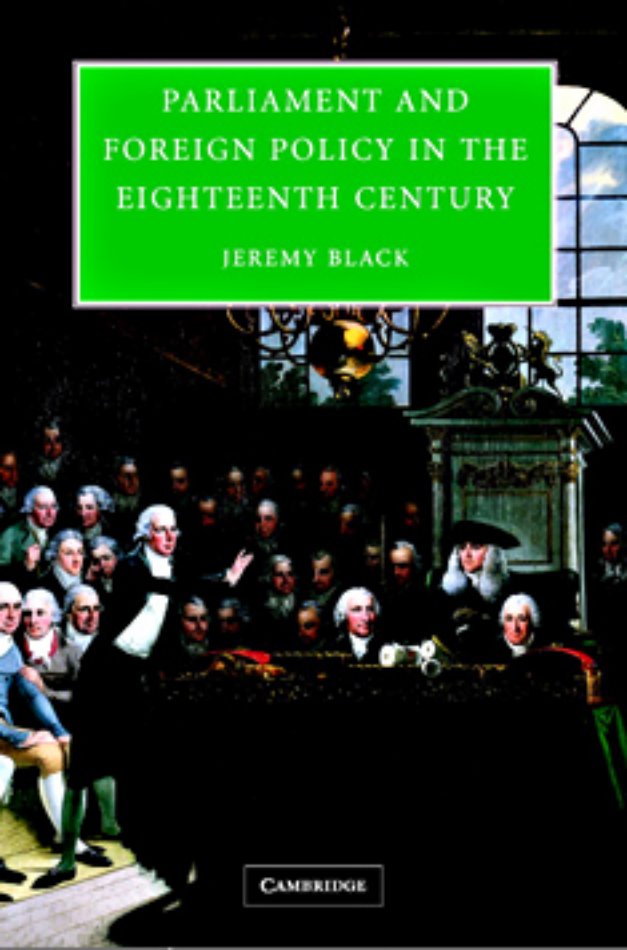
PARLIAMENT AND FOREIGN POLICY IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

JEREMY BLACK



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Drawing on a wide range of British and foreign archival sources, this book tackles the role of Parliament in the conduct of eighteenth-century foreign policy, the impact of this policy on parliamentary politics, and the quality of parliamentary debates. The study is important for our assessment of eighteenth-century Britain, and also, more generally, for an understanding of the role of contingency in the assessment of political systems.

'I shall never bear the smell of the House of Commons.' James Duff made this remark in 1784 having already served as an MP in the small and stuffy chamber for thirty years. It serves as a reminder that Parliament had many facets, some of which are difficult to recover. Reflecting over a quarter-century of work on parliamentary sources, this book highlights the influence of Parliament, positive and negative, direct and indirect, on foreign policy and politics. It also has great contemporary relevance as we consider the effectiveness of democratic states when confronting authoritarian rivals, and the rights of representative bodies to be consulted before wars are launched.

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For
Isabel and Oliver Letwin

Contents

Preface *page* ix
Note on dates, spelling and titles xi
List of abbreviations xii

1 Introduction 1

2 The Revolution Settlement, Parliament and foreign policy, 1689–1714 13

3 The Walpolean system, Parliament and foreign policy, 1714–42 40

4 The mid-century crisis, Parliament and foreign policy, 1742–60 78

5 George III, Parliament and foreign policy, 1760–1800 99

6 Sources and reports 137

7 Character and quality of parliamentary discussion 164

8 A parliamentary foreign policy? 200

9 Conclusions 233

Select bibliography 247
Index 256

Preface

Having now worked on this period for close to a quarter-century, there is a sense of coming back to old friends when writing on this subject. Yet, at the same time, in providing both a narrative and thematic account of British foreign policy in the eighteenth century, focusing on the role of Parliament in the making of that policy, I am trying to tackle at book-length a subject that has not hitherto received adequate attention. There are first-rate articles on various aspects of the relationship between Parliament and foreign policy, especially those of Graham Gibbs, but no comprehensive treatment, and none that takes my theme and follows it through the century. This reflects the difficulty of the task and the extent to which the subject matter demands the expertise of both the diplomatic historian and the domestic political historian. In this book, I consider the role of Parliament in the conduct of foreign policy, the impact of this policy on parliamentary politics, and the quality of parliamentary debates. These are important questions for our understanding of eighteenth-century Britain: our contemporary fashion for social and cultural topics does not obviate the centrality of Parliament, foreign policy and war in the politics of the period. The issues I discuss are also relevant today, not least because they relate to the important question of the effectiveness of democratic states when confronting authoritarian rivals. Moreover, in 2002–3, the right of Parliament to be consulted before Britain engaged in hostilities with Iraq, and the nature and role of that consultation, became important political issues.

