Political faction and the formulation of foreign policy: Britain, 1806-7

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Abstract

In 1801, William Pitt the Younger, resigned as prime minister after seventeen years in office, to be replaced by Henry Addington, whose most notable act in office was to conclude peace with France.

Pitt's resignation and the Peace of Amiens destroyed the huge majority that had characterised Pittite government, as four major political factions developed where there had previously only been the rump of an opposition. Pitt's cousin, Lord Grenville, angered at the terms of the peace, strongly opposed Addington, and eventually concerted with Charles Fox in an anti-Addingtonian 'junction'.

Following Pitt's death in January 1806, Grenville was invited by the king to form a ministry, and in forming the Ministry of All the Talents, he combined his own supporters with those of Fox and Addington, to form a broad-based administration.

Central to the problems facing the Talents was that of foreign policy, an issue on which the component factions had hitherto disagreed violently. Fox, now Foreign Secretary, made a concerted effort to conclude peace with France, and a British representative was present in Paris for this purpose from June to October 1806. These negotiations failed for reasons outside of the government's control, but serious divisions were later to emerge over policy towards the Continent, where war was resumed in October 1806. Two conflicting strategies of colonial conquest and Continental engagement were put forward by their protagonists, resulting in deadlock and disharmony.

This thesis will argue that despite the incongruous mixture of men who made up the Ministry of All the Talents, factional divisions were not primarily responsible for the lack of a vigorous and aggressive foreign policy. Instead, the pre-1806 stances of the Foxites and Grenvillites were forced to be remoulded by the changing European situation, and their eventual policy was not based on ideological considerations, but rather an uncertain and confused reaction to events that they could only dimly comprehend.

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Britain, 1806-7

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Abbreviations

BL. Add. MSS	British Library, Additional Manuscripts Division.
Cobbett	William Cobbett (ed.) *The Parliamentary History of England from the Norman Conquest to 1803* (London, 1806-20).
Fox Correspondence	Lord John Russell (ed.), *Memorials and Correspondence of Charles James Fox*, (London, 1853)
Grey MSS	Papers of the 2nd Earl Grey preserved at Durham University Library.
Hansard	T.C. Hansard (ed.), *The Parliamentary Debates From the Year 1803 to the Present Time*. First Series. (London, 1812)
HMC Dropmore	*Historical Manuscripts Commission Report on the Manuscripts of J.B. Fortescue, preserved at Dropmore.* (London, 1892-1927)
PRO. FO.	Public Record Office, Foreign Office papers.

I

INTRODUCTION

The political history of George III's reign is dominated by the debate on the emergence of organised and coherent parliamentary parties, frequently simplified as the transition from the Whigs and Tories of the mid eighteenth-century, to the Liberals and Conservatives of post-Georgian politics. The fifty years between 1780 and 1830 were notable for the long periods of comparatively stable government, such as Pitt the Younger's ministry of 1784-1801, and Lord Liverpool's administration of 1812-27. In contrast, these periods of stability were separated by eleven years of confusion, with five governments rising and falling in quick succession.

The years from 1801 to 1812 are perhaps unattractive to historians, who prefer the ordered change offered by a lengthy administration, to the chaos of coalition and frequent change of personnel, that characterises the first decade of the nineteenth century. Yet for the study of the development of the party system, these years can act as a crucial microscope by which historians can examine the leading personalities of the age in both government and opposition. The principals of the different parliamentary factions, who, after 1815 were to be instrumental in consolidating the two-party system of Victorian Britain, provide at times a kaleidoscope of political opinion, clashing violently on some occasions, coalescing uneasily at others.

The importance of these years as a period of political development, is all the more significant, when the high concentration of able and ambitious politicians who dominated debate, and by their personalities were responsible for the perpetuation the system of faction, are considered. The leading figures of the late eighteenth-century–William Pitt, Charles James Fox and William Grenville, patronised the statesmen of the early Victorian era. George Canning, Charles Grey, Viscount Melbourne and Viscount Palmerston, all received their political tuition in these years, each in turn nurturing their own group of disciples. The friendships and animosities generated in this period continued to reverberate into the age of Peel. Others, such as Richard Brinsley Sheridan and Samuel Whitbread, maintained a degree of fluidity in politics, by their determined independence from the parliamentary principals.

Unsurprisingly, given the highly divided nature of British politics, examples of consensus are rare. The two largest groups in parliament–the Pittites and the Foxites–disagreed on most of the major issues of the day, and on those few issues upon which the leadership of both party agreed, for

instance Catholic emancipation, their own parties suffered deep divisions. The greatest source of division was undoubtedly that of foreign policy, for the experiences of the French Revolution, and the subsequent wars against France, failed to unite the political nation behind Pitt's policy of relentless war; strong and diverse opinions on the aims and conduct of the wars, combined to produce confusion and discord, splitting the political groupings into even smaller entities.

With the exception of the eighteen months of uneasy truce produced by the Peace of Amiens, Britain was in a state of permanent war with Revolutionary and Napoleonic France from 1793 until 1814. The events in France from 1789 onwards had a profound impact on British politics that could not have been foreseen in the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Bastille. Differing attitudes towards the French Revolution destroyed the already divided Whig party, with the Duke of Portland, the nominal leader, defecting to the government and contributing to the Pittite ascendancy. The question of whether to treat with Napoleon, and what for what price peace should be purchased, was to dominate political debate in the years after war was declared, with the Pittites themselves, at times, coming close to dissolution. For this reason, the formulation of foreign policy provides an excellent model on which to dissect the working of faction at the advent of the nineteenth century.

For the purposes of studying the influence of factions on the formulation of foreign policy, no government seems a more appropriate model than the ill-fated and ironically-named 'Ministry of All the Talents' which presided over the administration of Britain from February 1806 until March 1807. Despite its short duration, the very formation of the ministry was a remarkable feat of political engineering. It was the only administration prior to 1817 to incorporate three of the four main factions, and was the closest that Britain came to a 'broad bottomed' coalition or 'national' government in this period.

In its composition, the Talents rivalled the Fox-North coalition of 1783, for the diversity and apparent incompatibility of its members, based as it was, on the duumvirate of Grenville, the belligerent Foreign Secretary of the 1790s, and Fox, the most inveterate opponent of the war. Viscount Sidmouth, the architect of the Peace of Amiens, sat in the same cabinet as William Windham, whose opposition to the former's administration had assumed a vitriolic and personal slant. Containing as they did, some of the greatest orators in parliament, and enjoying a parliamentary majority of considerable proportions,[1]

[1] After the general election of November 1806, Grenville thought he had in parliament 'from 430 to 500 friends, from 120 to 130 to the contrary' *HMC Dropmore*, VIII, 456.

the Talents exemplified Nebuchadnezzar's statue, with a head of gold, a chest of silver, yet feet of iron and clay.

The diplomatic and strategic preoccupations of the Talents can be seen in three principal areas: Fox's persistent, but ultimately unsuccessful attempts to conclude peace with France; Britain's relations with the Continent– especially the courts of Berlin and St. Petersburg; and the strategy, resulting partly from the failure of the above options, of pursuing colonial acquisitions in South America. The three problems were to mingle and merge with each other, as threads became tangled, and unpredictable events on the Continent required policies to be reappraised. For reasons that will be shown, Fox's peace negotiations, at one time the most divisive of policies, proved the least contentious of the Talents' initiatives, the Cabinet proving to be largely supportive of his efforts. Greater tensions were manifested over the direction and strategy of the war once these negotiations broke down, with conflict arising between the 'Europeans' and the 'South Americans'; between those who felt that Napoleon could only be forced to treat for an honourable peace through direct confrontation in Europe, and those who argued for a 'blue water' strategy, pitching Britain's maritime strength against the France's military power.

These differences reveal not only the divergent attitudes held by the factions toward foreign policy, but also the economic and ideological assumptions that underlay such opinions. After 1805 Britain became increasingly engaged in a commercial war as crucial markets began to be lost in both Europe and North America; Napoleon's Berlin Decree of 21 November 1806, marking the foundation of the Continental System, heightened the economic aspects of the struggle. Pitt's desperate attempt to break Napoleon's power with the Third Coalition, cost the British Treasury dear, and the reluctance of the Talents to pursue a similar policy must be considered in this context.

In the same manner, the different perceptions of Napoleon as despot and liberator, and the Revolution as a new age of liberty, or the dawn of a more uncertain and threatening era, contributed to the commitment with which ministers pursued the struggle. Those such as Windham, who saw the struggle of the 1790s in starkly ideological terms, were far less sanguine about the prospects of peace than were the Foxites, to whom the continuance of conflict was the fault of Pitt and the despotic Continental monarchies.

Therefore, attitudes toward foreign policy, were rarely as two-dimensional as simple opposition to the Crown, or support of Catholic relief,

rather, by combining, and frequently developing, these issues, assumptions of foreign policy could represent a greater world-view, incorporating, as they did, the quintessence of political philosophy. The arguments revolving around Britain's 'natural' interests, and her role in the European states system, that came to the fore in the post-Pitt years, were to dominate British diplomatic thinking for the next two decades.

Therefore, a study of the Talents' foreign policy must go beyond the simple mechanics of diplomacy, which by themselves are little more than a register of uncertain strategies and reactions, and characterised so much of British foreign policy prior to 1812. The interaction of the parliamentary factions in directing or censuring the Talents' foreign policy can reveal much about the priorities of the men who governed Britain during the tortuous struggle of Europe's first modern war.

II

THE FRACTURING OF POLITICS, 1801-6

In 1803, reviewing the political and international events of the previous three years, *The Times* commented, 'at the Peace of Amiens, indeed, the great mass of party was dissolved into a kind of neutral character...Whilst it still further wrought upon and softened down the old opposition, appeared to raise up new opponents to Government.'[1] This analysis is fundamentally correct, for whilst the existence of a 'great mass of party' prior to 1801 continues to be debated, it is clear that the resignation of William Pitt over Catholic Emancipation, and the conclusion of the Peace of Amiens had a profound impact on British politics, leading to the development of at least two new factions, and strengthening those already in existence. It was against this background of factionism that Lord Grenville attempted to fashion a coalition in 1806.

The contentious arguments surrounding the delineation and terminology of party in the early nineteenth-century make it imperative for any political study to begin by defining and justifying its nomenclature. It is clear that the early eighteenth-century or mid nineteenth-century classification of 'Tory' and 'Whig' is anachronistic and misleading for this period. If there were two discernible groups in parliament prior to 1830, it is more accurate to define them as Government and Opposition. Confusion has arisen because the 'Tories' appear to have been perpetually in government, whilst the 'Whigs' remained rooted in opposition.

Yet, by examining political correspondence and journals of the time, one finds this terminology used infrequently, and even then more often employed in describing past politics. Thus, *The Times*, in commenting on Foxite opposition, declared that they 'have latterly stood forward upon principles truly British, and of which the *Old Whigs*, to whom Mr. Burke, once so forcibly appealed, would not be ashamed.'[2] The Whigs in this sense were clearly the opposition of the 1780s, not that of the 1800s. The term 'Tory' appears to be entirely redundant, making virtually no appearance in reference to contemporary politics, except in a pejorative and rhetorical sense.[3]

Instead, it is far more practical to describe each grouping in terms of its nominal leader; the four main factions in 1806 being thus Foxites, Pittites,

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[1] *The Times*, 21 November 1803.
[2] *The Times*, 13 August 1803.
[3] For the redundance and resurgence of the term 'Tory', see J.J. Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative*, (Cambridge, 1993).

Grenvillites, and Addingtonians. In the period 1801-6 contemporaries were forced to adapt their political terminology to reflect the changes in the composition of the Opposition. In order to distinguish between the Foxites and the Grenvillites, they tended to use the terms Old and New Opposition, thus employing neutral categorisation which eschewed misleading assumptions about political ideology.[4]

As has been emphasised by recent historians, practically all politicians in the early nineteenth-century were 'whigs', committed to the Revolution settlement of 1689 and the independence of Parliament.[5] The divisive issues of the day–Catholic Emancipation, foreign policy, the power of the Crown etc–tended to cut across established political boundaries, breaking down and raising up new alignments. To contemporaries, the number of 'parties' in parliament was not at all clear. Sheridan spoke of 'twelve or thirteen parties' in 1802, and Peter Jupp has argued for the existence of six distinctive groups.[6]

Prior to 1801 the Foxite group in Parliament was definitely discernible, and so far as they had governed Britain for seventeen years, so were the Pittites. The refusal of Grenville to follow Pitt's policy of conciliation when out of office created a new grouping, although his separation with Pitt was not confirmed until the latter's return to office in 1804. The fourth faction to emerge, that of the Addingtonians, grew out of Addington's administration of 1801-4, and their experience of coalition in succeeding years. The grouping was nebulous, but recognised by contemporaries, and their importance can be seen by their participation in four out of the six administrations between 1801-15[7]. As well as these four established groups, there existed a cluster of politicians who were regarded as the Prince of Wales' party (fuelling the latter's belief that he was an opposition leader), and, whilst frequently considered as Foxites or Whigs by historians, should more correctly be seen as an independent anti-Pittite group. The political history of the years 1801-6 is essentially that of the development of these factions, in particular the 'junction' between the Grenvillites and the Foxites which was to form the cornerstone of the Ministry of All the Talents, and the parliamentary opposition prior to 1817.

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[4] Another variant, employed by V.R. Ham in *Strategies of Coalition and Isolation: British War Policy and North-West Europe, 1803-10.* (Unpublished Oxford D.Phil, 1977). is that of New and Old Whigs. This approach suggests that the Grenvillites underwent some form of political conversion between 1801-6, and is therefore unsatisfactory for political analysis.

[5] See, for instance, I.R. Christie, *Wars and Revolutions*, (London, 1982), and J.W. Derry, *Politics in the Age of Fox, Pitt and Liverpool*, (London, 1990)

[6] *Cobbett* XXXVI, 817; Peter Jupp, *Lord Grenville*, (Oxford, 1985) p.291. Jupp includes among his six groupings the Canningites, and the Prince of Wales' party.

[7] Hence Canning's jibe that Addington was like the measles–everyone had to have him once. Lady Bessborough to Leveson Gower, 24 February 1806. Castalia, Countess Granville (ed.) *Lord Granville Leveson Gower, Private Correspondence, 1781-1821*, (London, 1916) II, 180.

The Pittites, or 'friends of Mr. Pitt' as they were more commonly termed, could only be said to have existed as a cohesive group prior to 1801 in the sense that they were the governing 'party' and remained loyal to William Pitt, who led them for seventeen years. Pitt's resignation in March 1801 gave more definition to the group, especially when it became clear that the Grenvilles and William Windham had adopted a markedly different position from Pitt over the issue of opposition and the peace.

The Pittites included some of the most noted politicians of the age, and for this reason were a powerful consideration even when out of office in 1801-4 and 1806-7. Seventeen years of government had allowed Pitt to build up a comprehensive system of patronage, and he successfully groomed his protégés –most notably George Canning and Viscount Castlereagh–for high office. These men, as well as Lord Hawkesbury and Spencer Perceval, had known only Pittite government, and were well able to take up Pitt's mantle after his death.

As has already been suggested, to call Pitt and his followers 'Tories', would be a serious misnomer. For whilst Pitt's political philosophy was later to percolate *via* Canning into Peelite conservatism, he by no means considered himself to be a 'Tory' in the eighteenth-century sense. He believed in the liberation of trade, controversially signing a commercial agreement with France in 1786, and had expressed support for limited parliamentary reform and redistribution. Foxite allegations that he was nothing but a creature of the Crown, stemming from the bitterness of 1783-4, were only partially true, for whilst Pitt strongly believed in the established power of the monarchy, he did not hold that this power should remain unchecked. His stance over Catholic Emancipation in 1801 reflected both his deference and resistance to the Crown. Apologists for Pitt's secret pledge to the king never to raise the question again argue, perhaps correctly, that Pitt could not have envisaged the ailing King surviving for a further nineteen years.

The cohesion of the Pittites was put to test in the years after 1801 when Pitt steadfastly refused to join his cousin Grenville in opposition. Like their Foxite rivals, the Pittites were divided between the old patricians who could remember Chatham and Rockingham, and the new politicians such as Canning who were to be at the vanguard of nineteenth-century Conservatism. The issue of opposition was one which clearly separated these two elements.

Pitt distrusted 'systematic' opposition, believing that it was the duty of Parliament to support the King's government in all but the most extreme circumstances. He had helped to establish Addington's administration and had

pledged to support it (although, for that matter, so had Grenville). Likewise he had advised Addington in the negotiations with France and the subsequent peace, even though he had some reservations as to its wisdom and endurance. Lord Hawkesbury, the Foreign Secretary in the new ministry came from a Pittite tradition, and was to have the Home Office in Pitt's second administration; Castlereagh was later to join Addington's government with Pitt's blessing and Canning's contempt.

Pitt's reasons for this acquiescence were laid out in a letter to Grenville in February 1804, when the latter informed him of the Grenvillites new connection with the Foxite opposition.

> ...the more I reflect on the subject, the more I regret that the view you form of what is incumbent upon you, leads you to embark in a system in which I find it quite impossible to concur, and which, I fear, will not be productive of any increased credit to yourselves, or any advantage to the public. The immediate effect of an active opposition will be to harass a Government confessedly not very strong nor vigorous in itself, and in a situation of the country the most critical, with the constant distraction of Parliamentary warfare.[8]

Not all Pittites, however, were supportive of their leader's stand in this respect. Canning, in particular, represented the attitudes of the younger Pittites in his frustration at Pitt's inactivity, and worked alongside Grenville in trying to recruit him to the opposition cause. On 3 June 1803 he voted against Pitt for the first time in his career, although this separation proved only temporary–his deep attachment to both Pitt and his principles proving unshakeable.[9]

Canning, as Pitt's most ardent disciple, and arguably his most talented, was well aware of the dangers facing the Pittites out of power, and fully supported the organisation of 'a party of P's friends out of Office' which would give them a greater identity, and prevent them being subsumed into the ranks of the mediocre ministerialists. In 1805 he was to blame Pitt's reliance on Sidmouth as the consequence of failing to regroup and reorganise after 1801.[10]

Yet it was not only the younger generation of Pittites who were uneasy with Pitt's support of Addington and the peace. The veteran diplomat Lord Mulgrave lamented to Grenville Pitt's decision to uphold Addington's administration, which, he argued, could not survive without his support. Whilst opposing outright censure or opposition (he considered Fox to be

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[8] Pitt to Grenville, 4 February 1804, *HMC Dropmore,* VII, 213.

[9] Wendy Hinde, *George Canning*, (London, 1973), p.118. Canning was said to have held 'Pitt (as the Roman Catholics do the Pope) infallible,' Lady Bessborough to Leveson Gower, 1 January 1805, *Leveson Gower Correspondence*, II, 2.

[10] Canning to Leveson Gower, 25 February 1805, *ibid.*, II, 29.

representative of 'Jacobin factions'), he clearly hoped for a Pitt-Grenville reunion which could replace the ailing government.[11]

Thus the Pittites in opposition in 1801-4, and even more so in 1806-7, were divided between a reluctance to enter into outright opposition to the king's chosen government, yet a desire to defend Pitt's legacy and principles. Their uneasy role in opposition was exacerbated by the obvious jealousies and rivalries inherent in their ranks. Canning's brilliance was not yet appreciated by his colleagues who found him untrustworthy and deceitful. Indeed, Canning almost forced an irreconcilable breach in the Pittites in 1805 by his attack on Addington's foreign policy, thus condemning his Cabinet colleague, Lord Hawkesbury–Addington's Foreign Secretary. The desire to place the uncharismatic Duke of Portland at their head after Pitt's death had much to with the refusal of Hawkesbury, Castlereagh and Canning to serve under their closest rivals.[12] Only the protection of their late leader's memory and the desire to oust the Foxites from power maintained a semblance of unity among the Pittites in their brief experience of opposition.

After 1806, the Pittites, whilst divided, remained numerically strong in the Commons, Canning estimating their strength at between 160 and 223.[13] Their reluctance to oppose the Talents led Grenville to make numerous overtures to Canning (whom he rightly saw as the most ambitious of the Pittites, whilst underestimating his genuine attachment to Pitt's ideals) in the months after Fox's death. Whilst never participating in the Talents–whose name was certainly rendered useless by their absence–the Pittite opposition could never be absent from the considerations of the ministry, for as their attacks on Windham's army reforms were to show, the oratorical power and influence of Canning and Castlereagh was disproportionate to their numerical strength.

Whereas the Pittites were a recognisable group before and after Pitt's death, the small cluster of politicians who surrounded Henry Addington (Viscount Sidmouth after January 1805) remained a shadowy group whose significance became more obvious when they were out of power. Addington himself is a historical paradox. Almost unanimously vilified by contemporaries as stupid, weak and indecisive, he has in recent years been

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[11] Mulgrave to Grenville, 18 October 1801, *HMC Dropmore*, VII, 61-3.
[12] L.V. Harcourt (ed.), *The Diaries and Correspondence of George Rose*, (London, 1860) II, 258.
[13] Julian McQuiston, 'Rose and Canning in Opposition, 1806-7' *The Historical Journal*, XIV p.508

subject to justified revisionism by historians who point out his common sense and pragmatism.[14]

Unlike Pitt and Fox, Addington had no desire to be a parliamentary leader, and his rise to political consequence was more a case of misfortune than design. Propelled from the Speaker's Chair into the premiership by Pitt's resignation in 1801, and then forced to break with his former patron in 1805 as a result of Pitt's duplicity, Addington found himself at the head of a faction which, according to Fox, numbered approximately sixty members in the Commons.[15] In terms of personalities, these men were of little consequence, Lord Ellenborough (the Chief Justice) in the Lords, Charles Bragge and Nicholas Vansittart in the Commons being the most prominent, but the remainder consisted of contacts picked up by Addington at Winchester and Oxford, or parasites who had clung to him during his ministry. Yet Addington's importance as a coalition partner lay not in the size or rhetorical gifts of his supporters, but in the unique confidence he inspired among the politically neutral country gentlemen who comprised most of the lower House, and in his close personal relations with the king. Fox was quick to recognise that, although he had abused Sidmouth as Prime Minister, as a coalition partner he had considerable value:

> If the Doctor will fall in with these views, I am sure I have no objection to coalescing with him; on the contrary I should like whatever would tend most to show that the contest was between Pitt on one side, and *all* the men of influence on the other. I mention *influence*, because I think that is the only circumstance in which the Doctor is considerable...[16]

Equally useful, although frequently ignored by historians, was Addington's close relations with the press. During his ministry *The Times* was reduced to little more than a government organ, with Hiley Addington publishing frequent and vitriolic attacks on the Grenvilles as leading articles or under assumed names. Although certainly the least brilliant of the leading figures of his time, more than the others Addington had the intangible qualities of honesty and affability which gained him important allies alienated by the snobbery of the Grenvilles or the cruel wit of Canning.

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[14] See, for instance, Philip Ziegler, *Addington* (London, 1965), and Charles Fedorak, *The Addington Ministry and the Interaction of Foreign Policy and Domestic Politics* (Unpublished London Ph.D. 1990).

[15] Fox to Lauderdale, 12 July 1805, *Fox Correspondence*, IV, 98.

[16] Fox to O'Brien, 7 July 1805, *Fox Correspondence*, IV, 89. Wrongly cited by Ziegler as Fox to Grey, 12 July 1805. Addington's unfortunate sobriquet of 'the Doctor' arose from his father's position as chief physician to Lord Chatham.

Therefore, Addington's decision to join Grenville's administration in February 1806 was not as laughable as some of the Pittites believed. As a politician of influence, Addington could have been expected to be invited into a coalition government, and his relations with the king and parliament made him in many ways a greater asset than his opponents. Moreover, he came at a comparatively cheap price, demanding only one Cabinet seat besides his own. In an increasingly crowded government this consideration was not unimportant. The political observer, Dr. John Allen, commented that the Addingtonians, 'formed a more compact & better united body, and in their ranks there were several useful men of business who could be employed with advantage in inferior situations.'[17] Yet crucially for the future of the Administration and the prospects of successful reform, Addington considered his role in the Talents as that of the guardian of conservative and Anglican interests, an uneasy helmsman on an ostensibly whiggish ship.[18]

Of all the political groupings in the 1800s, only the Foxites could claim to have been a consistently coherent 'party' throughout the previous twenty years, and partly for this reason have been the subject of intense study.[19] The wit and scandal characterising the society of Devonshire and Holland House, of which the apotheosis was the brilliantly flawed Charles James Fox, created an alluring and enduring myth of Whig politics which was faithfully carried forward by his disciples in the nineteenth-century.

Whilst the experience of seemingly perpetual opposition had created among the Foxites a common bond stronger than that of the Pittites, in reality they suffered their own severe divisions, exacerbated by private jealousies which frequently erupted into public debate.

