived to be afraid of confronting their rivals were deemed to exhibit feminine characteristics, whilst those that were perceived

⁶⁹⁶ Clanricarde and Lansdowne, House of Lords, Hansard, lxxvi, 2 February 1843, cols. 22 and 56.

⁶⁹⁷ C. Sellers, *James K. Polk: Continentalist, 1843-1846* (Princeton, 1966), p. 241; *The Manchester Times*, 6 June 1846.

to demonstrate diplomatic fortitude conformed to the contemporary conceptualisation of manhood, and were lauded for doing so. Such observations have since merged with the historiographical phenomena considered in earlier chapters, so that liberal politics, John Bullism and masculinity have merged into a historiographical ideal of what it meant to be British and, ergo, a successful politician. There was, of course, no room for Aberdeen's Conservatism in this model.



More considered criticism has concentrated on Aberdeen and Webster's competing territorial claims for Oregon during the Washington negotiations.⁶⁹⁸ The disputed land in the boundary negotiations was that which was still under joint occupation by the terms of an Anglo-American treaty of 1827. This was the territory enclosed at its northern and southern extremities by the fifty-fourth and forty-second parallels of latitude, and enclosed at its eastern and western ends by

⁶⁹⁸ For this map, see historylink.org.

the continental divide with British North America and the Pacific coast. Aberdeen initially instructed Ashburton not to accept anything less than the land above the forty-ninth parallel and territory beneath it that was enclosed by the course of the Columbia River.⁶⁹⁹ As Julius Pratt has shown, the extra land beyond the forty-ninth parallel proved to be the stumbling block in negotiations.⁷⁰⁰ Given that Aberdeen later deemed the land between the forty-ninth parallel and the Columbia River inessential to British interests, it is conceivable that the problem might have been solved in 1842 if British demands had been reduced.

Failure to resolve the boundary in 1842 transpired to be more of a problem than might have been predicted at the time: the subsequent growth of belief in 'Manifest Destiny' would increase American resolution in future negotiations.⁷⁰¹ The nationalist element of the American sense of entitlement in Oregon increased, as can be seen in the work of Robert McNutt McElroy.⁷⁰² The religious impulses for expanding American territory in Oregon also increased, partly as a result of the biblical ideal of maximising the use of land, which Americans felt they were best placed to do, and partly from news that Native Americans in the area, especially the Nez Percé, were seeking conversion to Christianity.⁷⁰³

These impulses transmitted into a wave of American immigration into Oregon, which aimed at bolstering America's claim to the area. American politicians encouraged this immigration with an 1843 law allowing a white male to acquire one square mile of land for free and with a policy of letting the question drift in order to maximise American settlement: John Calhoun famously described this process as 'masterly inactivity'.⁷⁰⁴ In these circumstances, frustration with Aberdeen's inertia emerged in the Press: the *Glasgow Herald* concluded that the

⁶⁹⁹ See R. Clark, 'Aberdeen and Peel on Oregon', *The Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society*, xxxiv, 1933.

⁷⁰⁰ J. Pratt, *A History of United States Foreign Policy* (New Jersey, 1955), p. 211.

⁷⁰¹ The term 'manifest destiny' was not coined until 1845 but it is useful shorthand for the ideas to which the terms pertains in earlier years.

⁷⁰² R. McNutt McElroy, *The Winning of the Far West: A History of the Regaining of Texas, of the Mexican War, and the Oregon Question; and of the successive Additions to the Territory of the United States, within the Continent of America 1829-1867* (London, 1914).

⁷⁰³ See H. Jones and D. Rakestraw, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny: Anglo-American Relations in the 1840s* (Wilmington, 1997), p. 167.

⁷⁰⁴ See D. Johnson, *Founding the Far West: California, Oregon and Nevada, 1840-1890* (Oxford, 1992), p. 42.

Hudson's Bay Company, Britain's dominant business enterprise in the area, was 'to vanish into the sea before the tide of emigration.'⁷⁰⁵

Historians have criticised Conservative policy for being complacent about the dominance of the Hudson's Bay Company and noted that the concerns of officers in the company were eliciting little response from the government.⁷⁰⁶ One officer wrote to Aberdeen's brother, John Gordon, who was captain of a British vessel in the area:

The American immigrants arrive in this country strongly prejudiced against us, in consequence of the calumnies propagated by designing persons in the United States, and of an assertion made in the Senate by the late Dr. Linn on the occasion of introducing his Oregon bill, that the Hudson's Bay Company [...] had caused five hundred American citizens to be murdered on the west side of the Rockies.⁷⁰⁷

Immigration was in fact rather limited given the size of the debated territory and was generally confined to areas that were likely to be awarded to America.⁷⁰⁸ Gordon took a different view of immigration, writing to Britain's Commander-in-Chief in the Pacific Sir George Seymour, that the Hudson's Bay Company encouraged American immigration by offering to trade so many supplies with arriving settlers.⁷⁰⁹ This was something with which William Peel, Robert Peel's son and leader of a reporting mission to Oregon, agreed. He added that British connections with local peoples helped settlers to integrate.⁷¹⁰ Criticisms of the government tended to overlook the consideration that immigration was not viewed with political suspicion on the ground.

⁷⁰⁵ *The Glasgow Herald*, 26 February 1844.

⁷⁰⁶ Jones and Rakestraw, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny*, pp. 181-2; J. Galbraith, *The Hudson's Bay Company as an Imperial Factor 1821-1869* (California, 1957), pp. 228-9.

⁷⁰⁷ Chief Factor McLoughlin to John Gordon, 15 September 1845, L. Scott, 'Report of Lieutenant Peel on Oregon in 1845-46', *The Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society*, xxix, 1928, pp. 58-9.

⁷⁰⁸ See L. Scott, 'The Influence of American Settlement upon the Oregon Boundary Treaty of 1846', *The Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society*, xxix, 1928, p. 2. For a table showing the scale and distribution of immigration to Oregon, see J. Unruh, *The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1860* (Illinois, 1979), pp. 119-120: this table is also given in Johnson, *Founding the Far West*, p. 43.

⁷⁰⁹ John Gordon to George Seymour, 19 October 1845, Scott, 'Report of Lieutenant Peel', p. 69.

⁷¹⁰ William Peel to John Gordon, 27 September 1845, *ibid*, pp. 62-3.

Whilst delay in solving the Oregon question did allow American settlements in the area, the extent to which these settlers were hostile to Britain was debatable, and Aberdeen regarded 'masterly inactivity' as potentially beneficial to Britain. He wrote to Richard Pakenham, British Minister in Washington from 1844, that 'Mr. Calhoun is known to have heretofore expressed an opinion in the Senate, that the great object on the part of the United States ought to be to gain time [...] delay would by no means be unfavourable to Great Britain.'⁷¹¹ Being occupied in 1843 and 1844 with the construction and maintenance of the Anglo-French *entente*, which took greater precedence than a faraway boundary dispute, Britain could save itself for quieter times and consider its position. This approach came with its problems, not least the emboldening of confrontational elements in America, but European policy was prioritised.

Aberdeen's full engagement with the Oregon issue began late in 1844 and ended with the bill for its resolution passing the Senate by thirty-eight votes to twelve on 12 June 1846. As with the Washington negotiations, historians have pointed to Conservative worry about potential French interference as providing a backdrop to the construction of Aberdeen's conciliatory policy.⁷¹² But, again, whilst France maintained friendly diplomatic relations with the United States, Aberdeen recognised that its interest in the Oregon issue was minimal: references to Gallic concerns are notable by their general absence in his American correspondence. Besides aforementioned French concerns with American policy, France was concerned that northern American politicians were holding out for all of the disputed territory to provoke a war that would enfeeble Britain and potentially incur a slave rebellion in the South.⁷¹³ Mexico might then take advantage and attack the South. This would hardly square with Guizot's concerns about maintaining the balance of power and, besides, as Pageot observed: 'I do not think [...] that they will ever get an American congress to take the initiative in declaring

⁷¹¹ Aberdeen to Pakenham, 18 November 1844, Aberdeen Papers, BL, Add. MS 43154/68.

⁷¹² See, for example, D. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation: Texas, Oregon and the Mexican War* (Missouri, 1973), p. 245; Jones and Rakestraw, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny*, p. 207.

⁷¹³ See Pageot to Guizot, 12 January 1846, G. Vern Blue, 'France and the Oregon Question, part II', *The Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society*, xxxiv, 1933, p. 148.

war on Great Britain in order to get possession of the whole of Oregon.⁷¹⁴ Moreover, President Polk noted that the pacific nature of British relations within Europe was a reason why he took British threats seriously, because there was no fear on Britain's part that action in Oregon might engender wider conflict.⁷¹⁵ Aberdeen's policy can thus be considered with regard to his interpretation of British interests rather than in the context of external pressure.