The range of research on which this work is based ensures that I must thank a number of bodies. The British Academy, the Leverhulme Foundation, the Wolfson Foundation and the Universities of Durham and Exeter have provided valuable assistance, as has Merton College Oxford, the Huntington Library and the Beinecke Library, each of which elected me to visiting fellowships. I am most grateful to Her Majesty the Queen, the late Duke of Northumberland, the Marquess of Bute, the late Earl Harrowby, the late Earl Waldegrave, the Earl of Malmesbury, Lady Lucas,

Sir Hector Monro, John Weston-Underwood, Richard Head and the Trustees of the Bedford Estate for permission to work on papers belonging to them. I would also like to record my gratitude to numerous archivists at home and abroad, not least for the opportunity to work in three major archives when they were shut to the public. I benefited from the opportunity to advance earlier ideas at the 38th Conference of the International Commission for the History of Representative and Parliamentary Institutions, held in Durham in 1988, and at the 1997 colloquium on the Treaty of Rijswijk, held at the Institut für Europäische Geschichte in Mainz. I am most grateful to Bob Harris and Bob McJimsey for commenting on draft chapters, to two anonymous readers for helpful reflections and criticisms, to William Davies, a prince among publishers, and to David Watson, a most skilful copy editor. It is a great pleasure to dedicate this book to two good friends and university contemporaries, one of whom is a distinguished parliamentarian.

Notes on dates, spelling and titles

The New Year is always taken as starting on 1 January. Until the reform of the calendar in 1752 Britain conformed to the Julian Calendar. Dates recorded in this calendar are referred to as old style and designated (os). All other dates are new style, the Gregorian Calendar, which was ten days ahead before 1700 and eleven days ahead from then. Where possible, well-established anglicised forms have been used for both place and personal names. The length of proper noble titles and of titles of office has dictated their shortening. Individuals who held aristocratic titles could be MPs. For example, they could be the eldest son of a peer, as with Frederick, Lord North, or could hold an Irish peerage, as with John, 2nd Earl of Egmont. Place of publication is London unless otherwise indicated.

Abbreviations

152M/C	Addington (Sidmouth papers), Exeter, Devon CRO.
Add.	Additional Manuscripts
AE.	Paris, Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères
AN.	Paris, Archives Nationales
Ang.	Angleterre
AST.	Turin, Archivio di Stato
Aylesbury	Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire Record Office
Berlin	Berlin-Dahlem, Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz
BL.	London, British Library
Bod.	Oxford, Bodleian Library
Bowood	Papers of the 1st Marquess of Lansdowne, from Bowood House, now in British Library.
Cawdor	Carmarthen, Dyfed Record Office, Cawdor papers
Chewton	Chewton Hall, Chewton Mendip, papers of James, 1st Earl Waldegrave
Cobbett	W. Cobbett (ed.), *Parliamentary History of England* (36 vols., London, 1806–20)
CP.	Correspondance Politique
CRO.	County Record Office
CUL.	Cambridge, University Library
Dresden	Dresden, Hauptstaatsarchiv, Geheimes Kabinett, Gesandschaften
Eg.	Egerton Manuscripts
Farmington	Farmington, Connecticut, Lewis Walpole Library
HHStA.	Vienna, Haus-, Hof-, und Staatsarchiv
HL.	San Marino, Huntington Library
HMC.	Historical Manuscripts Commission
HP.	London, History of Parliament Transcripts