The Foxites of the 1800s were but a shadow of the opposition of 1784, and the accumulated legacy of twenty years of frustration and disappointment hung heavily on their leader. The impeachment of Warren Hastings, the Regency crisis of 1788, and finally, the havoc wrought on the party by the French Revolution, each served to reduce the numbers and morale of opposition. The nadir was reached in 1794-7 when the nominal leader of the party, the Duke of Portland, defected to the government, taking with him many of Fox's closest allies and leaving the Foxites so depleted that Fox and Grey made the futile gesture of seceding from the House. In the trough of pessimism

[17] The Allen Journal, BL. Add. MSS. 52204A f.5.
[18] Ziegler, *Addington.* p.254-5
[19] For studies of the Whigs prior to 1800 see in particular, Frank O'Gorman, *The Whig Party and the French Revolution* (London, 1967), L.G. Mitchell *Charles James Fox and the Disintegration of the Whig Party, 1782-94* (Oxford 1971), and J.W. Derry, *Charles James Fox,* (London, 1972).

to which he descended, Fox lamented to Grey that, 'all opposition seems to be out of the question, perhaps for ever; and we may boast, I expect, that we were the last of the Romans.'[20]

Yet even as Fox bemoaned the death of opposition, there were indications that important corners had been turned, and that the years of Pittite hegemony had come to an end. Although initially believing that Addington was nothing more than a brief interruption in Pitt's premiership, Fox soon came to realise that the resignation of Pitt and the controversy surrounding the French peace would bring considerable change, declaring to Holland that, 'I have a kind of second sight of very unexpected jumbles of parties here; and I will not say a probability, but a possibility of junctions of a very important nature.'[21]

Before such junctions could take place, however, Fox had to resurrect the will of his own party. In particular he needed to revive the political interest of his chief lieutenant, Charles Grey. Grey was clearly the heir apparent to Fox and had a important fixity in his opinions which contrasted with the latter's willingness to be led by his friends. Whilst Grey refused to emerge from his northern exile in Howick, Foxite opposition remained effectively hamstrung, and the correspondence between the two men throughout 1803-4 reflects the former's frustration, particularly at Mary Grey's permanent state of pregnancy by which her husband excused himself from attending Parliament. Relations between Fox and Grey, whilst never strained, were tested by both the latter's reluctance to resume active opposition, and his growing reservations regarding Fox's support of Addington and the peace.[22] Grey's eventual return to Westminster in the Spring of 1804 was greeted with evident relief by Fox.[23]

Of much greater concern to Fox was the actions of the Prince of Wales, the self-proclaimed *eminence grise* of opposition, and the intentions of his Foxite supporters. The 'Carlton House Whigs', as they are frequently termed, demonstrate how difficult it is to speak of Georgian politics in terms of fixed entities. The Prince gathered around him a small group of Foxite politicians–most notably Sheridan and Tierney–who, whilst clearly aligned with the opposition, entered into a series of negotiations between 1801-5 which gravely endangered the fragile façade of Foxite unity.[24]

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[20] Fox to Grey, May 1802, *Fox Correspondence*, III, 368

[21] Fox to Holland, 23 March 1803, *Fox Cottespondence,* III, 217

[22] 'The only reason that can influence you must be that in supporting him, you are supporting the cause of Peace. But this does not appear so dear to me now.' Grey to Fox, 15 March 1803, Grey MSS 16 f.40.

[23] Grey to Fox, 13 January 1804, Grey MSS 16 f.99; Fox to Grey, 10 July 1804, Grey MSS 16 f.101.

[24] To speak of numbers is difficult, but the assertion of the *Moniteur*, 13 January 1803 (printed in *The Times*, 20 January 1803) that the Prince influenced as many as eighty MPs is wholly unsubstantiated.

Through the mediation of Lord Moira, the Prince's personal representative in Parliament, communication between Grey and Addington was begun in late 1801, although Grey's demands amounted to nothing less than Addington's acceptance of a Foxite government either in personnel or in policy.[25] Only Tierney joined the administration. A greater threat came from Pitt's courtship of the Prince in 1804 by hinting at a military command and a favourable attitude in the bitter dispute between the Prince and his estranged wife. Indeed, the Prince claimed that he had secured six cabinet places for his followers.[26] Yet despite Tierney's support, Pitt's reliance on the favour of the King, who had no intention of allowing his son to become involved in government, prevented the negotiations from succeeding.[27]

Despite the deceitfulness of the Prince, and the suspicion with which Sheridan and Tierney were regarded by Foxite loyalists such as Grey, Carlton House provided a useful conduit through which negotiations with other opposition groups could be conducted without commitment, and the mediation of the Prince was useful in bringing about the 'important junction' that Fox foresaw, when, in July 1803 he suggested that the Foxites combine with the other major opposition grouping, the Grenvillites.[28]

William Wyndham Grenville (created Lord Grenville in 1791) stands out as one of the most enigmatic figures in the age of Fox and Pitt, not least because he was able to develop a strong and cordial relationship with both these contrasting men. As Foreign Secretary from 1791 until 1801 he had, along with Dundas and Pitt, been a member of the triumvirate which governed Britain during the Revolutionary wars, and in 1806 was, by a long way, the politician with the greatest experience of government. His aristocratic haughtiness and seemingly impenetrable reserve gave the impression of an Ozymandias-figure, with 'wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command', yet he came to power, as he had come to opposition: reluctantly, and never felt believed himself to possess the skills necessary for the position allotted him. Much misunderstood and maligned by his opponents, he felt uncomfortable as a leading political figure, yet equally could not bear, nor afford, to be sidelined

[25] T. Grenville to Buckingham, 16 December 1801, 30 January 1802, The Duke of Buckingham and Chandos (ed.), *Memoirs of the Court and Cabinets of George III*, (London, 1855) III,181; 189.
[26] Grey to Fox, 27 September 1804, Grey MSS 16 f.92.
[27] T. Grenville to Buckingham, 13 November 1804, 12 December 1804, 22 December 1804, *Court and Cabinets*, III, 373-5, 386-7, 394-5.
[28] Fox to Grey, July 1803, *Fox Correspondence* III, 417.

in the political arena. His brief tenure of the premiership proved him, however, to be an honourable, if less than brilliant, statesman.[29]

In 1803, Grey, less than enthusiastic about Fox's new liaison, stressed to his leader that, 'the measures of Govt have given very general disgust, & their characters are despised. But then on the other hand the Grenvilles, & Windham still more, are very unpopular. While Pitt keeps away, their numbers will be small, & the general dislike to them will have its full weight.'[30] He did not overstate the case, for the Grenvillite faction drew upon itself opprobrium disproportionate to its comparatively small numbers.[31]

The reasons for this dislike of the Grenvilles is not difficult to locate. In the first place, Grenville's decision to oppose Addington, whom in 1801 he had explicitly promised to support, had attracted much criticism at a time when opposition was frowned upon and honour held most dear. Although Grenville and Windham had gone into opposition out of an uncompromising refusal to support the peace, it is unsurprising that this was interpreted as a manoeuvre to regain office. Grenville's actions contrasted unfavourably with the more astute Pitt, who held aloof from all opposition until Addington was ready to fall, and was thus deemed to have preserved his integrity.[32]

Yet arguably a more important factor in the unpopularity of the Grenvillites was the manner in which their faction was comprised, for even more so than the Foxites, they were fundamentally an aristocratic grouping with little interest in popularising their cause and expressing a barely concealed contempt for the middle class politics of Whitbread and Tierney. At the centre of the group, holding court in his extravagant mansion at Stowe was Grenville's elder brother, the Marquis of Buckingham, whose avarice and unrelenting demand for a dukedom made him one of the most detested men of his age. Out of Stowe stretched a complex web of family connections and patronage which gave the Grenvilles influence beyond their comparatively small numbers in the Commons. Cobbett, who had himself benefited from Grenvillite patronage, spoke of, 'the haughty and arrogant family who are now famishing to swallow up the state.'[33]

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[29] Jupp, *Lord Grenville,* comprehensively discusses the intricacies of Grenville's character.

[30] Grey to Fox, 3 December 1803, Grey MSS 16 f.59

[31] Fox estimated that the Grenvillites comprised of 36 MPs in the Commons (Fox to Holland, 6 June 1803, *Fox Correspondence,* III, 222-4), J.J. Sack in his study, *The Grenvillites, 1801-29* (Chicago 1979) p.81, estimates that they comprised ten per cent of the total opposition to Addington. Their influence in the Lords was a good deal greater.

[32] The Government press was swift to seize on this divergence between the two cousins. See, for instance, *The Times,* 7 February 1803.

[33] Cobbett to Windham, 9 March 1806, Lord Rosebery (ed.) *The Windham Papers*, (London, 1913) II, 299. George III, whose dislike of Buckingham was profound, called the Grenvilles 'the Brotherhood,' adding, 'they must always either govern despotically, or oppose Government

The very strength of the Grenvilles rested on their independence from royal patronage or popular rhetoric, and this supported Buckingham's own assumption of his family's natural right to govern. The aristocratic league of Devonshire, Bedford and Buckingham was an immensely powerful force, and despite Grenville's own reservations, once Pitt had left the political stage, few questioned who was to be his natural heir.[34]

In January 1804 Fox wrote enthusiastically to Grey that:

> I have had a direct communication (wholly unsought by me) from that part of the opposition which sits at the bar end of the House, to the following effect. That it is their wish to join with us in a systematic opposition, for the purpose of removing the Ministry, and substituting one on the broadest possible basis...I own I lean very much to such a junction.[35]

Although, as noted above, the Prince of Wales played a role in this proposal, it appears that the key instigators were Thomas Grenville, brother of William, and Lord Fitzwilliam, a leading opposition peer. Both had been members of Fox's circle prior to Portland's defection, and the former in particular was eager for a reconciliation. Fitzwilliam shared many of the Grenvillites' principles, especially opposition to the peace and suspicion of the radical elements in the Foxite ranks.

Fox, whilst recognising that the Grenvilles were not perfect ideological bedfellows, was pragmatic enough to realise that successful opposition could not be carried out by one faction alone, and that the inertia of the system would always favour the King's men unless a concerted union could be formed. In a pessimistic vein, he declared, 'without Coalitions *nothing* can be done against the Crown; with them, God knows how little!'[36]

He summed up his ambivalent attitude towards union in a letter to Grey in March 1803:

> I have no liking for the Grenvilles or the Cannings: but both of them have, I believe, notions of acting in a party not dissimilar to my own... it might be a foundation for better things at some future period. Only consider what changes one event might produce; and in the jumbles that would ensue, how very advantageous to the public it would be that among the various

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violently.' Lord Malmesbury (ed.), *Diaries and Correspondence of the Earl of Malmesbury*, (London, 1844), IV, 317.

[34] Specific analysis of the Grenvillites can be found in Sack *The Grenvillites*, and A.D. Harvey, *The Grenville Party, 1801-26* (unpublished Oxford D.Phil, 1972). John Beckett's recent work, *The Rise and Fall of the Grenvilles* (Manchester, 1994) places the development of the family in its broader chronological and economic context.

[35] Fox to Grey, 29 January 1804, *Fox Correspondence*, III, 449-50.

[36] Fox to O'Brien, 7 August 1805, *Fox Correspondence*, IV, 102.

> knots and factions that would be formed, there should be at least one attached to principles of liberty.[37]

Thus to Fox, union with Grenvilles was not a sacrifice of principle or an expedient means of gaining power, but a way of preserving opposition. Whilst the Grenvilles opposed the Crown, they were to be at least tacitly supported. By attacking them, Fox argued, 'we are exactly doing the work of the Court: Are they not abusing the Grenvilles every day?' The tenacity of Grenville and Windham in suffering the slings and arrows of popular opinion impressed Fox, who felt that of all the groups which had appeared after 1801, it was the Stowe faction which had preserved 'something like a trifle of reputation.' Aware of the suspicion which his followers displayed whenever union was mention Fox was quick to declare that, 'I am very far from wishing to make coalition at this time, but neither would I throw unnecessary impediments in the way of any future one with any persons who are capable of acting in *real* opposition.'[38] Thus within two years of returning from secession, Fox was ready once more to pursue the crusade to which his political life had been devoted.

Not all among the Foxites shared their leader's enthusiasm for the junction. Most notably, Grey expressed serious reservations regarding the propriety of such an alliance. In March 1803 he agreed with Fox that there was 'vigour & abilities on the side of the Grenvilles' but as Fox's intention became clearer he began to be more doubtful: 'Our opinions correspond with theirs as to the incapacity of the present ministers, & the folly of their measures, but there I am afraid our agreement ceases'.[39]

Early in 1804 Fox pressed Grey to give his approbation to the junction, and this evidently caused some anxiety to the latter, torn between his deep loyalty to Fox and his still mildly radical principles. Echoing the taunts of the press, Grey expressed his opinion that the opposition of the Grenvilles, 'appeared to proceed rather from personal disappointment than public principle...it is not till they have failed first in their endeavours to set up Pitt as the only man who can govern the Country, & next to gain the Country & inflame it in support of a war which they helped to conduct, they have recourse to us.' These considerable reservations were even stronger in the mind of Lord Lauderdale who was dismayed at this apparent discarding of Foxite

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[37] Fox to Grey, 12 March 1803, *ibid.*, III, 397-9.
[38] Fox to O'Brien, 26 June 1803, *Fox Correspondence,* IV, 8-9.
[39] Grey to Fox, 15 March 1803, Grey MSS 16 f.40; Grey to Fox, 3 August 1803, Grey MSS 16 f.49.

principles.[40] Fox's defence, relying as it did more on historical precedent than on moral or political weight, could have done little to ease Lauderdale's fears.[41]

Likewise, on the Grenville side, there were those who were uneasy with the new political alignment. The Earl of Carlisle felt that any 'appearance of union beyond unavoidable coincidence of opinion in Parliament, ought in my judgment be avoided, lest in any other closer embrace we should make those tremble for our political virtue who now look kindly towards us.' The Earl of Minto had strong words with Windham on the matter, stressing, 'I should certainly have restricted it to something less objectionable than it now is.'[42]

Predictably the government press lost no opportunity in ridiculing such an unholy alliance which brought together Pitt's former captain with the Jacobin Fox. *The Times*, in an article written quite possibly by Hiley Addington drew comparisons with the latter's previous ill-fated coalition:

> The coalition between Mr. Fox and Lord North excited general odium and disgust; yet the opinions of Lord North were never of so high a Tory and prerogative stamp as those of Lord Grenville and his colleagues...In the present case not only the opinions, but the principles of the leaders, are diametrically opposite. Those of all the Grenvilles are almost in the highest strain of *Toryism*...What on the other hand, will every man of *Whig* principles, as far as Whiggism is more than a name, be disposed to think of the leaders of their party?[43]

Grenville and Fox were well aware of the unease their junction caused among their supporters and potential allies, and it was partly for this reason that until 1806 the union was nothing more than an informal agreement to co-operate in opposition, Fox admitting, 'I found some friends so prejudiced on the subject that it was agreed...that we should make no engagement of any sort, but simply co-operate upon such measures as we were agreed upon.'[44]

In practice this co-operation centred around the Catholic question and the issue of home defence. The divisions over foreign policy, which appeared to many to be insurmountable, were temporarily assuaged by a tacit agreement not to bring them to the fore in debates.[45]

Regarding Catholic emancipation, both Grenvillites and Foxites were united, albeit from slightly differing motives. The threat of revolution in Ireland had been increasing since the French began to export their principles of

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[40] Grey to Fox, 2 February 1804, Grey MSS 16 f.66.
[41] Fox to Lauderdale, 9 April 1804, *Fox Correspondence*, IV, 39-40.
[42] Carlisle to T. Grenville, 6 December 1804, BL. Add. MSS. 41854 f.111; Countess of Minto (ed.) *Life and Letters of Sir Gilbert Elliot, First Earl of Minto,* (London, 1874) III, 303-4.
[43] *The Times*, 5 March 1804. Note the careful and qualified use of 'Tory' and 'Whig'.
[44] Fox to Holland, 19 March 1804, *Fox Correspondence,* III, 242.
[45] The question of foreign policy will be analysed further in Chapter III.

universal brotherhood beyond their own borders. The 1798 uprising, whilst swiftly put down caused considerable concern among governing circles, and the unsuccessful Emmet rebellion in July 1803 provided evidence that the danger was by no means over. Grenville had resigned with Pitt in 1801 over the King's refusal to countenance emancipation, but unlike his cousin, he steadfastly refused to give his assurance that he would never raise the subject again. For the Foxites the Catholic question raised fundamental questions regarding the Rights of Man and the 1689 settlement which they felt it their duty to rectify. Yet for the Grenvilles, the Catholic question was not only significant for its moral implications, but also for Britain's military defence. As Thomas Grenville lamented in 1803: 'What are they doing in Ireland; for it is there, I do believe, that we shall have to fight the French?'[46] Whilst the two groups could agree on the necessity of Catholic Emancipation, the Grenvilles pursued it partly as a means of supporting a system abhorrent to the Foxites.

Notwithstanding these differences, the rejuvenation of opposition came as a great relief to Fox. 'Opposition now *seems* restored, at least to what it was before the Duke of Portland's desertion, and the other adverse circumstances of the time',[47] he wrote jubilantly to a still unconvinced Grey. The emphasis, however, was justly put on *'seems'*, for the restoration was as yet only a numerical one and unity was something to be desired rather than presumed.

The first important test of the new alignment came in April 1805 when the impeachment proceedings against Viscount Melville (Dundas) were voted upon in a dramatic and tense debate. Grenville refused to have anything to do with Whitbread's motion of censure, remaining loyal to his former colleague, and sensibly distrusting any attack on a government of which he had been a key part. Yet the Foxites came out in strength and with them voted twenty Grenvillites, including Thomas Grenville who had swiftly embraced the cause of his erstwhile captain. The issue was famously decided against Melville by the Speaker's vote and Pitt's now rapidly declining health received a further blow. Yet despite the victory claimed by the jubilant Foxites, the debate had highlighted Grenville's failure to lead even his closest supporters, and the divisions inherent in the junction were made manifest. They were to be widened further by the military disasters on the Continent six months later.

The Melville debate had irreparably damaged Pitt's government, and the resignation of Sidmouth in July which followed as a direct consequence raised hopes among the opposition that a decisive strike was now only a matter of time. Yet the opportunity of the Foxites to 'storm the closet' as they had done

[46] T. Grenville to Buckingham, 30 August 1803, *Court and Cabinets,* III, 321.
[47] Fox to Grey, 17 December 1804, *Fox Correspondence*, IV. 71.

over twenty years before, was denied them by Pitt's death on 23 January 1806. Even Fox, who had been inclined to believe that Pitt's illness was merely another ruse to avoid meeting Parliament was forced to accept that his death altered the political situation dramatically.

Neither Fox nor Grenville immediately believed that the king would send for them to replace the Pittites. Fox speculated that Pitt's death would lead to a 'new edition of an Addington Administration, Peace of Amiens and all'; Grenville, whose desolation at Pitt's death was profound, feared 'another experiment of shreds and patches like Addington's, to be composed of Hawkesburys and Castlereaghs.'[48] Yet without Pitt his followers were leaderless and even George III recognised that Sidmouth would be unable to resume the premiership. Perceval, Canning and Castlereagh agreed that they would under no circumstances co-operate with Sidmouth, vilified as the principal architect of Pitt's demise, but agreed that Grenville was the only man in the country suitable to lead, and promised to support him if he adopted Pittite as opposed to Foxite principles.[49] George III, still declaring that 'he would not suffer [Fox] to sit in any Cabinet that is to advise him', desperately attempted to form an administration under Hawkesbury, but the Pittites realised that they would never be able to face Parliament and the king was forced to send for Grenville.[50]

The Fox-Grenville 'junction' had reached its point of greatest disunity in January 1806. The Foxites demanded that the government be censured over the Continental catastrophes, but Grenville categorically refused to take part in any attack on a system of which he himself had been a key originator. Fox, angered that this ideal opportunity to bring down Pitt's government was being frustrated, wrote bitterly to Holland,

> this appears to me to be a moment when no *great* sacrifice ought to be made, even for the purpose of unanimity among ourselves...I will endeavour to see Lord G. and Tom, and see what I can make of them; but I have a dread of arguing much with obstinate men, lest one rivet them further in their absurdities.[51]

This was still very much the impatient and hot-headed Fox of the 1780s, but on this occasion he had the more cautious and astute Grenvilles to direct him. Grenville recognised that it was of crucial importance not to offend the Pittites

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[48] Fox to Lauderdale, 17 December 1805, *Fox Correspondence*, IV, 126; Grenville to Buckingham, 7 January 1806, *Court and Cabinets*, IV, 10.
[49] McQuiston, *Rose and Canning in Opposition*, p.504.
[50] Buckingham to Grenville, 25 January 1806, *HMC Dropmore* VII, 338; T. Grenville to Grenville, 25 January 1806, *ibid.*, VII, 339.
[51] Fox to Holland, 1 January 1806, *Fox Correspondence*, IV, 127-9.

and the King whilst so much continued to hang in the balance, writing to his brother, he expressed his fears that violent language from the Foxites could yet decide the issue against them:

> It is therefore of the utmost importance that we should do nothing that can create unfavourable impression against us...It has been, more than once, Fox's misfortune to let himself be hurried...and to throw away, by yielding to the intemperance of others, those advantages which he could never afterwards regain.[52]

It was in such a state of division and misapprehension that the Fox-Grenville coalition, with an Addington appendage, was requested by the King on 27 January to form a ministry, soon to be derided as the 'Ministry of All the Talents.'[53] The ministry had had an inauspicious and confused birth under the shadow of Pitt and Austerlitz. That it was born at all was a miracle of rare device, its survival, tenuous at all times, was to depend fundamentally on the question of foreign policy and the reconciliation of deeply held and contrasting beliefs. The absence of such disputes had maintained the junction throughout 1804-5; their manifestation in December 1805 had almost destroyed it.

In June 1805, Lord Temple, son and heir to the Buckingham estates had a long and frank conversation with William Sturges Bourne, a secretary to the Treasury. Bourne confessed that Pitt's ministry was practically at an end, and discussed the possibility of junctions. He made the prescient observation that, 'in plain English, there are four parties in the country; and if your two parties expect to govern without a third, you will fail.'[54] This represented a remarkable change from the situation five years before when pessimistic Foxites were speaking of a Parliament ruled by a monolithic party of the Crown. The political disruption caused by the twin events of Pitt's resignation and the peace with France not only reveals how such fragmentation of politics came to take place, but also helps to explain why no stable government was able to be formed in the succeeding decade. Foreign policy and Catholic emancipation, the two most contentious issues of their day formed and destroyed governments in rapid succession. The troubled fourteen months of the Talents epitomised this problem as Foxites and Grenvillites struggled to overcome their own

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[52] Grenville to T. Grenville, 23 January 1806, *HMC Dropmore*, VII, 333-4.

[53] E.A. Smith, *Earl Grey*, (Oxford 1990), p.100, attributes the phrase to Canning; the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* declares it to be from an anonymous source. In fact the phrase was in common currency before 1806 and was used by Grenville and Pitt in their negotiations of 1804. That Canning himself derisively used it reflected that his particular talent was absent from the ministry.

[54] Buckingham to Grenville, 27 June 1805, *HMC Dropmore*, VII, 281-2.

divisions as well as safeguard Britain's position in the world–an objective which both held equally dear.

III

FACTIONS AND FOREIGN POLITICS: FROM AMIENS TO AUSTERLITZ

Like all periods of warfare, the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars had a profound impact on the domestic and political sphere, where the longevity of the conflict and its ideological background served to polarise an already divided Parliament. It has already been shown how the resignation of William Pitt and the signing of peace with France caused factionism, or 'jumbles' to use Fox's phrase, and the question of foreign policy was to be integral to the independence and coalescing of these groups after 1801. Grenville's eventual coalition was as unlikely a mixture of opinions on this subject as it was of men.

Integral to the debate from the moment that Britain entered the conflict, was the question of war aims, and the attitudes adopted towards the French Revolution. The opinions held by the leading figures in the initial stages of the war were to influence them and their followers for the next twenty years. Thus, Fox's support of the Revolution and the Rights of Man were echoed in his refusal to denounce Bonaparte as worse than the Bourbons. Even in 1815 the Foxites remained true to their founder's principles when they censured the government for taking up arms once more against Napoleon.

Although he died In 1797, and did not to see the full extent of his prophecies fulfilled, it was arguably Edmund Burke who cast the longest shadow over British politics in the decade after 1790, certainly in ideological terms. Indeed, it was precisely because his gloomy prognostications had proved so accurate, in contrast to the Foxites' optimism, that Burke's disciples remained so endeared to his memory and his principles. In the years after 1801 when many of the Portland whigs returned to opposition, the differences between the Burkean and the Foxite views of diplomacy were brought into sharp focus once more.[1]

Such a fundamental difference of opinion naturally had profound implications for the debate on Britain's war aims, with the Foxites refusing to accept that Britain need be at war at all. Broadly, political opinion can be seen to have divided into three categories: those who supported Burke in believing that the war must be pursued until revolution was suppressed and monarchy restored; the adherents of Fox who argued that the war was unnecessary *ab*

[1] See in particular O'Gorman, *The Whig Party*, for a full discussion of the Burke-Fox schism.

initio, and that the first opportunity to treat for peace should be seized wholeheartedly; and the majority view, held by Pitt, and, more sceptically, Grenville, that peace was obtainable if France displayed a less aggressive spirit, and would agree to relinquish her Continental conquests, including most crucially Holland–Britain's original *casus belli*.[2]

By 1801, after eight years of war, these arguments had become somewhat jaded, and to a considerable extent irrelevant, but the resignation of the 'warmongers' and Addington's decision to accept the French terms of peace, reopened the debate and reinvigorated those who had argued all along that peace was to be found if searched for.

The peace itself was hardly a glorious act of diplomacy, and criticism that Addington had unnecessarily sacrificed Britain's colonial conquests without adequately securing her continental interests were well founded. Britain retained only Ceylon and Trinidad of her overseas acquisitions, giving up the Cape and the Caribbean islands, as well as Cochin and Pondicherry in India. In Europe Britain relinquished control of Malta and evacuated Egypt. The French, for their part, gave vague promises to withdraw from Italy, but retained control of the Netherlands. The British were forced to accept the *status quo ante bellum* for their possessions, whilst allowing France the *uti possidetis*.