Whereas the personal diplomacy of the Washington negotiations was largely conducted through Ashburton, Aberdeen focused more on relationships with American ministers in England during talks over the Oregon dispute. American politics were more excitable in the approach to the presidential elections of March 1845 and remained so under the leadership of James Polk. Cultivating friendships with Americans in England allowed Aberdeen to send his messages to America via its own diplomats, which circumvented the nationalist reactions that could be engendered by direct contact between Aberdeen or Pakenham and Washington.

It could be construed that the trust placed in American ministers backfired. Jones has argued that Edward Everett (American minister to Britain, 1840-5) 'may well have prolonged the crisis by over-emphasising Aberdeen's conciliatory position.'⁷¹⁶ Leaking strategic information designed at conciliation might also be considered inadvisable, given that it could encourage intransigence by reinforcing belief in Britain's pliability. Such might appear the case, for example, with Aberdeen's disclosure to Everett that the Hudson's Bay Company was to move its headquarters out of mainland Oregon and on to Vancouver Island. On 16 April 1845, Everett had noted that 'Lord Aberdeen added, that for the last two years the Company had been erecting an establishment on the Southern point of [...] Vancouver Island, with a view to making that their principal station. I do not remember to have heard this fact stated before, and you will no doubt regard it as one of importance.'⁷¹⁷ This may be interpreted as Everett instructing the recipient that Britain was not prepared to do diplomatic battle over the Oregon territory,

⁷¹⁴ Pageot to Guizot, 12 February 1846, *ibid*, p. 153.

⁷¹⁵ Polk speaking to the Senate, 24 March 1846, J. Richardson (ed.), *Messages and Papers of the Presidents 1789-1897*, iv: 1841-1849 (Washington, 1899), p. 427.

⁷¹⁶ W. Devereux Jones, *Lord Aberdeen and the Americas* (Georgia, 1958), p. 79.

⁷¹⁷ See Everett to James Buchanan, 16 April 1845, W. Manning (ed.), *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States: Canadian Relations 1784-1860*, iii: 1836-1848 (Washington, 1943), p. 951.

given that the Hudson's Bay Company had ostensibly given up on the area. In speaking of the company's relocation, however, Everett may, equally, have been referring to a demonstration of Britain's desire for an equitable compromise: Everett was persistently derided by American patriots as being 'too English' in his views on the matter.⁷¹⁸

The extent of Aberdeen's friendship with Everett's successor, Louis McLane (June 1845-August 1846), has led one historian to observe that they worked together in private towards a compromise boundary to such a close extent as to make one 'wonder if the full story of the Oregon settlement has yet been told.'⁷¹⁹ Indeed, the Foreign Secretary later reflected in Parliament on his friendship with McLane and McLane's influence in dampening the passion of American hawks: 'that gentleman I have long known, and long had reason to esteem in official intercourse fifteen or sixteen years ago; and I am perfectly certain, that, by every means in his power, he has contributed to [the settlement].'⁷²⁰ McLane, President of the Baltimore and Ohio Railway and with business connections in Britain, also wanted peace in order to maintain trade and because he viewed war as senseless in the immediate context of the border dispute and in the wider context of a belief in Anglo-American fraternity.⁷²¹ Aberdeen regarded McLane's professed interest in a compromise settlement as genuine and saw that the American's pacific efforts could be relied upon in correspondence with the American government.

As he had with the Anglo-French *entente*, Aberdeen insured his tactics by declaring the limits within which America must operate in response to his open conciliation. The clearest condition placed on America was that if it seized any territory in the course of negotiation, this would be considered a *casus belli*.⁷²² America was also given regular reminders, through communications to Pakenham, that war remained a strategic option for Britain if conciliation bred intransigence.

⁷¹⁸ B. Wilson, *America's Ambassadors to England (1785-1928): A Narrative of Anglo-American Diplomatic Relations* (London, 1928), p. 234.

⁷¹⁹ Devereux Jones, *The American Problem in British Diplomacy*, p. 54.

⁷²⁰ Aberdeen, House of Lords, Hansard, lxxxvii, 29 June 1846, col. 1039.

⁷²¹ For information on McLane's business connections, see Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation*, p. 235.

⁷²² See Everett to Calhoun, 28 February 1845, Jones and Rakestraw, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny*, p. 199.

Aberdeen wrote in the wake of Polk's address in the spring of 1845, with reference to a military survey of the area:

Whatever may be the course of the United States Gov[ernmen]t, the time is come when we must be prepared for every contingency. Our naval force in the Pacific is amply sufficient to maintain our supremacy in that sea; and Sir George Seymour has been instructed to repair without delay to the Coast of the Oregon territory [...] We are still ready to adhere to the principle of an equitable compromise; but we are perfectly determined to concede nothing to force or menace.⁷²³

Other hints were dropped throughout the negotiations: a year later Aberdeen referred to 'measures it may be expedient to adopt in order to meet any emergency which may arise.'⁷²⁴ American belief in the seriousness of Britain's preparations developed great importance towards the end of the talks, as it encouraged Polk to back down.

In Britain, the Conservative Cabinet aimed to strike a balance between appearing ready for war without provoking it and without draining money from Britain's domestic regeneration fund. In the spring of 1845 Aberdeen wrote to Peel, in a letter that also dealt with financial concerns: 'We ought to make all reasonable preparations without delay; but it should be such as may be consistent with the preservation of peace. In spite of Mr. Polk's address, I cannot believe, where they see us determined, that the American Government will drive matters to extremity.'⁷²⁵

As in Europe at this time, Peel agreed with a policy of moderate defence expansion despite excited outbursts at moments of heightened tension.⁷²⁶ In the autumn of 1845, the Prime Minister met with James Graham, Sidney Herbert and the First Lord of the Admiralty, the ninth Earl of Haddington, and concluded that full land defence of British North American possessions would be 'so expensive – that

⁷²³ Aberdeen to Pakenham, 6 April 1845, TNA, FO 5/423/47.

⁷²⁴ Aberdeen to Pakenham, 3 March 1846, TNA, FO 5/445/16.

⁷²⁵ Aberdeen to Peel, 29 March 1845, Peel Papers, BL, Add. MS 40455/27.

⁷²⁶ See, for example, Peel, House of Commons, Hansard, lxxiii, 22 January 1846, col. 154: Peel said 'there is no estimate which may not be justified on entirely defensive grounds.'

many will think actual war a more tolerable evil than such a state of burdensome and anxious suspense.⁷²⁷ The government was agreed that only limited land fortifications should be made – even Wellington assented to British restraint – and that naval pressure should provide the main insurance for Aberdeen’s diplomacy.⁷²⁸ The Foreign Secretary had set the precedent for this approach by sending a naval force to Oregon in 1843 to ‘show the flag’ alongside the message of conciliation.⁷²⁹

Aberdeen combined this strategy of applying military and moral pressure on America with diplomatic pressure. The proposal of arbitration was a favoured manoeuvre, which has attracted criticism: Jones and Rakestraw have argued that ‘Aberdeen contributed to the problem by relying on the proved ineffective tactic of arbitration.’⁷³⁰ This overstates the point. He believed that arbitration could transcend the public clamour that was proving so damaging to attempts at resolution, but recognised the unlikelihood of American submission. Repeated proposals of arbitration did, however, help to apply pressure on America to come up with some constructive proposals of its own.⁷³¹ Watching from Europe, France’s lack of interest in the Oregon issue could also only grow with every British diplomatic initiative that sought to contain the crisis: American intransigence only heightened existing French worries.

America launched its own diplomatic initiative in July 1845. American Secretary of State James Buchanan proposed an American compromise offer stretching from the Rockies to the Pacific along the forty-ninth parallel, with Britain to have free ports on the southern tip of Vancouver Island. It made no mention of navigation of the Columbia River, even for a temporary period, omitted to give Vancouver Island to Britain, and was written in a language of hostility and confrontation that made the historically erroneous justifications of its claims all the more unpalatable to Britain.⁷³² This was a long way from the settlement or sentiment that Britain wanted and Pakenham rejected the proposal out of hand.

⁷²⁷ Peel to Stanley, 5 September 1845, Peel Papers, BL, Add. MS 40468/359.

⁷²⁸ See *ibid.*

⁷²⁹ See B. Gough, *The Royal Navy and the Northwest Coast of North America, 1810-1914: A Study of British Maritime Ascendancy* (Vancouver, 1971), p. 65.