Hayton	D. W. Hayton (ed.), *The House of Commons 1690–1715* (5 vols., Cambridge, 2002)
Ing.	Inghilterra
KAO.	Maidstone, Kent Archive Office
LM.	Lettere Ministri
Marburg	Marburg, Staatsarchiv, Bestand 4: Politische Akten nach Philipp d. Gr.
Munich	Munich, Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv
Namier	L. B. Namier and J. Brooke (eds.), *The House of Commons 1754–1790* (3 vols., 1964)
NAS.	Edinburgh, National Archives of Scotland
NLS.	Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland
os	old style
Osnabrück	Osnabrück, Staatsarchiv, Repertorium 100, Abschnitt 1
PRO.	London, Public Record Office
RA.	Windsor Castle, Royal Archives, Stuart Papers
Sedgwick	R. R. Sedgwick (ed.), *The House of Commons 1715–1754* (2 vols., 1970)
SP.	State Papers
Thorne	R. G. Thorne (ed.), *The House of Commons 1790–1820* (5 vols., 1986)
UL.	University Library
Williamwood	Williamwood, Sir Hector Munro, Ewast papers
WW.	Sheffield, Archives, Wentworth Woodhouse papers

1

Introduction

'I shall never bear the smell of the House of Commons'.[1] James Duff made this remark in 1784 having already served as an MP in the small and stuffy chamber for thirty years. It serves as a reminder that Parliament had many facets, some of which are difficult to recover. It was a social centre as well as a place of business, and parliamentarians made an impact in many ways other than through their speeches. This needs to be borne in mind when we concentrate on Parliament's political role and, more specifically, on the debates. Indeed, the political importance of MPs was not simply measured by their participation, let alone skill, in debate, and, as also today, this was particularly so of parliamentarians in government. Similarly, votes in divisions were not solely the product of party alignments and of responses to the issues debated. In 1735, James, Earl of Morton complained that his son Robert, MP for Orkney and Shetland, where the Earls were the hereditary stewards, had been 'taking such flirts in Parliament by voting against our friends by the influence of a parcel of women'. Two years later, he threatened Robert that if the latter voted contrary to his wishes 'he would never see my face, nor possess a furrow of ground that belongs to me'.[2] The threat succeeded in bringing Robert into line.

Parliament, in its debates, political influence and constitutional powers, has justifiably played a major role in studies on British history. The role of Parliament was seen as central to the constitution, and indeed as a touchstone of British identity. In recent decades, however, Parliament has been displaced from centre stage as attention has been devoted to the world of popular politics and consciousness, particularly in its more dramatic manifestations of demonstrations and riots. Yet, fine work continues to

[1] Fife to William Rose, 11 May 1784, A. and H. Tayler (eds.), *Lord Fife and his Factor* (1925), p. 166.
[2] Morton to his heir James, Lord Aberdour, 25 Mar. (os) 1735, 15 Mar. (os) 1737, NAS. GD. 150/3476/52x, 85.

be produced on parliamentary politics, much of which can be approached through the journal *Parliamentary History* (1982–).

This book looks at Parliament and foreign policy because it was important to contemporaries, has received insufficient scholarly attention in recent decades, and is a topical issue today, as the question of the respective powers of executive and legislature over foreign policy is rightly seen as important, particularly, but not only, in the United Kingdom and the United States. Furthermore, many of the issues that were discussed in the eighteenth century, such as the extent to which parliamentary debate compromised national interests and also challenged the equation of reputation and security, are again subjects for consideration. Foreign policy itself may seem distant from the concerns of most eighteenth-century voters, let alone of the remainder of the population, but it helped lead to war or peace, the crucial factor in public finances and the most important aspect of state activity for the bulk of the population.

Approaching the issue from a different perspective, much of the problem in defining and assessing the formulation and conduct of foreign policy in eighteenth-century Britain hinges on the question of the influence of Parliament, both positive and negative. That influence was both direct and indirect. The monarch had the right of making war and peace, signing treaties, appointing, dismissing and paying diplomats, giving them instructions, and receiving their reports, and all without consulting Parliament. These rights were firmly asserted by the great jurist Sir William Blackstone in his influential *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765–9).[3]

Parliament, in contrast, had responsibility in the field of finance, and thus for supporting the military expenditure and subsidies to foreign powers that were judged necessary for the pursuance of policies. Treaties that entailed either a financial charge or a change in British law had to be brought before both Houses (House of Commons and House of Lords). With the majesty of legal authority, Philip, 1st Earl of Hardwicke, a longstanding Lord Chancellor and a key member of the 'Old Corps' Whigs, who had dominated British politics for four decades, told the House of Lords in 1755:

> The King is not obliged by our constitution to ask either the consent or the approbation of Parliament to any treaty he makes, nor even to communicate it to Parliament, unless it requires a grant or an Act of Parliament, and even then he is

[3] Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (5th edn, Oxford, 1773) I, 252–3, 257–8.

obliged to communicate the treaty only when he applies for the grant or the Act thereby required.[4]

Thus Parliament was to play a role in giving effect to policy, but at a time set by the Crown. Sir Robert Walpole, First Lord of the Treasury and longstanding head of the 'Old Corps' Whig ministry, warned, in 1738, on prudential grounds against an extension of parliamentary power: 'a future House of Commons may assume to themselves a power of calling for papers during the dependence of a negotiation; and if this should ever come to be our case, I am sure no foreign prince or state will ever enter into any secret negotiation or treaty with our government'.[5]

Treaties were communicated to Parliament after they had been ratified, which limited the value of parliamentary discussion, and certainly of any advice that might be given. On a number of occasions, individual parliamentarians and others called for an extension of Parliament's formal role. In 1738, Sir William Wyndham, the Tory leader in the Commons, argued that the prerogative arose from the circumstances of feudalism, stated that 'sovereigns now make war at the expense of the nation', and pressed for communication of treaties prior to their ratification.[6] In 1743, Philip, 4th Earl of Chesterfield, a Whig and former diplomat, then in opposition, repeated the call. Both employed parliamentary debates as occasions for their remarks. Chesterfield told the Lords that 'to execute measures first, and then to require the approbation of Parliament, instead of advice, is surely such a degree of contempt as has not often been shown in the most arbitrary reigns'.[7] In 1752, John, Earl Granville (formerly Lord Carteret), the Lord President of the Council, warned, however, that the communication of treaties for parliamentary approval prior to their ratification 'would be a total subversion of our constitution'.[8] In 1760, an anonymous pamphlet appeared setting out *Reasons Why the Approaching Treaty of Peace should be debated in Parliament; As a Method most Expedient and Constitutional*.[9] The charge of this pamphlet was ignored.

Such calls were rare, and pressure for a constitutional change in Parliament's position was slight. Instead, the emphasis was on the value to government of parliamentary support, and therefore on an extension of parliamentary competence by permission; rather than any alteration of the

[4] Cobbett, XV, 652. [5] Cobbett, X, 590, cf. 612. [6] Cobbett, X, 858.
[7] Cobbett, XII, 1135, 1145. [8] Cobbett, XIV, 1185, cf. Hardwicke in 1743, XII, 1170.
[9] G. C. Gibbs, 'Laying Treaties Before Parliament in the Eighteenth Century', in R. M. Hatton and M. S. Anderson (eds.), *Studies in Diplomatic History: Essays in Memory of David Bayne Horn* (1970), pp. 116–37.

royal prerogative in this field. In 1739, Richard, 2nd Earl of Scarborough, a Whig close to George II, told the Lords:

> Your lordships know that the power of peace and war is in the Crown . . . and that our constitution always understands that the Crown has a right to make either without the participation of Parliament. No wise King will indeed venture upon this; but, my Lords, no dutiful Parliament will refuse to thank such a king for his condescension in thus making the Parliament as it were partners in his prerogative,[10]

the latter a formulation that captured political reality and constitutional mutability.

A memorandum on peace treaties in the papers of Sir Gilbert Elliot MP, a supporter of John, 3rd Earl of Bute, the leading minister in 1762–3, claimed:

> The King's prerogative undoubtedly empowers him to conclude peace without laying the terms before Parliament. He may however ask their advice. The question therefore merely upon usage. Anciently, articles [in peace treaties] few and simple, not unusual to ask advice. In modern times, more complicated and branched into more particulars, scarce possible certainly not expedient to ask advice. Accordingly for 150 years hardly an instance Treaty of Utrecht [1713] excepted.[11]