Addington recognised that the terms left most British grievances unsettled, but he felt that Britain's domestic position demanded peace, and that the treaty signed at Lunéville the previous year, had left the country with no alternative but to accept French domination of Europe. In this he was supported by Pitt who also believed that Britain was close to bankruptcy and civil chaos.[3] His fatalistic, yet essentially pragmatic, approach to the peace was summed up in his response to Windham's critical motion in Parliament.

> God grant that peace may be preserved! It is my earnest prayer, that we may long enjoy the blessings of peace; and that France may not use her power in such a way as to compel us to arm against her; but if war should again take place in two or three years...I will say that it will even then be a matter of great consolation to every man in this house that he has done everything in his power to avert the calamity. I am well persuaded, that, whatever may happen, it is the wisest course for us to husband our resources at present that we may the better be prepared to meet it.[4]

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[2] Grenville's attitude towards the possibility of treating with France, which remained ambiguous throughout his career, will be examined more fully in chapter IV.
[3] See Ziegler, *Addington*, pp.116-22.
[4] 13 May 1802, *Cobbett*, XXXVI, 814.

As will be shown, these words were in many ways to embody Grenville's own attitude in 1806.

To some extent Addington was sheltered from hostile opinion by the support of public figures such as Pitt, Nelson and Richard Wellesley. Nelson was a close friend of Addington, and fully supported the cession of Malta, which in any case he believed difficult to defend. Wellesley was perhaps a more surprising advocate of Addington–as governor of India he was affected to a considerable degree by the terms of the peace. Grenville clearly expected his old friend to adopt a more belligerent line, but instead, Wellesley praised Addington's support of his administration and whilst declaring the peace to be 'perilous and humiliating', played down the implications it had for India; he openly disagreed with Grenville's decision to oppose the government. Grenville's humour could not have been improved when his reply to Wellesley, harshly critical of Addington's government, was captured and published by the French press.[5]

The attitude of Pitt was an enigma to his contemporaries, for Addington's peace was the antithesis of all he had fought for, and his support only added to suspicions that his resignation was nothing but a 'notorious juggle'.[6] That Pitt was considering peace in 1800 is well testified, but such a peace as was signed two years later would surely have then been inconceivable to him. The argument that he resigned partly in order to allow another to carry the burden is not impossible. Not only did he support Addington in the Commons, but he took an active part in advising the inexperienced government, and although he was disappointed with the final terms, he had to acknowledge that he bore some responsibility for them.

Pitt's support was met with incredulity outside of his own circle. Fox thought it 'difficult to conceive' and William Cobbett noted that the thinking public were 'outrageous against Mr. Pitt, whom they accuse of the most abominable insincerity.'[7] Yet Pitt realised, as also did Grenville, that the public and the politicians perceived him to be a war leader, and that should the peace break down, he would be called upon once more. He had nothing to lose by supporting Addington, whose tenure of the premiership was very much determined by external factors, whilst by pursuing at worst a neutral line, he

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[5] R. Wellesley to Grenville, 16 February 1803, *HMC Dropmore*, VII, 144; Grenville to R. Wellesley, 12 July 1803, *ibid.*, VII, 172-5.
[6] Fox to Holland, 19 April 1801, *Fox Correspondence*, III, 188.
[7] Fox to Grey, 12 October [1801], *ibid.*, III, 346; Cobbett to Windham, 20 October 1801, *Windham Papers*, II, 177.

would not alienate the king's goodwill, on which successful government continued to rest. Moreover, his health, which was to break down completely in late 1805, was already waning, and he continually protested his reluctance to resume the burden of office.[8]

The younger Pittites in Parliament were less than contented with their leader's stance. Their objection to passive support of Addington has already been noted;[9] to support a peace which seemingly betrayed all that they had fought for seemed not only incongruous, but dangerously hypocritical. In the Parliamentary debate on the peace, the difference between Pitt and his disciples came close to being made public. Pitt, choosing to ignore that he himself had refused a better peace, declared to Parliament: 'the question of peace or war between Great Britain and France, became a question of terms only', and that he was more concerned about the 'general complexion of peace' than 'any specific object that might be attained.'[10] In making this statement, he therefore played down the clear differences between his stated war aims, and the terms secured by Addington.

This was too much for some of his supporters. Henry Lascelles in particular was clearly uncomfortable in voting for the preliminaries, stressing, 'he could not rejoice at the peace without a mixture of anxiety and apprehension.'[11] Canning, discussing with Windham about how best to oppose the peace without entering into opposition admirably expressed the dilemma of the Pittites:

> Do you know, I have great doubts whether it would not be wise *not* to bring the Treaty directly into discussion in the *House of Commons*–at least, not to come to a vote upon it...Do not suppose that this is because I have the slightest doubt as to the impression which may be made by pointing out the gross faults and omissions, the weakness and the baseness, and shuffling and stupidity, that mark this Treaty...There is scarce an individual who does not in private think and, perhaps, avow nearly what you do–but not one half of whom would fail to vote against that opinion in the Commons...And lastly, perhaps as much as anything, of the whole being Pitt's work, and, as such, to be supported.[12]

The concluding sentence was the bottom line for the Pittites. Obnoxious though the treaty might be, whilst Pitt supported and was associated with it, it had to be supported. For this reason the vote against the peace was always

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[8] *Rose Diaries*, II, 23.
[9] See above, pp.11-12.
[10] 3 November 1801, *Cobbett*, XXXVI, 57.
[11] *ibid.*, 85. See also, Mulgrave to Grenville, 18 October 1801, *HMC Dropmore*, VII, 61-2, where the former categorically refuses to believe that Pitt has sanctioned the peace, 'until I hear the contrary from himself.'
[12] Canning to Windham, 20 April 1802, *The Windham Papers*, II, 184-5.

deceptively low, being supported only by the Grenvillites and disenchanted defectors from the Portland group.[13]

If the Pittites were divided over supporting Addington and the peace, the Foxites were no more united. This is perhaps surprising when it is considered that prior to 1801 they had been unanimous in calling for an end to the war and placing all the blame for the conflict on the shoulders of Pitt and Grenville. Yet once peace was signed, and the terms digested, many Foxites came to the conclusion that, welcome though peace was, the opportunities it opened for their party were not as great as anticipated. The problem was compounded by the disturbing realisation that for almost the first time Fox and Pitt were voting the same way on a major issue. Moreover, although Fox thought Addington a weak puppet of Pitt and George III, whilst he promoted peace he had to be supported.[14] Fox dealt with this dilemma in a fashion which was to become common over the next five years, namely, that of retrospective opposition.

The argument was a compelling one. If Pitt was prepared to support a peace which effectively ignored all Britain's war aims and yet had eschewed similar French overtures in the 1790s, then clearly he had been guilty of gross misgovernment and responsible for men and money being 'squandered wantonly and wickedly.'[15] On this at least Fox's followers could unite.

The opinion, spread by his opponents, of Fox as a francophile and pacifist must undergo considerable modification. Francophile he was to an extent, in that he was fluent in the language and spent a good deal of time in France prior to 1792, briefly returning in 1802. Yet, his experience of the Foreign Office in 1782-3 showed him to be as wary of Bourbon intentions as any of his contemporaries. Whilst welcoming the Revolution and its language of universal brotherhood, he fully opposed the French campaigns of conquest in Europe and, unlike Hazlitt, did not hold Bonaparte to be a liberator and friend of humanity.[16] Writing to Grey, he stressed, 'that the power of France is truly alarming, but the hope of diminishing or restraining that power has been,

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[13] It is worth drawing attention to an alternative Pittite sentiment expressed by Castlereagh (13 May, 1802, *Cobbett*, XXXVI, 786). His line was in many ways a Foxite one, deprecating the threat of invasion, and declaring that the best course lay in returning France's colonies and allowing her trade to revive, thus permitting Britain's interests to 'proportionably increase'. That this was not merely a sop to Pitt is evidenced by the fact that this was the very policy he pursued in 1814-15.

[14] Fox to Holland, 1 January 1803, *Fox Correspondence*, III, 209-10.

[15] Fox to Grey, 12 October 1801, *ibid.*, III, 346.

[16] A. Tangye Lean, *The Napoleonists*, (Oxford, 1970) attaches the lable 'Napoleonist' to a number of Foxites, but whilst Holland and Whitbread were to some greatly attracted to Napoleon, Lean's application of the term to Fox and Adair, is more questionable. Fox disapproved of Napoleon's imperial pretensions. Fox to Holland, 1 January 1803, *Fox Correspondence*, III, 210.

in my opinion, long *gone by...* The power of the Republic is certainly an evil, but it is an evil which has been the unavoidable result of the nature of the attack against it.'[17] Whilst France remained pre-eminent on the battlefield, war would only give her a pretext to conquer more of Europe, diminishing the possibility of eventual recovery.

Likewise, whilst Fox genuinely abhorred war, and believed that the present one had been deliberately incited and upheld by Pitt and the King for domestic reasons, he did not hold British honour so cheap that he would have demanded peace at any price. This was to be proved by his handling of the negotiations in 1806.

Yet whilst these principles were generally supported by the other Foxites, Fox's faith in Bonaparte's desire for peace was not so widely held. Even after he returned from France, disillusioned by the militarism of the First Consul, he felt, 'morally certain that Bonaparte and all his friends are of opinion that war with England is the only event that can put his power in peril.'[18] This was, of course, a serious misreading of French politics; like so many revolutionary dictatorships, Bonaparte's regime depended on war to support it.

Grey's relationship to Fox on this issue was in many ways similar to that between Canning and Pitt. He found it difficult to support Addington, for whom he had nothing but contempt, and felt that peace on such terms was not wholly desirable. Indeed, like Canning, it is clear that he had reservations over fully supporting his leader in the Commons, and did not speak in either of the two main debates on the peace. He did, however, make a cautious and ambiguous statement during a retrospective censure debate on Pitt's administration. His line was essentially that of an orthodox Foxite, declaring his belief in Bonaparte's sincerity and Pitt's folly in not concluding peace earlier, yet he stressed that the peace could only be 'defended on the score of necessity', and hinted that he was 'inclined to alter my opinion' as to supporting the final terms.[19]

The 'Carlton House Whigs' were even less inclined to follow Fox's leadership in supporting Bonaparte and the peace. In Parliament Sheridan denounced 'this disgraceful treaty' (although like Grey he felt obliged to vote for it), whilst he and the Prince of Wales expressed their firm condemnation of

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[17] Fox to Grey, 22 October 1801, *ibid.*,, III, 348-9. See also Fox's speech in Parliament (*Cobbett*, XXXVI, 72-83).
[18] Fox to Grey, December 1802, *Fox Correspondence*, III, 381.
[19] 7 May 1802, *Cobbett*, XXXVI, 624-5.

Fox's decision to visit France–an action that did nothing to persuade the public of Fox's patriotism.[20]

Thus, Fox discovered that, far from invigorating and strengthening his following, peace raised many questions about how far the Foxites should go in promoting an understanding with France, and under what circumstances would war be acceptable and necessary. The junction with the Grenvilles which occurred soon after war was resumed made this question even more urgent and prefigured the backbench discontent which was to express itself when in 1806 the Foxite leadership chose war rather than peace.

If there was one political grouping which did demonstrate unity on the peace, it was the Grenvillites. Such consensus was unsurprising; it was their opposition to the peace which had forced them to develop a separate entity, and was to a considerable degree their *raison d'être*. Grenville and Windham were both notified of the signing of the preliminaries by the government, who hoped, 'that, under all the circumstances, you will consider this as an honourable peace.' They were to be disappointed. Windham, in a brusque and ungracious note, curtly judged the country to have received its death blow, and told Addington: 'I am hardly a fit depository of what you have obligingly offer'd to communicate.'[21]

Grenville had not been backward in proffering advice to Addington and Hawkesbury, stressing the importance of retaining Egypt and of adopting a tough line towards the Baltic nations.[22] His pride was undoubtedly injured by Addington's readiness to take Pitt's advice, whilst ignoring his own, and this may well have played a part in the decision to renege on his promise to support Addington. Yet there is no doubt that he was considerably taken aback by the size of the concessions and the paucity of the gains. Moreover, as he wrote to Dundas, to enter into active opposition was far from his intentions, but, as Foreign Secretary for the whole of the conflict, he could not acquiesce in the charge that it was his policies which had led to Britain being placed in such a perilous position.[23]

Whilst Grenville led the opposition to the peace in the Lords, in the Commons the standard was raised by William Windham, Secretary at War in

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[20] 14 May 1802, *ibid.*, XXXVI, 817-21; C.A. Baring (ed.), *The Windham Diary* (London 1866), 21 September 1802, 26 September 1802, p.438; E.A. Smith, *Whig Principles and Party Politics: Earl Fitzwilliam and the Whig Party* (Manchester 1975), pp.267-8.

[21] Hawkesbury to Grenville, 1 October 1801, *HMC Dropmore*, VII, 45; Windham to Addington, 1 October 1801, *The Windham Papers*, II, 173.

[22] Grenville to Addington, 8 May 1801, *HMC Dropmore*, VII, 16.

[23] Grenville to Dundas, 4 October 1801, *ibid.*, VII, 48.

Pitt's administration and Burke's most fervent apostle. Like Burke, Windham had a reputation as a brilliant but over-lengthy orator with a capacity for single-minded determination, and he applied these assets (and liabilities) in his attempt to damn Addington and the peace at every opportunity. He was denied the opportunity of speaking on the first day of the debate on the preliminaries (it is more than probable that the Speaker tactfully chose not to inflict him on the House at the late hour of its sitting), but the next day gave one of his most acclaimed speeches, in which he denounced the government and declared the British to be a subjugated race, and a conquered nation.[24]

To Windham there could be no peace with France until the Revolution had been finally destroyed and 'legitimate' government restored. After the Fox-Grenville junction, he was accused by some of having deserted his former principles; a charge which he denied vigorously:

> Who shall pretend to say that the progress of the French Revolution would have been less rapid or less dangerous had Great Britain never joined in opposing it, or had no opposition been made to it at all Such an opinion certainly derives no countenance from the facts, which prove incontestably that the French Revolution did not need to be provoked to become mischievous–that the aggressions were not the consequence of the Resistance, but the resistance of the aggressions...I cannot condemn it now more than I did during the whole time it was carrying on, or than it was at all times condemned by Mr. Burke.[25]

No sentiment could be further from that held by the Foxites, yet such belligerence was not characteristic of all the Grenvillites, Grenville himself was prepared to sign peace with republican or imperial France, although he doubted whether the French would ever accept his peace terms without first being defeated.[26]

In fact, Tom Grenville was well aware that he and his colleagues were in danger of being condemned as warmongers by the public, if the Windhamite elements got out of hand, and was quick to impress upon the latter 'the imprudence of mixing in the debates on peace the feverish topic of the restoration of the monarchy.'[27] The French press, perhaps fearful of the return of a belligerent ministry were quick to pick up on the warlike sentiments of the Grenvilles, who were likened to 'bloodhounds.' Such sentiments were easily conveyed across the channel, and clearly had an impact in some quarters.[28]

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[24] *The Windham Papers*, II, 178; 4 November 1801, *Cobbett*, XXXVI, 86-140.
[25] Windham to Amyot, 7 October 1805, *The Windham Papers*, II, 270-1.
[26] See, for instance, Grenville to Pitt, 6 October 1801, *HMC Dropmore*, VII, 50-1.
[27] T. Grenville to Grenville, October 1801; 6 November 1801, *ibid.*, VII, 66, 68.
[28] *Moniteur*, 1 January 1803. Printed in *The Times*, 5 January 1803. See also, Fox to O'Brien, 26 June 1803, *Fox Correspondence*, IV, 8-9; Buckingham to Grenville, 11 September 1806, *HMC Dropmore*, VIII, 318.

Public, and particularly parliamentary, opinion was important to all the main factions, and each was quick to claim support for their opinion. Thus Cobbett, supported by Canning, could state that, 'nine-tenths of the thinking people condemn the peace',[29] whilst Fox rejoiced that Parliament was so firmly behind him, and that he had been the 'the means of showing that the real sentiments of the people are strongly for peace.'[30]

Judging from the caution displayed by the Grenvillites, it appears probable that the peace was genuinely welcomed by most of the public, and by the end of 1802, having failed to make the hoped for impact in Parliament, there was a good deal of despondency in their ranks. 'If both our spirit and our means are hourly wasting away, what signifies it who at last is to have the wretched pre-eminence of holding the rule of the country, at a time when it is sinking under the foot of its old and inveterate enemy?' Tom Grenville wrote disconsolately to his brother.[31] Grey, wrote optimistically to Fox, 'the Grenvilles, who seem to have found out that war is not very popular, will probably convert the mistake which they made at the beginning.'[32] Yet, as Grenville had consistently predicted, the peace was too fragile to last, and the resumption of war in May 1803 not only raised the spirits of those who had opposed peace from the beginning, but also cast doubt into the minds of those, like Grey, whose support had always been reserved and conditional.

The Peace of Amiens had, therefore, failed to bring the hoped-for stability for either government or opposition. Addington's administration was supported reluctantly by both Pittites and Foxites, and clearly depended upon the continuation of peace to survive. In the event of war the Foxites would resume their 'systematic' opposition, whilst the Pittites would demand that their leader be reinstated in government. The Grenvillites, who believed that their opposition to the peace would be supported by their former government colleagues found themselves isolated, with divisions in the Commons rarely exceeding twenty votes in their favour. It was against this background that Grenville began to call for a government which combined, 'as large a proportion as possible of the weight, talents, and character, to be found in public men of all descriptions, and without any exception.'[33] Yet the

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[29] Cobbett to Windham, 20 October 1801, *The Windham Papers*, II, 178; Canning to Windham, 20 April 1802, *ibid.*, II, 187-8.
[30] Fox to Holland, 19 December 1802, *Fox Correspondence*, III, 206.
[31] T. Grenville to Buckingham, 25 November 1802, *Court and Cabinets*, III, 333. Dated wrongly in *Court and Cabinets* as 1803. The reference to Grenville's speech on the opening day of Parliament, clearly dates the letter to 1802, as Grenville did not make a speech in the debate of 1803.
[32] Grey to Fox, 15 March 1803, Grey MSS, 16 f.40.
[33] Grenville to Pitt, 8 May 1804, *Court and Cabinets*, III, 352-3.

fundamental divisions over foreign policy remained, and both Foxite and Grenvillite were to discover that it was easier to speak of unity than to enforce it.

The 'Fox-Grenville junction', which developed out of this call for national unity, could not ignore the question of foreign policy which had served to bring their diverse followers together, and constantly threatened to wrench them apart. The greatest fears concerning the junction came, unsurprisingly, from some of the Foxites, who could not conceive how their unswerving condemnation of the war could be reconciled to the belligerence of the Grenvillites. Fox himself had declared, 'I never could be of a party with any men who did not hold that peace upon certain terms with the government of France, whatever that government might be, was desirable'; and Grey expressed his doubts that the Grenvilles were inclined towards peace, and his fears that they upheld, 'the absolute madness of urging on a contest upon principle'.[34]

Yet, as has already been argued, there was no simple dichotomy between the Grenvillite and the Foxite stance on foreign affairs, and the extreme positions held by Windham and Whitbread can mask a greater convergence in the centre, with Grenville and Grey having comparatively few differences. As a consequence, a great effort was made to consolidate those points which could be agreed upon, and attempt to ignore those where irreconcilable differences remained. For the Grenvillites this meant criticising the conduct of Pitt's foreign policy without questioning its basic aims. The desirability of peace was also stressed when it was not incompatible with support for the present war.

For Grenville this was neither hypocrisy nor a betrayal of principles, for as he stressed to his brother, 'peace I desire most fervently...but, then I am confident that there is no hope of peace for Europe, or for England, but by raising up some barrier against Napoleon's ambition.'[35] In other words, he could pronounce his desire for peace in the almost certain knowledge that this could only be realistically achieved through war.

This sophistry was enough to keep the junction operative, and Fox was able to report to his anxious followers that Grenville was 'not against peace in

[34] Fox to Grey, 9 August 1803, *Fox Correspondence*, III, 422; Grey to Fox, 3 August 1803, 2 February 1804, Grey MSS, 16 f.49, f.66.
[35] Grenville to Buckingham, 26 October 1803, *Court and Cabinets*, III, 332.

general', although his doubts about Windham could not be so easily dismissed, especially as the latter appeared to have no intention of dismissing them.[36]

The problem facing Fox and Grenville in their opposition to Pitt's foreign policy hinged on the 'Continental system'–Pitt's attempts to defeat Napoleon by subsidising a coalition of the great powers. For the Foxites this system was immoral because it had the effect of bribing states to take up arms and risk their destruction, and impractical because the end result was only to give Napoleon a pretext to wage war and thus increase his empire.[37] Yet for the Grenvillites, who not only supported Pitt's system, but had been largely responsible for its construction, coalition warfare represented the only feasible way of limiting Napoleon's ambition and creating the conditions in which peace could be secured. This was a difference that oratorical subtleties could not disguise, and prior to Austerlitz, care was taken to avoid open debate whenever possible.[38]

Pitt was well aware of this source of disunity in the ranks of the opposition, and clearly hoped to divide them by bringing forward the two issues that could best serve to split them; namely, the Russian treaty, concluded by Leveson Gower in April 1805, and the hints thrown out by Napoleon that he was willing to negotiate for peace.[39] In contrast, both Foxite and Grenvillite seized on Pitt's seizure of the Spanish treasure ships in October 1804, and Spain's declaration of war the following January, as a measure on which they could unite and 'should have the public with us.'[40]

An instructive example of co-operation and tension among the principals of the junction, can be seen in two of the key foreign policy debates of 1805–the debate on the King's Speech (15 January), and Grey's motion on the State of Public Affairs (20 June). Both debates, taking place simultaneously in the Lords and the Commons, precluded Fox and Grenville from effectively co-ordinating their speeches, and as a result, one notable difference was gleefully seized upon by the press.[41]

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[36] Fox to Grey, 9 August 1803, *Fox Correspondence*, III, 422.

[37] See, for instance, Fox to Holland, September 1805, BL. Add. MSS 47575 f.184 on the former, and Fox to Adair, 6 October 1805, *Fox Correspondence*, IV, 117, on the latter.

[38] Carlisle believed, 'the difference of opinion upon the wisdom of engaging with the Continental powers need not obtrude itself, if we agree in one conclusion, that the thing which has been done, has not been ably done.' Carlisle to T. Grenville, 12 January 1806, BL. Add. MSS 41854 f.115.

[39] T. Grenville to Grenville, 23 April 1805, *HMC Dropmore*, VII, 271, in which the former warns of Pitt's measure 'that must divide Opposition on foreign politicks.' See also, Camden to Bathurst, 30 August 1805, *Historical Manuscripts Commission Report on the Manuscripts of the Earl of Bathurst* (London, 1923), p.49.

[40] Grey to Fox, 13 January 1805, Grey MSS, 16 f.99. See also T. Grenville to Buckingham, 15 January 1805, *Court and Cabinets*, III, 410.

[41] T. Grenville to Buckingham, 18 January 1805, *Court and Cabinets*, III, 413.

The King's Speech, concerning the overtures received from Paris and the need for Britain to maintain her continental connections, contained plenty to exacerbate the opposition's divisions. In fact, the opposition speakers showed moderation in language and displayed sensitivity to their partners' views which resulted in only one obvious separation of principle. Grenville gave his full approbation to the speech, especially the principle of negotiating for peace with 'every power which has a community of interest, or a community of sentiment.' In doing so, he thereby expressed his decided opposition to any idea of unilateral negotiation, although not peace *per se.*[42]

Fox was careful neither to condemn nor endorse the speech, and unsurprisingly showed greater enthusiasm for peace than Grenville. Yet he was also less inclined to accept the principle of joint peace or joint war which the government was espousing, believing that peace should be seized whenever the opportunity arose, with or without pre-existing commitments. It was this point which the government press picked up on, although in itself it did not represent a serious difference. Windham practically avoided the issue of his peace in his speech, remaining fundamentally opposed to the idea, but smothering his irritation with prudent silence.

On the day of Grey's motion, Grenville took a moderate line that must surely have been composed to ease Foxite fears. He expressed his view that if a continental coalition proved impossible to construct, then peace negotiations must be seriously undertaken in order to either end the conflict, or prove to all of Europe Napoleon's infidelity and ambition. This was a firm move away from Windham's position of ideological warfare. Grey, whilst avowing the same principles as Grenville regarding the importance of co-operating with the other European powers, persisted in the Foxite line, 'that a separate peace, on moderate terms, would be preferable to a mere defensive war.'[43] Fox, for his part, confined himself to generalities on the desirability of peace whilst Windham could not have failed to have embarrassed his colleagues by a pointed attack on those (presumably Sidmouth and Castlereagh, but equally applicable to his new Foxite allies) who had justified the peace of Amiens but were now 'sensible of the propriety of continental connexions for this country.' Pitt, unsurprisingly, was quick to draw on Windham's approbation of his policy in contrast to the preceding Foxite speakers.[44]

Thus Parliamentary co-operation between the two groups was successful in the one instance of moderating the language used by Fox and Grenville, but

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[42] 15 January 1805, *Hansard*, III, 16-18.
[43] 20 June 1805, *ibid.*, III, 503.
[44] *Hansard*,III, 516, 531.

remained threatened by the principled intransigence of those on the extremes of both parties.