⁷³⁰ Jones and Rakestraw, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny*, p. 234.

⁷³¹ See Aberdeen to Pakenham, 3 March 1845, TNA, FO 5/423/21.

⁷³² See Jones and Rakestraw, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny*, pp. 211-3.

Aberdeen's subsequent criticism of Pakenham was regarded as demonstrative of the Foreign Secretary's tendency to confuse diplomats with contradictory instructions and then blame them for any negative results: this is also a frequent theme in the historiography of Anglo-French relations.⁷³³

Aberdeen criticised Pakenham for not referring the offer to the British government despite previous instructions that such American terms were unacceptable and that Pakenham was to use his own judgment in responding to any proposal. Historians such as Donald Rakestraw have asserted that it would have been 'impossible' for Pakenham to accept the American offer and that he was only acting on instructions given by Aberdeen.⁷³⁴ Aberdeen's realisation that he was culpable for Pakenham's refusal of the offer, and for the resultant concession of the diplomatic initiative to Washington, was seen to influence his decision not to recall the diplomat in the wake of the crisis.⁷³⁵

Pakenham had indeed acted within the letter of some of his instructions but had not considered the wider picture with regard to Buchanan's offer: Aberdeen's policy of continued arbitration proposals and military preparations had been designed to pressure America to the negotiating table. Aberdeen's failure to communicate his ideas with clarity was undoubtedly a factor in proceedings, but Pakenham had also ignored Aberdeen's request that should Buchanan make an offer, regardless of its likely inadmissibility, it must not be refused outright.⁷³⁶ Refusing the offer outright had given Polk the opportunity to walk away from the table once more.

In response to Aberdeen's criticism Pakenham initially concentrated on the detail of the offer, which he observed was a 'shabby attempt to keep up the blustering tone of Mr. Polk's inaugural address, in talking of the clear and unquestionable title of the United States'.⁷³⁷ His continued rebuttals of Buchanan's

⁷³³ For a dissent from the general conclusion, see D. Rakestraw, *For Honor or Destiny: The Anglo-American Crisis over the Oregon Territory* (New York, 1995), p. 2.

⁷³⁴ See D. Rakestraw, *For Honor or Destiny*, p. 3; Jones and Rakestraw, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny*, p. 219.

⁷³⁵ Jones and Rakestraw, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny*, p. 220.

⁷³⁶ Aberdeen to Pakenham, 18 April 1845, TNA, FO 5/423/55.

⁷³⁷ Pakenham to Aberdeen, 29 July 1845, TNA, FO 5/427/146.

incoherent justifications were accurate and incisive.⁷³⁸ Pakenham's grounds for rejecting the offer, when questioned by Aberdeen, nonetheless revealed an error of judgment. He argued that he could not accept the offer 'ad referendum' because it fell short of British requirements and that 'I purposely omitted in declining to accept the proposal, to say that I should not refer it for Your Lordship's consideration, wishing in this way to afford to Mr. Buchanan an opportunity to add something to his offer.'⁷³⁹ This handed the diplomatic initiative to America and refusal to accept the offer 'ad referendum' was a curious approach to diplomacy, which is ultimately a more elegant form of haggling.

In censuring Pakenham, Aberdeen agreed that the offer could not be accepted but in declining to refer it to the British government, Pakenham generated an abnormal degree of irritation in the Foreign Secretary.⁷⁴⁰ This is revealed in some of the rough drafts of correspondence that calmer reflections prevented from being sent.⁷⁴¹ The letter suggested that this irritation was not based on feelings of personal culpability as Rakestraw has suggested, but that it came from wider political dissatisfaction with Pakenham. Peel supported Aberdeen and, when considering the Foreign Secretary's proposal that Pakenham suggest to America that his and Buchanan's letters be expunged from official records, Peel wrote that 'I am very much afraid of entrusting such a delicate operation to Mr. Pakenham, after the experience of the last proceeding on his part.'⁷⁴² The Prime Minister's exasperation was reiterated in Parliament, where Lord John Russell spoke in agreement.⁷⁴³

From this point onwards Aberdeen needed to increase the pressure on America, given that the American compromise offer was withdrawn in the wake of Pakenham's rejection. This resulted in the use of Louis McLane in London to circumvent the need for direct dealing with the American government, which had

⁷³⁸ Pakenham to Buchanan, 29 July 1845, copy incl., TNA, FO 5/427/189. For Buchanan's letter to Pakenham, see Buchanan to Pakenham, 12 July 1845, copy incl., TNA, FO 5/427/153.

⁷³⁹ Pakenham to Aberdeen, 29 October and 13 September 1845, TNA, FO 5/428/55 and 18.

⁷⁴⁰ See, also, Peel to Aberdeen, 22 November 1845, Peel Papers, BL, Add. MS 40455/274.

⁷⁴¹ See, for example, Aberdeen to Pakenham, 3 October 1845, TNA, FO 5/423/139.

⁷⁴² Peel to Aberdeen, 2 October 1845, Peel Papers, BL, Add. MS 40455/184.

⁷⁴³ Peel and Russell, House of Commons, Hansard, lxxxiii, 22 January 1846, cols. 154 and 152.

hitherto resulted only in unproductive clashes. Standard Aberdonian openness began the exchanges, followed by references to the possibility of military measures:

Lord Aberdeen said very promptly and frankly that it would be improper to disguise that, with the sincerest desire to avoid it, they were obliged to look to the possibility of a rupture with the United States; and that in such a crisis warlike preparations now making would be useful and important, but he stated at the same time, very positively and distinctly, that they had no direct reference to such a rupture; and would have been made in the same way and to the same extent without regard to the relations of Great Britain with the United States.⁷⁴⁴

This appeared to have little effect on Polk and, if anything, it seemed to encourage him to engage in further brinkmanship: he wrote in his diary of being encouraged by Aberdeen and Peel's conciliatory position.⁷⁴⁵ Realising he was getting nowhere, Aberdeen made increasing references to military preparations and this seemed to have the desired effect. McLane wrote to Buchanan with escalating concern about Britain's mobilisation and Polk started to exhibit signs of worry.⁷⁴⁶ Early in 1846 the President began suggesting that he would refer British offers to the Senate: Aberdeen appeared to have prised him away from his position of non-compliance. The incident went to show that Aberdeen was prepared to alter course and consider more confrontational methods if his preferred approach of open diplomacy appeared to be getting nowhere.

In an attempt to win wider American political and popular approval for an equitable compromise solution to the boundary dispute, Aberdeen also leaked news of the Conservative government's intentions to repeal the Corn Laws. As Charles Greville recorded, with reference to *The Times* editor John Delane:

⁷⁴⁴ McLane to Buchanan, 3 January 1846, Manning (ed.), *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States*, p. 989.

⁷⁴⁵ A. Nevins (ed.), *Polk: The Diary of a President 1845-1849* (New York, 1968), p. 43: 10 January 1846.

⁷⁴⁶ See Sellers, *James K. Polk*, pp. 377-8; Nevins (ed.), *Polk*, p.54: 21 and 23 February 1846.

There can be very little doubt that it was Aberdeen's object that Delane should publish what he did, though he did not tell him to do so, and the reason is very obvious. Yesterday the American Mail went off, and it took with it the morning papers [...] as Foreign Secretary his most earnest desire is to get over the Oregon affair as well as he can, and he knows that nothing will have so great an effect in America, nothing tends so materially to the prevalence of pacific counsels, as an announcement that our Corn Laws are going to be repealed.⁷⁴⁷

One of Delane's biographers has questioned Aberdeen's motives but subsequent writers have agreed with Greville that Aberdeen's actions were deliberate.⁷⁴⁸ Aberdeen was by now committed to the repeal cause and it was common knowledge that there was a large agricultural-political lobby in America that supported the free trade of grain. The vast grain surplus of the Mississippi Valley could be traded and transported via the Juan de Fuca Strait, free from the duties that restricted its distribution. Norman Graebner has observed that there was a notable change in politicians such as John Calhoun after the free trade news reached America and the American press praised the Conservative government, even if Aberdeen had overstated its unity on the issue to maximise political effect.⁷⁴⁹

The move towards a solution gathered momentum and the treaty passed the American Senate in June 1846: the boundary was to run along the 49th parallel to the sea and then through the Juan de Fuca Strait, with Britain retaining the whole of Vancouver Island. The Columbia River was to remain temporarily open to British shipping whilst all ports to the south of the boundary line would remain free in perpetuity. The Hudson's Bay Company's property and remaining British subjects on the American side of the line were protected by law. One historian charged

⁷⁴⁷ See H. Reeve (ed.), *The Greville Memoirs: A Journal of the Reigns of King George IV, King William IV and Queen Victoria* (London, 1903), p. 318: 5 December 1845; C. Greville, *The Greville Memoirs*, ii: (London, 1885), p. 312: 5 December 1845.