This was a distinctly conservative approach to politics, and it is necessary to appreciate its widespread appeal in order to avoid a misleading perspective that emphasises support for change. In 1749, Henry Pelham, the First Lord of the Treasury, and a minister who was sensitive to the mood of the House of Commons, made a robust defence of the government's refusal, the previous year, to communicate the preliminaries of the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle. In his eyes, any encroachment on prerogative would be a dangerous constitutional innovation.[12]

As a separate issue, although the approval of treaties was at stake, the question of whether the Crown had the right to part with territories without parliamentary authority was raised, particularly over the loss of the Thirteen American Colonies.[13] Another aspect of the implementation of treaties related to obligations to provide military assistance. A pamphlet referred to the promise to do so under the Anglo-Prussian treaty of 1788, noting 'as they may be demanded when Parliament is not sitting, a King of England

[10] Cobbett, X, 900. [11] NLS. Mss. 11036 fol. 26. [12] Cobbett, XIV, 598.
[13] *Edinburgh Advertiser*, 27 Sept., *Morning Chronicle*, 2 Nov. 1782.

may be put under the necessity either of breaking faith with his ally, by not sending troops . . . or of breaking faith with his people, by raising troops without consent of Parliament'.[14]

To see the subject in terms of a struggle to extend parliamentary competence would be to adopt a modern approach to politics and a teleological account of the past, neither of which were appropriate in this case. Radical prospects were, indeed, to be outlined in the revolutionary crisis of the 1790s, and the American Revolution (1775–83) showed the constitutional and political structures and practices that could develop in the English-speaking political world, but the extent to which the radical possibilities of the Glorious Revolution of 1688–9 for the role of Parliament were not teased out is the most striking aspect of the situation. Indeed, the unsuccessful Peerage Bill of 1719 was the last major attempt to give constitutional form to the potential for ongoing change opened up by the manner of James II and VII's removal from his thrones in 1689.

Treaties were not the sole issue for Parliament in the field of diplomacy. Foreign policy was debated in both Houses, being the single most important topic in many of the major parliamentary debates, such as a large number of those on the Addresses of Thanks.[15] Thus, foreign policy posed, in an acute form, the serious problem of parliamentary management.

Parliament's indirect influence is harder to gauge, and was an issue over which contemporaries were understandably divided. The extent to which British policy, and the foreign response to British views that played such a large role in shaping British policy, were affected by the existence of Parliament, and the consequent need for government to consider how best to win parliamentary support or reply to parliamentary criticisms, was unclear to contemporaries, who were having themselves to respond to the dynamic character of British political developments. Thus, at the close of 1726, the British ministry hastened to assure its French ally that a Spanish attack on the British possession of Gibraltar would receive a firm response even though Parliament was not sitting:

neither need the Cardinal [Fleury, France's leading minister] apprehend that we shall be in any distress on account of the Parliament's not being assembled, the King having received from both Houses, in the last session, such strong assurances of support, and having so much reason to depend upon their being of the same

[14] Anon., *Considerations on the Prussian Treaty* (1789), pp. 3–4.

[15] The best introduction is Gibbs, 'Parliament and Foreign Policy in the Age of Stanhope and Walpole', *English Historical Review*, 77 (1962), pp. 18–37.

mind at their next meeting, considering the prudent measures that have been taken in consequence of those assurances.[16]

Parliament was often cited in discussion of foreign policy, whether by ministers stressing the need to settle matters before the sessions, British diplomats concerned about the detrimental consequences for their government's image of parliamentary contentions, or foreign diplomats seeking to assess the stability and intentions of the British ministry. The major setpiece occasions of the debate over foreign policy occurred in Parliament. It was in the House of Commons that the government was most seriously assailed, whether over relations with France in 1730 and with Spain in 1739, Hanoverian subsidies in 1742 and 1744, peace with France in 1762, or the prospect of war with Russia in 1791, although the Lords took centre stage for the struggle in 1711–12 over ending the War of the Spanish Succession.

And yet the significance of parliamentary discussion can be qualified. This study positions itself between scholars, such as the late Ragnhild Hatton, who have emphasised the Crown's freedom of manoeuvre in diplomacy and, more generally, in foreign policy, and others who have stressed the significance of popular and public engagement with foreign affairs, which might, inelegantly, be termed the 'public sphere' approach. Against the former, it is necessary to draw attention to the constitutional necessity (given the power of the purse) and political reasons for foreign policy to be a collaboration of Crown and Parliament, and to be seen to be such. Against the latter, it is important to emphasise that Parliament functioned less as an organ for popular expression than as an arena for the disagreements and contestations within the government. Indeed, this leads to a questioning of the usefulness of the very idea of a parliamentary foreign policy.