The last months of Pitt's ministry saw the divisions among the opposition widen as Fox's thoughts turned increasingly to the need for peace whilst the Grenvilles saw their hopes of a successful continental war once more destroyed. Even before Mack's crushing defeat at Ulm in October 1805, Fox wrote optimistically, 'I feel quite sure that Bonaparte would like peace if we would give way in any thing.'[45] Despite all the evidence to the contrary which had accumulated over the previous three years, the Foxites remained true to their belief that Napoleon needed peace, and only the mismanagement and the intransigence of Pitt prevented the signing of an honourable treaty.

It was sentiments such as these which made the Grenvillites doubt whether any agreement on foreign affairs was possible. Windham was naturally the most concerned about Fox's attitude, and gave Fox cause for concern himself. In a series of communications between Windham, Fox and Grey in late 1805 these fears were thrashed out, although without any changes of opinion on either side. Grey wrote to Windham in an attempt to play down rumours of Fox's pacifism, declaring, 'peace, therefore, must be his wish and mine. But it must not be inferred from this that we abandon all future resistance.' Windham, however, continued to demand the restoration of the Bourbons and the necessity of resisting Napoleon, and Grey, disheartened, lamented to Fox that Pitt could not fail to gain advantage from the 'separate armies' of the opposition.[46]

Thus, for the Foxites at least, the battle of Austerlitz was something of a *deus ex machina*, taking the divisive question of Continental connections out of the political equation. 'I hope the catastrophe of Austerlitz may produce more agreement', wrote Grey to Fox, who replied, 'I do not think any of our friends, or even the Ministry, are quite mad enough to wish for another campaign in Germany.'[47] It was hoped that by the time Parliament was due to meet, on 21 January, the question of peace would be reduced to one of terms only.

That the opening debates of the new session did not reveal the opposition divisions to all of Parliament was largely the result of the desperate state of Pitt's health and his eventual demise on 23 January. The Foxites

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[45] Fox to Holland, 21 September 1805, BL. Add. MSS 47575 f.115.
[46] Fox to Windham, 11 September 1805; Grey to Windham, 13 December 1805, *Windham Papers*, II, 268, 276-7; Grey to Fox, 6 January 1806, Grey MSS, 16 f.116.
[47] Grey to Fox, 6 January 1806, Grey MSS, 16 f.116; Fox to Grey, 10 January 1806, *Fox Correspondence*, IV, 131.

agreed to postpone their original amendment to the King's speech which in its original sketch had called Pitt's policy '*ill-timed, ill-concerted, ill-supported*' and moderated their statements in Parliament on the matter. Tom Grenville's fears that foolish talk would keep them from government were thus alleviated.[48]

If in opposition these expedients served to keep divisions in the background, in government they would have to be faced and Grenville was only too aware that the Foxite contingent in his Cabinet would not suffer the revival of Pitt's Continental system, and would urgently press for peace, unilateral or otherwise. Yet, as he wrote to his brother, he would find it difficult to give way to what he perceived was an irresponsible and dangerous policy:

> The great points on which I feel anxious are, the principles of continental system, and of resistance to France. These two must be kept high, and not only not decried, but maintained and insisted upon. In the present moment, the first is a speculative question only, for there cannot just now be any practical co-operation with us on the continent; but it is not the less necessary to teach the country, that this is still the thing to which we must look as to the only means of solid security.[49]

Both Foxite and Grenvillite were thus separated by a principle which neither could renounce, without declaring their stance of the previous thirteen years to have been misguided. Grenville saw the inherent difficulties involved in forming a government comprised of men, 'who the very first day we meet in Cabinet shall probably differ on the leading question of our whole policy–that of resistance or submission.'[50] Such pessimism, whether well-founded or not, did not augur well for the cohesion of the administration.

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[48] Fox to Grenville, 18 January 1806, *HMC Dropmore*, VII, 327; T. Grenville to Buckingham, 12 January 1806, *Court and Cabinets*, IV, 11.
[49] Grenville to Buckingham, [13] January 1806, *Court and Cabinets*, IV, 13.
[50] Grenville to Buckingham, 7 January 1806, *ibid.*, IV, 9.

IV

THE PRIORITIES OF PEACE

The Ministry of All the Talents has suffered from two misconceptions, which whilst based on some historical foundation, are overstated in their application. First, the ministry is frequently judged by its brevity and denouement, as if in its beginning was its end, and that this must reflect the mediocrity of its ministers. Only Fox and Grey escape this blanket judgement; Fox, because he died before the ministry's fall; and Grey, because he had a brighter future ahead of him.[1]

Yet, on closer examination, the view that the Talents was nothing more than a pantomime horse, composed of inexperienced and ineffectual politicians, can be dismissed. In fact, the principals of the government represented a wealth of experience and talent. Nowhere was this more true than in foreign policy, with none more experienced than Grenville in this field. Windham, as Secretary of War, returned to a similar post as he had occupied in Pitt's administration. Earl Spencer, the home secretary, was universally acknowledged as a brilliant administrator of the navy, and certainly played a part in the formulation of strategy and policy. Fox, taking the Foreign Office, resumed a role which he had undertaken in 1782 under not dissimilar circumstances.[2] When it is remembered that general political opinion held Castlereagh and Hawkesbury to be mediocre, and Canning untrustworthy, the Talents under the leadership of Grenville, represented some of the most obvious successors to Pitt, and this was initially recognised by the Pittites.[3]

The second misconception, and one of particular relevance to an appraisal of the Talents' foreign policy, is that the ministry was effectively a Foxite one, with the Grenvillites being nothing more than a sweetener for the king. Evidence cited for this claim is that the key cabinet posts were occupied by Fox's supporters, and that the ministry was characterised by 'whiggish' policies (namely, the abolition of the slave trade, the negotiations with France, and the abortive attempt at Catholic emancipation). Some historians have even

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[1] See, for instance, J. Steven Watson, *The Reign of George III* (Oxford, 1960). In April 1806, it was decided to confer an earldom on Grey's father–a subtle means of honouring Grey himself. Grey took the honorific title of Lord Howick until he succeeded his father two years later. He will be called Howick for the remainder of this study.

[2] As Foreign Secretary in 1782-3, Fox played a key role in negotiating the 1783 Treaty of Paris, and was quick to remind Talleyrand of this; Fox to Talleyrand, 14 June 1806, *Fox Correspondence,* IV, 171-2.

[3] McQuiston, *Rose and Canning*, p.504.

gone so far as to posthumously promote Fox to the premiership.[4] Not only is this factually wrong, but it ignores the nature of the Fox-Grenville coalition and misunderstands the relationship between the two men.

There have inevitably been attempts to formulate the factions in the ministry, although this presents a number of problems as the lines of division change according to the nature of the issue involved. Lord Henry Petty (Chancellor of the Exchequer), Lord Erskine (Lord Chancellor), and Howick (First Lord of the Admiralty) were confirmed Foxites, with Spencer and Windham representing the Grenvillites. Fitzwilliam (Lord President of the Council) is placed by historians in either camp, although in foreign policy he was certainly a supporter of Grenville, and Lord Moira (Mastergeneral of the Ordnance) represented the Prince of Wales, and was thus closer to a Foxite position. Sidmouth (Lord Privy Seal), and his colleague Lord Ellenborough (Lord Chief Justice), whose late entrance into the ministry was met with distaste by Foxite and Grenvillite alike, revealed the most obvious factional division in the Cabinet, but until February 1807 they did not actively oppose policy.[5]

The relationship between Fox and Grenville can be seen from a minor dispute which arose within the first month of office. This arose from the issue of retrospective censure, which Grenville attached as he was to Pitt's memory, could not admit, but which the Foxites understandably did not wish to renounce. Thus, when Grenville was apprised of a motion by Petty critical of Pitt's policy towards reversions, he was quick to protest to Fox in the strongest possible terms. Fox's reply justified the Chancellor's actions, and testily pointed out that Grenville had been quick enough to oppose Pitt at the time, but nevertheless Grenville prevailed.[6] In most instances Grenville and Fox were of one mind, but ultimately Grenville had the final say. Notwithstanding this, the Foxites were hardly junior partners in the coalition, and the reshuffle after Fox's death showed the importance Grenville attached to conciliating his partners, despite Buckingham's exhortations to the contrary.

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[4] Paul Schroeder, in *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763-1848* (Oxford, 1994), pp.295-6 is the most recent historian to do so.

[5] For closer analysis of the composition of the Cabinet, and differences between historians, see Sack, *The Grenvillites*, and V.E. Chancellor, *The Ministry of All the Talents: A Political Study* (Unpublished Oxford D.Phil thesis, 1978). Tom Grenville spoke of 'a disgust that I cannot conceal or disguise.' A. Aspinall (ed.), *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales, 1770-1812*, (Cambridge, 1968), V, 312. John Allen believed that Sheridan and the Prince conspired to bring the Addingtonians into the Cabinet, but there is little supporting evidence for this claim. The Allen Journal, BL. Add. MSS 52204A f.5.

[6] Grenville to Fox, 28 February 1806; Fox to Grenville, 1 March 1806, *HMC Dropmore*, VIII, 44-6. Grenville also won his dispute with Petty over who should reside in 10 Downing Street.

Neither is it true that the Grenvillites had been simply submerged into the Foxite philosophy, or that Grenville himself was of such weak character as to allow Fox to be the real policy maker. Regarding the first allegation, Cobbett certainly doubted the liberal credentials of the new ministry, complaining to Windham: 'I clearly perceive...from the retention of so many of the Pitt sect about [Grenville]...an intention, by no means equivocally indicated, to preserve, in spirit at least, the accursed system which I hope to see annihilated.'[7] Those who had hoped that Foxite government would bring franchise reform and a curtailing of royal power were to be swiftly disillusioned. Equally, with the exception of the peace negotiations, those liberal measures attempted had been agreed upon by both parties prior to 1806.

As to Grenville's indecisiveness and uncharismatic leadership, it is clear that he was uncomfortable with the role into which his brother had thrust him, and was far from impulsive in his actions.[8] His own low self-esteem led him to believe that he could influence no-one, but equally he was himself difficult to influence or sway in matters close to his heart. This was particularly true with regard to foreign policy. The Foxite firebrand Sir Philip Francis was later to note: 'Lord Grenville places all the weight of his opinion in one scale, and none at all or very little in the other; which, in my mind is neither fair in debate, nor safe in action; especially when the resolution to act may involve the fate of the Kingdom.'[9] Grenville's stance over Prussia in October 1806 highlighted the truth of this; the argument that he simply ignored his accumulated experience of foreign affairs in order to satisfy a pacifistic Foxite whim is highly questionable. As will be shown, where there was a convergence of opinion, it had more to do with the increasing belligerence of leading Foxites.[10]

The battles of Trafalgar and Austerlitz had not quite created the strategic equilibrium of naval versus military supremacy as they were later portrayed to have done. Trafalgar had maintained and emphasised the existing maritime *status quo*, whereas Austerlitz had overturned the military balance on the Continent; the situation of the two protagonists was hardly one of parity. Yet equally, Napoleon had not yet destroyed the Third Coalition; the Anglo-Russian alliance remained tenuously intact, and as the battles of 1806-7 were to

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[7] Cobbett to Windham, 23 February 1806, *Windham Papers*, II, 296.

[8] In writing to Buckingham, Grenville referred to 'the unfortunate resolution which I adopted at your urgent solicitation', and his desire to 'withdraw myself altogether from a scene and course of life which I detest.' Grenville to Buckingham, 9 May 1806, *Court and Cabinets*, IV, 29-30.

[9] Francis to Grey, 31 March 1815, Grey MSS, 15/8 f.13.

[10] This argument is supported by W.B. Taylor in his excellent study *The Foxite Party and Foreign Politics, 1806-1816* (Unpublished London PhD. thesis, 1974).

reveal, military campaigns in north-east Europe were a different proposition to those the French had fought in Bohemia and Thuringia.

The foundation on which the Talents had to build their foreign policy was one of continued war yet military impotence; for there was no-one in the government who believed that any good could come from a further campaign in central Europe. The cautious search for peace was therefore not only understandable, but the most logical response to the bleak circumstances.

Grenville's attitude towards peace and war had become increasingly pessimistic during his tenure of the Foreign Office, and the interventionist of the First Coalition had begun to despair as he witnessed British subsidies being squandered in military debacles. Yet although by 1800 he had ceased to argue that no peace should even be attempted with Revolutionary France, he remained firm in his belief that Britain should negotiate jointly with her allies, and that dishonourable peace was worse than a continuation of the war. It was for this reason that he threatened resignation over Pitt's decision to treat separately at Lille, and reacted so strongly to the terms of Amiens.[11] As he declared to Parliament, all peace negotiations should begin on the basis of either the *status quo ante bellum* or the *uti possidetis*.[12] The former would almost certainly require a decisive defeat and probable invasion of France, yet the latter remained a possibility whilst both protagonists remained undefeated and potentially undefeatable. Therefore Grenville's approbation of Fox's decision to open lines of communication with Talleyrand, was not simply a reluctant bargain with his Foxite allies, but very much in accord with his own reflections on the feasibility of peace.[13]

The manner in which Anglo-French negotiations began is unusual in diplomatic history for its obscure documentation and romantic connotations. On 16 February Fox received word from a Frenchman calling himself Guillet de la Gervillière who arrived at Gravesend '*sans passeport*', and declared his intention to assassinate Bonaparte. Such an offer of assistance was by no means unique–among Grey's papers there is a similar communication from an eccentric Scot[14]–but the fact that the potential assassin lived in France, and appeared to have co-ordinated a reasonably effective plan, led Fox to consider

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[11] A detailed analysis of Grenville's shift in perception can be found in Jupp, *Lord Grenville*, pp.189-90, 197-208, 253-8.

[12] 3 November 1801, *Cobbett*, XXXVI, 163.

[13] A.D. Harvey in 'The Ministry of All the Talents: The Whigs in Office', *Historical Journal* XV, argues that financial economy was Grenville's prime motivation, but, whilst this was certainly an important consideration, it would be unfair to overlook his genuine desire for peace and his intention of forcing the French to prove their sincerity or otherwise.

[14] John Stabilini to Howick, 12 December 1806, Grey MSS, 15/7 f.17.

that he was neither deranged nor unduly boastful. The Cabinet agreed that such underhand methods of waging war were beneath Britain's honour, and it was decided to warn Talleyrand and expel the miscreant from the Kingdom. Only Windham, who raised a technical objection, expressed any sign of dissent.[15]

Thomas Hardy, taking these facts at face value, was quick to condemn Fox in *The Dynasts* for sending a brave hero to torture and death in France, but it is more than probable that the entire episode was a French ruse in order to facilitate future negotiations. It is known that Talleyrand favoured peace in order to consolidate the victories of 1805, and the accession of his former friend to the British foreign office was an ideal opportunity to test British attitudes after the death of Pitt. Indeed, in 1804, under the mistaken impression that a Pitt-Fox coalition had been formed, the French made tentative enquiries through the medium of the American ambassador in Paris.[16]

Even if Gervillière was sincere in his intentions, his arrival in Britain within a month of the formation of the Talents was fortuitous in providing a way for Fox to communicate with Talleyrand without giving the appearance of suing for peace.[17]

The first stage of the peace negotiations was effectively begun with Talleyrand's reply to Fox's warning in which he expressed Napoleon's sincere desire for peace and placed the responsibility for ending the war firmly in the British court. The Cabinet met to consider what the proper course to take would be, and Fox concluded to the king that it would be right to proceed further, if only to 'guard your Majesty's Government from the imputation, which the enemy endeavours to cast upon it, of being averse to peace on any terms.'[18]

Fox's letter to Talleyrand contained many generalities concerning honour and the desire for peace, but made no firm proposals of the basis on which to negotiate. This was to characterise their correspondence. Nevertheless, Fox did make it clear early on that Britain '*se trouve unie à la Russie par des liens si étroits*' that whilst she could discuss and provisionally agree to some points, nothing could be concluded without her ally's

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[15] Fox to Talleyrand, 20 February 1806, *Fox Correspondence* IV, 146; *Windham Diary*, 17 February 1806, p.458.

[16] *Rose Diaries*, II, 137; *Malmesbury Diaries*, IV, 310. Rose and Sturges Bourne both urged Pitt to listen to the proposals.

[17] It is interesting to note that *The Times*, 7 January 1807, believed that Gervillière was an agent to Talleyrand. This opinion could arguably be seen as reflecting that of the Government themselves.

[18] Talleyrand to Fox, 5 March 1806, *Fox Correspondence,*. IV, 147-8; Cabinet Minute of 24 March 1806, *HMC Dropmore*, VIII, 66.

concurrence. This line, from which Fox never deviated, was the King's *sine qua non*. George III was less than happy about negotiating with the Corsican usurper, but eventually accepted the government's policy on condition that his honour was not compromised by a separate peace, and that Hanover, which had been occupied by the acquisitive Prussians, would be restored to him.[19]

For Talleyrand, joint Anglo-Russian negotiation was unacceptable, principally because, combined, the initiative lay with the allies, whilst separated, France could hope to extort favourable terms from both, although he could not express this sentiment in his correspondence with Fox. Instead he engaged in a series of theoretical arguments concerning the problems of Russian mediation and the necessity of Russia's military intervention being compensated by a marine intervention, perhaps hinting at American involvement. In an attempt to rush the British government into agreeing to separate negotiations, Talleyrand sent two blank passports to London so that a representative could be swiftly dispatched to Lille. Aware of Fox's urgent desire for peace, the French minister cunningly concluded, '*Si vous êtes justes, si vous ne voulez que ce qu'il vous est possible de faire, la paix sera bientôt conclue.*'[20]

Fox was not immediately perturbed by Talleyrand's demands, assuming that a degree of bartering would naturally take place before a sensible compromise could be made. He called a Cabinet on receipt of Talleyrand's dispatch, declaring, 'the answer seems obvious, namely, to hold pacific language, to enter into the agreement; but to show the impossibility, considering our engagements with Russia, to treat without her participation in some stage of the negotiation.'[21]

For Fox the issue was simple. Britain was bound by treaty, and therefore by honour, to Russia; each would negotiate for the other's interests in any case, and therefore joint representation could not possibly threaten France. For Talleyrand to talk about Russian *mediation* was a misrepresentation, as Russia would not be mediating on Britain's behalf, but negotiating with her. He hoped that by stressing as strongly as possible the non-negotiable nature of this point, he would force Talleyrand to concede it. In doing so, Fox not only assumed that Talleyrand was as desirous of peace as he was, but that he would be willing to adopt a potentially unfavourable means of negotiation. Moreover,

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[19] Fox to Talleyrand, 26 March 1806, *Fox Correspondence*, IV, 148-50; George III to Fox, 22 March 1806, A. Aspinall (ed.), *The Later Correspondence of George III* (Cambridge, 1968), IV, 412; Chancellor, *The Ministry of All the Talents*, pp.71-2.
[20] Talleyrand to Fox, 1 April 1806, *Fox Correspondence*, IV, 150-4.
[21] Fox to Grenville, 7 April 1806, *HMC Dropmore* VIII, 84-5.

he assumed that because he felt it was obviously in France's interests to make peace, Napoleon thought the same. Yet although Fox was wrong in his assumptions, and showed total incomprehension of Napoleon's character, it is to his credit that he refused to move from his demands, and forced Talleyrand to break off the first stage of the peace talks.[22]

Talleyrand's reasoning with which he answered Fox's demands for joint Anglo-Russian representation, highlights the essential differences in the two approaches. For where Fox was pragmatic and matter-of-fact, Talleyrand took his theoretical arguments to their extreme. Thus, he was able to argue that a combined Anglo-Russian position would in effect revive the Third Coalition and treat France as the vanquished rather than the vanquisher. In an implied threat to Britain's coveted maritime rights, he stressed that an Anglo-Russian-French negotiation would constitute a congress and as such would necessitate inviting all the other interested powers: '*Un grand nombre s'occuperaient de l'équilibre de l'Asie: toutes s'intéresseraient à l'équilibre des mers.*'[23]

Both parties proved intractable on this point, and Fox's hopes of a swift, or any, conclusion of peace were rapidly dispelled. It was by this time widely suspected that St. Petersburg was not being so intransigent in their dealings with France, and this gave Talleyrand greater leeway in his dealings with Fox. By mid-April Fox could speak of being 'exceedingly vexed, though not surprised at the going off of the negotiation', and he again reverted to his *penchant* for retrospective censure, begging Grenville to 'reconsider the propriety of your desire that we should abstain from accusing our predecessors. We are not, nor can be safe in *character*, perhaps not even in other respects, if we do not shew that the present state of affairs is in a great measure owing to the absurd and, in the event, ruinous line of conduct pursued by the late administration.' Grenville once again refused Fox this means of escape.[24] In June it was decided between London and St. Petersburg that each would pursue separate negotiations whilst attempting to co-ordinate their positions. This was precisely what Talleyrand hoped for, and he was aided by the decision of both courts to appoint peculiarly inept representatives.

The correspondence between Fox and Talleyrand cannot really be described as a series of diplomatic manoeuvres, as in truth it was only Talleyrand who was manoeuvring. It would be unfair to conclude from this that Talleyrand was engaged in an entirely cynical exercise, the only purpose being to see how far Fox would go in his concessions–although there was

[22] Fox to Talleyrand, 8 April 1806, *Fox Correspondence*, IV, 154-8.
[23] Talleyrand to Fox, 16 April 1806, *Fox Correspondence,* IV, 158-64.
[24] Fox to Grenville, 18 April 1806; Grenville to Fox, 19 April 1806, *HMC Dropmore*, VIII, 106,108.

certainly an element of this. Instead, Talleyrand's stance reflected the difference between the two powers; for, whilst Fox hoped that they could treat as equals, the French wished to dictate terms as befitted their recent victories. Both expressed their desire for honourable peace, yet such notions of honour were mutually incompatible. Nevertheless, Fox and Grenville were willing to enter the second stage of negotiations and send a representative to Paris.

The task of representing Britain fell to the Earl of Yarmouth, a young aristocrat who had had the misfortune of being detained in Paris when the Peace of Amiens broke down. Talleyrand had sent him as a courier to Britain, and after a meeting with Grenville, Fox decided to give Yarmouth one of the passports sent by France in March.[25]

The choice was an unfortunate, although not irrational one. Aged twenty-nine, Yarmouth was far too young and inexperienced to be a match for the cunning Talleyrand, and, as was later alleged, his own venality called into question the motives of his representation. Yet, the government were anxious that the negotiations did not assume an official nature that the sending of a minister intimately connected with the government would give them. It was agreed that Yarmouth would conduct the preliminary talks, and when something substantial was ready to be discussed, a more senior diplomat would be sent.[26]

Talleyrand had intimated to Fox *via* Yarmouth that he was prepared to treat on the *uti possidetis*. This was the best the Britain could hope for, and Fox was certainly willing to conclude peace on this basis, for it would prevent further French encroachments in Italy and the Mediterranean, and halt Napoleon's proposed reorganisation of Germany. Talleyrand was, however, too experienced to allow this proposal to be committed to paper, and Yarmouth was not issued with an official set of instructions. This informality, praised by some historians for allowing the negotiations to be flexible, were at the time censured by those who felt that as a result French perfidy could not be so easily proven.[27]

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[25] Grenville to Fox, 11 June 1806, *HMC Dropmore*, VIII, 184.

[26] In London it was rumoured that Petty or Tom Grenville were to be sent. Tom Grenville was an obvious choice having had experience at diplomacy, but not being a minister. Fox's illness, however, made it imperative that he support the Government's weak debating strength in the Commons. Lady Bessborough to Leveson Gower, 25 June 1806, *Leveson Gower Correspondence*, II, 202.

[27] Taylor, *The Foxite Party*, p.75; Francis to Howick, 10 December 1806, Grey MSS, 15/8 f.3, in which the former argues, 'it would have been prudent and desirable to have obtained from Talleyrand in the first instance, a distinct acknowledgement in writing that this was to be the basis of the negotiation.' This was the line of attack seized upon by the Pittites in the debates on the negotiations in January 1807.

Yarmouth's initial dispatches to London highlighted the important problems which were to remain unresolved throughout the next five months. 'I conceive Sicily to be the greatest difficulty, tho' it might be got over,' he wrote after his first meeting with Talleyrand. However, in the same way that Talleyrand had latched on to the Russian negotiation as his point *sine qua non* in the correspondence with Fox, so he now doggedly clung to Sicily as the question which would decide peace or war.[28]

As Napoleon's armies advanced further down the Italian peninsula, Pitt's government had cast a worried eye over the Mediterranean, fearing that, having been ejected from Malta and Egypt, the French would now use Italy to threaten Britain's influence in that region. In March 1805 4,000 troops under the command of Lieutenant-General Craig were sent to Southern Italy in order to protect it from French invasion and to liaise with the Russians who had taken on the role of defenders of Naples. By December 1805, sickness had seriously weakened the Russian force, and the decision was made to evacuate Naples, the Russians moving to Corfu, the British to Sicily.[29] It is worth noting that the decision to occupy and fortify Sicily against the French was made by Fox.[30]

For Grenville and Fox, Sicily became a source of much confusion, with so many interconnected principles attached that no consistent policy emerged. First, and most importantly, it was clearly not in Britain's interests for France to acquire Sicily. The island was of crucial strategic value in the command of the Mediterranean, and to allow it to be used as a station for the French navy–even in its much reduced state–would have been folly of great proportions. Secondly, the question of Sicily was tied up with the Russian alliance, St. Petersburg having a separate commitment to King Ferdinand of Naples. Thirdly, both Fox and Grenville felt revulsion at Napoleon's cavalier treatment of the European Courts, and they considered it integral to British honour to prevent Ferdinand being entirely dispossessed of his patrimony.