⁷⁴⁸ E. Cook, *Delane of the Times* (London, 1916), p. 27. For support of Greville see A. Dasent, *John Thadeus Delane: Editor of "The Times": His Life and Correspondence*, i (London, 1908); F. Merk, 'British Government Propaganda and the Oregon Treaty', *The American Historical Review*, xl, 1934.

⁷⁴⁹ N. Graebner, *Empire on the Pacific: A Study in American Continental Expansion* (New York, 1955), p. 138; Dasent, *John Thadeus Delane*, i, p. 51.

Aberdeen with an embarrassing retreat, believing that the Foreign Secretary had at one point sought to claim the whole of the disputed territory.⁷⁵⁰ The charge of 'surrender' has also proved common with respect to Aberdeen's previous claim to the land between the 49th parallel and the Columbia River.⁷⁵¹

Aberdeen had backed down on his claim to this land in the name of peace but, given the low priority of the Oregon dispute during the Washington negotiations, the British government had not paid it much attention. Numerous surveys had since been conducted and the land was deemed worthless, whereas for Americans it sat at the end of the 'Oregon trail', which had acquired vast significance in the age of migration and Manifest Destiny. Aberdeen made up his mind that this land was inessential to British interests long before the conclusion of the treaty, preferring to concentrate on the whole of Vancouver Island, free port access, and the 49th parallel.⁷⁵² The land north of this line was the best for the fur trade and the most populous in terms of British settlement.

Aberdeen had not undermined the Hudson's Bay Company through the Oregon treaty, despite subsequent criticism to that effect.⁷⁵³ The Hudson's Bay Company suffered little considering its move to Vancouver Island and the easier access to ports that this engendered. Navigation of the Columbia River would expire within a decade but it was only navigable for two months of the year and alternative land routes were available. This seemed like a small cost to pay when the potential benefits of free trade were considered. It must be considered that a more confrontational Foreign Secretary might have jeopardised the peace and what was a fair settlement by fixing Polk to the hostile platform on which he initially stood. As sections of the British Press were reporting in the wake of the Oregon treaty, transatlantic commerce experienced a boom with news of the agreement.⁷⁵⁴

Whilst the settlement protected British strategic interests, the Oregon dispute had for Britain long since developed into one mainly concerning honour. In Oregon, this essentially meant compromising in a way that protected British

⁷⁵⁰ Pratt, *A History of United States Foreign Policy*, p. 217.

⁷⁵¹ See, for example, Graebner, *Empire on the Pacific*, p. 137; Galbraith, *The Hudson's Bay Company as an Imperial Factor*, p. 245.

⁷⁵² Aberdeen to Peel, 25 September 1844, Peel Papers, BL, Add. MS 40454/268.

⁷⁵³ Galbraith, *The Hudson's Bay Company as an Imperial Factor*, p. 249.

⁷⁵⁴ See, for example, *The Standard*, 1 July 1846.

interests but without it being seen that compromise originated from the threats of Polk. The concept of peace with honour had come to define the talks over Oregon, long before Disraeli used the term to conclude the Eastern Crisis of 1878 or Neville Chamberlain used it to herald the Munich agreement of 1938. Ministers talked of the primacy of honour in Parliament and some historians have since argued that the land in dispute was not important.⁷⁵⁵ If Aberdeen was to maintain external belief in Britain's international resolution he needed to uphold the mantra he spoke of in Parliament and that he and Peel often paraphrased in correspondence: 'our honour is a substantial property that we can never neglect.'⁷⁵⁶ Honour also needed to be preserved to convince the wider public that peace was desirable. The *Belfast News-Letter* captured the strength of feeling that Aberdeen had to placate:

The Americans must be made to understand, that they are not to tamper with the honour or rights of Britain with impunity. They are a vain, boastful race. Their pride is intolerable. They imagine that they may, without question, assume everything, and intrude everywhere. Our Yankee neighbours must be taught otherwise; and now that they seem desirous to shake their flag in the face of old England, and wrest from us our just possessions, we feel confident that, throughout the whole nation, there will universally prevail this one sentiment – that to such indignity and wrong Great Britain must not, for a moment, submit.⁷⁵⁷

The question of whether or not the Oregon treaty was honourable for Britain should not be measured against the boundary lines proposed by previous ministers. Canning might have held out for more land, but Lord Liverpool would have been happy to treat along the 49th parallel followed through Vancouver Island,

⁷⁵⁵ See, for example, The Earl of Hardwicke and Lord Brougham, House of Lords, Hansard, lxxiii, 22 January 1846, col. 29. See, for example, Devereux Jones, *The American Problem in British Diplomacy*, p. 37; F. Merk, 'British Government Propaganda and the Oregon Treaty', p. 45.

⁷⁵⁶ Aberdeen, House of Lords, Hansard, lxxix, 4 April 1845, cols. 115-124: quoted in M. Chamberlain, *Lord Aberdeen: A Political Biography* (London, 1983), p. 336. See, for example, Aberdeen to Wellington, 3 March 1845, incl. and copy, Peel Papers, BL, Add. MS 40455/3; Peel to Aberdeen, 23 February 1845, Peel Papers, BL, Add. MS 40454/413.

⁷⁵⁷ *The Belfast News-Letter*, 8 April 1845.

which amounted to less land than the 1846 settlement secured. Competing claims had ebbed and flowed for decades without anything being resolved.

Central to the debate about British ‘honour’ – which has been joined as much by historians as contemporaries – is the question of whether or not Polk forced Aberdeen to compromise by aggressive diplomacy or if Aberdeen’s measured approach drew Polk away from his professed claims to all of the territory in dispute. Most historians take the line that Polk was the prime mover and that Aberdeen surrendered. Robert Ferrell argued that Polk forced Aberdeen to accept the 49th parallel and Charles Sellers talked of a policy ‘shift’ in the face of Polk’s persistence, whilst Henry Blumenthal talked of Britain’s ‘complete reversal’.⁷⁵⁸ Paul Bergeron dealt with the issue in a chapter entitled ‘Polk and the Winning of the Northwest’.⁷⁵⁹ Elsewhere, it has been suggested that the idea of accepting the 49th parallel only occurred to Aberdeen late in 1845.⁷⁶⁰

Aberdeen had in fact made up his mind to treat along the 49th parallel in 1844, before Polk became President.⁷⁶¹ Polk’s blustering meant that this could not be offered sooner without appearing to truckle to the American President: his policy of claiming the whole of Oregon did not affect the Conservatives’ position on the boundary dispute and delayed resolution of the conflict. Some historians have argued that Polk never believed in his claim to the whole of Oregon and was only using it to apply pressure to Britain and achieve patriotic domestic support.⁷⁶² This argument is redundant from the British point of view because Aberdeen retained the same territorial objectives throughout Polk’s presidency regardless of the nature of American tactics.⁷⁶³

Aberdeen always felt that Polk would compromise in the end as there were significant groups of people in America whose opprobrium Polk could rely on if he

⁷⁵⁸ R. Ferrell, *Foundations of American Diplomacy 1775-1872* (New York, 1968), p. 199; Sellers, *James K. Polk*, pp. 372-3; H. Blumenthal, *A Reappraisal of Franco-American Relations 1830-1871* (North Carolina, 1959), p. 42.

⁷⁵⁹ P. Bergeron, *The Presidency of James K. Polk* (Kansas, 1987), pp. 113-134.

⁷⁶⁰ E. Rich, *Hudson’s Bay Company 1670-1870*, ii: 1763-1870 (London, 1959), p. 728.

⁷⁶¹ See Aberdeen to Peel, 25 September 1844, Peel Papers, BL, Add. MS 40454/268.

⁷⁶² See F. Merk, *The Oregon Question* (Harvard, 1967), pp. 338-9; R. Schuyler, ‘Polk and the Oregon Compromise of 1846’, *The Political Science Quarterly*, xxvi, 1911, p. 446.

⁷⁶³ Histories that argue Polk did believe in his claim to all the territory include Bourne, *The Balance of Power in North America* (London, 1967), pp. 124-5.

started a war with Britain over Oregon. Most Southern politicians feared the war would disrupt the lucrative cotton trade with Britain and that there was a chance of slaves seizing the unrest as a chance to rebel against their masters. Significant numbers of American Whig politicians had property and commercial interests in Oregon that war would compromise and possibly liquidate, whilst embryonic businesses in neighbouring California could ill afford the impact of war.⁷⁶⁴ The uncertainty caused by the possibility of war was already doing damage to the markets. Polk might be holding out to appease the confrontational lobby that propelled him to power – particularly the western politicians of Ohio, Indiana and Illinois – but he could not do so for long without provoking war and generating greater opposition than he would face by backing down in 1846.