Equally important, it can be suggested that any assessment of Parliament's role requires a more specific approach, one that is more sensitive to particular issues and years. This emphasis on contingency requires a stress on the archival research that aids an understanding of the dynamics of specific moments. In addition, a reliance on manuscript material has an analytical importance in its own right, as it redresses the bias towards newspapers, pamphlets and other printed material which have played too large a role in the populist account of foreign policy.

The qualification of Parliament's importance has various sources. At one level, it is but part of the more general realisation that the tendency to stress

[16] Thomas, Duke of Newcastle, Secretary of State for the Southern Department, to Thomas Robinson, 20 Dec. (os) 1726, BL. Add. 32748 fol. 475.

public spheres of discussion can be misleading. They were less frequently spheres of decision-making, or sources of the decisions that were taken, than is generally appreciated. Nevertheless, there is a marked reluctance among scholars to accept this situation, or to consider its consequences. Instead, there is a powerful sense that the public sphere, Parliament, the culture of print and the world of campaigns, agitation, propaganda and public opinion, must somehow have been not solely important, but, instead, central to the processes of decision-making; and that if Parliament had a role it was in large part because it was receptive to this public sphere, and thus represented it.

It would be foolish to deny the importance of the public sphere, both in Britain and, more generally, in Europe;[17] but, equally, the stress on it sometimes seen can be described rather as an act of faith than as an assessment based on an understanding of the steps by which decisions were usually taken. Furthermore, there is a related tendency to focus on crises in Britain in which public manifestations of opposition to the government were notable, which presents a misleading view of the difficulties that ministries encountered. This view concentrates on the relationship between policy and public, especially popular, opposition, and on the pressures that the latter could produce. As the crises are automatically defined by the strength of the latter, an impression is created that the central political problem was that of defending policy in such contexts, and that the political chronology of the period can be readily traced from crisis to crisis. A 'structure of politics' has indeed been advanced for this public opposition, one based on urban institutions, sociability and manifestations: clubs, petitions, newspapers, instructions and addresses. In addition, a corresponding ideology has been discerned, most prominently for the 1730s–1750s, one of 'closely intertwined . . . Patriotism, nationalism, and commercial expansion'.[18]

These factors were indeed of importance. To consider foreign policy without paying attention to the range, intensity and impact of public debate would be misguided, but this impact has been exaggerated, not least in terms of its role in defining a chronology of crisis and an agenda for study. Thus, the period 1738–63 apparently becomes a matter of the Jenkins'

[17] T. C. W. Blanning, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture. Old Regime Europe 1660–1789* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 103–82; H. Barker and S. Burrows (eds.), *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America 1760–1820* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 1, 17, 93–7.

[18] N. Rogers, *Whigs and Cities. Popular Politics in the Age of Walpole and Pitt* (Oxford, 1989), p. 397. See also J. Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III* (Cambridge, 1976), and K. Wilson, *The Sense of the People. Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715–1785* (Cambridge, 1995).

Ear agitation for war with Spain of 1738–9, the upsurge of opposition to Hanover in 1742–4, the Pittite onslaught on the Duke of Newcastle, the head of the ministry in 1754–6, and his policies, and the response, first, to Pitt's fall in 1761, and, then, to peace with France in 1762–3. Each of these was indeed important, but it is misleading only to study crises, or to suggest that such crises defined Parliament's relationship with foreign policy.