If the government had consciously prioritised the question in this manner, then much later confusion would have been avoided, and both Yarmouth and Lauderdale could have returned to Britain sooner without having wasted time in the futile bargaining surrounding compensation to Ferdinand. As it was, the reasons for maintaining Sicily appeared to shift with each new development. The essential demand, however, remained unaltered: Sicily was part of the *uti possidetis*, and therefore could not simply be given away.

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[28] Yarmouth to Fox, 19 June 1806, BL. Add. MSS 51458 f.1.
[29] C. Hall, *British Strategy in the Napoleonic War, 1803-15* (Manchester, 1992), pp.115-7.
[30] Cabinet Memorandum of 2 March 1806, BL. Add. MSS. 51547 f.3.

After receiving Yarmouth's initial report, Fox and Grenville met to discuss what role he should adopt in France. Yarmouth had complained that Talleyrand refused to be frank with him until he had been given full powers to treat, and it was recognised in London that without these Yarmouth could not really be expected to gain much from the French. Fox decided. 'it would be right to send them with an injunction that he should not produce them till the point of Sicily is understood,' and this was agreed by Grenville.[31]

The British position, however, had a major flaw in it which was easily exploited by Talleyrand. For, whereas the British wanted *uti possidetis* on the French side, by demanding the restoration of Hanover to George III, they were demanding an exemption for themselves. It was true that it was Prussia, rather than France, which actually held Hanover, but this did not stop Talleyrand from pointing out the obvious similarity between France forcing Prussia to relinquish Hanover, and Britain removing her support for Russia over Sicily.[32] Fox's response that 'Hanover is to be given for the honour of the Crown, in return, our recognitions are given for the honour of *his* Crown' indicates the weakness of the British position, and is a reminder that not all the questionable arguments were on the French side.[33]

Grenville's view on Sicily at the start of the negotiations was certainly conditioned by its potential value as a naval base, and he recommended not only consolidating the British force in Sicily, but also garrisoning Sardinia, 'and thus make of all these islands in the Mediterranean an important chain of stations highly useful to us both in war and commerce.'[34] This was a classic Pittite stance, and undoubtedly the right one in the absence of any definite treaty of peace. Fox was equally adamant that Yarmouth should not give an inch on the question, stressing 'that Sicily is a *sine qua non*, on which subject if the French minister recedes from his former answer, it is in vain that any further discussion should take place.'[35] Unfortunately, this determination rapidly became obscured when the Russians announced their opinions on the subject.

The Russian court had dispatched the Count d'Oubril as their negotiator in Paris, and the French were assiduous in ensuring that Oubril and Yarmouth

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[31] Yarmouth to Fox, 19 June 1806, Grey MSS, 15/7 f.5; Fox to Grenville, 21 June 1806, *HMC Dropmore*, VIII, 195.
[32] Yarmouth to Fox, 19 June 1806, BL. Add. MSS 51458 f.1-7.
[33] Fox to Grenville, 21 June 1806, *HMC Dropmore*, VIII, 195. Also, Fox to Yarmouth, 26 June 1806, BL. Add. MSS 51458 f.9-15. Recognition by the other European Courts was always an object close to Napoleon's heart, but he never felt it to be more substantial than territorial possessions.
[34] Grenville to Fox, 22 June 1806, *ibid.*, VIII, 196.
[35] Fox to Yarmouth, 26 June, 1806, BL. Add. MSS 51458 f.7-8.

were separated. This worried Grenville who was not even certain what the Russian objects in the negotiations were, although he did not initially fear that they would treat for a separate peace.[36] The first intimation he had of a serious shift in the Russian position came in a letter from Stroganoff, the Russian ambassador in London, who argued that Sicily should be ceded to France in return for the creation of an 'independent' kingdom in Dalmatia.[37] This was clearly a specifically Russian interest, consolidating her influence in the eastern Mediterranean whilst sacrificing an island which she was powerless to defend in any case, yet the issue of 'compensations' was thus broached. Grenville's immediate response was to condemn the idea as inconsistent with British honour, and an order to reinforce Sicily by 6,000 troops was issued.[38] In Paris, however, discussions had already begun about the price to be paid for Sicily.

Talleyrand now employed another novel argument in order to induce Yarmouth to loosen his hold on Sicily. Moving further away from the *uti possidetis*, he argued that until definitive terms were actually agreed upon, France would have to take into account the potential for conquest, and stressing the strength of French forces in Italy, he declared that Napoleon was 'convinced of the facility of taking Sicily at some future period of the war.' He again demanded that Yarmouth reveal his full powers, although the latter continued to desist.[39]

Talleyrand's persistence was beginning to have effect, however, as Yarmouth's resolution wavered. Although he went as far as to demand his passports when Talleyrand continued to refuse the Sicilian point (Talleyrand persuaded him to 'wait one day'), French threats and incentives were working to convince him that peace could, and perhaps should, be signed.[40] French incentives were few, Talleyrand unofficially suggesting that France would support the abolition of the slave trade should peace be signed; the threats were far greater, and had a considerable effect on Yarmouth. 'What will war produce,' he lamented, 'a more close connexion between France and Prussia, the total loss of Hanover, the destruction of the German Empire, the partition of Switzerland &c.'[41] The French were careful to increase these fears at every opportunity. On 1 July, Yarmouth warned of 'a romantic scheme for marching thro' Turkey to India'; and later he wrote of 30,000 French troops stationed at

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[36] Grenville to Fox, 22 June 1806, *HMC Dropmore*, VIII, 195-6.
[37] Stroganoff to Grenville, 4 July 1806, *ibid.*, VIII, 218-9.
[38] Cabinet Minute of 4 July 1806, *HMC Dropmore*, VIII, 217-8.
[39] Yarmouth to Fox, 1 July 1806, PRO. FO. 27/73.
[40] Yarmouth to Fox, 9 July 1806, BL. Add. MSS 51458 f.29-32.
[41] Yarmouth to Fox, 9 July 1806, Grey MSS, 15/7 f.7.

Bayonne ready for the invasion of Spain. This last threat, the Government, especially Howick, took seriously.[42]

As Yarmouth wavered, Oubril took action. In a letter to Fox, he had already hinted that Russia would not wait around whilst Britain continued to insist on Sicily, which Russia had now dropped. His letter forced the government to reconsider their attitude, and in one of the last letters that Fox was physically able to write, Yarmouth was made aware of the new reasoning in London.

> The pretence that we should give up Sicily without the color of any intermediate event having happened to affect the point since it was offered, is so unreasonable as to make one lose all patience. But if on the other hand it is the express & declared wish of Russia that we should give it up in order to gain for her what she mistakenly thinks better security the thing might be done, but then in that case there must be some decent equivalent for the K. of Naples.'

The strategic folly of giving up Sicily to France was forgotten amidst the fear that Russia would sign a separate peace. Fox's final instructions to Yarmouth were condensed into three short commands: ' 1st Honor. 2nd. Hanover. 3rd. Preservation of the Russian alliance, these are the cardinal points.'[43] These were hardly helpful to Yarmouth, who was clearly left to decide for himself what constituted 'honor', and how best to preserve the Russian alliance.

Oubril's impatience led him to spend all of 19 July in deep discussions with the French, and to sign a separate peace on the following day. The terms of the peace stipulated that the Russians evacuate their remaining positions in Italy and Dalmatia, which would be made into an independent republic. For their part the French would evacuate Germany. In a secret article, Ferdinand IV of Naples was to be 'persuaded to part with Sicily' and be compensated in the Balearic Islands. If he refused this he was to abdicate in favour of his more pliable son.[44]

The terms were received with stupefaction by all who beheld them. 'M. d'Oubril is either an ideot or much worse' declared a stunned Yarmouth. In London, Grenville, communicating the events to George III, referred to 'the unexampled disgrace of this transaction.' Even Stroganoff was amazed, which

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[42] Yarmouth to Fox, 1 July 1806, Grey MSS, 15/7 f.6; Yarmouth to Fox, 19 July 1806, PRO. FO. 27/73.

[43] Fox to Yarmouth, 15 July 1806, Grey MSS, 32/10b (unfoliated). Most communications after 1 July are in a hand other than Fox's. The brevity of the dispatch reveals the pain Fox was in.

[44] Yarmouth to Fox, 20 July 1806, PRO. FO. 27/73.

gave the government some grounds for hoping that Oubril's action was entirely unauthorised.[45]

Had Yarmouth been a more experienced diplomat, he would have adopted Grenville's approach of waiting for news from St. Petersburg before taking any precipitate action. Instead, quite understandably, Yarmouth was horrified at Oubril's treaty. 'We are now alone,' he wrote disconsolately, 'time cannot be gained.' Talleyrand now devoted all his efforts to persuading Yarmouth that Britain had no choice but to follow Russia's lead, and once again he demanded that the former reveal his full powers; 'I did not feel myself authorised to withhold them,' the unfortunate Yarmouth replied.[46]

The French naturally increased their demands, and the *uti possidetis*, now disappeared entirely from view. Talleyrand and General Clarke, the Minister for War, asked for Pondicherry, various West Indian possessions, and the captured Dutch colonies in South America. Sicily was to be given over to France, and Britain was to compensate Ferdinand from her own treasury to the amount of £50,000. The Bonaparte dynasty was to be recognised in all its branches. Yarmouth protested vigorously, and still believed that some small concessions could be wrought from the French, but he confessed that the essential points had to be conceded.[47]

Predictably, the government in London were less than enamoured with Yarmouth's actions. He had ignored all previous instructions by revealing his full powers without first securing the point of Sicily and the *uti possidetis*. 'It is plain that Lord Yarmouth does not feel his own ground, and is much too prompt in committing us without authority by new expedients of his own,' wrote Grenville.[48] This judgement was watered down in its communication to Yarmouth, but the latter was left in no doubt about the annoyance felt by the government.

Yarmouth's actions showed inexperience and panic, but they did little to affect the eventual outcome of the negotiations. The government deserves as much blame for the chaos in Paris as their representative. Yarmouth knew that he was out of his depth within days of returning to France, and he begged Fox to send a more senior diplomat as had been promised at the outset of his

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[45] Yarmouth to Fox, 19 July 1806, Grey MSS, 15/7 f.9; Grenville to George III, 25 July 1806, *HMC Dropmore*, VIII, 243.
[46] Yarmouth to Fox, 20 July 1806; 21 July 1806, BL. Add. MSS 51458 f.55-6, f.60-3.
[47] Yarmouth to Fox, 20 July 1806 (2), BL. Add. MSS 51458 f.66-75; Yarmouth to Fox, 24 July 1806, PRO. FO. 27/73.
[48] Observations on Lord Yarmouth's despatches of the 20th and 21st July by Lord Grenville, *HMC Dropmore*, VIII, 244.

mission.[49] In his favour, it should be added that, unlike Oubril, he at least did not make use of his powers to sign an embarrassing and disadvantageous treaty, even though Talleyrand and Clarke presented him with such a project whilst threatening to invade Spain and Austria.[50] His dispatches reveal a genuine belief that the fate of Europe hung in the balance, and that failure on Britain's part to conclude peace, would result in the total subjection of the Continent ('if however we do not make peace before the 15 August Portugal will probably be seized').[51]

Grenville's response to the crisis was sensibly to bring the issue to a head and either conclude peace or break off the negotiations. In a seven point memorandum he decided that Russia should take full responsibility for Naples whilst ensuring that the *uti possidetis* was fully applied to Spain and Portugal. Above all Yarmouth should be ordered to issue Talleyrand with an ultimatum, as 'delay now only gives ground against us, and impedes our resolutions for the case of war.'[52] In order to prevent Yarmouth from further exacerbating the situation, it was decided to send the Earl of Lauderdale to Paris as the senior representative.

Lauderdale was a choice clearly made to ease Foxite fears that the impending death of Fox would result in a cessation of the peace talks.[53] As one of the more radical Foxite peers, Lauderdale could be expected to pursue peace with enthusiasm, and this would hopefully cast further blame on the French should peace prove impossible.

This leads on to an important point regarding the significance of Fox's death. W.B. Taylor argues that once Grenville took control of foreign policy in mid-July, 'the character of the French negotiations changed over night.'[54] It is true that subtle differences did occur which can be imputed to Grenville's assumption of foreign policy. Most significantly, Lauderdale was given extensive written instructions prior to leaving Britain, and the government's line became notably more inflexible and impatient with the French.

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[49] Yarmouth to Fox, 1 July 1806, Grey MSS 15/7 f.6.
[50] Memorandum submitted by Mr. Goddard, 1 August 1806, BL. Add. MSS 51458 f.100-6.
[51] Yarmouth to Fox, 27 July 1806, PRO. FO. 27/73. See also Yarmouth to Fox, 30 July 1806, BL. Add. MSS 51458 f.93-99.
[52] Observations on Lord Yarmouth's dispatches of the 20th and 21st of July by Lord Grenville, *HMC Dropmore*, VIII, 244-5.
[53] Fox's health had been declining for some years. In late June he was struck seriously ill and it was doubted whether he would survive a month. By mid-July he was too weak to continue with his official duties and Grenville reluctantly took on the burden of the foreign office. Fox lingered on until his death on 13 September.
[54] Taylor, *The Foxite Party*, p.75.

Yet, two objections must be raised to this argument. Firstly, it assumes that there were significant differences between Fox and Grenville prior to July, and that Grenville allowed Fox to run the negotiations his way, without intervening. This is a return to the misconception that Fox was the effectual leader of the government, which has been disputed above. In fact it appears as though both Fox and Grenville were of one mind in the initial stages of the negotiation, Fox declaring after the end of his correspondence with Talleyrand, 'You will be happy to hear that it occasioned no difference or even a shade of difference in the cabinet.'[55] The importance of treating on the *uti possidetis* was agreed by both men, and even the confusion regarding the Sicilian question seems to have afflicted them equally. Where there was a difference, it was in their motives and approach, rather than their actions, but as Fox admitted, 'I wish peace most ardently...but to make peace by acceding to worse terms than those first suggested to you by M. Talleyrand wd be as repugnant to my own feelings as it wd be to the Duty I owe to the K & Country.'[56] Ultimately the terms demanded by France were incompatible with the honour of either Fox or Grenville, and it is futile to argue, as the French tried, that the failure of peace was caused by the removal of its leading advocate.

Instead, the prime causes of the change in the negotiations can be put down to five factors, four of which had nothing to do with the death of Fox. In the first place, the debacle surrounding Yarmouth's diplomacy did much to shake up the government in London. The issuing of instructions to Lauderdale was a natural response to this, signifying a recognition on the part of Grenville that the previous informality of the discussion did nothing to resolve issues and invited the French to confuse matters further. The final sentence of the instructions reiterated the importance of bringing the issue to a head, for 'procrastination would now only give fresh ground of advantage to the enemy.' The instructions themselves did not state anything new in the government's position, although the principle of compensation was now officially embraced, should an adequate price be offered. The *uti possidetis* was once again stressed as the basis from which all negotiations must proceed. [57] This can hardly be seen as a dramatic or irrational change of direction.

The second, and most important event, was Tsar Alexander's repudiation of Oubril's treaty, the first rumours of which arrived shortly after Lauderdale took over the British representation. This forced the French to drop their more outlandish demands and Lauderdale noticed an immediate change

[55] Fox to Bedford, 13 April 1806, *Fox Correspondence*, IV, 136.
[56] Fox to Yarmouth, 26 June 1806, BL. Add. MSS. 51458 f.7-8.
[57] Instructions to the Earl of Lauderdale, 2 August 1806, PRO. FO. 27/74.

for the better in their treatment of him. Moreover, the Russians now adopted a belligerent position, expressing little interest in pursuing the negotiations, and not bothering to replace Oubril. This meant that not only was Britain compelled to negotiate on what it perceived to be Russia's interests, but that the possibility of further Franco-Russian conflict increased.[58]

The third factor, significant in the short term, was the change in Britain's military and strategic position, which briefly appeared to force the French onto the defensive. This principally involved Britain's capture of Buenos Aires, reports of which were received in London towards the end of June,[59] and the British military victory at Maida in Calabria on 4 July–the first such success on the Continent since the wars began. Grenville felt justified in including Buenos Aires in the *uti possidetis*, and optimistically hoped that this, combined with the military victories in southern Italy, would restore all of Naples to its legitimate ruler.[60] Although naive in this hope, for Napoleon cared little about South America, he should not suffer too much criticism for the attempt; he was merely following the same principles already employed by Talleyrand. Maida did at least end the French assumption that they would shortly capture Sicily.

The fourth factor, crucial in French calculations was their reorganisation of the Rhineland, and the tensions this created with Prussia, leading to war in October 1806. In late July Yarmouth reported that French troops were assembling in the Rhineland, ostensibly in order to facilitate the restoration of Hanover to Britain, and on 30 August Lauderdale confirmed that there was 'some misunderstanding concerning Prussia'.[61] The French were thus anxious to preoccupy the British until the issue was decided, and prevent Prussia from receiving subsidies, whilst Grenville entertained brief hopes that a peace congress could result from the tensions, and further hardened his face against a separate peace.[62]

The final factor, which was a result of Fox's death, and effectively decided the end of the negotiations, was Grenville's decision in October to

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[58] Herbert Butterfield in *The Peace Tactics of Napoleon, 1806-1808*, (Cambridge, 1929) argues that Russia knew of Prussia's determination to fight Napoleon, and was gearing itself to a resumption of war. This was apparently unknown in London at the time.

[59] The Talents' involvement in South America will be examined in chapter V.

[60] On South America, see Grenville to Lauderdale, 30 September 1806, PRO. FO. 27/74; on the significance attached to Maida, see Windham to Lauderdale, 10 September 1806, PRO. FO. 27/74, and Lauderdale to Grenville, 24 September 1806, BL. Add. MSS. 51458 f.200-3.

[61] Yarmouth to Fox, 27 July 1806, PRO. FO. 27/73; Lauderdale to Fox, 30 August 1806, BL. Add. MSS. 51458 f.144-8.

[62] Grenville to Lauderdale, 22 September 1806, *HMC Dropmore*, VIII, 352; Spencer to Lauderdale, 23 September 1806, PRO. FO. 27/74.

strengthen his weakened government by a dissolution of Parliament. Not wishing to go to the country with the negotiations unresolved, and requiring Lauderdale to help with the election, Grenville asked him 'to bring the thing to a point speedily.'[63]

Thus, the third stage of the negotiations, which cover Lauderdale's arrival in August until his almost unnoticed departure in October, are more remarkable for the events occurring outside of France, than the futile charade being played out to its end in Paris. Yet Lauderdale's dispatches are a good barometer of French opinion, stretching from his acute pessimism on his arrival, to his presumptive optimism in September when confirmation arrived that Oubril's treaty was not to be ratified. Lauderdale himself was more cautious than Yarmouth, and gave Talleyrand far less opportunity to toy with him, although the latter was clearly infuriated by Lauderdale's insistence that all discussions had to be written rather than verbal. The Prussian ambassador in Berlin, Lucchesini, one of few Prussians respected in Britain, spoke '*de la sagesse, et de la dextérité*' of Lauderdale, suggesting talents rarely appreciated by historians.[64]

On arriving at Paris, Lauderdale discovered to his horror that Yarmouth was alleged to have been speculating on the funds in the hope of a peace, and moreover had done so in partnership with one of Talleyrand's spies. The affair was carefully hushed up, and using the fortuitous French protest regarding Britain's use of two negotiators, Yarmouth was quietly recalled, to the relief of all concerned.[65] Lauderdale was also able to scotch some of Yarmouth's more hysterical reports of French conquest and invasion, particularly the mythical army at Bayonne. Beyond this, however, he could only state his 'absolute despair of doing any good.' He was particularly hurt at French insinuations that he was deserting the noble principles of Fox.[66]

Like Yarmouth before him, his application for passports was continually obstructed by the French, and he began to suspect that they were playing for

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[63] Grenville to Lauderdale, 1 October 1806, *HMC Dropmore*, VIII, 369.
[64] The Journal of Friedrich von Gentz, *ibid.*, VIII, 534. Grenville spoke of Lauderdale's 'conciliating temper & a mind that goes directly to the point of any question.' Grenville to T. Grenville, 18 November 1807, BL. Add. MSS 41852 f.317.
[65] Lauderdale to Grenville, 12 August 1806; Grenville to Lauderdale, 14 August 1806, *HMC Dropmore*, VIII, 271-2, 278. The case against Yarmouth has not been fully proven, and the possibility remains that it may have been another French ruse designed to isolate the new diplomat. Grenville was certainly unconcerned about the truth of the accusations, as he had specifically instructed Lauderdale to find any possible pretext for the removal of Yarmouth. The Allen Journal, BL. Add. MSS 52204A f.12.
[66] Lauderdale to Fox, 16 August 1806, BL. Add. MSS. 51458 f.124-6.

time in order to discover what the fate of Oubril's treaty would be. In London rumours that Alexander was furious with Oubril were known by mid-August, and this was confirmed in early September, with immediate instructions sent to Lauderdale that the *uti possidetis* must be insisted on, and, more importantly, that the preservation of Sicily was now to be considered a *sine qua non.*[67] The British position had not shifted away from its original basis, instead it had tortuously come full circle.

This new turn of events excited Lauderdale to a considerable degree, declaring, 'it is seriously my opinion that I can get better terms of peace at present than, in all probability, we shall ever have it in our power to induce.' He even felt that France would conclude a favourable separate peace with Britain if only to spite Russia.[68]

It was at this point that the negotiations reached their final deadlock, with Lauderdale trapped between the obstinacy of both governments. Grenville and Howick (Foreign Secretary after Fox's death) steadfastly refused to respond to French suggestions of a naval armistice, or colonial concessions in the Caribbean, whilst the French did not fulfil Lauderdale's expectations and showed themselves more concerned with detaining him at Paris than actually treating with him. By late September both Lauderdale and Grenville were speaking of the negotiation 'going off', and Lauderdale's one concern was that he should be exonerated from all blame in the matter.[69] Prussia and South America had by now completely surpassed the peace negotiations in the preoccupations of the French and British governments and Lauderdale finally received his passports on 6 October.[70]

In the same way as external events affected the British attitude towards the negotiations, so the French were similarly responding to events outside of France. There seems little reason to doubt that Talleyrand, and to some extent, Napoleon himself, desired peace in May 1806. One of Talleyrand's biographers has referred to his 'perennial disposition toward peace', and in his memoirs, Talleyrand spoke of how he 'eagerly seized' the opportunity at negotiation.[71] Yet Napoleon, speaking from the summit of Austerlitz, would accept nothing less than French hegemony on the Continent, and even the *uti possidetis* was an

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[67] Cabinet Minute of 7 September 1806, *HMC Dropmore*, VIII, 312.
[68] Lauderdale to Fox, 1 September 1806, 4 September 1806, BL. Add. MSS. 51458 f.150, f.159-64.
[69] Talleyrand unfairly attached blame to Lauderdale for 'spoiling' the negotiation. Duc de Broglie (ed.), *Memoirs of the Prince de Talleyrand* (tr. R.L. de Beaufort, London, 1891), I, 230.
[70] Howick to Lauderdale, 1 October 1806, Grey MSS, 39 (unfoliated); Lauderdale to Grenville, 29 September 1806, *HMC Dropmore*, VIII, 358-9.
[71] J.F. Bernard, *Talleyrand: A Biography* (London, 1973), p.267; Talleyrand, *Memoirs*, I, 230.

unsatisfactory basis, excluding as it did, Germany and the Mediterranean. The question of Hanover, according to Talleyrand, rendered peace 'morally impossible.'[72] Wishing not to provoke Prussia into immediate war, Napoleon deliberately kept the point of Hanover vague, but once Yarmouth had told the Prussian ambassador that France was exchanging the electorate for peace, such deception was no longer possible. Aware that a successful war against Prussia would destroy any Anglo-French peace based on the *uti possidetis*, Napoleon became increasingly disinterested in the negotiations after mid-August.

It is, therefore, a little unfair to argue that the French had no intention of concluding peace with Britain *ab initio*, and were merely engaged in diversionary tactics whilst they consolidated their power in Germany. Instead, it appears as though the French were hoping, that by playing on Foxite demands for peace, and the inexperience of their representatives, they could secure a peace similar to that of Amiens but which also reflected the increase in French power on the Continent. This was the thrust of Talleyrand's correspondence with Fox, and his discussions with Yarmouth.

Yet whilst both sides could at least conceive of peace, it was impossible for a treaty to have been concluded which would have left both parties' honour intact. The failure of the negotiations represented the strategic position of both sides; the French too powerful to accept a curtailing of their conquests, the British invulnerable enough to reject a humiliating peace. There are many grounds for criticising the conduct of the Government: their instructions were vague and changeable; they showed little understanding of the real issues at stake; and they arguably protracted the negotiations in Paris long after they should have been terminated. It is wrong, however, to suggest as A.D. Harvey does, that the negotiations were wrong *per se*.[73] Evidence of Napoleon's duplicity was not as obvious in 1806 as hindsight would suggest; the view that he not only desired peace, but actually needed it, still persisted, and was encouraged to some extent by Talleyrand in his correspondence with Fox.[74]

Even those like Grenville and Windham, who were sceptical about the prospects of peace, had a valid reason for entering into negotiations. It was in their interests to prove beyond reasonable doubt that Napoleon would not accept peace with Britain, and therefore every effort should be made to secure Britain's defensive and offensive capacity. Nothing would be more amenable to this purpose than the failure of an ostensibly Foxite-led negotiation. Moreover, after Austerlitz, and with Russia willing to treat separately, the

[72] Talleyrand, *Memoirs*, I, 231.
[73] Harvey, *The Ministry of All the Talents*, p.630-3.
[74] Talleyrand to Fox, 1 April 1806, *Fox Correspondence*, IV, 150-4.