British military preparations and Aberdeen's related correspondence represented the deciding factor in bringing America to the negotiating table.⁷⁶⁵ There were impulses for peace in America, but Polk's fears that Buchanan and Calhoun were trying to bring about compromise to increase their presidential prospects at the expense of his reputation delayed the conclusion of talks into 1846. Polk revealed concern at British military developments towards the end of 1845 and shortly afterwards in 1846, at the time of McLane's messages of warning from England, the president began to exhibit the desire to compromise.⁷⁶⁶

If Britain was now to offer a compromise solution, which it did, Polk could preserve some of his honour on the basis that Britain had made the proposal. He could also dampen the noise that Buchanan and Calhoun might generate and avoid a war that was looking ever more likely. Britain did not have to concede anything more than Aberdeen had been prepared to concede in September 1844. Meanwhile, some historians have suggested that it was escalating problems in

⁷⁶⁴ See Graebner, *Empire on the Pacific*, p. 133.

⁷⁶⁵ For details of these preparations, see Scott, 'Influence of American Settlement upon the Oregon Boundary Treaty', p. 10.

⁷⁶⁶ See M. Quaife (ed.), *The Diary of James K. Polk 1845-1849* (Chicago, 1910), pp. 133-4: 23 December 1845.

Mexico, not Aberdeen, which forced Polk to compromise, but his diary shows that the president considered the Oregon and Mexican issues as unrelated.⁷⁶⁷

The actions and reactions of the British Press and populace combined with those of the political world, more so than at any time during Aberdeen's tenure, to demonstrate that whatever constituted British 'honour' was secure in the eyes of a wider cross-section of contemporary opinion. Criticism would be quick to surface in these arenas, but what instead appeared was support for the different facets of Aberdeen's policy. Press comment took a variety of forms. Newspapers such as the *Blackburn Standard* focused on the general benefits of peace: 'A war between two such mighty nations must have brought ruin to one or the other, and probably to both. In proportion, therefore, to the vast amount of desolation and misery spared, should be our gratitude and thanksgiving.'⁷⁶⁸ Elsewhere, appreciation of patient policy was framed in the context of the limited value of the land under dispute.⁷⁶⁹

Other newspapers examined the nature of the treaty, echoing the Foreign Secretary's assertions that it had been delayed by Polk but that it was honourable and Britain could be pleased with it. The *Bristol Mercury* proclaimed that 'the Oregon question is settled, and on terms which, under all the circumstances, may be regarded as satisfactory to both parties [...] to the firmness and moderation of the British Government, and of the American Senate, is the settlement [...] to be attributed.'⁷⁷⁰ The formerly agitated *Belfast News-Letter*, which had criticised America with venom, thought that, 'peace, humanity, and the mutual interests of America and England have triumphed in the settlement of the Oregon question by an amicable and honourable treaty.'⁷⁷¹ The *Leeds Mercury* reported that 'we have scarcely ever felt higher satisfaction.'⁷⁷²

Throughout negotiations there were also newspapers that agreed with Aberdeen's resistance to the British 'patriotic' clamour stirred up by Polk's sabre-rattling and perceived the Americans' fundamental desire for compromise. It is

⁷⁶⁷ See, for example, H. Allen, *Great Britain and the United States: A History of Anglo-American Relations (1783-1952)* (London, 2nd edition, 1969), p. 401. Nevins (ed.), *Polk: The Diary of a President*, p. 91: 13 May 1846.

⁷⁶⁸ *The Blackburn Standard*, 1 July 1846.

⁷⁶⁹ *The Dundee Courier*, 3 March 1846.

⁷⁷⁰ *The Bristol Mercury*, 4 July 1846.

⁷⁷¹ *The Belfast News-Letter*, 3 July 1846.

⁷⁷² *The Leeds Mercury* (citing *The Times'* American correspondent), 4 July 1846.

worth quoting two at length, given the contrast that these articles provide with historians who have described Britain's actions as surrender. The *Leeds Journal* wrote of America:

The Government has now in its Treasury about 7 000 000 dollars, which, it is thought, will be exhausted when the Texas expenditures are paid. In truth, if the Administration seriously intend [sic] immediate war on account of Oregon, they are not fanatics, but lunatics. Mr. Polk may, and I believe does wish such a state of things, thinking it might promote his political views: but the people, the American people, neither wish [sic] nor anticipate war. They will not sustain any Administration that prefers war to arbitration.⁷⁷³

The *Bradford Observer* reflected on the folly of being drawn into the arguments of the minority of 'incendiary' patriots, a month before the settlement:

When we reflect that there are nuisances miscalled statesmen in both countries, who, to serve an unholy, factious purpose, would readily plunge the two nations in the horrors of war, we would not absolutely affirm that the Oregon dispute will be settled peaceably. We can only express our earnest hope that such incendiaries will be kept in check.⁷⁷⁴

The *Bradford Observer* also mentioned that public opinion favoured an equitable compromise along the lines that Aberdeen set out whilst the *Preston Guardian* awarded 'high tribute to that public opinion which daily, more and more, tends to compel ministers to "Bear a temperate will, and keep the peace" but is a valuable testimony to the pacific and civilising influence of commerce.'⁷⁷⁵ The relationship of peace, commerce and prosperity with public favour was a strong one during Aberdeen's time at the Foreign Office: at a time of economic deprivation it was almost impossible to satisfy these commodities whilst beating the nationalist drum. This was a situation that well matched Aberdeen's political inclinations.

⁷⁷³ *The Leeds Journal*, 6 December 1845.

⁷⁷⁴ *The Bradford Observer*, 14 May 1846.

⁷⁷⁵ *The Preston Guardian*, 4 July 1846.

Palmerston had carried the public with him in better times and he would win it back in the later 1840s and 1850s when revolution, French resurgence and the Crimean war engendered political upheaval, public concern about national security and the need for his brand of patriotic leadership. For Aberdeen's tenure, however, press coverage of the conclusion to the Oregon talks goes some way to showing that he held the greater share of popular approval, not that this was something Aberdeen would have celebrated, courted, or even considered in his policy-making. Parliament reflected the public support. The government had backed Aberdeen throughout the crisis: Wellington felt no need to get involved as he did in the Webster-Ashburton negotiations; Stanley had poured water on Bagot's repeated requests for extensive military preparations; and Peel voiced his opinion in the House of Commons, that a single month of Anglo-American war would have been 'more costly than the value of the whole territory.'⁷⁷⁶ The opposition was also as good as united in support of the treaty. Russell came out in support of Conservative policy towards the end of 1845 and subsequent dissentient voices were few.⁷⁷⁷

By the fall of the Conservative government, then, there had been a significant improvement to relations between Britain and America. The Washington negotiations took on the character of later engagements with France: Aberdeen set out terms of negotiation that allowed for conciliation but set limits for Britain that could not be breached. His choice of Lord Ashburton showed the potential smoothness of diplomacy when Aberdeen was able to choose his diplomats and when those of the other power were disposed to conciliation. The type of problems that were experienced with Lyons and Bulwer in Greece and Spain were circumvented by the nature of Ashburton's 'special mission'. Bypassing Fox, who was disliked almost as much by some British politicians as he was by the Americans, allowed Aberdeen to arrange the type of diplomatic relationship he shared with Guizot. Ashburton and Webster were old friends who could be relied

⁷⁷⁶ Re Stanley see Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation*, p. 251. Peel's comment is quoted in Chamberlain, *Aberdeen*, pp. 339-40: the exact date is not given but the context shows it postdates the settlement.

⁷⁷⁷ Frederick Merk observes the cross-party consensus in 'British Party Politics and the Oregon Treaty', p. 659.

upon to secure a settlement in which both sides made concessions to restore good feeling and open up new markets in a stable political environment.