Parliament's role is mistaken if it is presented largely in terms of a forum for the advancement or rejection of public aspirations, a sphere in short for the conduct of public politics. This was clearly of consequence, but its role has been exaggerated, for, by focusing on the debate between government and opposition, and then largely in terms of this as an aspect of a wider struggle between antithetical values and 'consciousnesses', the importance of Parliament to discussion and contention within government has been underrated. Instead, it is clear that parliamentary attitudes, and the real and alleged problems of parliamentary management, played a major role in discussions over policy within the government. Ministerial cohesion and successful parliamentary management were linked, John, 2nd Earl of Stair reporting in January 1724:

> The session of Parliament we are told is to be a very short one and in appearance a very quiet one. His Majesty [George I] confides entirely in Mr. [Robert] Walpole for the management of his affairs. There is not the least struggle in that manner.[19]

Parliament and the executive were not separate. Aside from their close relationship, as working parts of the state, as well as the linkage arising from the presence of government figures, including diplomats, in both Houses of Parliament, both Parliament and the executive were affected by the arguments advanced in public debate. Indeed, part of the importance of Parliament rested in its role as the sounding-board for ideas, and as a setting in which they took on consistency and coherence, and became political ammunition. Newspapers and pamphlets in part fulfilled these functions, but they lacked the authority and validation provided by public exposition in Parliament by senior politicians. Politics involved far more than issues of policy but, in so far as these played a role, Parliament was the public forum in which these issues were given weight and clear partisan alignment.

Parliament was also therefore the forum in which tensions within particular traditions of approaching foreign policy were noted and shifts marked.

[19] Stair to 3rd Earl of Loudoun, 18 Jan. (os) 1724, HL. Loudoun papers 7664.

In 1723, Horatio Walpole, a prominent diplomat, Whig MP and brother to the leading minister, Robert Walpole, provided Philip, Duke of Orléans, the leading French minister, with an uncomplicated account of party alignments in Britain:

> I had an opportunity of touching upon the principles of the Whigs and Tories, that indeed the first had been during the last war [1702–13] against France as absolutely necessary for preserving the present establishment of their government, but that the peace at Utrecht [1713] and the treaties since made in consequence of it had made and must make upon that foot the Whigs for keeping well with France and particularly friends to his Royal Highness [Orléans] and the Tories must of consequence as far as they were Jacobites be against his interest.[20]

In practice, as numerous debates in Parliament were to show, the Whig response to the Anglo-French alignment of 1716–31 proved divided and contentious.

There is no doubt of the influence of Parliament as a whole in the conduct of foreign policy. Despite repeated claims that ministries were certain of parliamentary support, because of the widespread distribution of places and pensions, Parliament's independence should not be underestimated. More generally, parliamentary views on policy could be of considerable consequence. Nevertheless, a tendency in work from the 1970s to refocus the traditional view of the sovereignty of the King in Parliament, by stressing the independence of royal action in the field of diplomacy, means that it would be mistaken to claim that Britain followed a parliamentary foreign policy in the sense of one based simply on a consideration of what Parliament would accept.

The constitutional and political roles of Parliament in the conduct of foreign policy were still significant. Paradoxically, the principal constitutional necessity, that of voting the funds necessary for the military forces, British and foreign, that were expected to give substance to foreign policy, would have been emasculated had the 'Country' strategy, advocated with varying degrees of plausibility by Tories and opposition Whigs, of dispensing with a standing army and limiting treaty commitments, been carried out. The following of a contrary policy from 1714, albeit with significant variations, by successive Court Whig ministries, instead, ensured that Parliament had to be approached frequently with requests for financial assistance.

In response to these, and other, requests, parliamentarians were not simply manoeuvring to their own personal or factional advantage: they had

[20] Horatio Walpole to Duke of Newcastle, 20 Nov. 1723, BL. Add. 32686 fol. 408.

opinions on policy. These were not simply on party lines: for example, the recently published papers of William Hay reveal him as a committed ministerial Whig MP, who disapproved of the opposition Whig 'Patriots', but could also be critical of the government. He exercised independent judgement as an MP, and, to gain his support, the ministry had to rely on principle and policy, not bribery or intimidation.[21] The same was true of many other parliamentarians.