British really did not have a great number of alternatives before them. It is perhaps significant that no further attempt was made to treat with France until 1814; the lesson had been learnt on both sides.

V

CONFLICTS OF POLICY

For the Foxites, wholeheartedly pursuing peace in 1806, power could not have come to them at a more opportune time: Pitt's Continental strategy appeared to be out of the question for the foreseeable future; French power was dominant and secure, whilst Britain had seemingly guaranteed her immediate security by the victory at Trafalgar. Yet this scenario, fortunate whilst peace seemed possible, was translated into despairing impotence when the alternative of war was considered. A cursory glance at the events of the preceding year was enough to convince even the most belligerent that resistance to Napoleon on the Continent was futile whilst the other powers remained disunited, and military strategy uncoordinated.

Pitt had staked all on the Third Coalition, promising huge subsidies and territorial acquisition as incentives to the other powers. Austria was to be paid the vast sum of £4,000,000 for each year that she was militarily active, and a treaty with Russia, dependent on the number of men she placed in the field, was expected to be in the region of £2,000,000. In all, Pitt had pledged £7,000,000 in subsidies for the year 1806 alone.[1]

Had Pitt been able to persuade Prussia to take up arms, this sum would have been even higher. Pitt recognised that any continental coalition depended for its success on the participation of all the four major powers, and, if he overestimated Prussia's military capacity, he was certainly correct in seeing the indecisiveness of Berlin as a serious threat to the coalition. His initial offer to subsidise Prussia on the same basis as Russia, was raised as the desperate plight of the Austrian armies became all the more evident. Before his health collapsed, Pitt was to offer Berlin the extraordinary amount of £2,500,000 and hinted that Britain would acquiesce in Prussian annexation of Holland–the latter a measure both of Pitt's desperation, as well as the value he placed on Prussian participation.[2]

Prussia prevaricated, torn between this incredible offer from London and fear of the consequences of departing from her hitherto successful policy of neutrality. After Mack's defeat at Ulm, Russia put more pressure on Berlin to join the coalition, and by the Potsdam Convention of 3 November 1805, Frederick William agreed to enter the war should Napoleon reject a set of

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[1] J. Sherwig, *Guineas and Gunpowder. British Foreign Aid in the Wars with France*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1969) pp.164-5.
[2] Sherwig, *Guineas and Gunpowder*. p.169.

peace terms calculated to arouse French scorn. The Prussian minister Haugwitz delayed presenting the terms to Napoleon until 28 November. A week later the coalition had collapsed; Prussia had delayed long enough to avoid war, and yet revealed her intentions in time for Napoleon to capitalise on her discomfort.[3]

The result was an offensive-defensive alliance signed between France and Prussia at Schönbrunn on 15 December 1805. Prussia was forced to guarantee France's conquests, and agree to further French annexations in the Rhineland. In return Napoleon recognised the Prussian annexation of Hanover, which Frederick William had surreptitiously invaded in November, although it was Berlin's responsibility to expel the British troops currently stationed there. The French intention was clearly to force Prussia into hostility with Britain. By a further treaty of 15 February 1806, Prussia was ordered to break all relations with Britain, and declare unconditional support for France in any future European war.[4]

Therefore, when the Talents took over control of British foreign policy in February 1806, they were faced with the shattered remnants of the Third Coalition, a Continent almost totally subjugated by the victorious French, and claims from Vienna and St. Petersburg for the fulfilment of Pitt's outstanding subsidies. Only against these stark facts can Fox and Grenville's Continental policy be fairly judged, for the situation bequeathed them by Pitt was a far from enviable one.

Fox, on taking the Foreign Office seals, had no doubts as to the bleakness of the European situation. 'I cannot but think this country inevitably and irretrievably ruined,' he wrote to Grenville. 'That is no reason for our quitting our stations, especially as we took them with something like a certainty of the evils I dread coming on; and yet to be Ministers at a moment when the country is falling and all Europe sinking, is a dreadful situation.'[5] The confusion on the Continent was matched by chaos in St. James' Palace. The demise of the Third Coalition had not been well documented in London, partly due to Pitt's lingering end, and the difficulty of gaining accurate information from the war-

[3] See Schroeder, *Transformation of European Politics*, pp.279-83.
[4] *ibid.* p.285. For two recent appraisals of Prussian foreign policy, see Philip Dwyer, 'The Politics of Prussian Neutrality, 1795-1805' and Brendan Simms, 'The Road to Jena: Prussian High Politics 1804-6' both in *German History*, XII, October 1994.
[5] Fox to Grenville, 18 April 1806, *HMC Dropmore*, VIII, p.105.

torn Continent.[6] Lord Granville Leveson Gower, the ambassador to St. Petersburg and British signatory to the 1805 subsidy treaty, had accompanied Tsar Alexander to the battlefield, and consequently London was unenlightened as to the direction of Russian diplomacy. The inevitable delay in Baltic communications meant that it was early March before Leveson Gower was even aware of the change in ministry.[7]

The immediate direction of British policy was a further enigma in the opening months of 1806. Whilst Fox was eager to seize the first opportunities for peace negotiations, he was aware that it would be foolish to be seen to take the initiative and give the appearance of suing for peace. It would seem that prior to the arrival of Guillet de la Gervillière, Fox made no overt attempts to communicate with Paris. Yet the Anglo-Russian alliance was still officially active, war between Britain and Prussia seemed an inevitability, and rumours persisted that France was on the verge of invading Spain. Until a general peace congress could be convened, an actively belligerent policy remained the only feasible course of action, and Fox, realising early on that his options were limited, was prepared to pursue this line. Surprisingly, it was Sidmouth who first put the priorities of foreign policy in a succinct statement: 'the present state of the Continent and the movements of the French armies, make it important that the first measures of the new administration should be marked by vigour and decision.' In particular, he advised launching a pre-emptive strike on Spanish ports in order to deny the French valuable naval facilities. Unsurprisingly, his suggestion was quietly ignored, if indeed it was ever noticed.[8]

The immediate priorities facing the Talents were the reaffirmation of the Russian alliance which Fox, never having departed from his Russophile views, was eager to expedite, and the rapid removal of the British forces in northern Germany, before the Prussian army arrived. The latter comprised 20,000 troops, originally dispatched by Pitt as an added incentive for Prussian co-operation; it was rightly deemed foolish to try to defend Hanover against a combined Franco-Prussian army.[9]

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[6] 'The papers relative to the Continental wreck are more observable for what they omit than for what they contain....There is not a single despatch or instruction from the British Government.' Auckland to Grenville, 10 February 1806, *ibid.*, VIII, p.26-7.

[7] Sherwig, *Guineas and Gunpowder*, p.173; Leveson Gower to Fox, 3 March 1806, BL. Add. Mss. 51460 f.53.

[8] Memorandum by Viscount Sidmouth, 4 February 1806, BL. Add. Mss. 37883, f.54-5; Ziegler, *Addington*, p.255. W.B. Taylor's thesis that Fox and Sidmouth shared similar views on foreign policy must be questioned. *The Foxite Party*, p.59.

[9] See Ham, *British War Policy*, pp.48-61.

Although it was subsequently argued by the Pittites that Fox had declared war hastily on Prussia, and had thus prevented later co-operation with this power, in reality Fox was left with very little option but to make official the *de facto* hostilities.[10] Personal and political factors contributed to the eventual declaration of war in April. It must be noted, that neither Grenville nor Fox held Prussia in high esteem. For Grenville, experience as Foreign Secretary during the first two coalitions had convinced him that Prussia was treacherous and motivated entirely by self-aggrandisement. Writing later, he warned Howick, 'long experience has satisfied me that nothing can be done at Berlin by liberality & concession. We must work upon their necessities...All sentiments of liberal policies are totally extinct there–the feeling does not exist, and cannot be worked upon.'[11]

For Fox, the distrust of Prussia was a more instinctive feeling, although no less powerful. Prussia had been one of the 'despotic powers' which had moved to crush the French Revolution in 1792, and by doing so had been responsible for the war and the subsequent derailing of the French liberal constitution. He also appears to have specifically associated Prussia with the cynical and acquisitive *realpolitik* of Frederick the Great, of which he saw yet another example in the annexation of Hanover–'that unwarrantable practice of late among the Powers of Europe of indemnifying themselves for the sacrifices they have been obliged to make to powerful enemies at the expence of a third party.'[12] To Fox, it was the parasitical conduct of powers such as Prussia, which had allowed the war to be protracted, and had constantly offered France more opportunities to increase her own power.

Yet despite the extremely negative views regarding Prussia held by the leaders of the coalition, these were not themselves the principal motives which compelled Fox to declare war. Instead two very practical considerations guided his conduct. In the first place, it was Prussia, albeit forced by France, who had broken off relations, closed the German ports, and annexed Hanover; secondly, the annexation of George III's electorate was not an event which any government aiming on retaining power could afford to ignore.

The last point is an important one, for it should not be forgotten that the king could still influence and direct policy, and was not backward in voicing his discontent should the government pursue a course against his wishes. In March 1806, he was quick to chastise Fox for replying to Talleyrand in his

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[10] W.B. Taylor also maintains that Fox was overly zealous and refused to listen to the Prussian pleas. *The Foxite Party*, p.70.
[11] Grenville to Howick, 27 September 1806, Grey MSS, 21/2, f.50.
[12] Fox to Leveson Gower, 17 March 1806, PRO FO, 65/62 f.17.

name and express his hope that the government would, 'think it their duty to quash at the outset any idea or proposal of negociation.'[13] Swift vengeance for the insult to his name perpetrated by Prussia, was therefore a priority for the King, whose delicate mental constitution was not such as to allow contradiction on this point.

In fact, Fox's first draft of the *note verbale* to be sent to Berlin protesting at the seizure of Hanover, was refused by the King on the grounds that it should be 'more pointed, and should mark more strongly His Majesty's determination not to give up his own rights.'[14] George III needed little cause to replace Fox at the Foreign Office should a justifiable reason have arisen, and there is no cause to doubt that failure to defend His Majesty's dominions would have been reason enough. Auckland was quick to see the importance of the question as a means 'to conciliate the King's mind towards his new government, and also to lessen any leaning towards the new opposition, if they should take up this question as they have taken up every other.'[15]

Yet whilst Fox was compelled by political reasons to pursue a belligerent policy towards Prussia, his determination to force the truculent court to yield to British demands was not lacking in zeal or persistence. The initial measures against Prussia were such as Berlin could have expected: Francis Jackson, the British ambassador, was asked to apply for his passports, and a blockade was swiftly applied to Prussia's ports, with her vessels seized.[16] Prussian attempts to prevent the declaration of war took the form of a *note verbale*, claiming that all Prussia's actions had been an essential part of preserving German independence and neutrality, and that the seizure of Hanover 'has not been obtained without painful sacrifices on His Majesty's Part.'[17] Such language was unlikely to make much impact in a country already cynical and disillusioned about the military endeavours of its European allies.

Fox, however, was not content with mere diplomatic and naval pressure. In an ironic twist of diplomacy, he attempted to form a European coalition against Prussia, in the hope that Hanover could be restored through direct military action. He had little trouble in enlisting the Swedish government to take an active part in the blockade of Prussia, although Stockholm would not take part in any land operations in Pomerania.[18] Most important to Fox, was

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[13] George III to Fox, 22 March 1806, *Correspondence of George III,* IV, p.412.
[14] George III, to Fox, 13 March 1806, *ibid.*, IV, p.405.
[15] Auckland to Grenville, 7 April 1806, *HMC Dropmore*, VIII, p.85.
[16] Fox to Jackson, 5 April 1806, PRO FO 64/71, f.7.
[17] *Note Verbale* delivered by Baron Jacobi to London, PRO FO 64/71 f.12.
[18] Henry Pierrepont to Fox, 23 May 1806, BL. Add. Mss. 51461 f.29.

the support of the Russian army in this task, and to this end he urgently pressed Leveson Gower.

To what extent Fox was aware of the terms of the Potsdam Convention is uncertain, but he clearly underestimated the ties existing between Russia and Prussia which had survived the latter's effectual subjugation by France. Harrowby, Pitt's special envoy to Prussia, had discovered to his horror that in a secret article, Alexander had promised Hanover to Prussia, but it cannot be said with any certainty that Fox knew of this.[19]

His dispatches to Leveson Gower, however, do clearly show that he expected some Russian assistance in this new war. Considering that Russia herself was still in the process of retreating from a far more deadly enemy, and that under these circumstances the very last thing that Alexander could have wanted was a war on his western borders, the demands made by Fox are quite astonishing:

> If the Court of Berlin has gone too far to venture to tread back her steps, it is the opinion of His Majesty, that nothing remains for the allied powers but to carry on the most vigorous War...If the Cabinet of Petersburg feels as we do the identity of our interests, the next consideration is in what manner or shape its support may be most efficacious, and upon this point it seems clear, that a direct attack on the territory of Prussia is by far the most eligible mode of proceeding. The success of Russia against the Polish provinces of Prussia, cannot be doubted.

Fox's presumption did not end with requesting that Russia undertake a war for purely English dynastic reasons, for, 'the English will assist in the manner that shall appear most desirable, either by such land forces *as she can spare*, by naval exertions, or by pecuniary aids, *if the amount required be not too exorbitant.*'[20]

Fox's active determination to wage war on Prussia was noticed by contemporaries. 'You will see in the papers and no doubt approve of Mr. Fox's brilliant war whoop...his whole mind is set on making an example of Prussia', wrote Lady Bessborough.[21] Fox's political allies also must have had some difficulty reconciling his former statements with his present conduct. Fox seemed to be pursuing an essentially Pittite policy without the financial commitments.[22]

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[19] Schroeder, *Transformation of European Politics*, p.280; Sherwig, *Guineas and Gunpowder*, p.169.
[20] Fox to Leveson Gower, 29 April 1806, FO PRO 65/62 f.36-40. The italics are mine.
[21] Lady Bessborough to Leveson Gower, 23 April 1806, *Leveson Gower Correspondence*, II, 189.
[22] Although Fox clearly had some doubts over the war. Writing to Bedford he referred to, 'this Prussian war, which we had no means of avoiding, but by a submission equal to that of the King of Prussia himself, will be very injurious to our commerce, and of course cause great discontent; and if there is a bad harvest, the evil will be incalculable.' 13 April 1806, *Fox Correspondence*, IV, 133.

The Russians were unsurprisingly unprepared to countenance a campaign against their neighbour, and continued to entertain hopes that an Anglo-Prussian *rapprochement* could yet be reached. The tsar's chief minister, Prince Czartoryski spoke common sense when he argued that Britain and Russia, 'must therefore, for the present, dissemble their dissatisfaction, & endeavour to take advantage of the good intentions, which Prussia holds out for the future.'[23] Yet, until Russia could persuade Berlin to relinquish her hold on Hanover, the chances of such reconciliation were impossible. The Russians were prepared to make protests to Berlin, and convinced Leveson Gower of their vigour in this respect, but ultimately military action was out of the question. Alexander 'could not without exposing his Empire to a very great danger, provoke hostilities with the King of Prussia,' and Fox had to make do with reports from Jackson of the 'greatest distress & consternation' suffered by the Prussian merchants as a result of the British blockade.[24]

In mid-May the Prussians sent Baron Jacobi to London in order to mollify the British, yet apart from reiterating his court's line that Hanover had merely been administered by Berlin, until a general peace could settle matters, Jacobi did nothing to materially reduce British grievances. Fox's response sent to Jacobi is worth quoting as an example of the contempt in which Prussia was held by London.

> The idea that the Prussians can ever be a bulwark against the French power when she declares herself obliged by imperious circumstances to be a mere fool of that power, is not worth noting. The conduct of the court of Berlin is distinguished from that of all the other Countries which France has subdued by this circumstance. Others have ceded thro' fear, whilst the Prussian Government has made its fears the pretence of aggrandisement & acquisition.[25]

This, admittedly justified, prejudice, pervaded the government, and was to be of crucial importance later in the year, when the question changed from one of war to alliance.

This assertive attitude towards Prussia was also present in the policy pursued by the Talents in South America, and the two questions, which were to dominate foreign policy once the peace talks began to wane in September, graphically represented the contrasting choices facing British strategists.

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[23] Czartoryski to Woronzow, 2 February 1806, BL. Add. Mss. 51460 f.119-20.
[24] Leveson Gower to Fox, 17 May 1806, 22 June 1806; PRO FO 65/62 f.157, f.183; Jackson to Fox, 20 April 1806, PRO FO 64/71 f.222.
[25] Fox to Jacobi, 20 May 1805, BL. Add. Mss. 51461, f.24.

The question of 'new world versus old world' strategy, as it came to be known, was present from the very outset of the war. Pitt, and particularly Dundas, were greatly in favour of pursuing a Chathamite strategy whereby British maritime supremacy would secure the wealth of the enemy's Caribbean and Asian colonies, using the income generated to support their own military effort, and to fund the coalitions fighting on the Continent. This was seen as the logical strategy for Britain to pursue, and the success of Chatham's policy in the Seven Years War sufficed to neutralise many potential critics.[26] By 1801 the Royal Navy, with her military detachments, had wrested Ceylon, the Cape and the East Indies from Holland, and the Caribbean sugar islands from France.

Yet such a policy, whilst profitable for the merchant community and popular among the public, did not completely escape censure. The frugal and pragmatic Auckland expressed as early as 1793 his fear, 'that if we are materially diverted from that object by the pursuits of conquests, whether on the continent of Europe, or in the East or West Indies, we risk the fate of the whole war.'[27]

Grenville himself was a leading sceptic of the value of colonial conquests in time of European war. In 1799, strongly supported by Windham, he refuted Dundas' arguments for the penetration of South America and the Middle East, in favour of a renewal of the Continental campaign.[28] Nor did his attitude perceptively change whilst in opposition; in February 1805 he launched a powerful attack on the renewal of such a policy.

> If the stories that were floating were true, of desperate, mad and romantic expeditions against South America, he would prophesy that it would be a most calamitous war to G. Britain. A more perilous and a more calamitous adventure for the sake of mere plunder, could not be taken than such an expedition, either for the country that gave it birth, or for humanity in general...It tended to exhaust the blood and treasure of this country, to disperse our naval force, to ruin our army, and be productive of the worst mischiefs to the country.[29]

After such unambiguous condemnation, it is therefore perhaps surprising that within two years, Grenville was planning expeditions of such a 'desperate, mad and romantic' nature that even Dundas would have been unlikely to countenance.

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[26] On Pitt and Dundas' strategy see Piers Mackesy, *War without Victory: the Downfall of Pitt, 1799-1802*. (Oxford, 1984), pp.125-7.
[27] Arthur Bryant, *The Years of Endurance, 1793-1802* (London, 1942), p.78.
[28] Jupp, *Grenville*, p. 241.
[29] Debate on the War with Spain, 11 February 1805, *Hansard*, III, 361.

Involvement in South America was certainly not foremost in the Talents' priorities on assuming office. When the Russians offered to send troops to support British operations in the Caribbean, Grenville replied, 'as we have abandoned all such projects for ourselves, we can give them no aid in it, on account of the wasteful expense of men which these operations occasion us.'[30] Yet even before Admiral Home Popham's unauthorised attack on Buenos Aires, there were indications that the government were taking an increasing interest in South America.

Two reasons can be cited for this shift in emphasis. There was a clear sense of frustration at British impotence in the face of Napoleonic power, and, unlike in 1799, the choice between continental and colonial campaigns did not seem to present itself–at least, not until October 1806. Thus the objection that by pursuing separate objects, valuable forces were being diverted from Europe was not immediately applicable. Windham, who was to become the most zealous supporter of the Buenos Aires expedition, genuinely believed, 'with an establishment on the continent of South America, followed by a hearty support of the war in this country, the period may not be far distant...when the power of Bonaparte may begin to totter.'[31] There also appears to have been genuine concern, although largely baseless, that if Britain did not take the initiative in South America, then France would. One Foxite peer anxiously warned, 'the probable or almost certain consequence of our remaining in a state of inaction would be that these vast territories would fall into the hands of France.'[32] In this fear, the Talents were anticipating Canning's famous statement that if France was to have Spain, she should not be allowed to have the Indies.

The second, and arguably more substantial, argument for involvement in South America, was the belief, based on reports from Yarmouth in Paris, that British conquests in South America would pressure the French into making a more favourable peace. On 19 June, Yarmouth suggested that the government publish in the press, the rumours beginning to arrive that Buenos Aires had fallen. Five days later, dispatches from Popham proved the truth of the rumours, and Fox quickly wrote to Yarmouth, stating, 'that we most eagerly

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[30] Grenville to Windham, 12 April 1806, *HMC Dropmore*, VIII, 97.
[31] Windham to Grenville, 11 September 1806, *ibid.*, VIII, 321.
[32] Selkirk to Windham, 7 June 1806, BL. Ass. MSS. 37884 f.12-24. Napoleon's acquisition of Louisiana from Spain was seen as indicative of greater pretensions in the Americas, although the destruction of the French navy, and military commitments in Europe, meant that any forcible conquest was out of the question.

wish for an early decision, in order to arrange our System respecting S. America.'[33]

Even before, Popham's unexpected news, the government had been tentatively giving tacit support to the activities of the rebel General Miranda, who was planning an insurrection in Venezuela. Howick sent cautiously worded instructions to Admiral Cockrane that all British trade to the insurgents was to be protected, 'but you are carefully to abstain from any measure which may tend to commit his Majesty's government to the future support of an undertaking, in which it has hitherto taken no part.' Perhaps wishing to imitate Popham's success, Cockrane blatantly ignored the brief, lending Miranda ships, and supporting his landing, much to the annoyance of Howick.[34]

Popham's exploits were far more momentous and serious than Miranda's expedition. After having successfully retaken the Cape, which had been returned at the Peace of Amiens, he sailed across to Buenos Aires and forced the Spanish colony to capitulate. To the fury of the government, which highly disapproved of the illegal expedition, Popham sent immediate word to the City, promising great dividends and making retreat all but impossible for the government. Popham and General Baird were immediately recalled, but the problem of Buenos Aires remained, for reinforcements were clearly needed, and the public expected further colonial success to ensue.[35]

The disadvantages of such an engagement were obvious. The distance between Britain and Buenos Aires made communication unfeasibly difficult and co-ordination of military activities impossible. If the natives chose to repel the invading force, rather than welcome them as the liberators they pretended to be, then the operation could be disastrous, requiring an increasing commitment of British manpower, in much the same way as Napoleon's invasion of Spain drained his reserves. Grenville was well aware of this risk, but felt that Popham's action had tied his hands:

> I always felt great reluctance to the embarking in South American projects because I knew it was much easier to get into them than out again. The capture of Buenos Ayres, trumpeted up as it has been by Popham and his agents, has already produced such an impression here as will make the surrender of that conquest most extremely difficult.[36]

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[33] Yarmouth to Fox, 19 June 1806, Grey Mss, 15/7 f.5; *Windham Diary*, 24 June 1806, p.462; Fox to Yarmouth, 26 June 1806, BL. Add. Mss. 51458 f.8. The latter is in Fox's own hand–an important point as his illness later made him silent on the subject of South America.

[34] Howick to Cockrane, 3 June 1806, Grey MSS 52/21 f.1; Howick to Windham, 13 July 1806, BL. Add. MSS 37847 f.255. The insurrection failed.

[35] Lord Holland, *Memoirs of the Whig Party During my Time* (London, 1852), II, 112.

[36] Grenville to Lauderdale, 22 September 1806, *HMC Dropmore*, VIII, 352.

Yet despite Grenville's scepticism, he was still susceptible to Popham's propaganda and to the belief that the French were genuinely worried by this latest conquest. Even Auckland fell under the illusion that Buenos Aires was a means of minting money, believing that commerce would soon benefit by £2,000,000. Within weeks the Board of Trade had received applications from entrepreneurs proposing various projects from copper mining to the cultivation of silk worms. Under such circumstances, for Grenville to pull back would have risked public opprobrium of huge proportions.[37] Cobbett, whose *Political Register* was the sternest critic of the Talents' foreign policy, had no illusions as to the ephemeral benefits of Buenos Aires: 'The shallow-brained rabble...will see nothing but the *mines* and the *money*...Not a dollar of the captured money will get into circulation here. Not a shilling of tax will be saved us by Buenos Ayres. Not a jot will Napoleon concede for it at the making of a peace.'[38]

Despite this, reports from Paris continued to encourage Grenville's hopes. On discussing the subject with Talleyrand, Yarmouth, 'could easily perceive that this last topic had great weight...& I do believe that great effect will be produced by entertaining & strengthening these apprehensions.'[39] The belief in the value of Buenos Aires as a bargaining counter took deep root in Grenville's mind, and once he took over the conduct of the negotiations, this factor began to feature regularly in dispatches from London. Grenville was now determined to include South America in the *uti possidetis*, believing, 'it is impossible not to believe that rather than see all Spanish America fall into our hands, as it must now do in twelve months or more of war, France would willingly give up Naples.'[40] This stance was not so very far from Talleyrand's argument that imminent French conquest of Sicily took it out of the *uti possidetis*. For his part, Lauderdale was unhappy with Grenville's change of tack, and neglected to bring this new element into the *uti possidetis*, aware that the negotiations were by this stage at an end, and that the French would use the new British demands as a fuel to their argument that it was the death of Fox which had brought an end to the hopes of peace.[41]

Whilst Auckland was contemplating the sudden replenishment of the British Treasury, and Grenville was envisaging winning Europe in the

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[37] Auckland to Grenville, 16 September 1806, 29 November 1806, *ibid.*, VIII, 339, 449.
[38] *Political Register*, 20 September 1806.
[39] Yarmouth to Fox, 19 June 1806, BL. Add. Mss. 51458 f.6.
[40] Grenville to Howick, 29 September 1806, *HMC Dropmore*, VIII, 366.
[41] Lauderdale to Grenville, 26 September 1806, *ibid.*, VIII, 358. Holland later argued implausibly that the demand to include Buenos Aires in the *uti possidetis*, was a deliberate ploy by Windham or Spencer to force the negotiations to be broken off. *Whig Party*, II, 80-81.

