



PARLIAMENT AND
FOREIGN POLICY IN THE
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

JEREMY BLACK

CAMBRIDGE

CAMBRIDGE

www.cambridge.org/9780521833318

PARLIAMENT AND FOREIGN POLICY IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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

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

JEREMY BLACK MBE is Professor of History, University of Exeter. A prolific author, his many books include *Maps and History* (1997) and *War and the World 1450–2000* (1998).

PARLIAMENT AND
FOREIGN POLICY IN THE
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

JEREMY BLACK



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521833318

© Jeremy Black 2004

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provision of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published in print format

ISBN-13 978-0-521-83331-8 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-83331-0 hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

*For
Isabel and Oliver Letwin*

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	page ix
<i>Note on dates, spelling and titles</i>	xi
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xii
1 Introduction	I
2 The Revolution Settlement, Parliament and foreign policy, 1689–1714	13
3 The Walpolean system, Parliament and foreign policy, 1714–42	40
4 The mid-century crisis, Parliament and foreign policy, 1742–60	78
5 George III, Parliament and foreign policy, 1760–1800	99
6 Sources and reports	137
7 Character and quality of parliamentary discussion	164
8 A parliamentary foreign policy?	200
9 Conclusions	233
<i>Select bibliography</i>	247
<i>Index</i>	256

Preface

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

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

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

Notes on dates, spelling and titles

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

Abbreviations

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

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

Introduction

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

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

¹ Fife to William Rose, 11 May 1784, A. and H. Tayler (eds.), *Lord Fife and his Factor* (1925), p. 166.

² Morton to his heir James, Lord Aberdour, 25 Mar. (os) 1735, 15 Mar. (os) 1737, NAS. GD. 150/3476/52x, 85.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁴ Cobbett, XV, 652. ⁵ Cobbett, X, 590, cf. 612. ⁶ Cobbett, X, 858.

⁷ Cobbett, XII, 1135, 1145. ⁸ Cobbett, XIV, 1185, cf. Hardwicke in 1743, XII, 1170.

⁹ G. C. Gibbs, 'Laying Treaties Before Parliament in the Eighteenth Century', in R. M. Hatton and M. S. Anderson (eds.), *Studies in Diplomatic History: Essays in Memory of David Bayne Horn* (1970), pp. 116–37.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁰ Cobbett, X, 900.

¹¹ NLS. Mss. 11036 fol. 26.

¹² Cobbett, XIV, 598.

¹³ *Edinburgh Advertiser*, 27 Sept., *Morning Chronicle*, 2 Nov. 1782.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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