The role of initiating fiscal legislation was restricted to the Commons. In that constitutional or legal sense, the Commons possessed a formal authority in the field of foreign policy significantly greater than that of the Lords, although, in 1735, it was correctly pointed out in the Lords that the House had an important role that ensured that treaties entailing expense also had to be communicated to it:

> if it was necessary for his Majesty to lay this treaty before the other House, because it was to be attended with some expense, the very same reason made it necessary for his Majesty to order it to be laid before this House; for, although grants of money are first made by the other House, no such grant can be effectual, without the consent of this.[22]

Much of the parliamentary discussion of foreign policy took place during Commons' debates on fiscal measures designed to ensure an adequate military strength for the furtherance of this policy. Furthermore, the sensitivity of these measures led to attempts to manage news in order to help the government. John Boteler MP reported on the Commons' discussion in June 1721 of such a governmental request for money:

> Mr. [Robert] Walpole to sweeten this draught told us there was no ways and means wanting and . . . he also took this opportunity to tell the House that the peace with Spain was actually signed, that he had it this morning in his hands, and that he did not question but the preliminaries between the Swede and the Czar [Peter the Great] were also by this time agreed upon.[23]

Fortunately for the government, which was faced by the consequences of the bursting of the South Sea Bubble, international problems indeed eased greatly that year.

The role of Parliament was not restricted to its constitutional prerogatives. As with much in the British political system, the 'constitution', itself no immutable or clear entity, was related to a set of political practices and

[21] S. Taylor and C. Jones (eds.), *Tory and Whig: the Parliamentary Papers of Edward Harley, Third Earl of Oxford, and William Hay, MP for Seaford, 1716–1753* (Woodbridge, 1998).
[22] Cobbett, IX, 667–8.
[23] Boteler to Cowper, 17 June (os) 1721, Hertford, CRO. D/EP F53 fol. 46.

conventions that affected the parliamentary discussion of foreign policy; although the flexibility this offered was constrained by an emphasis on precedence:

> proceedings are regulated and governed by laws not written, as well as by . . . standing orders . . . The law and the practice of all courts are derived from the nature and objects of their institution – They exist in the received and acknowledged usage – In the opinion of grave and learned men . . . in the memory and experience of persons who have sat long in Parliament, and in the history of the debates of those who have gone before them.

This reassuring advice, offered in 1796 by the Commons' clerks when the Speaker, Henry Addington, sought advice on whether an MP could force a division,[24] did not do justice to the extent to which government interpretations could be challenged, and to which the challenges could affect policy.

For example, the view that parliamentary supervision entailed scrutiny led to repeated opposition calls for laying papers about negotiations before Parliament, which, although defeated, helped to encourage ministries to offer selected papers for consideration, although, in turn, that led to repeated debate over the range of papers that was provided.[25] The possibility of such scrutiny encouraged ministers and envoys to correspond privately, although this practice would have been important irrespective of the role of Parliament, for it provided a valuable means to expound opinion and to supplement official correspondence. Partly as a consequence of this private correspondence, much evidence that is relevant to the formulation of foreign policy and to the influence of Parliament cannot be found in the state papers.

Conversely, the role of Parliament was extended by other factors. The habit of speaking at length upon unrelated subjects ensured that, even when parliamentarians were asked to discuss only very limited subjects, they tended to consider the whole range of foreign policy, and ministerial speakers had to be prepared to respond to discussion and criticism accordingly. Alongside criticism, Parliament represented the best forum for the public presentation of government policy, a position that owed much to its national scope, which contrasted with the provincial origin and character of many comparable bodies on the Continent. The national scope of the Westminster Parliament was enhanced after the Act of Union with Scotland came into effect in 1707. Parliament thus represented the power

[24] John Ley to Addington, 1 Mar., John Hatsell to Addington, 1 Mar. 1796, 152M/C 1796/OZ 16, 10.
[25] P. D. G. Thomas, *The House of Commons in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 24–5, 38–9.

of a new state.[26] This was an age when European states, whether 'absolutist' or in possession of important agencies of representative government, were increasingly concerned to achieve a good public defence of policy, not least in the field of foreign policy.

Both Houses of Parliament participated in the wider political role of presenting government views on foreign policy. As it was a role that lacked a formal constitutional place or a specific institutional expression, there is, and was, a considerable subjective element involved in the judgement of Parliament's general (and indeed frequently specific) impact. Nevertheless, Parliament was crucial to the process by which support was elicited and demonstrated, and foreign policy was a key area in which this support was both sought and contested.

[26] J. Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688–1783* (1989), e.g., pp. 246–7; D. Hayton, 'Contested Kingdoms, 1688–1756', in P. Langford (ed.), *The Eighteenth Century 1688–1815* (Oxford, 2002), p. 67.