Argentine, the small force in Buenos Aires was being repelled by the discontented natives who were unhappy at this fresh example of European despotism being forced on them.[42] For the strongly Catholic population, the heretical beliefs of their new oppressors did nothing to endear them to the British. That the British government was entirely oblivious to this turn of events was made all the more ironic by the fact that Grenville, Windham, and Buckingham had spent a considerable amount of time planning the conquest of the whole of Spanish America. A detailed plan of attack involving the conquest of the Philippines, Mexico and Chile had been drawn up and a force collected for the purpose. Grenville had consulted such notable figures as Sir Arthur Wellesley for the purpose, and it was widely anticipated that an attack on Montevideo and Chile would soon render all of Spanish America to the victorious British armies.[43]

Rumours of the recapture of Buenos Aires first reached London on 2 January 1807, and were confirmed on 25 January, a cabinet meeting being called immediately to discuss the course of action to be pursued.[44] There were two possible alternatives for the government to pursue. The first was to send immediate reinforcements for the purpose of retaking Buenos Aires. Those such as Windham who were strongly inclined towards this course, took comfort from the dispatches received from Popham, who felt, 'although the British army has received a check, yet on the arrival of reinforcements, Montevideo will fall & measures may I think then be adopted by which possession will also be obtained of Buenos Aires.' Even Tom Grenville, who after Howick, was the most vociferous critic of South American operations, felt that this much was true, albeit undesirable.[45] The second option was for the government to cut their losses and order a full re-embarkation and return to Britain.

Where there had been uneasy consensus in June, there was now open disagreement as to the correct policy to pursue, with two rival groups led by Windham and Howick arguing their case. In June the opening of the French negotiations, and the lack of military opportunities on the Continent, had persuaded Howick and Grenville that little could be lost by involvement in South America. Yet with the violent eruption of war in northern Europe the international situation had been transformed once again, and Britain's military

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[42] Buenos Aires was recaptured in August 1806, and not December as E.A. Smith states, *Earl Grey*, p.114.

[43] Wellesley's copious memoranda on the subject can be found in BL. Add. MSS. 58988 f.1-39; Windham to Grenville, 2 November 1806, *HMC Dropmore*, VIII, 418-20.

[44] *Windham Diary*, pp.466-7.

[45] Popham to Howick, 9 September 1806, Grey MSS 49/1; T. Grenville to Howick, 25 January 1807, Grey MSS, 21/1 f.13.

commitments were being openly questioned. The irreconcilable divisions which split the cabinet prefigured the dissolution of the government two months later.

The resumption of war on the Continent came as a surprise to the government, who had assumed that a period of enforced peace would operate until Napoleon resumed the campaign against Russia in the spring of 1807. Prussia's belated and suicidal attempt to recover her honour took Howick and Grenville by surprise.

Prussia's grievances against France dated from the moment that Napoleon had forced Berlin to accede to the humiliating treaties of 1805-6. It swiftly became apparent that Prussia's balancing policy had served to anger both the French and allies alike, and instead of securing her primacy in Germany, she had merely ransomed it to the whim of France. By the Treaty of Pressburg the Holy Roman Empire had been finally dissolved, yet Prussia did not replace Austria as the patron of the German states; instead it was French hegemony that prevailed. In July 1806 Napoleon carried out his ambitions for a rationalisation of central Europe with the formation of the Confederation of the Rhine, a direct challenge to Prussian pride. When Berlin discovered the terms being talked about in Paris, it appeared that even Hanover, the one solid gain made by Prussia in 1806, was being bartered away.

Napoleon clearly expected Berlin to be provoked into some action by these plans–hence his concern to disguise his intentions regarding Hanover–yet the decisiveness of the Prussian court probably surprised even him.[46] Yarmouth reported in late July, 'many French troops are assembled about Wesel &c. I am desired to tell you for His Majesty's information that they are there only in case of peace to enforce the restoration of His Majesty's German dominions.'[47] Whether Yarmouth himself believed this explanation is uncertain, but events were to show that the concentration of the French army in the Rhineland served a more sinister purpose.

For his part, Frederick William continued to waver as to the precise policy that Prussia should pursue, although the dismissal of the belligerent Hardenberg seemed to indicate a disposition to remain at peace. Yet Russia, herself more warlike since Czartoryski had been replaced by Baron Budberg, made efforts to rouse Prussia into action, and in July 1806 the two courts renewed their defensive alliance. This change of attitude in the east, which

[46] George Lefebvre argued that war with Prussia was the last thing Napoleon wished for in 1806, *Napoleon from 18 Brumaire to Tilsit, 1799-1807* (tr. H.F. Stockhold, London, 1969) p.254-6.
[47] Yarmouth to Fox, 27 July 1806, PRO FO. 27/73.

manifested itself in the Tsar's repudiation of Oubril's treaty, was not immediately appreciated in London, which continued to believe that Prussia would remain inactive, and that Russia would send a new negotiator to Paris.[48]

It must therefore be stressed, that whilst British policy was hardly notable for its perspicacity regarding Continental politics, the complex manoeuvres being undertaken in Berlin, St. Petersburg and Paris, could not easily be understood in London. Such information as reached Grenville, came not from the accredited envoys to the eastern courts, but from Lauderdale in Paris, who wrote on 30 August: 'there certainly is some misunderstanding with Prussia.'[49] On the strength of such vague intimations, the government were forced to decide whether immediate aid should be sent to the Prussian army.

The immediate reaction of Grenville and Howick was incredulity. 'I own, I cannot well conceive what motive can really, in the present state of the Prussian councils, animate that Court to resistance,' confessed Grenville to Lauderdale, 'but some shew of it there undoubtedly is.'[50] Lauderdale initially refused to countenance any idea that Prussia might unilaterally take on the power of France. He openly stated his belief that Napoleon could force the truculent Prussians to heel by the 'crack of a French post whip...Your Lordship will therefore perceive that in my judgement it is at present next to impossible that the Court of Berlin should do anything vigorous or decisive.'[51]

This belief was understandable, if incorrect. Prussia had made no effort to apprise the British of her intentions, and her former record of resistance to France was hardly one of renown–she had not taken up arms since 1795. Yet by the end of September Berlin had decided on war, and an attempt was made to swiftly resolve the continuing dispute with Britain, and if possible sign a subsidy agreement. Baron Jacobi was once again sent to London to reason with the British.

Before departing Jacobi discussed the issues with Britain's representative in Berlin, General Decken (being officially at war, there was no ambassador). Incredibly, despite the realisation that without British subsidies, the Prussian war effort would have no chance of success, Frederick William continued to prevaricate on the subject of Hanover:

> His Prussian Majesty did not consider the possession of the Electorate of Hanover as being definitely decided, until His Britannick Majesty has

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[48] Schroeder, *Transformation of European Politics*, p.304; Butterfield, *Peace Tactics of Napoleon*, p.34-5; Stuart to Fox, 20 August 1806, PRO FO. 65/63 f.117-8.

[49] Lauderdale to Fox, 30 August 1806, BL. Add. MSS. 51458 f.145.

[50] Grenville to Lauderdale, 4 September 1806, *HMC Dropmore*, VIII, 304.

[51] Lauderdale to Grenville, 7 September 1806, BL. Add. Mss 51438 f.166-71. Lauderdale had no illusions as to the real strength of the Prussian armies, 'in addition to my doubts of its honesty, I have doubts of its power.' Lauderdale to Grenville, 26 September 1806, *HMC Dropmore*, VIII, 359.

> given his consent that it should remain in the possession of Prussia; that if His Britannick Majesty should be pleased to trust His Prussia Majesty with respect to the sincerity of the declaration, the King of Prussia expects that Great Britain would not only cease all hostilities against Prussia, but assist him with subsides and by co-operating by its naval and land forces.[52]

Unsurprisingly, Grenville expressed utter astonishment at Jacobi's presumption. This was surely not the language of a court on the brink of fighting the victor of Austerlitz on the plains of Germany. 'The demand of immediate pecuniary succours, without even the formality of a treaty of subsidey, & with no further explanation about Hanover except that Prussia will do in that respect whatever she shall hereafter promise to do, is certainly not very modest,' noted Grenville, characteristically understating the case. It was agreed that no subsidy would be agreed until the point of Hanover was assured.[53]

This opinion was not, however, shared by all who contemplated the events in northern Europe. Lauderdale, whose initial scepticism was receding, argued, 'that if it is the object of Ministers to form a new coalition on the Continent, Prussia should have money, & that too immediately. Without it I do not imagine you will get them to go on long enough to give the business a trial.'[54] The last comment was proved all too accurate. From his retirement in Tunbridge Wells, Francis Jackson was equally prophetic: 'The Prussian Treasury,' he predicted, 'would be totally exhausted by the expences of one campaign.' He recommended that a subsidy treaty along the lines of that concluded in 1794 be considered, although this would have cost the British Treasury almost £3,000,000.[55]

Such advice was far from welcomed by a government trying its best to economise after Pitt's extravagant promises, but it was agreed to send Lord Morpeth, Carlisle's heir, to Prussia to see the state of the Prussian preparations at first hand. Morpeth was an unsuitable choice for a diplomatic mission, although it is unlikely that even the most experienced statesman could have materially affected the course of events in Germany.[56]

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[52] Decken to Grenville, 22 September 1806, PRO FO. 64/71 f.328.
[53] Grenville to Howick, 3 October 1806, 11 October 1806, Grey MSS, 21/2 f.55, f.57.
[54] Lauderdale to Howick, 5 October 1806, BL. Add. MSS. 51458 f.204-7.
[55] Jackson to Howick, 23 September 1806, Grey MSS, 49/6 f.10; Sherwig, *Guineas and Gunpowder*, p.179.
[56] Although Tom Grenville, Pitt's representative to Berlin in 1799, would have been a more obvious choice. Once again, it is probable that the weakness of the Ministry in the Commons precluded his being sent on a diplomatic mission.

Morpeth's instructions were carefully drawn up by Howick, fearing that Prussian deviousness could persuade the young aristocrat to pledge vast amounts of British gold to the war effort. Howick provisionally lifted the blockade on Prussia in anticipation of Prussia meeting Britain's demands. These were, 'the absolute and unconditional restitution of all His Majesty's electoral dominions', the restoration of the Hanoverian government, and the re-opening of the German ports to British trade. Should Prussia agree to these demands, Morpeth was to pledge British military support but to state categorically that no subsidies would be forthcoming until Prussian pecuniary need was proven.[57] Armed with these instructions Morpeth departed for Hamburg, but the issue had been effectively resolved before he had even found the Prussian government. On 14 October, Napoleon crowned his glittering military career with perhaps the most overwhelming of all his victories. In the twin battles of Jena and Aüerstadt the Prussian armies were annihilated, and with them the myth of Prussian military might. Morpeth decided that his mission was nullified and fled Germany with all haste.[58]

It was in the wake of the catastrophe of Jena that the Talents' interests in South America and the Continent clashed, and the surprising consensus of opinion which had survived the peace negotiations and the question of subsidies, broke down as two opposing interpretations of Britain's role clashed.

Grenville gave no leadership in this dispute, allowing the strong personalities of Howick and Windham to divide the Cabinet. Howick's doubts over the prudence of involvement in South America had been present before the choice of Continental action presented itself. He was angered by the careless talk in the Cabinet which proposed to send thousands of men to Buenos Aires or Caracas: 'To maintain a force in addition to what will be required for Sicily seems to me almost impossible without leaving ourselves without the chance of acting anywhere else if an opportunity offered itself.'[59]

Until the end of October Howick was isolated in this cautious view. Grenville had no great desire to spend money in Continental wars, when there was a chance of gaining revenue in South America, and in this opinion he was supported by the remainder of the Cabinet.[60] The revival of the Continental war caused the orthodoxy of the 'blue water' strategy to be questioned.

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[57] Howick to Morpeth, 29 September 1806, PRO FO. 64/73 f.1-11.
[58] Morpeth to Howick, 21 October 1806, PRO FO. 64/73 f.45-6.
[59] Howick to Windham, 13 July 1806, BL. Add. Mss. 37847 f.255.
[60] Holland, *Whig Party*, II, 112-3.

Sidmouth, whose earlier dealings with Napoleon made him vigorous in his determination to fight France, felt that it was,

> 'very questionable whether we should be justified in sending, *just at this moment*, so large a proportion of our best infantry as 4,000 men in pursuit of what may be deemed a new object [ie. the recapture of Buenos Aires]...if Prussia is hard pressed, she can only be saved by powerful co-operation...the inducement to afford it will not, I fear, be effectual without some military as well as pecuniary aid from Great Britain.'[61]

Tom Grenville also felt that the ships and troops destined for South America would be of greater value employed in the Baltic.[62]

Yet there were those such as Windham, to whom the disasters on the Continent provided further evidence that British involvement would be costly and foolhardy. Even Fitzwilliam, who in September had defiantly declared, 'as long as there is a prospect of an effort being made by Prussia, I do not wish to see GB at peace...I do not pretend to say that my hopes of success by war are great, but bad as the chance is, it is the only one, and the alternative is either to submit tamely, or to die gloriously,' by November was pronouncing, 'an end of the old world; we must look to the new.'[63]

Amidst all this talk of war, Holland was the only remaining member of the Cabinet to preserve a true Foxite line, consistently maintaining that all operations in South America should be undertaken with a view to liberation and the establishment of independent republics. His intense bitterness towards Windham, whom he blamed for opposing peace with France and of wishing to exploit South America for commercial gain, was still evident twenty years later.[64]

The crisis over the direction of foreign policy came in February 1807, whilst Napoleon was experiencing his first serious military check in the frozen wastes of Poland. In two stormy Cabinet meetings on 11 and 12 February, the issues were thrashed out. Howick had written a long memorandum on the subject which eloquently put the case for Continental involvement and an end to the South American expedition:[65]

> 'I have been from the beginning adverse to distant expeditions for the purpose of extending our colonial possessions. They are necessarily

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[61] Sidmouth to Grenville, 25 October 1806, *HMC Dropmore*, VIII, 401.
[62] T. Grenville to Windham, 31 December 1806, BL. Add. MSS. 34847 f.227.
[63] Fitzwilliam to Grenville, 24 September 1806, *HMC Dropmore,* VIII, 354; 3 November 1806, BL. Add. MSS. 58955 f.65.
[64] Holland to Grenville, 7 December 1806, *HMC Dropmore*, VIII, 460; Holland, *Whig Party*, II, 112-5, although being, with the exception of Ellenborough, the sole member of the 1807 Cabinet to have died by 1820, Windham was the only one of Holland's erstwhile colleagues whom he could unreservedly attack.
[65] Undated memorandum in Grey's handwriting, Grey MSS, 52/21 f.5.

> attended with a further diversion of our force, & with a diminution of our means of acting in Europe. Whilst we are acquiring colonies the enemy is subjugating the Continent.'

Howick expressed his belief that the failure of Coalition warfare in the years 1793-1801 were due to the tendency of the European powers to look to their own interests rather than co-ordinate their policies, '& we shall again be in danger of incurring the same evil if whilst our allies are calling upon us for assistance, we shall appear to be pursuing separate objects of our own.'

Such words may seem incongruous against Howick's earlier refusal to countenance subsidising Prussia unless her most acute need was proven. Yet Howick did not now recommend subsidies, rather he looked for direct military intervention, 'either in the north of Germany, on the coast of Holland, or on that of France itself.' Furthermore, it would appear as though he had started thinking along these lines as early as November 1806.[66]

In opposition to Howick's arguments, Windham 'argued the great value and easy conquest of every part of the new world & the little hope afforded by the old', whilst Grenville 'maintained that the possession of such colonies even though temporary afforded great resources for war & facilities for peace.' Windham had already represented to Grenville the apparently prohibitive cost (at least by his figures) of sending troops to the Continent, and this encouraged the economy-minded Grenville to shun such a commitment.[67] The numerical advantage of the South American party forced Howick to back down. He had been supported only by Tom Grenville and Holland, the waverers backing the seemingly safer option presented by Buenos Aires. Interestingly, Windham, noting in his diary Howick's memorandum, felt it was, 'the same as I ought to have drawn up last war.' A hint, perhaps, that his instinctive desire to crush the French hydra was wrestling with the economies and caution necessitated by his present portfolio.[68]

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[66] Holland, *Whig Party*, II, 114; Grenville to Howick, 28 November 1806, Grey MSS, 21/2 f.66. The note referred to in the above, to which Grenville is replying, is in neither the Dropmore nor Grey collections. However, Grenville's doubts that Britain could not 'secure ourselves against the total loss of the force we may employ & which is as you know the only army we have, or can form,' suggest that the subject is military intervention in Europe.

[67] The Cabinet discussions of 11 and 12 February were recorded by Lord Holland, BL. Add. MSS. 51917 (unfoliated); Windham to Grenville, 22 September 1806, *HMC Dropmore*, VIII, 353. Windham's scare tactics clearly had some effect, for Grenville replied, 'If we desist from all idea of acting on the Continent we shall then probably reinforce ourselves in South America.' Grenville to Windham, 23 September 1806, *ibid.*, VIII, 353.

[68] *Windham Diary*, 12 February 1807, p.468. E.A. Smith (*Earl Grey*, p.115) argues that Tom Grenville defected from his pro-Europe position, but this assertion is not borne out by Holland's minutes. Hall's belief (*British Strategy*, p.148) that Howick 'succumbed to the lure of the New World' also appears unfair.

The Talents did not remain in office long enough to see the fruits of their decisions, and the month of March was almost wholly taken up with the Catholic crisis which was to bring them down. The South American expedition, built as it was on faulty and exaggerated assumptions, did not reap any of the benefits promised, and after failing to secure Buenos Aires, the force was brought back by the Pittites in 1807.

Much has been written about the Talents' war policy, and very little of it favourable.[69] It is tempting to argue, as Christopher Hall does, that the Talents 'failed to understand the need, the essential need, to restrain Napoleon in Europe,' and that the complete isolation imposed on Britain by the Treaty of Tilsit in June 1807 was the result of this failing, but an analysis of the realities of the situation reveals that the Talents ultimately had very little choice in their policies, and that, paradoxically, the course they pursued was the least dangerous.[70]

Grenville's brief ministry unhappily coincided with the zenith of Napoleon's career. Between December 1805 and March 1807, with the exception of the stalemate of Eylau, the French Emperor destroyed every military force that dared to oppose him. He acted swiftly and decisively, from the astonishing march of his armies from Boulougne to Thuringia, to the obliteration of the Prussians at Jena. The government in London, hampered by inaccurate and outdated reports from their embassies was left having to pursue a responsive policy, yet responding to events themselves already superseded by ones of greater magnitude. Unaware that Russian policy had decisively switched from one of seeking peace, to an actively belligerent course, Grenville continued to negotiate with France for essentially Russian objects. Surprised by Prussia's decision to go to war against France, the government was given no opportunity to aid Berlin even had they been inclined to do so. This was the argument used by Howick to refute Canning's insinuations that the government's prevarication had prevented aid being swiftly sent to Prussia. Jacobi's proposals were communicated to the government on 11 October, three days later the war had been lost.[71]

Even had Prussia approached Britain in July, the question must remain as to whether it would have been prudent to aid a country so manifestly inferior

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[69] Although, ironically, despite his severe censure of Pitt and his successors in foreign policy, Schroeder presents a less condemnatory attitude towards the Talents, seeing correctly that Grenville's response towards the Continental hegemony in 1807 was similar to that of Churchill in 1940. *Transformation of European Politics*, p.314.

[70] Hall, *British Strategy*, p.149.

[71] Debate of 19 December 1806, *Hansard*, VIII, 68.

in military power to her opponent. It should not be forgotten that £1,000,000 of Pitt's subsidy to Austria was diverted straight into the French Treasury, and there is no reason to doubt that the same would have happened to any such funds directed to Prussia.[72] The experience of the Third Coalition had served as ample proof that financial aid could not alone win the war. Had Grenville pursued a similar Pittite policy there is no evidence to suggest that the outcome would have been any different. Equally, whilst the shabby and parsimonious treatment given to Russia in 1807, certainly made the Tilsit agreement easier for Alexander to accede to, it surely cannot be suggested that had his unreasonable demand for £6,000,000 been agreed to, Friedland would have been won, and the final coalition successfully forged.[73] Notwithstanding this, the conduct of the Talents regarding subsidies can hardly support Holland's later assertion that their policy, 'was to succour those states who would voluntarily resist the power of France, but not to bribe them to engage in the contest.'[74]

This is not to say that the Talents pursued a wise and sagacious policy, indeed it is difficult at times to locate any coherent policy at all. If their initial enthusiasm regarding South America was a product of their time (and it is notable that the Pittites refrained from attacking this policy in Parliament, with the exception of criticism at the slowness with which it was undertaken), there can be less justification for their decision to attempt the recapture of Buenos Aires when it had fallen, especially considering Grenville's instinctive reservations about such expeditions. If it can be argued that Grenville was correct to preserve Britain's resources *vis-à-vis* the Continent, then he should also be censured for wasting them on profligate adventures in the Americas.

Thus, the Talents' war policy can be seen essentially as one of helpless impotence in the face of a seemingly undefeatable opponent. Their response was to wait cautiously on events, and if possible to commit themselves to nothing that would prove inordinately and fruitlessly expensive. As such it was not so much a policy as a reaction, but whilst this attitude was never likely to win the war, it was equally unlikely to lose it.

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[72] Sherwig, *Guineas and Gunpowder*, p.170.

[73] E.E. Roach, Anglo-Russian Relations from Austerlitz and Tilsit, *International History Review*, V, is particularly censorious of the Talents, comparing their lack of 'will and imagination' with the subsequent exertions of Canning and Castlereagh. Yet, as Schroeder points out, Canning was no more successful in his Continental strategy; *Transformation of European Politics*, p.358-61.

[74] Holland, *Whig Party*, II, 95.

VI

FACTIONS AND FOREIGN POLICY

Having examined the details and direction of the Talents' foreign policy, the mechanisms by which this policy was formulated remain to be examined, for only when the pressures exerted upon government are known, can policies be effectively judged. The particular influences felt by the Talents can be seen as coming from both within the Cabinet, divided as it was by varying and conflicting opinions, and from the wider arenas of Parliament, the press and informed opinion. Before examining in greater detail the attitudes and influence of the political factions in 1806, the extra-parliamentary opinions need to be accounted for.

At the highest level of the political hierarchy, there was the monarch. George III's influence over foreign policy has already been noted, and was largely confined to disapproval of certain measures, rather than actively giving advice.[1] On those occasions when the King did express his wishes, such as his demand, in September 1806, that Hanover should be restored before British support was given to Prussia, they usually coincided with government thinking.[2] The Prince of Wales liked to believe that he had an occult influence over foreign policy (he told the Marchioness of Hertford that Lord Yarmouth, her son, had been released from imprisonment in Paris, 'to oblige me *personally*'[3]) in the same way that he felt himself to be the patron of the Foxites, but Moira, his representative in the Cabinet, was mostly silent on foreign policy issues. The government's dealings with the Prince mainly centred around the tangled problems of his personal life, which became a political issue with the 'Delicate Investigation' of the Princess of Wales.

For professional diplomatic advice, the Foreign Secretary looked principally to the embassy staff abroad, and those former diplomats who retained contacts on the Continent (the Foreign Office in this period was a clerical rather than an advisory body). Butterfield's opinion that the Talents were badly served by their diplomats is only true up to a point.[4] Certainly

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[1] See above, pp.75-6.

[2] George III to Spencer, 21 September 1806, *Correspondence of George III*, IV, 472. On those occasions when the king did disagree with his ministers' policy, the government was surreptitiously able to ignore his objections. Thus Fox continued corresponding with Talleyrand despite the king's discomfort, and Howick provisionally lifted the blockade on Prussia even though the king had expressly forbidden this.

[3] The Prince of Wales to the Marchioness of Hertford, 16 April 1806, *Correspondence of the Prince of Wales*, V, 369.

[4] Butterfield, *Peace Tactics of Napoleon*, p.97.

Morpeth and the Earl of Douglas–Leveson Gower's replacement in St. Petersburg–were ill-suited to their delicate tasks, but both Leveson Gower and Sir Robert Adair–ambassador to Vienna–were conscientious in their duties, and at times despaired of the inactivity shown by London. Leveson Gower anxiously wrote of 'the long silence of His Majesty's Government', and Russia's, 'total ignorance of the system of Foreign Politicks upon which the new Administration intended to act.'[5] Whilst Adair, the experienced Foxite diplomat, tried single-handedly to effect an Austro-Prussian alliance against France, and sent urgent suggestions to the government in London for offensive measures in Sicily and Spain.[6] Hutchinson, whose dispatches from Prussia, Butterfield regarded as unduly pessimistic, cannot be criticised for giving foolish advice, as his reports of the Prussian army regrettably proved only too accurate.