Palmerston deemed the arrangement part of ‘the system of purchasing temporary security by lasting sacrifices.’⁷⁷⁸ The first half of Palmerston’s proposition was disproved by the passage of time – British security in North America was secure in the long-term - while the second was only accurate insofar as Britain did not obtain all the territory under debate, but the military road had been secured. Competing claims had been made since 1783 without achieving anything but acrimony and, whilst the conceded land might have proven valuable after development, it is hard to imagine that this value would have offset the costs of war or the lost benefits of trade that the settlement of the dispute engendered. It certainly would not have encouraged Guizot’s faith in a relationship with Britain to see war made over a peripheral issue. It would also have been difficult to persuade the public of the merits of war over a small amount of land in a faraway boundary dispute when domestic social and economic issues required urgent attention. Charles Greville noted the public mood when reflecting on the Webster-Ashburton Treaty: ‘there is a very general feeling of satisfaction’.⁷⁷⁹

Besides protection of the Hudson’s Bay Company and the maintenance of free ports, the Oregon boundary dispute became much more a point of honour than a mission to protect wider strategic interests. Aberdeen maintained a consistent position when the dispute began gathering momentum late in 1844 but in Polk he faced a challenge far greater than Tyler had presented: Polk’s blustering tone made it easy for conciliation to be interpreted as truckling. Pakenham’s outright refusal of America’s move to conclude the issue hardened Polk’s resolve, which meant that Aberdeen’s usual reliance on gentlemanly persuasion and subtle intimations of the possible use of force needed reinforcement. Messages were passed to McLane of British military preparations and ships were sent to America as a show of seriousness. Together with a significant American domestic lobby, this encouraged Polk to compromise on the terms Aberdeen suggested.

⁷⁷⁸ Palmerston, House of Commons, Hansard, lxxvi, 7 August 1844, col. 1872.

⁷⁷⁹ Greville, *The Greville Memoirs*, ii, p. 101: 11 September 1844.

The area between the 49th parallel and the Columbia River became part of the new Oregon and in some ways this represented a retreat from Britain's position in 1842, but this had little to do with Polk's brinksmanship. Aberdeen decided that the area was inessential to British interest six months before Polk's presidency began, in the era of the pacific Tyler, whom Aberdeen could probably have browbeaten if the determination had been there. Historians have concentrated too much on this area of land in their narratives of 'surrender' without a wider consideration of British interest in the region. The business interests of the Hudson's Bay Company were protected by a change of headquarters and the legal protection of their property and activity in Oregon. Britain's commercial interests were protected by free access to Oregonian Pacific harbours and absorption of the best fur trading territory into British dominion. This, together with the increasing trade that developed in the wake of the settlement, ensured the achievement of strategic consolidation and fiscal regeneration as the government intended.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

A more nuanced perspective is needed on the foreign policy of Lord Aberdeen and the Conservatives between 1841 and 1846, one where it is considered in relation to the Peel administration's domestic objectives, and to the intellectual and practical matrices of Aberdeen's policy-making. Aberdeen's career has not been entirely neglected – Iremonger and Chamberlain authored detailed biographies – but there is nonetheless a gap in the historiography for a study that looks beyond the diplomatic minutiae.⁷⁸⁰ Other authors have pointed out the need for Conservative foreign policy to be inexpensive, but this was only one of the facets of Aberdeen's thinking, and behind that of wider Conservative policy in the nineteenth-century. Without a full appreciation of Aberdeen and the Conservative party's motivations, our understanding of the foreign policy of the Peel government remains restricted.

By considering Aberdeen's personal background – to garner more than the narrative details provided in previous biographies – this study has considered the nature of Aberdeen's world view in the 1840s, and from whence it came. The pursuit of an inexpensive foreign policy came largely from the need of the Peel government to finance its programme of domestic reform, although other considerations must be taken into account. It would be the aristocratic Tories, for example, who would bear the substantial majority of the increased tax burden required to underwrite expensive foreign initiatives. Some have suggested that Aberdeen's prudence distorted his appreciation of domestic and international affairs, but this was hardly fair. A reluctance to join calls for vast defensive improvements in 1845 was rational, and a survey of his foreign policy record has shown that when diplomatic avenues had been exhausted, moderate defence expenditure was justified in the name of British interests: projects such as the development of the Sandwich Islands demonstrated a natural desire to improve Britain's international position.

⁷⁸⁰ L. Iremonger, *Lord Aberdeen: A Biography of the Fourth Earl of Aberdeen, K. G., K. T., Prime Minister 1852-1855* (London, 1978); M. Chamberlain, *Lord Aberdeen: A Political Biography* (London, 1983).

Aberdeen and the Principles of Conservative Foreign Policy

The principles with which the Conservatives approached foreign policy revolved around the protection and consolidation of British power, in keeping with their need to provide money for domestic regeneration, and with their inherent reluctance to engage in expensive foreign ventures. Aberdeen's aversion to radical change fitted into this model, rather than demonstrating an ideological inclination to reaction that stemmed from some fear of progress, or belying an aristocratic affiliation to European autocracy. Short shrift was given to anything that risked undermining the balance of power, given that this balance helped to preserve British predominance, and that risk was a potentially expensive commodity. This did not mean that the clock stopped in 1815 and Europe was frozen as it had been then, in favour of emperors and the forces of reaction, and to the detriment of the ruled. Aberdeen regarded the balance of power (and the British state) as organic entities, for which measured and considered evolution was necessary. Sudden and/or radical change was, however, viewed as dangerous. It was not change itself that worried Conservatives, but its extent.

A reluctance to intervene in the affairs of foreign states followed on from this conception of the balance of power, as Aberdeen was concerned that interference could prove a catalyst to greater trouble. Intervention was, of course, necessary if British interests were deemed to be directly threatened, whilst peaceable diplomatic intercourse remained as a natural transaction of the state. Aberdeen and the Conservatives were prepared to work with any power to this end, regardless of its nature. They did not share in the ideological revulsion at working with Europe's autocrats, which existed in the calculations of some liberally inclined politicians.

Many analyses have concluded that Aberdeen's openness was synonymous with naivety or, even, stupidity. Aberdeen's willingness to work with European powers in an open and transparent fashion came rather more from the continental outlook of Aberdeen's principal intellectual progenitors, Pitt the Younger and Castlereagh, which fused with his humanitarian distaste for war. This approach was always backed up with private vigilance, however, and war remained as a strategic

option if diplomacy failed, as was seen clearly in the dispute with France over Morocco, and in the negotiations with America over Oregon.

Aberdeen's belief in the balance of power as set out at the Congress of Vienna complemented his inbuilt prudence and continental outlook to influence a conservative foreign policy, although not to the extent that it could be described as unthinkingly reactionary. Aberdeen's reluctance to countenance significant changes to the European equilibrium was not informed by any grand or doctrinaire world view, but by a considered interpretation of how best to protect British interests. There was no room for the religious fervour and ideological interventionism associated with the continental conservatism of the Northern Courts: Aberdeen found his motivation to protect the European balance in the view that it maintained conditions by which British trading and general economic preponderance were insured.

The importance of trade in the Conservatives' conception of British power was apparent throughout Aberdeen's tenure as Foreign Secretary. Trade was important for any Foreign Secretary and, indeed, for any powerful state, but Aberdeen viewed mercantile predominance as the very currency of British power. This could be seen particularly in Greece, where Aberdeen refused to back Edmund Lyons' attempts to restore Alexander Mavrocordato – regarded as the representative of local 'English' interest – principally because the ascendancy of the 'French' Jean Coletti was deemed unthreatening to British trading dominance in the area. Trade was also a central consideration in Spain, in the negotiations over the Maine-New Brunswick boundary, and elsewhere.

Further evidence of the Conservatives' priorities in foreign affairs could be seen in Aberdeen's approach to the Ottoman Empire. More liberal politicians such as Stratford Canning and Palmerston came to regard the Ottoman Empire as an institution whose longevity might be extended by remodelling it on British liberal values. Just as the Conservatives eschewed campaigns driven by prestige, so did they view with suspicion such moves to reconstruct other nations upon British constitutional-liberal foundations. Aberdeen's distaste for the Islamism of the Turks was certainly important in his dim view of the Ottoman Empire, and this seems to explain why he thought the Porte *should not* have British capital invested

in its reformation. There were also a number of practical reasons that demonstrated to Aberdeen and other Conservatives why the Ottoman Empire *could not* be reformed. A recurring inability and/or unwillingness to instigate reforms that it had promised by treaty, such as those expected by Serbia from 1812 onwards, pointed to an inherent lethargy onto which the religious prejudices of the day could be easily grafted. Reforms introduced by the previous government, such as those of the Anglo-Ottoman Commercial Treaty of 1838, had also met with limited success. The geostrategic utility of the Ottoman Empire nonetheless dictated that its demise should not be catalysed, so a palliative approach was taken.

The Peel administration showed scant interest in the promotion of particular regimes elsewhere, or in the wider internal affairs of others. Whereas many liberals considered theirs a moral mission to spread liberalism and constitutionalism over Europe, at least partly because those sharing (what they perceived as) British values were deemed the best partners with whom to transact business, the Conservatives were reluctant to interfere in the affairs of a foreign power, particularly in the name of proselytising liberal values to which they did not subscribe. This could be seen in Spain, for example, where the collapse of Espartero's supposedly liberal administration elicited little reaction. As long as trade continued uninterrupted, they saw little reason to protest.

If a certain strand of liberal morality dictated that nations should be enlightened and emancipated by conversion to liberal values, most Conservative minds were inclined to think that interference was, in fact, the immoral course to pursue. Lord Stanley spoke upon the issue in 1847, in relation to the affairs of Portugal, with reference to what he felt was Britain's ideological intervention in Portugal on the part of John Russell's liberal administration:

I conceive that there is no principle more distinctly established or more universally recognised than this, that with respect to the purely internal and domestic concerns of any State, no other country has a right to interfere, but least of all to interfere by force of arms; and that the only possible qualification of this universal principle is, that the affairs so-called domestic and internal, are in their nature such as immediately and directly to endanger,

if not the institutions, at least the great leading interests of the country which claims a right to interfere.⁷⁸¹

The Conservatives' ingrained aversion to interference was not based upon abstract isolationism, however, as has previously been contended.⁷⁸² Their view was simply that the type of government in other states was not a 'great leading interest' for Britain. In the debate on Portugal, furthermore, Stanley referred to the likelihood of interference leading 'this country into a perpetual labyrinth of complications threatening the most serious embarrassments to our diplomatic and foreign relations.'⁷⁸³ This was, of course, related to the specifics of the Portuguese issue, but represented his wider practical concerns and those of Conservatives in general about poking sticks into continental hornets' nests. Support for non-interventionism did not preclude action deemed necessary, however, for Stanley's later governments or the Peel administration.

An intellectual investment in the overall benefits of non-interventionism was not the only connection of the government of 1841-46 with the Derbyite Conservatism of the decades to follow. Along with a focus on conciliatory foreign policy – connected to the prioritisation of domestic economic recovery – a suspicion of that proselytising brand of liberalism in foreign policy associated with its leading practitioner, Palmerston, pointed to a consensus among most Conservatives regarding foreign affairs, if the issue of protection came to divide them on domestic concerns.

This was one of the reasons for which a study that assessed Aberdeen's policy in the context of his personal outlook and contemporary Conservative objectives is necessary: the Palmerstonian terms on which debate has largely hitherto taken place distorted interpretations of an alternative approach to foreign policy. The work of Angus Hawkins and the 'Norwich School' has helped to provide a more nuanced understanding of mid-nineteenth century Conservatism than that given by the 'Whig' historians of previous generations, or that offered within the

⁷⁸¹ Stanley, House of Lords, Hansard, xciii, 15 June 1847, col. 543.

⁷⁸² See, for example, W. Devereux Jones, *Lord Derby and Victorian Conservatism* (Georgia, 1956).

⁷⁸³ Stanley, House of Lords, Hansard, xciii, 15 June 1847, col. 543.

framework of Palmerstonian and Disraelian perspectives. Aberdeen's Conservatism, and its relation to that of the Peel government and to wider mid-nineteenth century Conservatism, however, has until now remained underexplored.

Reinterpreting Conservative Foreign Policy

Besides aiming to expand our understanding of Conservative foreign policy, this study has sought to challenge a number of longstanding yet questionable historiographical claims, which have clouded interpretations of Aberdeen's policy-making. Most previous accounts have, for example, characterised the Peel-Aberdeen relationship as quasi-filial, with Aberdeen steering the Foreign Office under Peel's paternal supervision. This study has contended that Aberdeen was in fact left to his own devices, working towards the objectives of the Conservative government on the same basis as the Prime Minister. Peel needed to use stronger language in the House of Commons than Aberdeen did in the Lords, but this did not affect the autonomy of the Foreign Secretary, whose policy was challenged in the context of policy-making discussion, but not undermined or overridden. The diarist Charles Greville, who could always be relied upon to attack any political arrangement he thought false, noted that Aberdeen's and Peel's was a symbiotic relationship with its origins in mutual respect and necessity, with Peel needing to concentrate on domestic issues.⁷⁸⁴ That Peel only once mentioned foreign affairs in his cabinet reports to the Crown suggested the nature and success of this arrangement.⁷⁸⁵

The historiography has also portrayed the cornerstone of Conservative policy, the Anglo-French *entente*, as either non-existent, a poor imitation of Palmerston's Quadruple Alliance, or a well-meaning initiative that showed signs of promise but weakened under the weight of increasing rivalry and collapsed as the question of the 'Spanish marriages' developed. The evidence has led this study to consider an *entente* that was flexible, morally binding, and durable. It arose from the Conservatives' need to keep foreign policy inexpensive whilst maintaining

⁷⁸⁴ C. Greville, *The Greville Memoirs*, ii: 1837-1852 (London, 1885), pp. 376-77: 18 March 1846.

⁷⁸⁵ UEA Library, *Microfilm of Cabinet Reports by Prime Ministers to the Crown, 1837-1867*, i, 1978.

Britain's international position – because Guizot could be relied upon to check the more radical elements of French expansionism – without alienating the Northern Courts by the formation of an exclusive alliance, which was never seriously entertained. Such an arrangement with France was also symptomatic of Aberdeen's approach to foreign policy, whereby personal diplomacy was the preferred method of achieving Britain's goals. Aberdeen's continental contacts made this viable, and its intellectual origins might well be traced to Castlereagh. Critics of this style of diplomacy might suggest that the gentlemen's agreements that resulted from it stored up problems for the future. The agreement with Nesselrode in 1844 regarding the fate of the Ottoman Empire, and the understanding with Guizot over the issue of the 'Spanish marriages', serve as two such examples. Although, as this study has shown, a closer analysis might suggest otherwise.

This study has also proposed a reinterpretation of that notorious aspect of Anglo-French relations, the marriages question. Jones Parry's seminal study remains the most thorough work on the topic, yet it contains a number of questionable assertions, some of which appear merely to reflect the prejudices of 1936. The Spanish Queen Dowager's changeable political opinions were, for example, put down to being female.⁷⁸⁶ Analysis of Aberdeen's foreign policy was also weakened by an ongoing focus upon perceived hypocrisy, where British diplomatic intercourse with France and Spain was deemed to breach a professed desire for Spain to reach its decisions independently. Besides distracting from a broader analysis of Conservative foreign policy, these charges are wide of the mark. Britain certainly offered Spain diplomatic counsel, as was normal between friendly nations, but this was different from pressuring Spain into decisions or making overt threats. Later studies enhanced understanding of British policy in Spain, but their inflated interpretations of the nature of the *entente* informed a tale of British

⁷⁸⁶ E. Jones Parry, *The Spanish Marriages 1841-1846: A Study of the Influence of Dynastic Ambition Upon Foreign Policy* (London, 1936), p. 171. See chapter 4 for detail of events in Spain.

failure and muddle.⁷⁸⁷ This study has contended that when Aberdeen's policy is considered in the light of Conservative aims, it appears rational.

Save for comment on the Nesselrode Memorandum, the Conservatives' policy towards Russia and the Ottoman Empire has largely been ignored. Anglo-Russian relations nonetheless show the Conservatives' consistent approach to affairs in the East. The regeneration of the Ottoman Empire was not countenanced for intellectual, religious and practical reasons, but its existence was protected due to its geostrategic and geopolitical utility. Aberdeen's reluctance to intervene in internal Ottoman affairs, or to support the revolutions in Greece and Serbia, was bound up in the conviction that Turkish collapse would precipitate a power struggle that would not only derail immediate Conservative objectives, but also threaten the peace of Europe and the international order. Tsar Nicholas and Nesselrode naturally placed Russian interests first but, similarly to Guizot, they were people with whom, cautiously, Aberdeen and the Conservatives could work. This was not assumed on the basis of any ideological favour to Europe's autocrats, but on personal experience and the practical evidence that Russia also wanted the Ottoman Empire to remain a part of the European order, at least in the shorter term.

The historiography of American affairs is much richer but remains subject to the problems identified elsewhere. Early work and provincial journal articles were bogged down in diplomatic minutiae, or clouded by partisan loyalties. Later studies expanded understanding of the period – that of Jones and Rakestraw remains the most thorough – but there remains room for a study that considered Conservative policy in light of the objectives of the Peel administration, and in the context of Aberdeen's 'mental map'.⁷⁸⁸ In settling the boundary between Maine and New Brunswick, Aberdeen managed to improve relations between Britain and America, which had all but broken down under the previous administration. Britain's local interests were preserved, contrary to beliefs of those such as Palmerston and, more importantly, negotiations about trade contracts replaced bickering over

⁷⁸⁷ See, for example, R. Bullen, *Palmerston, Guizot, and the Collapse of the Entente Cordiale* (London, 1974); Chamberlain, *Aberdeen*, pp. 379-389.