The government, therefore, chose to follow professional advice when it accorded with their own opinions (especially over the folly of subsidising Prussia in late 1806), and quietly ignored those which appeared to involve excessive financial commitment. Howick, in response to Adair's suggestion that Austria might be encouraged once again to take part in the war, if subsidies were forthcoming, stressed, 'if Austria is not determined to take the field from a sense of her own interests & an apprehension of her own danger Great Britain cannot supply such subsidies as would alone reconcile her to a war undertaken from less powerful motives.'[7]

Fox and Grenville, preferring to exert direct control over diplomacy, placed great importance on the quality of the ambassadors accredited to the Court of St. James. Woronzow, who had a cordial relationship with Pitt, aggravated Fox immensely; the latter preferred to work with Stroganoff, and eventually secured the former's recall.[8] The Prussian decision to send Jacobi to London in October 1806 was an unwise action, as the baron was considered incompetent and untrustworthy by the Government.

Outside of these official channels, the press was the most obvious source of comment and opinion. This was most obvious in regard to the negotiations with France, which only the overtly Foxite press supported in January 1806. *The Times*, discounting the rumours of the Fox-Talleyrand correspondence,

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[5] Leveson Gower to Fox, 13 April 1806, PRO. FO. 65/62 f.35.
[6] Adair to Windham, 7 September 1806, 23 November 1806, BL. Add. MSS 37884 ff.126, 247.
[7] Howick to Adair, February 1807, BL. Add. MSS 51609 f.24.
[8] Fox's distrust of Woronzow whose 'perverse character' and 'jealousy and ill-humour' was a constant irritation, certainly threatened to disrupt Anglo-Russian co-ordination in the initial stages of the French negotiation. Fox to Leveson Gower, 1 April 1806, 8 April 1806, BL. Add. MSS 51460 ff.107, 131.

was strongly critical of any attempt to negotiate with France, and, when the negotiations were finally terminated, was clearly relieved, arguing, 'when nearly all Continental Europe is on the point of being embattled against France, we should be sorry to see that this country, the marked object of her envy and hate, was not enrolled in the list of the enemies of that vain, insolent, and ambitious power.'[9] Cartoonists drew Fox assiduously courting Napoleon whilst the French navy prepared itself once again for an assault on England's shores.[10]

The most enigmatic figure in the press was William Cobbett, whose *Political Register* had been founded by the patronage of Grenville and Windham, yet turned violently against them in 1806. This defection was all the more surprising when it is remembered that no-one was more opposed to peace with France than Cobbett, and the *Political Register* consistently argued that should Fox conclude peace, 'everything will be sacrificed to this object', which would be 'nothing more than a *mere cessation of hostilities.*'[11] In contrast to most of his contemporaries, he opposed the occupation of Buenos Aires and the principal of fighting for Hanover, asking, 'how the restoration of these territories is to be effected and,...how far the object is worth attaining?'[12] Despite this, his firm opposition to unnecessary expenditure and his advocation of financial reform were very similar to Grenville's own position.

The Talents could, for the most part, afford to ignore the opinion of the press, which generally adopted a neutral or favourable line towards their foreign policy. Of greater consequence was the mercantile community, who strongly pressed for peace on the one hand, and colonial conquests on the other. The allegation that Yarmouth had speculated on the funds had considerable weight, as the funds rose sharply whenever rumours reached London that a treaty had been signed. It has already been noted how Popham's decision to inform the City of his South American conquests placed the government in a severe predicament.[13] The influence of the commercial interest was most acutely felt in the debates on the American Intercourse Bill, which aimed at lifting some of the restrictions placed on American trade as a result of the Continental blockade. The Pittites, many of whom had important

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[9] *The Times,* 21 March 1806, 9 October 1806.

[10] See, for instance, the cartoons by Williams and Sawley of August 1806, M.D. George (ed.), *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires,* (London 1947), VIII, 455-6.

[11] *Political Register*, 28 June 1806, 19 July 1806. Later, in singling out his most implacable enemies in Britain, Napoleon chose Grenville and Windham in politics, with Cobbett and Coleridge in the press, Tangye Lean, *The Napoleonists*, p.206.

[12] *Political Register*, 3 May 1806.

[13] See above, p.77. Holland later wrote, 'Lord Sidmouth, Lord Moira, and others, not accepting entirely Lord Grenville himself, were anxious to court the commercial interest by giving new sources for their ventures.' *Whig Party*, II, 112.

connections in commerce, effectively destroyed the Bill, and with it one of the few chances to avoid war with the United States, which eventually broke out in 1812.[14] On hearing of Howick's proposal to intervene in Portugal, the merchants sent anxious memoranda to Fitzwilliam, urging him to consider the importance of British trade to Lisbon, and causing evident frustration to Grenville.[15]

Therefore, with the exception of the mercantile interest, the extra-parliamentary groups served to establish the climate of opinion, rather than exerting a direct influence on the government's foreign policy. It was in Parliament and the Cabinet that the immediate influences on foreign policy were felt. This is unsurprising, for the power to create or destroy government still lay with the King and parliament rather than the wider electorate. As Addington had discovered in 1804, foreign policy, if perceived to be handled incompetently, could prove an issue on which governments fell.

In February 1806, Canning 'considered Lord Grenville as the direct and lawful inheritor of the support of Mr. Pitt's friends, provided he continued to maintain Mr. Pitt's system, and provided he shewed himself disposed to call for our aid.'[16] It quickly became apparent that with the entrance of the Sidmouth party into government, the latter condition was not going to be met ('the proscription of Pitt's friends is complete without a single exception'[17]) and this placed the Pittites in an awkward position. Even if Grenville chose to adopt Pitt's system in its exact form, opposition was not an endearing thought, especially when the government contained some of Pitt's most inveterate enemies.

Canning's response was to adopt an uneasy compromise, opposing the government but not Grenville personally. The best policy, he felt, 'would be to go on with a vigorous Opposition, looking to Lord Grenville *at the same time* as the person really at the head of the Party.'[18] For Canning, this task was certainly made easier by the concentration of the Grenvillites in the Lords, and the Foxites in the Commons.

When Windham's plans for the reorganisation of the army and militia were announced, the Pittites quickly cast off their uncertain acquiescence of the government, and became, in the words of one observer, a very active (not to

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[14] On the Talents and United States, see Taylor, *The Foxite Party*, pp.93-104.
[15] Fitzwilliam to Grenville, 25 August 1806, *HMC Dropmore*, VIII, p.294; Grenville to Fitzwilliam, 27 August 1806, *ibid.*, VIII, 296.
[16] Canning to Lowther, 9 February 1806, *Historical Manuscripts Commission Report on the Manuscripts of the Earl of Lonsdale* (London, 1893), p.164.
[17] Canning to Leveson Gower, 25 February 1806, *Leveson Gower Correspondence*, II, 181.
[18] *Rose Diary*, II, 263.

say *factious*) Op[position].'[19] By July 1806, when it became clear that Fox was negotiating with France, the Pittites recognised that Pitt's system had been departed from, and were unrestrained in their criticism.

Despite their reputation as the belligerent faction in Parliament, most Pittites were not adverse to the peace negotiations, believing with Grenville, that if an honourable peace could be effected between Britain, Russia and France, then it was worth seizing. As early as April 1805, Canning admitted that he had 'ceased to be very sanguine as to *War*, in the first instance, and had turned my thoughts (you will be surprised, perhaps) wholly to a joint negotiation for general peace.'[20] This feeling became all the more evident after Pitt's death, with the Third Coalition in ruins, and Britain facing isolation once again. There remained some Pittites, most notably the young Palmerston, who maintained the attitude that peace with Napoleon was both impossible and undesirable, but by 1806 they were a minority.[21]

The issue for the Pittites was not one of whether it was right to negotiate with France, but whether the government could be trusted not to sacrifice British interests for an expedient peace. There remained an ingrained distrust of Fox, whose apparently pragmatic actions in office could not wholly make up for his anti-war rhetoric of the previous thirteen years. 'Mr. Fox says he will not give up a particle of *our honour*,' wrote Cobbett, but 'I must be allowed to fear, that if peace be now made, Mr. Fox will not be able to keep his word.'[22] Palmerston, expressing the Pittites' anxieties, did not believe that Fox 'would willingly betray his country but there is a danger that from his eagerness to obtain peace, and from his opinion of Buonaparte's sincerity he might be much more satisfied than either you or I should be.'[23] The decision to send the Foxite Lauderdale to Paris did nothing to ease fears, and throughout August rumours persisted that peace was within days of being signed. Under this apprehension, the Pittites greeted Fox's illness with a morbid sense of relief: 'There is another circumstance which may avert us from a most disadvantageous peace, which is that since Fox has become worse he has made over to Grenville all his papers and has put the state and conduct of his negotiations entirely into his hands,' wrote one Pittite.[24]

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[19] Lady Bessborough to Leveson Gower, 25 June 1806, *Leveson Gower Correspondence*, II, 202.
[20] Canning to Leveson Gower, 16 April 1805, *Leveson Gower Correspondence*, II, 58.
[21] 'I am heartily sorry for it, it is a wretched thing and I cannot help thinking the majority of the sensible part at least of the Country will be of the same opinion,' wrote Palmerston. Palmerston to Sullivan, 8 August 1806, Kenneth Bourne (ed.) *The Letters of the Third Viscount Palmerston to Laurence and Elizabeth Sullivan, 1804-63*, (Royal Historical Society, London, 1979). p.61.
[22] *Political Register*, 28 June 1806.
[23] Palmerston to Sullivan, 17-25 August 1806, *Palmerston-Sullivan Letters*, p.65.
[24] Charles Long to Lowther, 5 August 1806, *HMC Lonsdale*, p.197.

Regarding the Talents' Continental policy, the Pittites could find little to condemn until the resumption of war in October 1806, when Canning was scathing towards the Talents' treatment of Prussia:

> The British Government had continued at war with Prussia as long as the Prussian resources were unimpaired, and her strength unexhausted; but as soon as there seemed the prospect of a war between France and Prussia, an ambassador was dispatched to Berlin, with instructions adapted to all possibilities, except that which was most probable, namely, that war had actually commenced...Our Government began to perceive their error, and to think that there was really something like war between France and Prussia,–from the trifling circumstance that the Prussian army was annihilated![25]

The problem with such a stance, was that the Pittite leadership had thoroughly endorsed the declaration of war on Prussia in April, and the motion had been carried without dissent in Parliament. Canning's argument, that parliament was unaware of Fox's intention to treat with France, was unfair; Prussia's actions in the early months of 1806 had brought the calamity upon her own head, and the Pittites recognised this.

The Pittites, therefore, were generally willing to support the Talents' foreign policy whilst they adhered to what they saw as Pitt's principles. Their opposition to the negotiations in Paris, and government inactivity over the European war, coming as it did some months after these events had taken place, was little more than a registration of complaint. Parliament's influence over the formulation of foreign policy was indeed minimal. Instead, if the Talents' foreign policy was determined by domestic political factors, then it must be within the government itself that such influences are sought. The eventual formulation of policy inevitably involved the reconciling of differences in attitude and outlook which characterised the coalition.

Once the Fox-Grenville 'junction' had been converted into the Ministry of All the Talents, the component factions became less discernible. Sidmouth's followers were indistinguishable from the Grenvillites until the Abolition of Slavery Bill and the Catholic crisis of March 1807. In foreign policy, Howick discarded his Foxite principles, only to resume them once more in opposition. According to Grenville, the administration was 'formed on the principle of agreeing, if we could, prospectively, to administer the affairs of this country without retrospect to former differences.'[26] For some, these differences were

[25] 19 December 1806, *Hansard*, VIII, 49-50.
[26] Grenville to Windham, 4 June 1806, BL. Add. MSS 37847 f.67.

the result of a decade of political warfare, and in the case of Holland and Windham, had begun to harden into 'tradition'.

Ironically, despite the changes in the political landscape since 1801, the differences that did emerge in foreign policy mostly dated from the 1790s, and were fundamentally between the Portland and Foxite whigs in the Cabinet. This is perhaps unsurprising, for Grenville and Sidmouth, like Pitt, had been quite consistent in maintaining a non-ideological foreign policy, being prepared to pursue peace with whichever French government could offer honourable terms. The Portland Whigs–principally Windham, but also Spencer and Fitzwilliam– were opposed to peace with Napoleonic France at all events, and were certainly uneasy with the peace negotiations. Even in November 1806, Spencer, commenting on Howick's proposals for an invasion of France, argued, 'if this were attempted it appears to me that we must take up the whole question at once & make the attack avowedly for the object of restoring the legitimate race of princes to the throne of France.'[27]

The peace negotiations, whilst agreed upon at the outset by all the Cabinet–the Foxites would have undoubtedly withdrawn from the government had this demand been refused–were not morally supported by all the members. The Pittites recognised this, and clearly hoped that the question of negotiation would encourage Grenville to turn to his 'true allies' on the opposition bench. 'What will the Grenvilles say to it, or how will Windham slip his neck out of the noose?' asked an astonished Palmerston, when he heard of the negotiations in June.[28] As has been argued, Grenville himself was quite willing to negotiate so long as the basis was the *uti possidetis* and the Russian alliance was not jeopardised.

Holland's opinion was 'that Mr. Windham from habitual hostility to the new order of things in France, Lord Moira and Lord Sidmouth from a love of popularity, or from fear of facing a clamour, contemplated the probable rupture of the negotiation with less concern than one could have wished.'[29] His comments on Moira and Sidmouth are revealing, although not necessarily accurate. Sidmouth certainly had more cause to distrust France than most, he had, after all, attempted to conclude peace with Napoleon three years earlier,

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[27] Spencer to Howick, 30 November 1806, Grey MSS 52/23 f.16.
[28] Palmerston to Sullivan, 26 June 1806, *Palmerston-Sullivan Letters*, p.57.
[29] Holland, *Whig Party*, II, 80. Holland was, however, adamant that there was no difference of opinion expressed between Fox and the other members of the Cabinet. *ibid.*, II, 78.

yet his recorded comments are few, and whilst he advocated vigorous action against France, this did not necessarily mean he strongly opposed negotiation.[30]

Moira is more interesting. As the Prince of Wales' representative he was more inclined towards the Foxite position than the Grenvillites, but in a lengthy memorandum to Grenville in September 1806 he argued strongly against the protraction of the negotiations, instead favouring direct aid to Prussia.[31] His arguments were uncomfortably close to the ones employed by the Pittites in the debates of January 1807:

> After our experience of Bonaparte's faith, can we have this hope that, were he victorious over Prussia, would offer any such peace as we could accept? Then it is our interest that he should not be victorious over Prussia either by vanquishing him in the field or by terrifying him into submission without contest...Have not the pacific overtures at this moment held out to Ld Lauderdale [been] unquestionably dictated by the policy of preventing us from making a joint exertion with Prussia: and what excuses should we have to offer hereafter for being the dupes of deceit and artifice?

By the end of September 1806 there was a clear majority in the Cabinet who favoured terminating the peace negotiations, with a significant number now actively supporting an increase in Britain's commitments on the Continent.

This move towards a more belligerent position was also noticeable in the Foxite ranks, not least in Howick, and, to some extent, in Fox himself. Howick's increasing suspicion of France prior to 1806 has already been noted,[32]and this certainly became more prominent once he entered government. Once he took over Fox's mantle in September 1806, he displayed an eager desire to fight France. This at times manifested itself into unrealistic optimism: 'I really believe', he wrote to Holland in January, 'that Bonaparte is at last in a situation from which everything is to be hoped, if the opportunity is not lost by the misconduct of the Continental powers and our remises.' It had only been a year earlier that Howick had thought it 'nonsense to talk any more of Continental confederacies...the game is too desperate even for Pitt.'[33] In 1806 he essentially saw peace as desirable because war was impossible.

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[30] In a hastily written note to Windham, Sidmouth commented, 'we have had a great escape at Paris,' but this most likely refers to Yarmouth's recall. Sidmouth to Windham, 14 August 1806, BL. Add. MSS 37884 f.108.

[31] Moira to Grenville, 23 September 1806, BL. Add. MSS 58962 f.50-2. The omission of this memorandum from *HMC Dropmore* is greatly surprising.

[32] See above, p.32.

[33] Howick to Holland, 20 January 1807, BL. Add. MSS 51550 f.33; Grey to Creevey, 29 December 1805, Sir. Herbert Maxwell (ed.) *The Creevey Papers* (London, 1903), I, 45.

Fox's shift in position was less pronounced than Howick's, and his early death probably saved his reputation,[34] but his conduct whilst in office accorded far more with Grenville's philosophy, than with his statements prior to 1806. His hopes of peace, and faith in Napoleon's statesmanship, faded with his health, and those, such as Howick, who saw him in the month before he died, described how he now avoided all talk of European affairs: 'He never enquires, and generally changes the conversation if you attempt to talk to him on the conduct of the war or the progress of the negotiation. The whole of the latter has been carried on in his name, without his reading the papers he has signed.'[35] Fox, like Pitt, died with his hopes and ambitions destroyed before his eyes. By September, only Holland and Erskine remained to represent the orthodox Foxite views in the Cabinet.

The political manoeuvring, which was present throughout the administration, although particularly so after Fox's death, brought the prejudices of the different factions to the fore. The problem of Fox's death was made more acute by the fact that he was not only Foreign Secretary, but also leader of the Commons, and the only man capable of commanding respect from the more radical elements in the Foxite ranks. Carlisle thought his death would 'render the H of C's as wild & as impractical as a kennel of hounds without a huntsman, & more mischief arising from want of discipline in our friends, than the exertions of our enemies.'[36] His prediction proved all too true.

The question of who should take his place as Foreign Secretary was of crucial importance to the conduct of the negotiations and the war. Buckingham had no doubt that the post should be given to Tom Grenville, leaving Howick to lead the Commons, and hinted that this was also the King's wishes.[37] Grenville wished to give his brother a secretaryship, but recognised that the Foxites would not accept anyone outside of their ranks taking Fox's portfolio. Windham's refusal to take a peerage was a further obstacle to a general reorganisation.[38]

The Foxites demanded that the new Foreign Secretary be one of them, and the popular choice was for Holland, Fox's nephew and confidant. Grenville

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[34] Although it worth nothing that Holland, instead of arguing that Fox's death materially affected the peace negotiations, believed that he would have ended them before Grenville did. *Whig Party*, II, 78.
[35] Howick to Whitbread, 8 September 1806, *Prince of Wales* Correspondence, V, 429; Carlisle to T. Grenville, 3 August 1806, BL. Add. MSS 41854 f.127.
[36] Carlisle to T. Grenville, 3 August 1806, BL. Add. MSS 41854 f.127.
[37] Buckingham to Grenville, 11 September 1806, *HMC Dropmore*, VIII, 317-8.
[38] Buckingham cruelly suggested that Windham might aid the Government by going into opposition. Buckingham to Grenville, 23 July 1806, *HMC Dropmore*, VIII, 242.

recognised that Holland's appointment would send entirely the wrong signals to the French, and could possibly take the negotiations out of his cautious hands.[39] The appointment of Howick can be seen, therefore, not as an attempt to conciliate the Foxites, but a clever compromise on the part of Grenville. Holland was brought into the administration as Lord Privy Seal, and Tom Grenville took Howick's place at the Admiralty. The balance in the Cabinet was thus preserved, and Grenville's control of foreign policy was, if anything, strengthened.

Howick recognised that in becoming Foreign Secretary, he taken a post that some had already marked out for Holland. Writing to the latter, he expressed his fears that Holland would 'think I am myself too warlike. I confess that I am more so than I was some time ago, but still I am anxious for peace.'[40] Holland later made out that only he knew of Fox's wishes regarding the Foreign Office, but Howick was certainly aware that Holland was Fox's first choice.[41]

As Carlisle had predicted, Fox's death, and the appointment of Howick as his successor, loosened the ties which had hitherto bound the radical wing of the Foxites to the larger body. Whitbread, in particular, had regarded the foreign policy of the Talents' with distaste, and saw the rupture of the peace talks as nothing less than a betrayal of Fox's ideals. Thus, when in January 1807, parliament debated the negotiations with France, Whitbread felt no compunction to refrain from attacking the policy of the government.

From beginning to end, the government handled the release of papers and subsequent debates in a decidedly amateurish fashion. Grenville was opposed to any release of the diplomatic papers, even though those relative to the Peace of Amiens and the formation of the Third Coalition, had been laid down by the previous governments.[42] There was the additional problem that, although the government maintained that the negotiations failed because the French departed from the agreed basis of the *uti possidetis*, there was no written evidence to show that such an agreement had ever existed.

Grenville compounded the ministry's problems by making remarks in Parliament regarding Yarmouth's actions in Paris. Yarmouth was greatly

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[39] Holland believed, 'that my Uncle's friends felt very jealous of the Grenvilles, and thought that my name in the Cabinet was absolutely necessary, and in the Foreign Office desirable, to prove that there was a disposition to cultivate my Uncle's friends, to preserve his system and principles.' Holland to Lauderdale, 22 September 1806, *Whig Party,* II, 53.

[40] Howick to Holland, 28 September 1806, BL. Add. MSS 51550 f.15.

[41] Holland, *Whig Party*, I, 248; Grey to Whitbread, 8 September 1806, *Prince of Wales Correspondence*, V, 429.

[42] Grenville to Howick, 4 December 1806, Grey MSS 21/2 f.67.

aggrieved at the suggestion that he had acted improperly in revealing his powers, and demanded that he be given an opportunity in the Commons to put the record straight. This unseemly dispute between the government and their representative did nothing to persuade the opposition that the negotiations had been conducted with wisdom.[43]

Whitbread's assault on the government was undoubtedly the most damaging of all these events. Picking up on the government's confusion over Sicily and the *uti possidetis*, Whitbread argued that the latter was never the *sine qua non* of the negotiation, and whilst admitting that there was evidence of 'tergiversation and chicanery' on the part of France, he argued, that for Britain, 'the path was plain and obvious; I do not think it was pursued'. As a further insult to his brother-in-law, Whitbread's amendment took the same wording as Howick's similar response at the rupture of the Peace of Amiens.[44] The Government front-bench made the debacle complete by declining to respond to Whitbread's allegations, leaving it to an astonished Canning to resume the attack. Canning's closing remarks aptly sum up the contempt felt by the Pittites at the government's apathy and incompetence:

> Ministers have so contrived to make this a question of no small doubt and perplexity. They make the choice between peace and war difficult, almost indifferent. When I peruse their negotiations, and see to what sort of a peace alone they could have led; with what chance of security, with what hope of permanence; I am inclined to congratulate myself on the escape from such a peace to a continuance of the war; but on the other hand, when I observe what sort of a war the right hon gent.[Windham]carries on, I can scarce refrain from casting back a wishful look at the negociation.[45]

Canning's judgement was sarcastic and harsh, and coming after Whitbread's attack, was a pithy *coup de graçe*, but nonetheless, few present would have denied it some justification.

As Howick had foreseen in December 1805, the situation of the Continent after Austerlitz precluded many of the potential divisions over foreign policy. With the failure of the peace negotiations in October, the fears of Windham and the Portland whigs were alleviated, and until the crisis in the early weeks of 1807, something like consensus prevailed in the Cabinet. Once in government, differences tended to centre around the direction that the war should take,

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[43] Grey to Grenville, 3 January 1807, *HMC Dropmore*, IX, 3; Yarmouth's speech can be found in *Hansard*, VIII, 325.
[44] Debate of 5 January 1807, *Hansard*, VIII, 340-73.
[45] *Hansard*, VIII, 410.

rather than its justification, with the 'new versus old world' dispute replacing the previous divisions of peace versus war.

In 1809, opposing the decision of the Pittites to intervene in Spain, Grenville, concisely summed up the principles behind his foreign policy: 'It was a violation of that defensive and husbanding system which we pursued when we were in office, & for which we were so much reproached: But which I am more & more convinced affords this country the only chance of maintaining to the end this dreadful struggle.'[46] If the war could not be efficiently won, or the peace honourably secured, then Grenville, Windham and Howick prepared themselves and the country for a war of attrition. This was the purpose behind Windham's army reforms, and the reluctance to subsidise the Continental powers.

This policy was hardly a heroic one, but neither was it reckless. The Talents were parsimonious toward Russia, and unforgiving toward Prussia, but it was not Grenville who wasted money and lives in Walcheren, or who drained the British Treasury in subsidising an ill-concerted coalition. The war could not have been won in 1806, and the decision to seek peace was a natural response to the European situation—comparable to Pitt's attempts in 1795 and 1797, and Addington's treaty of 1802. The Talents found themselves confined to the cycle of active war and *de facto* truce, which had characterised Anglo-French relations since 1793, and would continue to affect British foreign policy until 1812. For, whilst Napoleon remained dominant on the Continent, there was comparatively little that a British government could do to arrest his progress. It was this sense of impotence that Windham expressed when he argued, 'it is of no great consequence who the Ministers are. They may retard our fate, but they will never finally prevent it.'[47] The same fatalism underpinned Grenville's 'defensive and husbanding' policy.

The men who made up the Ministry of All the Talents were ill-suited to control British foreign policy, having neither the vigour nor the imagination required of a government in time of war; their later opposition to the war in Spain revealed their shortcomings in military strategy and opportunism. Yet paradoxically, whilst each component of their policy can be subjected to severe criticism, considered as a whole, the Talents' pursued the most sensible course available. Whilst Britain remained isolated and besieged, a cautious and frugal policy was undoubtedly the most prudent; after 1809 a different approach was

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[46] Grenville to Fitzwilliam, 9 November 1809, BL. Add. MSS 58955 f.98; Jupp, *Lord Grenville*, p.398.
[47] Windham to Grenville, 8 November 1802, *HMC Dropmore*, VII, 124.

needed, and it was fortunate that, in the ranks of Pitt's heirs, there were adventurous and imaginative men to be called upon.

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