⁷⁸⁸ H. Jones and D. Rakestraw, *Prologue to 'Manifest Destiny': Anglo-American Relations in the 1840s* (Wilmington, 1997).

boundaries. Tensions resurfaced in the dispute over the boundary between British and American possessions in Oregon. Calm but determined policy (eventually reinforced with inferred threats) was sufficient to face down President Polk in that dispute and secure British interests in the region. The negotiations were not dominated by America, as has previously been assumed, and Anglo-American relations were left in a much better condition than in 1841.

In exploring the different theatres of Conservative foreign policy, comparisons with Palmerston have inevitably been drawn in this study. His historiographical and contemporaneous ubiquity cannot be ignored. Palmerston was seen as representative of mid-Victorian success and, certainly to the generations of 'Whig' historians, as the personification of John Bull. In concentrating upon the earlier 1840s, this study has noted how it was in fact Aberdeen who received the bulk of contemporary accolades for a more restrained approach. Palmerston spent the duration of the Peel administration attacking its foreign policy, but Greville's account of such criticism was revealing, if a touch exaggerated: 'it all falls dead and flat, and nobody takes the slightest interest in his orations.'⁷⁸⁹ One of the main reasons why Palmerston's volleys from the opposition benches failed to hit the mark was that they often appeared hypocritical: criticisms of the 'Ashburton capitulation' overlooked the fact that Britain had given away no more land than Palmerston himself had been prepared to concede in 1835, whilst his attacks over policy regarding French encroachment in Tahiti were undermined by a previous admission that the island was legally, practicably and strategically beyond British protection.⁷⁹⁰

Despite the obvious differences between Aberdeen and Palmerston's diplomatic methods, it is possible to talk of foreign policy objectives that were not so vastly contrasting. Palmerston recognised that peace and stability on the continent were desirable both because they provided the best conditions for trade and because Britain's land army was insufficient to make a decisive impact in large conflicts, or in those out of its reach. The Navy would always provide Britain with

⁷⁸⁹ Greville, *Memoirs*, ii, p. 292: 21 August 1845.

⁷⁹⁰ Palmerston to Pritchard, 19 July 1837, HCPP, 'Correspondence relating to the Proceedings of the French at Tahiti' (1843), lxi, 473/5; Palmerston to Pritchard, 9 September 1839, 'Tahiti Correspondence' (1843), lxi, 473/7.

security but the balance of power provided security for its interests and, despite his championship of liberalism, which derived from a mixture of genuine ideological commitment and domestic politicking, Palmerstonian actions and liberal ambition were also subjected to natural and practical restrictions. The difference between Palmerston and Aberdeen was that the former would attempt to transcend limitations with rhetoric and bluff, whilst Aberdeen preferred to practise a more candid diplomacy. Each approach carried its own benefits and dangers.

Where the Conservatism of Aberdeen really differed from the liberalism of Palmerston was not in levels of commitment to British interests, but in the way in which Aberdeen dealt with the limits to British power and influence. Aberdeen preferred to use his continental contacts whereas, lacking these, Palmerston recognised that an alliance with public opinion was a useful means by which to strengthen his authority. When revolution consumed Europe in 1848, for example, he lauded the efforts of Kossuth and the Magyars in Austria and hailed the challenge to reaction. This message gratified the public and indicated to continental powers a strength of conviction which, driven by the force of public support, suggested powerful national resolution. Palmerston regarded this as a deterrent to Britain's enemies. Similarly in the Don Pacifico case, when Greece was blockaded to extract recompense for the material damage inflicted upon that 'British' citizen, the *Civis Romanus Sum* speech that followed was undertaken with a combination of personal justification, public gratification, and continental consumption in mind. The Conservatives regarded this approach as unnecessarily risky.

Reinterpreting Conservatism in the Mid-Nineteenth Century

From this study of Aberdeen's foreign policy has emerged an alternative interpretation of the mechanics of the Peel administration. Peel was undoubtedly a strong-minded leader with a clear conception of the direction in which he wanted to take the country. His relationship with Aberdeen, however, suggested that the dictatorial leadership style of historiographical tradition needs to be challenged. Generations of historians have portrayed Peel as a marionettist whose ministers

operated under their master's direction and control.⁷⁹¹ In the case of Aberdeen at least, this idea does not stand up to close scrutiny. Whilst Aberdeen was working towards the objectives of a Conservative government led by Peel, the relative autonomy with which the Foreign Secretary went about his business belied the idea of the quasi-filial relationship put forward by the historiography. Richard Gaunt has suggested that other offices of government functioned with a similar degree of independence.⁷⁹² Although further study is required in this area, it seems that there was a wider mandate for Peel's approach to government than traditionally thought, as his ministers were working towards the same ends as their leader without the need for Peel's frequent intervention and persuasion. Perhaps it is no longer appropriate to conceptualise the mission to reform the state as the brainchild and ongoing project of the Prime Minister, rather that of a wider group of ministers, if not the Conservative party as a whole. If this was the case then Conservatism in this era must be supposed a good deal more liberal than is traditionally thought.

This study has also considered how for this Conservative government at least, foreign policy in the nineteenth-century was not just a series of *ad hoc* measures that amounted to a block upon the more systematic liberals, and provided a barrier to the ostensibly progressive values that 'Whig history' celebrated. Alongside a domestic programme that has been well documented, we have considered how Aberdeen's role complemented regeneration on the home front. The Conservatives had a clear agenda for government in which foreign policy was an arm of an overarching programme to restore Britain to social and financial health. Recent scholarship has proposed a slightly different dynamic for the interrelationship between foreign and domestic policy in the Peel government and in wider British history, with foreign strategic concerns driving domestic policy.⁷⁹³ Anthony Howe has stressed the influence on the Peel government of the collective

⁷⁹¹ For a recent example of this view, see J. Charmley, *A History of Conservative Politics since 1830* (London, 2nd edition, 2008), p. 12.

⁷⁹² R. Gaunt, *Sir Robert Peel: The Life and Legacy* (New York, 2010).

⁷⁹³ See, for example, Mulligan and Simms (eds.), *The Primacy of Foreign Policy in British History*.

idea that international free trade would block the emerging economic competition from America and Germany, thereby freezing British dominance in place.⁷⁹⁴

Whatever one believes with regard to the relative balance of foreign and domestic priorities, it remains that these aspects of policy were inextricably linked, and that they were dominated by economic concerns. This is what ultimately gave the Peel administration its coherence. Aberdeen's dealings were in part informed by the background influences investigated in Chapter Two, and in part by the practicalities of the international situation, but there was an overriding focus on economy, as evidenced by the ongoing preoccupation with the maintenance and extension of Britain's mercantile intercourse. It was the filter through which foreign policy was often viewed and this economic preponderance – as well as threading together the aims of the Peel government – also connected the Conservatism of the 1840s with that of the Derby governments in later decades. Conservative foreign policy in this era might have seemed directionless, lacking the moral and ideological mission that characterised liberal aspirations on the continent, but there was an overriding idea that British power could be consolidated and protected by preserving and extending Britain's economic dominance, which was construed as the very currency of British power, rather than as a by-product of it. This combined with the inherent prudence of Conservatives to unite the different elements of a government, as well as to form connections between Peelism and Derbyism. It is, therefore, perhaps in this pervading economic focus that we find the very essence of mid-nineteenth century Conservatism, and of the rival tradition to the liberal movement that still dominates understanding of politics in that era.

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This study has sought to illuminate one of the more obscured phases of nineteenth-century Conservatism by considering the foreign policy of the Peel

⁷⁹⁴ Howe, 'Radicalism, Free Trade, and Foreign Policy in Mid-Nineteenth Century Britain', in Mulligan and Simms (eds.), *The Primacy of Foreign Policy in British History*, pp. 167-180.

administration through a contextualised study of its practitioner, Lord Aberdeen, and of the world in which he operated. A rational, practical and successful politician has emerged, one who largely worked in harmony with the Prime Minister and with the overall support of his Party, delivering a foreign policy focused on the maintenance and extension of Britain's mercantile predominance, applying non-interventionism to such an extent as was compatible with British interests, and using personal diplomacy to keep France close and to maintain working relationships with Europe's other powers. This approach helped to deliver the Conservatives' international objectives and, thereby, their domestic objectives too. The approach of the Peel administration and Aberdeen foreshadowed that of later Derbyite Conservatism and placed Aberdeen's policy within that broader historical context.

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